Ethnicity Mediated: Identity Practices of Greek Diaspora on a Social Network Site

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the processes by which new media practices may result in redefining ethnic belonging for diasporic populations. Similarly to other social media, the social network site of Facebook mediates the diasporic experience of Greeks in London. The thesis’s methodological choices are aimed at addressing the challenges and potentials that social networking applications have created for practice-based ethnographic research as well as for the study of identity and diaspora. With an aim to describe how a set of participants – Greeks in London – practice their ethnicity and move between online and offline sites, countries, cultures and languages, I triangulate qualitative and quantitative data which emerge from various online and offline locations such as interviews, questionnaires, screen observation and fieldwork. Following the tradition of online ethnography, I examine ethnospecific content shared on the Profile and Group pages, identify the resources which the participants draw upon to articulate their ethnic identity and I investigate the beliefs and attitudes related to their online practices. Along with expressions of banal nationalism, the study points to a range of creative and innovative online practices of hybridization which contest stereotypical notions of Greek ethnicity, create a new identity for ‘place’ and ‘home’ and expand the resources from which ethnic identity can be imagined. In a wealth of textual evidence, emerging from the Status Updates and Wall posts, participants celebrate their transnational mobility, report on their experience of homeland in real time, participate in Groups for Greek diaspora and build networks of practice to engage with life in London. The analysis reveals the existence of an online space which facilitates transnational identities and challenges discourses of ethnicity and diaspora.
INTRODUCTION

‘This morning, millions of college students are thinking differently about their online identity. The reason? Facebook, the industry-leading college social networking website, introduced “feeds” last night. Feeds are pretty simple – they’re a running list of what you’ve been doing in the Facebook. For example, if you add a friend, update your relationship status, upload photos – this all gets dumped into a feed, viewable by anyone that can view your account … The Facebook is no longer just a current method of identity presentation, it is an archive of our digital identity’ (Stutzman, 2006:1).

In the past decade, social network sites\(^1\) have not only transformed the nature of the web\(^2\), but also our communicational habits. Although the growing technologies of social network sites were only introduced a few years ago, they attracted the attention of the academic community and triggered a proliferating body of research which has renewed interest in identity issues.

What distinguishes social network sites from other types of virtual environments is that they are centered on self-presentation which allows users to maintain and manage their Profile pages, share content with the support of hyper-linking pages and build their social networks based on real-life connections (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). A variety of interactive tools for the presentation of the self and a range of communicative affordances offered by social network sites are blurring the boundary between digital and physical social activity and have created new angles from which to understand virtual life and identity construction.

‘the increasingly digital representation of personal characteristics changes our ways of identifying individuals, and supplementary digital identities, so-called virtual identities are being created for security, profit, convenience or even for fun. These new identities are feeding back into the world of social and business affairs, offering a mix of plural

---

\(^1\) Boyd & Ellison (2007) define social network sites as ‘web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site’. They chose not to employ the term ‘social networking sites’ to describe this phenomenon for two reasons: ‘emphasis and scope. Networking’ emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC)’ (Boyd & Ellison, 2007:1).

\(^2\) According to O’Reilly, Web 2.0 is ‘the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an architecture of participation, and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences’ (OReilly, 2007:1)
identities and challenging traditional notions of identity’ (FIDIS Project, 2009).

Social networks have enabled a stronger interplay between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ – which accounts for their growing popularity – and have revolutionized the collection and procession of identity information, therefore opening up new paths for empirical research and a richer conceptualization of identity.

‘A user exploiting Facebook for performing identity in a never-ending process towards coherence and intelligibility is, effectively, doing what we do when we have a conversation, perhaps in a café, with a friend and speak of ourselves, desires, experiences, recent actions, tastes. Within a disciplinary society of surveillance (Foucault, 1977), we police each other’s subjecthood for coherence, often in line with stereotypes and easily-recognizable “norms” and narratives: one subject’s taste for classical music but punk outfits demands an explanation for consistency, intelligibility and uniformity in order to belong and maintain participation in the social …’ (Cover, 2012:5)

I was inspired for this study when I realized that my social practices as a Greek in London were increasingly mediated by the use of the social network site of Facebook (FB). In addition, the observation that the Profile pages of my FB Friends – who also lived in London – contained the usual stereotypes and easily-recognizable markers of Greek ethnic identity, generated questions regarding whether these digital representations were processual and consistent with the way they were experiencing ethnicity in a diasporic setting. Therefore, I decided to examine how ethnic identity – articulated in a transnational context – emerges in a social network site and with what implications for ethnicity. FB, the most popular social network site at that time, provided an ideal model to investigate how their experience of displacement was mediated by social network use. Ethnicity also offers a valuable site for the study of deterritorialized forms of identity, since it is a dynamic concept constantly shaped by broader cultural and socioeconomic processes – such as movement across borders.

At the theoretical level, I was inspired by Sinclair and Cunningham’s realization that diasporas not only shape a demand for certain media, but that they are also formed by media use (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2000). To trace how this process unfolds in the context of social network sites, I will follow 30 individuals – Greeks in London – through their online

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4 Mediation refers to ‘the communication through one or more media through which the message and the relation between the sender and receiver are influenced by the affordances and constraints of the specific media and genres involved’ (Hjarvard, 2006: 5).
and offline interactions and practices and examine the way that they use FB, the content they circulate and how their FB use interferes (or not) with their transnational practices. Relying on ethnographic methods, I will investigate how the participants’ identities are sustained at a transnational level, lived at a local level and imagined at a national level—according to Georgiou’s conception of the triangular position of diasporic identity (Georgiou, 2005). The multicultural environment of the city of London, where multiple identity options are offered, has provided an optimal context in which to study aspects of the process of identity construction (also Rex & Josephides, 1987; Jacobson, 1995; Chow, 1993).

To answer the posed research questions, I will draw on an interdisciplinary perspective which brings together cultural studies (e.g. postcolonial studies, diaspora and transnationalism), social studies (e.g. identity studies, sociolinguistics) and media studies (e.g. studies of personal homepages, studies on virtual ethnicity and studies on social network sites). I borrowed different theoretical concepts and analytical tools from each discipline and synthesized them in a way that serves the purpose of this study.

This study treats the participants’ ethnicity as embedded in their everyday practices, traces it in the process of self-categorization and representation and examines it as a process of self-exploration. The study of the cultural content that the participants share on their FB Profile pages and Group pages will provide a starting point for this investigation: are participants projecting well established stances when interacting online or are they drawing on innovative resources for the display of ethnicity? Far from presupposing a dichotomy between local and global digital content shared on the Profiles, this analysis is seeking to produce a bottom-up account of the points from which the participants engage with Greek ethnicity and to investigate how interaction on FB may result in redefining common belongings.

The Literature Review (ch.1) will present the study’s theoretical framework for thinking about identity. Departing from the essentialists’ views on ethnic identity, I will approach identity from the social constructivists’ view and adopt the sociolinguistic perspective which situates identity in the lived experience of everyday communication, representation, social actions and processes rather than in any given social categorical characteristics (1.2). Treating identity as a process rather than as a product allows me to account for the co-existence of different identities within one person (e.g. being both Greek and British), search
for versions of identity in multiple locations, examine narratives of the self as a symbolic project (Thompson, 1995) and investigate the construction of the participants’ identity in the process of online interaction and socialization.

The Literature Review starts from a broader perspective of identity (1.2), to be refined to more particular aspects of identity such as ethnic (1.3), diasporic and transnational (1.4). The concept of diaspora has been widely employed across the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and cultural studies as a means for the study of the relationship between territorially defined forms of identity and the articulation or the mobilization of diverse identifications (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2000). A vast number of studies, which seek to understand how diasporic practices and identifications lead to changing spatial expressions of national identities (e.g. Glick-Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Ong, 1999; Anderson, 2003), recognize that this process could not operate directly without mediation (Hall, 1996). Literature in 1.4 originates from the tradition of media and sociocultural studies and relies on the notions of ‘connectivity’, ‘space’ and ‘home’ to describe the main theoretical underpinnings related to the study of the relationship between new media, diaspora and transnationalism. With regard to the existing literature on diaspora and media, I initially describe the participants’ experience of displacement as ‘diasporic’; however, whether the discourse under study can be characterized as diasporic or transnational remains to be re-examined in the light of its findings (6.4). Section 1.5 will review studies related to virtual diaspora, community and online representation.

Although there exists a vast literature on media and their role in the formation and sustenance of ethnic and diasporic identities (1.5), the construction of ethnic identity in diverse technological contexts, such as the widespread technology of social networking, remains an area which has yet to be explored. Section 1.5 revises literature on virtual ethnicity as approached by modernist and postmodernist accounts of identity construction on the web. Analysis will attempt to answer how ethnicity is constructed and expressed in the social networking site: are users defining themselves primarily on the basis of belonging to a particular nation, a collective domain geographically rooted —according to modernist perspectives of identity construction — or do they claim postmodern identities on the basis of individual definitions?
The third part of the literature chapter (1.5) will argue that online social networking applications have not only introduced new parameters for the study of identity, but have also offered new opportunities and angles from which to study identity in computer mediated environments. Expanded visibility (1.5.4), greater levels of editability (1.5.2) and the stronger interplay between online and offline contexts (1.5.1) that social network technologies enable, have created a need to view online identity as a part of broader discursive practices, revise the separation between online and offline persona – which often rests upon a bipolar view of a 'real' offline world and a 'virtual' online one (Stubbs, 1998) – and therefore extend the methodological tools used to approach identity.

Given the complicated nature of the main research question, which seeks to investigate how the social network site of FB mediates aspects of the participants’ ethnic identity in a diasporic context, the study follows the tradition of virtual ethnography. I relied on heterogeneous types of data, employed mixed methods and analytical frameworks. In the second chapter (2), I will present the different kinds of data collected (2.4), discuss why I chose virtual ethnography (2.2) and reflect on issues that underpinned the research design. Therefore, I discuss how I gained access to the field of study (2.6.2), how I dealt with ethical considerations (2.6.2) and how I moved between online and offline research settings (2.6.3). Data collection took place over a period of 10 months. Data was collected both online and offline by an array of tools: interviews, a group interview, online questionnaires, screen observation, fieldwork and participatory observation. For the analysis of data, I used quantitative methods complemented with qualitative methods (2.7.1), content analysis (2.7.2) and discourse analysis (2.7.3). It has been equally important for the analysis to attend to the contextual factors that underlie the participants’ online practices and diasporic experiences and study FB as a space where social signs and meanings circulated were interacting with aspects of social life.

In Chapter 3, I will introduce the main findings which emerged from the interview and questionnaire data, such as frequencies and patterns of FB usage. Numerical information combined with qualitative evidence will provide a general picture of how FB is embedded in the participants’ daily lives and will point to the prevailing practices for self-presentation, interaction and participation on FB (3.2). Section 3.3 will focus on self-presentation on the Profiles, and section 3.4 will present information regarding the interactional and hyperlinked
dimension of the Profiles, the participants’ communicational practices, their friendship behaviour, kind of ties they activate etc. In 3.5, I will present findings related to how diasporic individuals use FB to participate in FB Groups. I will investigate the participants’ motives and reasons for creating or joining a Group (3.5.1) and provide an overview of the FB Groups for Greeks in London (3.5.2). Asking how the participants ‘inhabit’ FB Groups for Greeks in London and use them as spaces to support their diasporic practices, I will investigate the process in which participation in FB Groups may support (or not) diasporic and transnational identities (3.5.3).

In Chapter 4, I will demonstrate how the participants perform their ‘in between’ status on their Profiles by publicly deploying on them aspects of their identity. Analysis of the ethnospecific visual and textual content that the participants’ circulate (4.2) will provide an insight into how the participants reproduce ethnic stereotypes and symbols in their Profiles (4.3) consistent with the way they experiencing their ethnicity, but also will examine an array of creative practices (4.4) through which they enact hybrid identities according to postmodern narratives of identity construction. Interview data regarding the participants’ perceptions and practices related to their ethnic status as well as screen data will point to how editing the Profile page can be a process of self-exploration (4.4.1), constructive for the ethnic self (4.4.2). Analysis in 4.4.3 will investigate the points from which the participants engage with Greek and British ethnicity in their textual production and reveal the existence of a discourse of transnational mobility and movement reflected in the participants’ Profile activity.

In Chapter 5, content analysis of the ethnospecific Wall threads reveals the prevailing frames in which ethnicity emerged in the interaction. Following recent approaches on the study of identity (cf. 1.2), which ‘urge the analyst to look at constructions of self and identity as necessarily dialogical and relational, fashioned and refashioned in local interactive practices’ (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008:1), I will demonstrate that ethnicity is not a category unquestionably assumed by the participants in their Wall exchanges. Analysis in Chapter 5 draws on a critique of postmodernism and a symbolic interactionists’ framework to examine the discursive construction of ethnic identity and place on the Profile and Group Walls.
The concluding chapter (6) will summarize the main findings and their implications for the theory of new media, transnationalism and ethnic identity (6.3) and will reflect on the methodology I employed (6.2). I will argue that discourses of diaspora and forms of ethnic belonging are constantly reshaped at the interface of social network technologies and transnational movement (6.4), and will point to areas for further exploration (6.5).
1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Identity studies provide the main theoretical framework for this study. Throughout this chapter, identity remains the key component around which literature unravels. First, I introduce the term ‘identity’ and present the lens through which I approach identity and ethnicity. Second, literature review focuses on how new media have created new conditions for the experience of ethnicity—a fundamental version of identity—and diaspora and third, I examine the way that diasporic populations practice ethnicity through everyday new media use.

Studies on identity and the self have important implications for interpersonal relationships, society, and culture. Acknowledging that the term ‘identity’ is a wide and problematic concept that marks a broad area of research across different disciplines, identity in the age of information becomes a topic with increasing importance (Halperin & Backhouse, 2008). Accounting for the recent proliferation of identity studies, the chapter’s second section (1.2) stresses the need to treat identity studies as an emerging field which aims to provide a fuller understanding of the conditions of modern living and its implications for the self. As the chapter develops, specific parameters for the study of identity are introduced, in a progressive manner, to narrow down the discussion in a way that serves the study’s aims. In the third and fourth section (1.3, 1.4), the focus is on three interrelated components of modern identity: ethnic, diasporic and transnational. I examine their properties and relations to each other, linkages between the terms, and their relevant qualities with an aim to establish a framework according to which the terms are used in the context of this study. Ethnicity is the aspect of identity most extensively studied. Despite that ethnic identity is a broader term, it is also a substantial ingredient for diasporic identity and it also exists as a part of a transnational’s identity.

Typically, ethnic identity is a construct according to which ‘an individual is by themselves and by others perceived as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group or common heritage’ (Cheung, 1993). This construct provides a starting point to think broadly about ethnic identity as a model to approach the process of identification and self-construction. However, a review on the many conceptual approaches to ethnic identity is beyond the scope
of this chapter which aims to present the complex problems that transnational mobility poses both for identity and the experience of ethnicity, as well as the creative possibilities that flow from populations’ movement across borders. Approaching the conditions that constitute the ethnic self today, 1.4.1 presents literature on diasporic and transnational identities as they interfere with two fundamental parameters of modernity and globalization: populations’ movement across ethnic boundaries and new media use.

New media technologies and connectivity have played a central role in the formation and sustenance of ethnic, diasporic and transnational identities. The literature presented examines how new media connectivity has a transforming effect on notions and dimensions which are fundamental for identity construction – such as time, place and home. Literature on new media, diasporic and transnational identities is presented along three central concepts: ‘connectivity’, ‘home’ (the place of origin), ‘space’ (the diasporic sphere of experience).

The chapter’s fifth section (1.5) examines how ethnic identities are expressed online (1.5.1) and specifically, it focuses on versions of collective identities – e.g. diasporic communities and transnational social spaces –, representational acts and interactional practices on the web (1.5.2). Researchers ask whether the web is a space for the reproduction of the ethnic self, a space where established accounts of ethnicity are reflected and reproduced, whether the web is a space with transforming qualities for definitions of ethnic identity, or a space where new collectivities (e.g. diasporic communities) and definitions of ethnicity can emerge. This section outlines the main directions of theoretical thought at the interface of ethnicity and the web: the constant construction of national/ethnic identity through stereotypical representation, the reconfiguration of national belonging through symbolic creativity and social interaction, the formation of communities and networks of practice.

However, the web is not a single and unified space. Technical specifications, software and tools, are constantly developing and enhancing possibilities for action, its functions and practices. Thus, the study of identity on the web responds to emerging social trends and to the particular possibilities that each technology allows. The chapter's sixth section (1.6) points to the parameters and opportunities that social network sites create for the study of the self. Discussion focuses on the concepts of anonymity, editability and audience – central features on CMC research – to describe the characteristics of social network sites and point to
the new parameters that social network sites introduce for the study of identity. In addition, this section points to a need to extend the theoretical and methodological tools of CMC research and adjust them to the distinct contexts that surround communication on social network sites.

1.2 A Framework for the Study of Identity

The term identity, broadly defined as the ‘status of the subject/individual/person’ (Paul du Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000), the ‘sameness of a person or thing at all times in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else’ (Simpson & Weiner, 1989:620), takes on different connotations depending upon the context within which it is employed. Identity studies are, to a large extend, multidisciplinary in nature. Analytical definitions have been generated and debated from a plethora of disciplines originating from the realms of human, social, cultural sciences and anthropology. The term identity is derived mainly from the work of psychologists (Erikson, 1950) and dictionary definitions today are failing to capture the multiple meanings that the term carries (Fearon, 1999). The most common idea we have of identity, is that of a social category defined by certain characteristics and membership rules, attributes and expected behaviors, and socially distinguishing features ‘that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential’ (Fearon, 1999:2).

Despite that the concept of identity has been an important analytical tool for research across a range of study fields; it is only recently that the academic community has recognized the pervasiveness of identity-related issues. In the era of information technology, there is a proliferation of identity related studies and researchers have started to view identity as an emerging field in academic research (Halperin & Backhouse, 2008). The tendency to study identity from a single dominant point of view provides only partial understandings of identity (Jones, 2010). Especially in the context of new media technologies, discussion on what constitutes identity is just beginning:

‘The scope of any research agenda should be broadly defined to allow inclusion, not exclusion, of relevant themes and related debates. When considering units of analysis pertinent to the study of identity, one recognises the need to further broadening the
research scope. For example, identity of persons in different roles (e.g. citizen; costumer; individual) in different places (home; work; mobile) and in different modes (offline; online; mixed modes) are equally relevant. Likewise, explorations of identity in different contexts are significant, as they range from the individual through to the organisational, the national, international and the global’ (Halperin & Backhouse, 2008:534).

Recognizing that no definition is capable of covering all usages of the term and that a person’s identity has many and diverse facets, there is a need to draw a distinction between two dimensions of identity: the internal aspect of personal identity – the set of characteristics or attributes which represent a person – and disclosure of this information – the process of identification – (Nabeth, 2009). Definitions of the term identity can be broadly categorized into those referring to group identities and those describing individual dimensions.

The field of sociology has mainly approached identity from its social dimension, focusing on the process of identification as a process according to which the characteristics or representations of identity can be objectively known or observed by others. Individual and collective identifications of gender, race and class have traditionally been the main sites for the study of identity in the sociological realm (e.g. Appiah & Gates, 1995). Traditional sociological understandings of identity have been based on the assumption that there is ‘a unified, singular social experience, a single canvas against which social actors constructed a sense of self’ (Cerulo, 1997:387). However, recent theorizations on identity formations are moving away from the assumptions that there is ‘some intrinsic and essential content to any identity which is defined by either a common origin or a common structure of experience or both and deny the existence of authentic and original identities based in a universally shared origin or experience’ (Grossberg, 1996: 89).

In the light of modernity where multiple affiliations of the self alter the nature of human experience, scholarly attention has been redirected on how identities are constructed, maintained and mobilized (Poster 1990, Nicholson 1995). The social constructionists’ view treats identity as a process which develops in social contexts rather than as a fixed category, and finds identity as a source of mobilization and an interactional accomplishment negotiated through linguistic exchange and social performance (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Vygotsky, 1978; Gergen, 1991; Jenkins, 1992). This approach – commonly held in communication studies – emerged within the tradition of social identity theory and it is based
on the assumption that people come to know themselves through a process of self-categorization and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Cultural scripts, issues of power and technological artifacts interfere with the process of identity formation to the extent that identity may be viewed as a product of such parameters and also mobilized by them. Giddens argues that since the self is a somewhat an amorphous phenomenon, self identity cannot refer merely to its persistence over time in a way that philosophers might speak of identity of objects or things: ‘identity is not something that it is just given as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action system but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual’ (Giddens, 1991:52). In this context, sociology has approached ethnic identity as multiple, always relational, incomplete and depending upon discourses of the other –e.g. processes by which ethnic groups exclude and delineate other groups– and theories of difference (e.g. Melucci et al, 1989; Calhoun, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Grossberg, 1996). The majority of this work stresses the similarities, shared knowledge and attributes in a group and elaborates how symbolic distinctions and discourses of the ‘other’ are created, preserved, negotiated or altered through interaction.

This study relies on a sociolinguistic approach of identity and situates identity in the lived experience of everyday communication and social actions (Zimmerman, 1998). For sociolinguistics, identity is not treated as the end point of the analysis, the product of the communicative actions but ‘is integrated into communication as a motile active ingredient which is reformulated or rejected as that activity unfolds’ (Rampton, 2008:1). In this frame of thinking, Rampton explains that researchers tend to look at how a given identity gets activated and displayed in situated discourse rather than how the identity changes over time (Rampton, 2008).

Viewing identity from the realm of the sociolinguists’–as a process rather than as a product–, the study adopts the social constructionists’ view on relational and contextual versions of identity to answer the research questions posed. Therefore, I approach identity as a site of struggle situated in the users’ everyday online social practices –rather than in given social categorical characteristics– and I trace versions of the participants’ ethnic identity on the interpretive resources that they exploit when online. Such a framework allows me to account for the co-existence of different identities within one person (e.g. being Greek and British), search for versions of identity in multiple locations (e.g. gender, class, locality etc.) and
examine narratives and stories of the self.

Another useful framework for the study of identity which has inspired this research, originates from the work of the social interactionists (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Reymers, 1998). In the sociolinguistic realm, the interactionists have studied the process of identity formation from the perspective of human interaction. Blumer (1962) expanded on Mead's work and coined the term ‘symbolic interactionism’ to study identity. Symbolic interactionism examines:

‘the world of symbols –anything that carries a particular meaning that is recognized by people who share a culture. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behaviour’ (Blumer, 1962: 180).

Symbolic interactionism’ perspectives have treated the self as being empirically generated in the interaction (Cooley, 1902). According to this tradition, versions of the self (e.g. ethnic self) rather than being essential bounded and unique (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) are perceived as the product of social interaction. Goffman’s metaphor of the self in ‘dramaturgy’ has been a central concept for interactionists (Goffman, 1969). Goffman is building on Mead’s distinction between the creative ‘I’ and the individual’s response to the ‘me’ to view interaction as a performance, shaped by the context and the audience. According to this procedure, in each given interactional situation, the performer deploys deliberately signs and symbols –verbal or nonverbal– suitable to the occasion and the interaction purpose, consistent with expectations formed by the audience. It is through this internal interactional process that the self masters the ability to be both the subject and the object of interaction and manages impressions strategically to facilitate desired relationships (Robinson, 2007). From the perspective of the interactionists’, analysis of everyday conversation provides valuable insights on the way that individuals create the illusion of a shared social order through their interaction. For example, Cilla, Reisigl and Wodak (1999) describe the process according to which a set of similar predispositions complex common ideas, concepts or perception themes, emotional attitudes are intersubjectively shared within a specific group. They introduce the notion of ‘national socialization’ to explain how notions of national identity, shared cognitive representations in the minds of individuals (Romney et al., 1996) and shared conceptual maps (Hall, 1997) are internalized through socialization.
Bucholtz and Hall (2005) proposed a framework for the analysis of identity as produced in linguistic interaction. In this frame, identity is studied as a product relationally constructed in linguistic and semiotic practices indexed through labels, stances, styles, or linguistic structures and systems:

‘identity may be in part intentional, in part habitual and less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation, in part a construct of others’ perceptions and representations, and in part an outcome of larger ideological processes and structures’ (Bucholz & Hall, 2005:1).

Narrative theory has also provided a framework for the study of identity. A narrative approach to self-understanding stresses that:

‘The sense of self is an essentially narrative phenomenon; people conceive of themselves in terms of stories about their actions in the world, using them to make sense of the temporal flow of their lives. We find identity and meaning as a result of the stories we tell about ourselves or that others tell about us. Therefore, a narrative approach to self-understanding is not a distortion of reality but a confirmation of it’ (Stiver, 1993: 412).

Throughout this study, the self is thought of as a narrative or story rather than a substance or thing (Donald, 1991). The ability of the narrative to verbalize and situate experience as text makes it a resource for the display of self and also a starting point to unravel versions of identities. Exploring narrative and small stories, Georgakopoulou opens up the scope for identity research: ‘narrative tends to be a privileged mode for self-construction and a unique point of entry into trans situational features of the self and identity as those emerge in a person’s life story’ (Georgakopoulou, 2007:15).

Baker (2006) studied the formation of the self as a process in the conjunction of two types of narratives: ontological narratives, and public narratives. Ontological narratives are stories that social actors use to make sense and define oneself:

‘This in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to do.... This "doing" will in turn produce new narratives and hence, new actions; the relationship between narrative and ontology is processual and mutually constitutive. Both are conditions of the other; neither are a priori. Narrative location endows social actors with identifies, however multiple, ambiguous, ephemeral, or conflicting they may be (hence the term narrative identity)… These narratives are sustained by intersubjective webs of relationality, “webs of interlocution” (Taylor, 1989) or public narratives’ (Somers, 1994: 61).

According to Somers (1994), public narratives, however local or global, micro or macro, are
attached to cultural or institutional formations, to intersubjective networks or institutions, and can be stories about a notion (e.g. the notion of ‘being Greek’), a concept or a location (e.g. living in UK): ‘Like in all narratives, people selectively appropriate events from their everyday life to construct stories about a concept, in the same way that the mainstream media connect and arrange events to create a ‘mainstream plot’ (Somers, 1994). Georgakopoulou (2006) and Bamberg (2007) develop an approach which places emphasis on micro-scale social interaction and investigate identity formations in ‘narratives-in-interaction’. They view small stories and the way those stories surface in everyday conversation as the locus where identities are continuously practiced and experienced. This approach allows them to explore how individuals position themselves taking into account the way that their referential world is constructed as a function of interactive engagement (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008:1).

Viewing identity as a narrative of the self helps the researcher emphasize the contextual dimensions of identity: time and place. Those categorical destabilizing dimensions of identity (Baker, 2006) can only be approached through empirical inquiries and not by a priori assumptions. Narratives of the ethnic self have been a common site from which to approach ethnic identity.

1.3 The Study of Ethnicity and Diaspora

Early theorizations describe ethnic identity as the ‘natural and counterfeit cultural, psychological and social characteristics of a population’ (Vacher de la Pouge, 1896). Much of the research on ethnic identity originates from the work of social psychologists who treat ethnic identity as an aspect of group social identity (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For Tajfel, ethnic identity is ‘that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from knowledge of membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership’ (Tajfel, 1981:255). However, ethnic identity is a subset of identity, thus a highly dynamic and multidimensional construct, such as identity is. Trimble and Dickson combine the definitions of identity and ethnicity, and conclude that both terms are used to express identical notions: ‘the notion of sameness, likeness, and oneness’ and ‘sameness of a band or nation of people who share common customs, traditions, historical
experiences, and in some instances geographical residence’ (Trimble & Dickson, 2005). They argue that the term ethnicity is sufficient to capture the manner in which identity is generally conceptualized and they suggest that identity is almost synonymous with ethnicity.

Although disciplinary boundaries dealing with ethnic identity are quite arbitrary, the main debates on ethnic identity have arisen within sociology and social anthropology (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Patterson, 1977; McKay, 1982; Weinreich, 1986). Ethnicity has been an aspect of identity studied extensively for a number of reasons: it provides a model to examine identity constructions, is a dynamic concept that shapes broader cultural and socioeconomic processes (e.g. ethnic conflicts), penetrates other aspects of identity (e.g. gender roles and attitudes) and it has the power to mobilize social action. Ethnic identity studies are also contributing to reveal the psychology of immigrants and other multicultural groups, to uncover heterogeneity within cultural groups and to expose the mechanisms of cultural influence (Tsai, Dutton & Wong, 2002).

Weber distinguishes ethnicity from race, as early as in 1922, and defines ethnic relations as:

‘those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation; furthermore it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists.’ (Weber 1965:306).

Following much of the recent literature on ethnic politics (Varshney, 2001; Chandra, 2004; Wilkinson, 2004; Posner, 2005), this study adopts Horowitz’s (1985) broad, descriptive classification of ‘ethnicity’ as a socially constructed category, an umbrella concept that ‘easily embraces groups differentiated by colour, language, and religion; it covers tribes, races, nationalities and castes’ (Horowitz, 1985:53). Therefore, ethnic identity makes a claim for a shared common ancestry, values, beliefs, culture, race, religion, language, kinship, or place of origin, satisfies peoples’ need for affiliation and self-definition, includes a sense of personal continuity, attachment to a group, a sense of uniqueness from other people and common experience of a place (Phinney, 1990; 2000; 2003). Although affiliation can be influenced by natal (place of origin), racial (physical characteristics), cultural and symbolic factors (rituals, clothing, foods artifacts etc.), ethnic identity is a source of identity which is not determined at birth but acquired in later life (Cheung, 1993). Unlike race and gender, ethnicity can be a product of self-designations and also attributions made by others.
Barth was the first to articulate the notion of ethnicity as mutable and ‘a product of social ascriptions, a kind of labelling process engaged in by oneself and others’ (Barth, 1969). Another element of ethnic identity cited in almost every theoretical discussion has been the level of commitment and self-belonging, where the strength of commitment is not necessarily related to the content of the ethnic identity but to the specific attitudes or worldviews held by the individual (Cokley, 2005). Central to this process is the notion of exploration, defined as the lifelong process of seeking information and experiences relevant to one’s ethnicity through a range of cultural practices, events etc. (Phinney, 2007).

According to social researchers and sociolinguists, self-categorization and labeling, have been the most important components of ethnic identity which denote the genuine association of one’s personal identification with a communal one (Smith, 1992; Phinney, 2003). Phinney argues that any measurement of ethnic identity must begin with approaching how individuals view and describe themselves relying on labels and naming practices. Although literature recognizes the value of labelling and its socio-political function in assisting naming and classification, the use of labelling is only a part of identity process. That is because ethnic identities are also likely to include other identifiers — occasionally conflicting —, multiple and diverse affiliations and categories such as acculturation status, natal background, attitudes toward own and other groups; behavioral preferences, language usage, friendship affiliations, music and food preferences, participation in cultural and religious activities (Trimble, 2000). It is for this reason that the settings of large multicultural cities where individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds coexist and interact provide an ideal context for the study of ethnic identity.

Jenkins understands ethnic identity formation according to two interacting elements: a name (the nominal) and the experience. These elements are united in the ongoing production and reproduction of identity and its boundaries (Jenkins, 2002).

The achievement of a secure ethnic identity derives from experience, but experience is not sufficient to produce it. Because one’s ethnic identity is constructed over time, the actions and choices of individuals are essential to the processes’ (Phinney & Ong, 2007: 33).

Both the nominal and virtual elements of ethnic identity formation include processes that demand from the individual to make choices regarding actions, life choices, friends, social
interactions, to select groups to affiliate and react in behaviors etc. These processes involve boundaries where one makes a distinction between ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’ members between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. Otherness is ‘as much about the construction of oneself as it is about creating distance’ (Hallam & Street, 2000:250). Barth finds that ethnic identity serves as a means to create boundaries that enabled a group to distance themselves from one another: ‘it is ethnic boundaries that define a group and not the cultural stuff that encloses it’ (Barth, 1969:15).

Discourses of the ‘other’ are not only integral to ethnic identity but also constitutive. Perceptions of ‘others’ may serve to form, sustain boundaries and strengthen identities, or even to weaken and marginalize ethnic identities as they are largely determined by relations of power, domination and authority. In this sense, internal and external definitions of an ethnic group work together to produce, reproduce and transform the social boundaries of an ethnic group in a two-way process that takes place across the boundary and between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Barth, 1969).

To study ethnic identity, I follow an interdisciplinary approach which allows me to search for ethnic identity in the main components that I described above –in the process of self-categorization and labeling, the process of self-exploration, in social practices, social interaction and in discourses of the ‘other’–. My approach to ethnic identity moves away from essentialist views –which understand ethnic identity as a fixed unity ‘based on shared claims to blood, soil or language’ (Appadurai, 1996:140) – and shares a social constructionism approach (cf.1.2) to study identity formation in a diasporic setting. The study does not rely solely on the individuals’ self-categorization but takes into account multiple statements and a range of representational practices and narratives that reveal ethnic affiliation. Moreover, ethnic identity is viewed as a social process, a practical accomplishment rather than a static trait. I approach ethnic identity as ‘never complete, always in process and always constituted within not outside representation’ (Hall, 1990:222) and as a process ‘situational and changeable’ (Hall, 1990). In this respect, ethnicity is perceived as situationally defined and produced in the course of social transactions that occur across –and in the process help to constitute– the ethnic boundary in question (Jenkins, 2002).
Individuals’ everyday social practices of labeling, representation and interaction are considered as manifestations of ethnic identity and serve as starting points to unfold narratives of ethnic identity. These social practices are studied as embedded to specific historical, situational and technological contexts and as they interact with changing circumstances and situational factors. The recent renewed interest in ethnicity has been strongly linked to populations' movement across boundaries.

1.4 Ethnicity Beyond Boundaries

From the realm of sociocultural studies, scholars have approached ethnic identity as being articulated both in ethnic contexts and in broader global context (Bhabha, 1990; Cohen, 1997; Ogan, 2001). In an increasingly globalized world where the importance of ‘borders as institutions’ is diminishing (Balibar, 2004), ethnicity and group identities are much less territorially bounded (Demmers, 2002). Ethnic identity has been currently studied under the lens of phenomena such as diaspora and transnationalism and as shaped in the setting of multiethnic societies where diverse, ethical and cultural backgrounds and linguistic resources coexist and interact. Moving away from the old, hegemonic, imperializing form of ethnicity (Balibar, 2004), diasporic formations and their ‘floating lives’ (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2000) are becoming increasingly significant as transnational connections between non-state actors. Although ethnicity still serves as a place from which dispersed populations can speak, is no longer related to a quality that can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland (Hall, 1990). Media have played an increasingly significant role in the process according to which diasporic and transnational identities are being formed. Section 1.4.1 reviews the phenomena of diaspora and section 1.4.2 makes a distinction between diaspora and transnationalism, concepts that have been used interchangeably throughout the literature review and will be further discussed in the study’s conclusion (cf. 6.4). In the subsequent sections (1.4.3-1.4.5), literature review focuses on the notions of connectivity, home and space –key components of diasporic and transnational identities– to approach the experience of dispersion in the era of new media.
1.4.1 Diasporic Identities in the Era of New Media

The phenomenon of diaspora, notably the human experience of dispersion, has been the center of numerous studies derived from interdisciplinary theorizations and thus reflecting different modalities and methodologies of the humanities and social sciences. Situating the diasporic experience, most scholars start from the fact that ‘population themselves are on a move, often in ‘a process of deterritorialization that erases the national boundaries with which nation states literally define themselves’ (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2000:1). The term diaspora is indicative of a range of human dispersal (Tölöyan, 1996; Cunningham & Sinclair, 2000), and ‘immigrants have been studied as immigrants, guest workers, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, displaced populations, ‘folk devils’ or threats to the security and prosperity of ‘host’ societies’ (Tsagarousianou, 2004: 53). According to Cohen’s historization of diaspora as a particular kind of immigration, ‘diapora’ is used to describe not only the physical movement and shifts of populations from one society to another but also a sense of longing, loss and the possibility of return to the homeland (Cohen, 1997). It is also evident that a great amount of studies examine for the diversity of the settler’s multicultural experiences in the form of late modern transnational mobility while avoiding a boarder typology of these phenomena (Tölöyan, 1991; Cunningham & Sinclair 2000; Fludernik 2003).

Transnational movement of ethnic populations is not a recent phenomenon. It has been occurring through centuries and it has been determined by colonization and trading connections across the globe (Morley & Chen, 1996). This transnational migrant circuit is a result of continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information (Rouse, 1991) challenging the autonomy and authority of the state over its otherwise sedentary and singular populations (Silverstone, 2002). Rather than describing diaspora as an uncomfortable experience, Karim stresses the ambiguities of the term that denotes communities of people dislocated form their native homelands through migration (Karim, 2003) but etymologically suggests ‘fertility of dispersion, dissemination and the scattered of seed’ (Braziel & Mannur, 2003:4).

Attendance to the historic conditions that produce diasporic phenomena or subjectivities (Robins & Aksoy, 2001; Clifford, 1997) can provide valuable information about the
distinctiveness and multiplicity of diasporic contexts and also may create difficulties for the study of diaspora as a single and unified narrative. A consensus upon definitions of diasporas is absent in the vast literature, thus, theorizations of diasporas have become a site of contestation (Braziel & Mannur, 2003; Tsagarousianou, 2004). The reason is that a variety of human experiences of displacement and the range of phenomena that surrounds them (Grossberg, 1996) have been used as analytical tools adjusted to the changing concerns of social and anthropological research over time.

Cultural and historical resonances of the term ‘diaspora’ have been developed by a growing number of studies which beyond postcolonial studies trace a number of subjects and diasporic configurations across the globe: Chinese, black African, Jewish, South Asian, Latin American and Caribbean, Indians etc. Narratives of globalization are an integral part of theory on diaspora. Sociology and anthropology have been extensively occupied with the phenomenon of diaspora as a vehicle to describe the conditions of late modernity where current economic geographically and political forces are constantly altering the discursive frames in which national identities are shaped (Hall, 1990; Giddens, 1991). Recent studies recognize that the concept of ‘diaspora’ problematizes the issue of origin and accentuates the idea of ethnicity as a never-ending process of identity construction (Girloy, 1997). Clifford sees diaspora as an interpretative term used to characterize ‘the contact zones of nations cultures and regions’ (Clifford, 1997:245).

What has most problematized research on diaspora, however, are the wider implications of media discourses for diasporic experiences and the experience of ethnicity. In a broader sense, the trajectory of diaspora and new media practice provides a tool to question the rigidities of identity itself and rethink concepts of nationhood and ethnic identification (Karim, 2003). In this respect, transnational groups have also been studied as a form of globalisation from ‘below’ (Falk, 1993; Karim, 2007) caught up in a process of mediation, according to which individual experiences and practices of transnational populations have been increasingly mediated by a variety of technological forms.

As Thompson points out: ‘We may be entering a new, postmodern epoch in which the idea of a single, nation-state based identity is giving way to a more fragmented and hybridized spectrum of cultural identities. The new media offer rich sources for constructing these
diasporic and hybrid identities’ (Thompson, 1995: 417). In this context, Georgiou points to the triangular position of diasporic cultural experience: experiences of displacement are sustained and expanded in a transnational level, lived at the local level of the host country and ‘imagined’ at a national level (Georgiou, 2006). At the interface of the local and global, the symbolically marked neighbourhoods of diaspora constantly embody current economic and social changes, new communications practices and new forms of ‘consumption at a distance’ (Martiniello & Piquard, 2002). As a result, the process of understanding diasporic phenomena is marked by experimentation and should be placed in a continuous dialogue with media technologies and globalization processes. The impact of media technologies and globalization has also created a debate on the terms used to describe the phenomena of human displacement and dispersion globally (e.g. diaspora and transnationalism).

1.4.2 Diaspora and Transnationalism

To reflect the diversity of the settler’s experience, the terms ‘diasporic’ and ‘transnational’ have been used interchangeably throughout the literature. Whereas the term ‘diaspora’ is traditionally used to denote the human experience of dispersion giving emphasis to group identity that maintains strong cultural boundaries, the newer ‘transnational’ approach accounts for a wider range of processes that cross the boundaries of national communities and surround the experience of displacement. Importantly, ‘diaspora’ can be used to signify not simply transnationality and movement, but also ‘political struggles to define the local as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement’ (Clifford, 1994:308). For this reason, the vast amount of literature adheres to the term ‘diaspora’ to emphasize group dimensions, community, social mobilization and collective identities enabled by movements across borders.

In the face of globalization and modernity, the term diaspora is constantly being reinvented to include new forms of mobility, connectivity and displacement and has been adjusted to include distinct resonances for migrating and movements across nations according to social and cultural forces of the historical conditions. For example, immigrants, whose social activities traverse more than one nation-state are often referred to as ‘transnationals’ or
‘transmigrants’ (Basch et al. 1992; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998) because they develop and maintain multiple relations – e.g. familial, economic, social, institutional, religious, and political that span borders– (Glick Schiller, 2003).

Glick Schiller (2003) defines transnationals as those persons who live their lives across borders, participating simultaneously in social relations that embedded them in more than one nation-state. However, the concept has been used in a variety of different contexts – depending on the source– ranging from globalization to the cross-national exchange of political, economic and cultural resources via modern technology and legal agreements (Basch et al. 1992, Nonini & Ong, 1997; Gold, 2000; Levitt, 2003). From the realm of cultural studies scholars have started to study transnationalism using ethnographic methods and focusing on the actual experiences of immigrants, their activities and practices (e.g. Wilding, 2007). In this frame, Sassen’s conceptualization of a transnational social space as ‘a space that is both place-centered in that is embedded in particular and strategic locations, and it is trans territorial because it connects sites that are not geographically proximate yet are intensely connected to each other’ (Sassen, 2004: 652) proves useful for the study of transnational discourses (cf. 1.4.5).

Also theories of transnationalism, have existed in pair with theories on hybridity. Since both discourses emphasize a flexible ‘state of in-betweenness’ (Brah, 1996), transnationalism and hybridity are often combined in postcolonial literature. Bhabha (1990) first used the term ‘hybridity’ to describe the construction of identity in a postcolonial context as a site of struggle between contesting identifications emerging from the interweaving of elements between the colonized and the colonizer. Since then, hybridity has been celebrated as ‘a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference’ (Hoogvelt, 1997:158). For Bhabha (1996), hybridity emerges in a liminal ‘in between’ space which blurs existing boundaries, a ‘third space’ which challenges the authority of any cultural identity (cf. 1.4.5). This space is disruptive for hegemonic colonial narratives, enables new positions to emerge and engenders new possibility for cultural identifications. Being ‘interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative’ Bhabha’s third space can be productive of new forms of cultural meaning (Bhabha, 1994). Except narratives of cultural capitalism, Bhabha’s work has also been studied in the context of globalization and cultural flows (e.g. Pieterse, 2004; Kraidy, 2005).
Piezerse views hybridity as enabling a form of transnationalism and globalization which rather than facilitating homogenizing forces, it constitutes the rhizome of culture (Piezerse, 2004). In this study, I view the concept of hybridity as a component of transnationalism which challenges essentialism and questions established categorizations of identity and culture. In the era of new media, hybridity appears in the literature on transnationalism and new media –especially in an increasing amount of identity studies (e.g. Ignacio, 2005). Mitra & Gajjala (2008) find that interaction on virtual spaces can support transnationalism and enable fragmented, choice-driven and hybrid identities (cf. 1.5). However, research in this field has yet to account for the specific technical properties of each web application and situate the inquiry into the particular situational and contextual frameworks that surround its use.

Alternatively, cosmopolitanism and theories of multiculturalism provide also distinct narratives that explain transnational mobility (Hannerz, 1990; Kotkin, 1992; Bhabha, 1996; Robins, 1999). However as Hebdige (1990) points out, such terms are mostly a product of media, tourism and consumer culture and fail to address the conditions that oblige people to inhabit more than one national space. Thus, rather than just treating the diasporic experience of cultural difference as a victory of cultural pluralism it would be more fruitful to explore the distinctiveness and the complexities within the diasporic experience as an effect of global investment patterns and international inequalities (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2000).

With regard to the population examined –Greeks in London– it remains to be tested whether they can be characterized as ‘diasporic’ or ‘transnationals’. Since the reasons for their mobility and consequently the duration and intensity of their experience of displacement may vary, an a priori characterization of the population would pose boundaries to the analysis. An investigation into social practices –ethnic, diasporic and transnational– will provide more in-depth information on the way that the participants practice their ethnic identity in a transnational social context. Adhering to Butler’s argument that ‘conceptualizations of diaspora must be able to accommodate the reality of multiple identities and phases of diasporization over time’ (2000:127), I will come back to this issue in the study’s conclusion (cf. 6.4).
The following parts of this section provide an overview of the phenomenon of diaspora and transnationalism through the lenses of three core dimensions that influence diasporic and transnational identities: the notion of connectivity, home and space.

### 1.4.3 The Notion of Connectivity

Mobility – movement across borders –, a core characteristic which defines diasporic experience (cf. 1.4), has acquired a new dimension in the face of new media. A dynamic shift from ‘mobility’ to ‘connectivity’ (Tomlinson 1999, Tsagarousianou 2001) is a central narrative that fosters understandings of diasporic phenomena today. Communication links such as mail, telegraph, telephone, facsimile, and digital technologies have eliminated temporal and geographical distance and enabled cross-border contact among members of diasporic communities spread over several continents (Karim, 1998). Highly interactive and creative features of web technology enable audience participation in global commons and empower individuals to become both producers and consumers of media meaning – images, audiovisual texts and applications – (Lull, 1990; Silverstone, 1994; Ang, 1996; McQuail, 1997; Morley, 1999). Far from facilitating intercultural conversation at a global scale (Hewitt, 2000), this increasingly interconnected landscape creates a shift in diasporas’s everyday life as it is now easier for diasporas to share common experiential frames with their homeland, connect live with events taking place there, maintain relationships with relatives and friends and even participate in the social and political realm of the homeland’s public life.

### 1.4.4 The Notion of Home

Migration may be a radical break from a place of origin to a destination (Faist, 2000), however populations that have settled away from their territory of origin still maintain strong emotional ties with their roots (Braziel & Esman, 1986). Most studies view diasporic culture as a place ‘away from roots towards to routes’ (Clifford, 1994). Particularly early studies have approached diaspora centered on questions evolving around home and ‘how to place it,
find it, secure it, connect with it, recover it’ (Silverstone, 2002: 19). ‘Home’ may mean different things to those who are traveling and to those who are immigrating; consequently definitions of home may vary according to the conditions and motivations of human displacement (Bauman, 1996). As the country of settlement is usually the locus where diasporic experiences are lived and extended, the issue of home remains in flux in the diasporic imagination (Tsagarousianou, 2001), ‘a mythic place of desire’ (Brah, 1996) a ‘symbolic actor’ (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997; Van Hear, 1998; Faist, 2000). This relationship with notions of ‘home’ is often a product of the population’s need to identify with their homeland in an effort to resist complete assimilation by the culture of the host nation. It is, a relationship that is sustained by some form of communication (Naficy, 1999) across also for this reason that in a vast amount of studies diasporic populations are treated as marginalized groups.

Rather than theorizing diasporic communities as subcategories of a nation, the concept of diaspora often implies a real or ‘imagined relationship’ among scattered or dispersed individuals/governments, transnational corporations and individuals (Mowlana, 1997). In an international setting, homelands serve as means of cultural identification and create an 'imagined sense of oneness' (Anderson, 1991; Ginsburg et al. 2002) that is being fostered by increased connectivity.

While electronic media ‘reterritorialize the diasporas through the resonance of electromagnetic spaces’ (Karim, 2003:10) and merge dislocated experiences, the experience of 'home' is caught up in the process of modernization. The myth of physical return to the homeland is now being replaced by ‘virtual returns’ (Hanafi, 2001) enabled through media technology. Notions of homeland, a place of diaspora’s nostalgic links and memories (Brah, 1996) are being redefined through imaginative dynamics embedded in cultural practices, mediated by mental places (Bhabha, 1994) and often ‘fraught with tensions and ambivalence’ (Tsagarousianou, 2001:29-30).

Diasporic identities however, are entities framed according to the dual relationships held with the country of origin as well as the new host country (Srinivasan, 2006) and articulate elements from different frames of culture and action experienced in a coherent whole (Clifford, 1997; Fazal & Tsagarousianou, 2002). Therefore, as diasporas are connected live
with their homeland activity and foster communal links, the place of ‘home’ intersects in vital ways with the notion of homeland everywhere (Braziel & Mannur, 2003). In this frame, Cunnigham & Sinclair (2000) argue that a diasporic consciousness can never be unified culturally as it refers to several ‘homes’ and a complex interlocking of histories and cultures. The reformatory forces of media experiences (both the media that diasporas generate and those they receive from the host culture) create new spheres of existence for displaced communities. As local, national and transnational interweaves in emerging de-centered cultural spaces (Morley & Robins, 1995), images of a distant homeland are constantly reinvented: ‘diasporas recreate home by instilling such resonance into the spaces they occupy: they do it with their language, art forms, customs, arrangement of objects and ideas’ (Karim, 2003: 25). In this respect, the linkage between home and the individual is revised in Hall’s assumption that 'home' as a place of experience is being transformed beyond recognition (Hall, 1992).

1.4.5 The Notion of Space

Transnational places of experience create a complex interface for diasporic subjectivities as both frameworks of the country of origin and the country of settlement interfere (Morley 2000). Diasporic populations carrying different cultures are characterized by Pieterse (2004) as populations living in a ‘cultural fusion’, a constantly configuring non static process, a ‘third culture’ (Hannerz, 1990; Martin-Barbero, 1993). For Karim, this notion of hybridity (cf. 1.4.1) demarcates a distinct locus of experience, a space in which the relationship between people and landscapes is reconceptualised as inhabiting into a transnational ‘third’ space (cf. 1.4.1) characterized by creative dynamics (Bhabha, 1996; Karim, 2003). Similarly, for Faist, the very concept of ‘space’ transcends understandings of a localised set of geographical features and refers to cultural, economic and political practices of individual and collective actors within territories or places (Faist, 2000; Gamlen, 2008). Those transnational social spaces consist of combinations of social and symbolic ties and their contents, positions in networks and organisations that cut across the borders of at least two national states.

Thus, 'space' is being understood as relatively stable and dense sets of both real and symbolic
ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states. It also offers a valuable tool to explore the principles by which geographical propinquity is supplemented or transformed by transnational exchanges and practices (Faist, 2008). In this process, symbolic ties have a central and transforming role: ‘Symbolic ties are continuing transactions with which the people involved link common meanings, memories, expectations for the future and collective representations. Languages can be seen as highly complex sets of symbolic ties’ (Faist, 1998:4).

Massey describes the diasporic space as ‘the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations at all geographical scales from the intimacy of the household to the wide spaces of transnational connections’ (Massey, 1993:168). Cultural practices that extend the diasporic experience to mediated spaces and allow ‘regrouping individuals of similar origins’ (Dayan, 1998:108), range from setting up of religious and cultural institutions to use of communication tools (letters, telephones, online social networks) and mass media (cinema, satellite, radio television). Media have been central to the formation of this space. Media forms have helped diasporas not only to reflect what already exists but also to ‘to constitute new kinds of subjects and discover places form which to speak other than ethnicities’ (Hall, 1990: 228).

Georgiou (2006) discovers an amount of emerging multi and de-centred cultural spaces among diasporic individuals who use new media and examines these spaces as sites that diasporas experience everyday life at the local, national or transnational level. Such cultural spaces are full of inequalities and inconsistencies while at the same time enable dialogue and encompass conflict (Giddens, 1991). According to many scholars, the space intersecting between two cultures is a space where identity is articulated between marginal and dominant discourses and encompasses a war of positions in order to assert itself, through an evolving and adaptive process (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1997; Webner & Modood, 1997).

Notably, increasing attention in recent studies has been directed towards the emergence of transnational social spaces on the micro-level. Mau, Mewers & Zimmerman (2008) ask how border-crossing interrelations influence the attitudes and values of the people involved and point to the controversy caused by the assumptions that on one hand the increasing transnationalization of social relations will foster the development of cosmopolitan attitudes...
or on the other hand, it may result in renationalization. However, different media environments (e.g. a social network site) have the potential to create distinct types of spaces at the transnational level.

1.5 The Study of Virtual Ethnicity and Diaspora

Despite that ethnic identity has been extensively studied in the context of traditional media (broadcast media, the press), there is a lack of research on ethnicity and the way it interacts with new media and particular the internet. Although gender issues have been examined in terms of identity formation, race and ethnicity online have not been studied adequately (Nakamura, 2002). Nakamura recognizes that studies about ethnicity on the web are mainly derived from American contexts of experience and situates a need for similar studies to be carried out in diverse cultural contexts (Nakamura, 2002). This study attempts to fill this gap and pave the way for further empirical research on relevant issues. Section 1.5.1 reviews the existing theoretical frameworks for thinking about ethnic identity on the web, and 1.5.2 focuses on collective forms of identity online such as virtual diaspora, online communities and networks of practice. Section 1.5.3 presents studies related to the representation of ethnic and diasporic identities on the web.

1.5.1 Ethnicity Online

Ethnic identity online is traditionally understood in representation, notably the system of signs and symbols that stand in and take the place of ethnic identity (Mitchell, 1995). Especially in the context of broadcast media, studies have approached ethnicity through representation –a core media function– and go as far to argue that ‘ethnic identities are more concerned with the symbols of ethnic cultures rather than with the cultures themselves’ (Alba, 1990: 306). Cyberspace offers a new terrain for identity work. The web can be understood as a space of representations: ‘While human beings have inhabited representational spaces for a very long time, we have never been able to create representations with the ease and flexibility possible in cyberspace’ (Lillie, 2007:5).
Theoretical frameworks regarding how ethnic diversity on the web is controlled extend in diverse directions. Researchers point to the dual nature of the web as it can exert both forces of social homogenization and diversification. Modern approaches on virtual ethnicity view the web as a tool with homogenous and centralizing tendencies which fosters existing discourses on identity and community and reproduces established accounts of ethnicity, stereotypes and prejudices. In this frame, researchers find that the web is likely to reinforce the culturally dominant social networks and to lead to an increase of their cosmopolitanism and globalization (Castells, 1996). On the opposite end, scholars also find that the internet is equally possible to contribute to the empowerment of traditionally marginalized actors (e.g. ethnic minorities) allowing marginalized groups to circumvent mainstream media and to subvert hegemonic discourses (Bunt, 2000; Poole 2002; Anderson, 2003). As a result, one can observe ambivalence between the web’s possibility to offer viable alternatives and critical re-articulations of race, gender and class or to serve as a restatement of old hierarchies (Leung, 1999). These binary positions are mostly expressed by modernisms – modernism prescribed a set, fixed notion of identity—. Their approaches to identity can be characterized by terms such as ‘linear’, ‘logical’, ‘hierarchical’ and can be distinguished by most recent postmodernism accounts which are reflected in terms such as 'decentred,' 'fluid,' 'nonlinear' and 'opaque.' (Turkle, 1995:17).

Turkle (1995) was the first to situate a cultural shift from modernist to postmodernist accounts of virtual identity, and finds that this change of perspective has deep implications for considerations of human identity. According to postmodern perspectives, the rise of virtual environments has facilitated a radical anti-essentialism (Callero, 2003) which conceives identities as disengaged from gender, ethnicity and other problematic constructions. Turkle’s work is representative of postmodern accounts in which the digital self is treated as if it were a separate entity (Zhao, 2005), emerging in ‘semi fictional digital otherworlds’ (Dibbel, 1998: 16) where distinct cultures coexist and interact and the boundaries between self and the other, imagination and reality are being dissolved (Turkle, 1995). In a postmodern framework, the virtual self is seen as a flexible (Lifton, 1993), dismantled fleeting construction (Gergen, 1991) saturated by a multiplicity of voices, fluid, non linear and fragmented (Dowd, 1991; Harre, 2001; Volmer, 2005). Acknowledging that ethnic identity is no longer anchored solely in ethnic structures, this tradition views a
powerful force of identity fragmentation emerging from diverse online depictions of ethnicity (Alba, 1990; Mitra, 1997; Ito, 1999; Wu 1999).

However, revising postmodernist perspectives on virtual self, social constructionist models of ethnicity (cf. 1.2) argue that ethnic identity is constructed through social interactions inside and outside ethnic community (Smith, 1992; Nagel, 1994). By critiquing early theorizations on virtual identity, they approach categories of virtual identity not only in relation to the way identity is reflected online but also taking into account broader processes, interactive functions of online technologies and community enabled on the web. As a result, an increasing body of identity work –derived mainly from psychology, cultural and feminist studies– emphasizes the social and the cultural context in which the self is experienced, in the face of constantly developing forms of CMC environments (Burman, 1990; McLaughlin et al 1997, Butler, 1999; Huffaker & Calvert 2005, Sun 2005). For instance, Adler & Adler find that ‘the internet offers a reservoir of cultural hiding places where users can form their own cultures and communities even though normative standards and assumptions are not totally absent’ (Adler & Adler, 2008:50).

Wertheim’s work (1999) examines the practices through which one can adopt different personaes both online and offline to point out that multiple selfing online does not necessarily refers to self-fragmentation. There are a number of identity aspects and assumptions that users reproduce into their interactions. Robinson approaches the virtual self through the lenses of symbolic interactionism (cf. 1.2) to find that ‘in creating online selves, users do not seek to transcend the most fundamental aspects of their selves. Rather, users bring into being bodies, personas and personalities framed according to the same categories that exist in the offline world’ (Robinson, 2007:94).

Similarly, critiques of the postmodern view assume that ‘the web is not a new world, but an electronic reflection of the world we currently inhabit’ (Lawley, 1993:78). In that respect, scholars ask what people are doing online and what happens ‘when people cross the so called cyborg boundary’ (Arnorld & Miller, 2001). Hardey further supports that ‘the embodied lives, identities and material circumstances of users are themselves significant in affecting patterns of access to and use of the internet’ (Hardey, 2002:581). For most individuals, internet enhances and supplements what they do offline and identities are likely to be
extensions of offline identities (Rainie, 2004). This makes internet an ideal place to study ethnic identity. Towards a comprehension of virtual life, this body of work goes beyond cyber identities, to look at the offline contexts of online selves and discover cases where online identities are continuous with offline identities (Kennedy, 2006).

In this line of though, Nakamura’s work has inspired my study. In her work, she realizes that ‘the Internet is a place where race happens. In the early days of the Net, technological visionaries imagined the online word as a utopian space where everything was possible. Now that the ‘internet revolution is over’ (Nakamura, 2002: 11), Nakamura examines how our ideas about race, ethnicity and identity continue to be shaped and reshaped every time we log on. She investigates the ways that race is configured in English language based cyberspaces hosted in the United States and argues:

‘The internet functions as a tourism machine; it reproduces digital images of race as others. Missing from this picture is any depiction of race in the American context… Racism is recuperated as cosmetic multiculturalism, or cosmetic cosmopolitanism…american minorities are discursively fixed, or cyber typed in particular ways to stabilize a sense of cosmopolitan, digerati-privileged self which is white and Western’ (Nakamura, 2002:140).

She finds that ethnic diversity on the web is controlled through racially stereotypical representations referring as ‘cybertypes’ that serve to define identity by oppositional positions to what is visible by dominant media images. Also, stresses the need for studies conducted with regard to different ethnic and cultural contexts. Apart from Nakamura's groundbreaking work, there are only few studies examining ethnicity on the web. Mitra’s (1997) research also suggests that the distinction between ethnic representation on mainstream and independent media can still be applied on the web as a distinction between commercial and non commercial content. Depictions of ethnicity in virtual communities appear to be the result of an ongoing atemporal dialogue that challenges the modes of ethnic representation in traditional media (e.g Melcotte & Liu, 1999). Miller and Slater (2000) have shown how expatriate Trinididanians use the internet as a platform to deal with their marginalized position on the global stage and point out to a number of social cultural and personal activities carried out by Trinididanians on the web. These online practices were embedded in the daily routines of the locals and were not viewed as electronic projects separated from actions of the self in other areas of everyday life.
1.5.2 Virtual Diaspora: Transnational Social Spaces, Communities and Networks

Media do not only provide powerful means for the representation and visibility of diasporas but have traditionally served to sustain a shared commonality and a sense of belonging across members of diaspora (Riggins, 1992; Husband, 1994). A great amount of research has focused on media’s role in the formation and sustenance of diasporic communities across borders. Early theorizations on diasporic identity that define the scientific parameters for the study of diasporas, stress that a community’s strong links in the past, would predict strong shared identity among members (Cohen, 1997). Later, theorists suggest that such prescriptive models undermine a number of relationships regarding the variety of diasporic experiences (Fazal & Tsagarousianou, 2002). Rather than an ideal and static type of diasporic community, the notion of diaspora is viewed as a dynamic and complex process (Clifford, 1997). In the face of new media applications, research on deterritorialized communities extends and further complicates concepts of community. Rheingold was the first to define virtual groupings of geographically dispersed individuals as ‘virtual communities’, thus ‘social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace’ (Rheingold, 1993: 5).

Recognizing the possibilities for new media technologies to serve specific community aims, Wellman & Gulia (1999) argue that the sharing of information resources and the ‘social’ uses of information systems can positively impact on community formation and sustenance. Although ‘community’ has been a debated term, it has also been used with consistency by a number of researchers (Wellman & Gulia, 1999; Mitra, 1997; Jones, 1998; Baym, 1999) to point to the contribution of virtual diasporic communities in the maintenance and preservation of ethnic identities and practices in a diasporic setting.

The concept of ‘virtual diaspora’ has been widely used to embrace notions of virtual communities:

‘By virtual diaspora we mean the use of cyberspace by immigrants or descendants of an immigrant group for the purpose of participating or engaging in online interactional
transactions. Such virtual interaction can be with members of the diasporic group living in the same foreign country or in other countries, with individuals or entities in the homeland, or with non-members of the group in the hostland and elsewhere. By extension, virtual diaspora is the cyberexpansion of real diaspora. No virtual diaspora can be sustained without real life diasporas and in this sense it is not a separate entity, but rather a pole of a continuum…. Virtual diasporas may include diverse communities of interests as they tend to generate a plurality of intersecting circuits ‘that crisscross one another while maintain their distinct focuses’ (Laguerre, 2002:2).

The communal identity that emerges through this process is not the old one, but one ‘that is a hybrid of: past alliances, the re-establishment of relations through the newsgroup, as well as the experiences of negotiating real life in the new country of settlement and interaction with other individuals/groups in that society.’ (Karim, 1998:13).

Another essential process of diasporic community formation is diaspora’s kind of self-mobilization around their awareness of themselves as a diaspora and their ability to construct the appropriate discourses around imagined versions of themselves (Tsagarousianou, 2001). Extending Anderson’s original usage of the term ‘imagined communities’—intended to apply to the study of nations and the role of print capitalism and imagination in creating imagined national communities—Appadurai (1996) conceives the imagination as a social practice mediated through the complex prism of modern media. He also extends Anderson's understanding of nationalism to point out to the phenomenon of 'long-distance nationalism', a new type of nationalism formed as a result of mass communication.

Whether a group of CMC users communicating online across borders constitutes an ‘imagined’ diasporic community or not, has been the subject of long debates which often rest upon a bipolar view of a ‘real' offline world and a 'virtual' on-line one (Stubbs, 1998). At the center of this examination lies an attempt ‘to capture the impact of deterritorialization on the imaginative resources of lived, local experiences’ (Appadurai, 1996: 52). For Appadurai, the diasporic space is occupied by a growing number of diasporic public spheres formed ‘as electronic media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries, and as these audiences themselves start new conversations between those who move and those who stay (Appadurai, 1996: 22). Hartley’s notion of ‘indigenous public sphere’ presents an original approach to the relationship between ethnic affairs and the new media. Hartley and McKee (2000) describe virtual diasporic communities as a highly mediated public space for developing notions of ‘indigenuity’. Studies on the transnational communicative space
created by Chinese immigrants online discuss the emergence of a public sphere on the web—corresponding to the ideal of Habermas’s public sphere, a sphere marked by tension, unevenness and ambivalence (Yang, 1999; Wong, 2003; Sun, 2005).

While some researchers recognize that digital spaces have the potential to act as democratic public spheres that link populations geographically dispersed (Poster, 1990; Papacharissi, 2002; Downey & Fenton, 2003; McKee, 2005; Freelon, 2010), others argue that the emergence of networked media have posed a detrimental effect on geographically localized communities—such as public spaces, recreational leagues, political parties, local cafes, religious institutions and bowling alleys—(Putnam, 2000). From this angle, Putnam (2000) finds that the fundamental role of diasporic institutions and face-to-face interaction among displaced populations has been eroded. Place based communities, which have facilitated face to face interaction and have contributed to the creation and accumulation of social capital, are gradually becoming obsolete social spaces. In that sense, new media have increasingly led to the erosion of territory as a marker of community (Jacobson, 1995) and the only common space that dispersed diasporas can occupy is the ‘electronic space’ (Mitra, 1997: 70).

Helland (2007) finds that new forms of religious practices began to occur on the websites he examined as a result of diasporic individuals using the internet to develop network connections. The notion of community of practice has become an influential tool to conceptualize how groups and subgroups have developed over time into a cohesive community with shared knowledge and mutual relationships between members (Lave & Wegner, 1991). Brown and Duguid (2001) draw on Lave and Wengner’s work on communities of practice (1991) to develop the concept of ‘networks of practice’, a term that reflects a number of various emergent social networks formed to facilitate information exchange between individuals with practice oriented goals. This concept is also useful for the study of diaspora in new media contexts and particularly social network sites. Electronic networks of practice defined as ‘a self-organizing open activity system focused on a shared practice that exists primarily through computer mediated communication’ (Wasko & Faraj, 2005:39) may incorporate a range of informal, emergent networks, from communities of
practice to electronic networks of practice\(^5\).

Although a community of practice involves strong interpersonal relationships and creates norms of direct reciprocity between members (Lave, 1991; Lave & Wengner, 1991; Wegner, 1998), networks of practice consist of a larger, loosely tied geographically distributed population, individuals who are connected through weak (mainly) social relationships and voluntarily chose to participate in the network. Members of a network of practice may never meet or know each other face-to-face, yet they are capable of sharing knowledge and information and coordinate through electronic means (Brown et al., 1994).

Migrant networks influence migration flows, performance, adaption at destinations and have been a key to understanding the diasporic experience. Although various studies focus on the multiple functions that these networks serve, only few studies have paid attention to the effects that different reasoning for immigration have on the formation of these networks and also on the migration process. It is, therefore, necessary to answer the questions of how migrant networks are transplanted to destinations, how they are constructed at destinations, which networks are used in specific contexts, and how they serve specific purposes (Higuchi, 2010:73).

**1.5.3 Ethnicity, Representation and Interaction on the Web**

Representation, being the point at which various discourses become visible (Leung, 1999) and the only way that we can engage with reality (Hall, 1990), is a fundamental element for the study of discourses at the intersection of media, ethnicity and diaspora. In media studies, there is a wealth of literature on the representation of race, culture and ethnicity in broadcast and print media, seeking to examine how ethnic identity is articulated and contested through modes of minority and mainstream cultural production. Studies on ethnicity pay particular attention to modes of representation, both visual and textual. Especially in the context of new media, a growing amount of work based on representation explores the subjective terrains of ethnicity as social constructions that vary according to location (Karim, 2003; Radhakrisnan

These studies have to explain cultural levels of controls placed by technology around the creation and dissemination of visual and textual representations of diaspora both in indigenous media and national media.

Traditional audiovisual media networks and linear communication technologies today have been supplemented with global digital infrastructures, digital spaces that create a more open, interactive and creative experience for users. Expanding domains of production and transmission of media images offer new possibilities for public expression and ethnic identification. Through electronic media, marginalized discourses can be published without having to enter into the traditional ‘top-down’ editorial process, taking the form of websites and online spaces that give a ‘voice’ to the displaced populations. As everyone’s voice may be empowered on the internet, populations are not only empowered to create sites that assert rights to territorial states (Bakker, 2001), express nationalistic discourses but also to recreate versions of their ethnic identity through a plethora of symbolic modes and practices (Miller & Slater, 2000; Chan, 2005; Srinivasan, 2006).

Scholars point to a continuous power struggle among different groups to gain a space in media culture and to make their voices heard (Silverstone, 2002). Hybrid cultural expression and diasporic new media production may challenge and destabilize the binary opposition between majority-included and minorities-excluded. ‘Otherness’ is also communicated with images, textual representation, rhetoric, aesthetics and modes of display which construct artificial cultural accounts (Clifford, 1994). It is through these dialectics that images and texts become manifestations of cultural authority according to Street’s conception of culture ‘as a process’ (Street, 1993).

‘What emerges in all of these venues, is what I have called a creolized discourse that mixes bits of wire service news, transcriptions of sermons, intense debate about home-country issues, stories of expatriate life and notices of cultural events, sources of food and of cheap flights home, and even matrimonials’ (Anderson [1995] in Srinivasan, 2006: 6).

However, transnational identities are experienced on a daily basis in an environment where both traditional and new media coexist and interconnect as part of our communication and information habits. Georgiou (2005) traces the ways that non mainstream media and minority media become active participants in the process of identity construction, especially
when they have to coexist and compete with mainstream media. It is this process that creates the need for diasporic groups to develop their own (self) representations as an alternative to the mainstream media discourses and challenge their exclusion, stereotyping and homogenized representation in the mainstream media cultures. Therefore, in the same way that the mainstream media can be used to maintain and strengthen boundaries, diasporic media may also strengthen ethnic ties. However, they may also serve as spaces that transcend modes of identification available within societies. Since different kinds of media create different discourses, which also borrow from each other (Mitra, 1997), the study of diasporic identity becomes a complex task. Consequently, rather than understanding new media as a catalyst for new interpretations and alternative paradigms, future research needs to account for wider discourses formed at the interface of new and traditional media, mainstream and diasporic media when engaging with identity formation at a transnational level.

For example, larger forces of nationalism may affect the process of symbolic new media cultural production and interpretation. Billig’s concept of ‘banal nationalism’ moves attention away from macro scale theorizing on nationalism to empirical and contextualized case studies which focus on the everyday, less visible representations of national identity. Billig introduces the term ‘banal nationalism' to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced: ‘daily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged’, in the lives of its citizenry’ (Billig, 1995). He argues that the nation is reproduced and reminded constantly through popular representations, and narrative symbols of belonging in ‘mundane’, ‘routine’ and ‘unnoticed’ ways (Billig, 1995:6,8) embedded in routines and habits of social life. Such habits include those of thinking and using language. For Billig, nationalism ‘far from being an intermittent mood in established nations is the endemic condition’ (Billig, 1995:6).

From another angle, Karim is drawing on the assumption that ‘diaspora offers myriad, dislocated sites of contestation to the hegemonic homogenizing forces of globalisation’ to theorize experiences of displacement as an alternative way of national identification. In this direction, Hall suggests a complex definition of diasporic subjectivities which are considered as unstable, metamorphic or even contradictory, constituted by multiply presence or even absences of meaning (Hall, 1996). He distinguishes between two types of identities constantly contesting each other: the cultural identity in terms of collectiveness, a shared
culture shaped by continuous frames of reference, reflecting the common historical experience and underlying media representations and a second type, a disruptive one. This second type is engaged in constant transformation, subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power, and that is where its metamorphosing power stems from. In this line of though, ethnic identity is being revised as a ‘production’ process always constituted within representation (Hall, 1996).

Alternative symbolic representations of ethnicity can be indicative not only of the dynamics of power relations in social life but also of the role of practice in social dynamics (Bourdieu, 1993). Social interaction is a social practice that plays a major role in this process. It has been argued that in face to face communication setting, the Goftmanian model has provided a comprehensive analytical frame for the study of identity formation (cf. 1.2). As the self depends on expressions ‘given out’ to convey an identity consistent with the audience’s expectations, the role of the performer is formed by the audience’s anticipated response –the signs and symbols which are ‘given off’ unconsciously–. In an attempt to comprehend identity formations online, there emerges a need to extend Goffman’s model beyond lived experiences of identity and also take into account the specific genre characteristics that form the interactional process. Research on identity construction on the web draws on Goffman’s model to argue that the web page is a ‘performative sphere’ (Hine, 2000) and the virtual self is formed in an interactional process which produces multiple roles and performances (Turkle, 1995; Markham 1998; Surrat, 1998; Waskul, 2003).

In virtual environments, ‘where people still meet face to face but under new conditions of meet and face’ (Stone, 1995:285), the ethnic self has to be digitally edited and presented. Whereas in face to face settings the body provides a stabilizing actor (Donath, 1999) and impression management is structured through a variety of verbal and non-verbal cues about one’s ethnicity or race (Jones & Pittman, 1982), in computer mediated communication, the presentation of the self takes place through mechanisms and processes guided by the limitations and affordances of the medium (Walther, 2007). Therefore, Hutchby (2001) suggests that researchers of virtual interaction should take into account the interplay between the communication functions of the technological artefacts under study– their particularities, limitations and affordances– and the way they rearticulate normative structures of human interaction (2001). The following section outlines the main technological features of the
online environment under study –FB, a social network site– in an attempt to point to the novel parameters that social networking applications introduce for the study of identity.

1.6 Identity on Online Social Network Sites

Facebook is a popular social network site in which identity is put into practice. Being an online network which allows individuals to actively publish the self, project desires, values, goals, attitudes, belongings and interact with each other, one may ask what is the relationship between identity features that users project on FB and those that they display offline. This question implies a distinction between an offline and an online identity. Although there is no single answer to this question, it can be used as a starting point to investigate the process of identity management on an online social network.

As online social networks are only recent new media environments, there is only a limited amount of research on their implications. Early research on online social networks has emerged from a variety of disciplines –education, computer science, social network theory, marketing, sociology–. Issues related with surveillance and disclosure of information on social network sites have inspired a great amount of academic activity in the field (e.g. Andrejevic, 2005; Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Beer, 2008; Christofides et al. 2009). Social network sites in education (Miller & Jensen, 2007; Alexander, 2008; Livingstone, 2008), their use as an effective marketing and professional tool (Chapman, 2008) have been the primary concerns for researchers coming from diverse scientific fields.

Sociologists and media researchers have approached online social networks either through the lenses of social network theory –to point to typologies of ties and their relation to the formation of social capital (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2006) – or follow a social psychology perspective to study aspects of socialization on social network sites, friendship behavior and their functions (e.g. Liu 2007, Byrne 2008). There is only a limited amount of research on the implications of social network sites on identity (e.g. Boase et al., 2006; Boyd, 2007; Donath, 2007; Beer, 2008; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Larsen, 2009). While reviewing work on social network sites, I also traced a complete lack of studies on ethnic identity in the context of these applications and a lack of consistent methodologies to deal
with identity issues on social network sites.

Yet, researchers have extensively studied virtual identity—both at a group level and at an individual level—in the context of a variety of new media. As shown in 1.5, the majority of research on ethnic identity up to now has been carried with reference to online communities, chat rooms, instant messaging applications, newsgroups, MUDs, and avatar applications. Since all these are web environments with distinct properties and user bases, each digital space shapes different discourses. In the face of social network sites, concepts of anonymity, editability and audience, are placed within a new technological paradigm (web 2.0 applications6) which creates new opportunities and challenges for the study of identity management.

1.6.1 Anonymity and the Interplay Between Online and Offline World

CMC users are authoring the self while the visual elements of self and social traits (e.g. gender, ethnicity, culture) are absent. Biologically grounded identities represented online in the absence of physical cues, have the opportunity to construct a flexible image of self (Robinson, 2007). The sender is physically isolated from the receiver, thus may ‘mask’ involuntary cues and ‘give out’ preferred identity signals through textual cues (Danet, 2000). Although being anonymous on the net creates the possibility of confusion and deception (Stone, 1995), it also creates the potential for ‘identity play’ (Wynn & Katz, 1997). As the self escapes the confines of a live body, online chat is all about playing with oneself (Waskul, 2003) and the lack of commitment to any given self (Jaureguiberry, 2000). For some researchers (Wertheim, 1999), anonymity allows a greater range of unacceptable behavior than in the offline world, while for others (Hardey, 2002), it acts as a foundation for the building of trust and enables the anticipated establishment of real world relationships rather than the construction of fantasy selves.

6 Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an “architecture of participation” and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences (O'Reilly, 2007:1).
What is widely recognized however, is that anonymity and disembodiment (Dreyfus, 2001) liberates the individuals from their physical embodied selves and allows them to perform multiple characters and ethnic affiliations (Weigert & Gecas, 2005). User interaction on avatar applications provides a comprehensive frame to examine the projection of identity in a virtual environment which is not bounded to real settings. Gee (2003) employs the concept of ‘projective stance’ to account for the specific identities that users take on when actively externalizing their goals, desires and values on their virtual characters.

The most compelling consequence of anonymity on the web is that identity is constructed by probing the balance between virtual selves and real selves (Turkle, 1995). From one point of view, the lack of ontological presence allows individuals to author the self as a desired object who takes up positions, stances, codes and values. These positions arise partly in the imaginary and the symbolic, to contribute in the subjective construction of the ‘ideal self’ (Hall, 1996). In the same way, engagement in self-production in digital networks is enabled by purposeful choices and active decisions of what to hide, what to conceal and what to exhibit (Sandywell, 2006). However, neither invisibility nor mutability of online identity make it possible to escape the real world identity completely and ‘we cannot help but bring our own knowledge, experience, and values with us when we log on’ (Kolko, Rodman & Nakamura, 2000:4). Gonzales concludes that ‘when people walk away from the keyboard they would take with them aspects of their online presentation’ (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008:179). This approach creates an interesting ground for the study of ethnicity as projected through online interaction.

While for Turkle anonymity on the net has an empowering democratic effect as it equalizes users who are now able to perform multiple ethnic identities, conceal marginal identities and participate in mainstream discourses, for this study anonymity has little importance as FB users create online selves consistent with their offline identities. Yet the body still appears in the form of a text description, a graphic representation, ‘a symbolic and discursive construction’ (Marshall, 2000). In this line of thought, Gee (2003) finds that variables such as ethnicity and gender, while not eliminated, are backgrounded in virtual interaction (e.g. Black, 2007).

One common assumption lying behind studies on virtual spaces and communities is that
communication takes place principally based on common points of affiliation (e.g. interests) rather than on the base of pre-existing social groups and geographic locations (Wellman et al., 2001). In those cases, online entities are perceived as completely unlinked to real settings and online interaction was regarded as a precondition for offline meetings (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Rheingold, 2000). CMC researchers would use online settings as a main site for the study of the self. On social network sites, interaction follows a reversed direction: offline interaction is a predisposition for online interaction. On FB, users are likely to reveal their real names and articulate existing friends on their Profile. Since FB is principally designed to maintain and enhance pre-existing social ties (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2006), there is a stronger interplay between online and offline dynamics. In an environment where links between users are mutual and public; connections create accountability, social responsibility, honesty and trust in the user’s self-representational information. So users are unlikely to play with their real identities and are most likely to sculpt carefully an online Profile, providing information about their tastes, behaviour, interests and preferences bounded to their everyday settings. As a result, anonymity is no longer a useful concept for the study of the online self.

Researchers on social network sites have to examine in a most systematic way the interplay between online and offline identities. In the context of social network sites, the concept of anonymity does not appear to have the same validity as in previous CMC studies. Alternatively, concepts such as ‘performance’ might prove more useful for the study of interaction on social network sites (Boyd & Heer, 2006). Boyd and Heer, view social network sites as environments of performative expression where ‘public displays of connection serve as identity signals to help people validate identity information displayed in their profiles’ (Boyd & Heer, 2006). However, FB Profiles are still online entities that lack embodiment and the commitment associated with maintaining social roles and relationships (Adler & Adler, 2008).

FB users may organize information displayed in their pages and enhance self-image by strategically selecting how and what to convey to the receiver (Walther, 2007; Boyd, 2008). In the absence of physical interactional cues, they are exploiting a plethora of offline cuing systems to signal identity claims and compensate for lack of face to face interaction and also represent themselves through textual and visual representations, signs, a plethora of symbols,
linguistic markers and paratextual cues. Each FB Profile is a unique page, full of creative and conventional statements about oneself. Although some researchers have pointed out to the way that users might express their creativity through their Profiles (Westlake, 2008; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009), Ladd argues that FB users often invoke and reproduce cultural conventions and stereotypes so that they can feel more included: ‘Users are choosing to adopt online selves that are constrained by conventionality so that they can be intelligible to other users, instead of embracing the potential for a more flexible portrayal of self’ (Ladd, 2009:59). To investigate whether FB use is likely to encourage creative cultural production or promote conventionality, one has to look closer at the process of editing the self on social network sites.

1.6.2 The Process of Editing the Self

Social network technologies present a whole range of modes for selecting, organizing and presenting information. Similarly to a family photo album, an advertisement, a curriculum vitae, constructing a FB Profile page entails an amount of backstage preparation. As interaction on social network sites is mainly text based and ‘tied to keyboard usage’, it is thus ‘editable’ (Walther, 2007). On FB, both asynchronous and synchronous online editing systems offer high degrees of editability, which allow the user to select carefully the elements that they want to present on the Profile page, make alterations and changes and constantly update their Profiles. Constructing a Profile page on FB is a highly deliberate process where users carefully select each component to facilitate the desired impression.

The study of FB Profile pages has a lot in common with previous research on personal homepages and online diaries. These digital literacy artefacts provide ways of technologically mediated self-representation as spaces for editing the self and spaces where performative expression takes place (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Liu, 2007). Previous research on personal homepages has been focusing either on homepage content, form and technical characteristics (Miller, 1995; Seale, 2001; Bauman, 2004), either on the author and the process of homepage construction (Abbott, 2001; Nixon, Beavis & Atkinson, 2003; Stern 2004). A vast amount of research on personal homepages treats the keyboard as a writing tool which challenges traditional concepts of authorship, storytelling and traditional
narratives of identity (Brown et al., 1994; Chandler, 1996; Sandothe, 1996). In this study, both aspects have been equally examined to point out to the specific conditions surrounding content production and consumption on FB social networking Profiles.

Engagement with self-presentation on the Profile pages is considered a key task for ‘identity work’. FB users more than ‘writing the self into being’ (Boyd, 2006) they are also engaging with practices of linking their identities (Kennedy, 2006: 869) and also practices that continue to exist when the user moves away from the keyboard. For this reason, the study of self-presentation and identity management on FB borrows tools from studies for the presentation of self in the personal homepages, diary practices or blogs.

A Profile’s Status Update (SU) is the most common form of text that users may type in their Profile and send it to their Friends (cf. 2.4.2). A Status Update (SU) is a short, text based entry, a message with which individuals share something that they consider as worthwhile for all their Friends to read. The most recent SU appears on the Profile’s Wall and the user’s Friends’ homepage. A SU allows users to inform their Friends of their current status (situations, feelings, actions etc.). Initially, users were required to refer to themselves in the third person when typing a SU (e.g. Anna “is nearly sleeping” or "Nikos is enjoying his holiday"). A SU is created when the user fills a blank box in the Profile’s Wall with information about what is happening at the moment that he/she types in the words.

Altered conditions of audience, editing and time, make the SUs different from other forms of online blogging. SUs are edited to be visible and meaningful to a certain audience, the Profile’s Friends. Clearly addressing a live and responsive audience, the information expressed on a SU might be sourced in the participant’s personal experience or might be a product of interaction on FB (e.g. an answer on someone’s post). SUs do not always have an autonomous meaning but are more likely to rely on predispositions or shared events. A SU’s form and function is related to a situational context which emerges from offline situations or even online events7. Their nature is also dialogical. SUs might trigger an asynchronous message exchange in webrings (Wall Threads) that can also be close to constant interaction (e.g. Appendix 6: W4).

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7 e.g. Baso ‘Wants to thank everyone for your warn wishes’
Whether a SU describes an event, makes a confession, expresses feelings or evaluations, reflects on a situation or displays something trivial and meaningful, the practice of publishing oneself constantly, is viewed as a presentational act which bears a resemblance to diary practices. One of the most common assertions about the diary is that it represents the emergence of the modern individual self (Kitzman, 2003). Kitzman reviews the evolution of diary practices to point out to their function as vehicles for the exploration of the self, spaces for self-expression and self-construction. He argues that the web has offered new ways of reorganizing and resituating our everyday experience, however, each new media practice involves the self in a different manner. Allowing users to document and archive their daily lives, SUs are studied as a form of web diaries which do not only depart from the conventions of written diaries (Kitzman, 2003) but also from the dairy practices of autobiography on personal webpages and blogs.

The process of presenting oneself through a FB Profile may also borrow useful tools from the study of personal profile pages and blogs. A vast amount of literature on the presentation of the self on personal web pages argues that when deciding on content, length and resilience of their ‘virtual selves’, users tend to present selective versions of oneself even idealized versions through multiple creative and expressive modes (Ellison et al. 2006; Walther, 2007). Theorists on social network sites employ the phrase ‘perform the self’ to describe a dramaturgical performance of self on social network sites (e.g Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Liu, 2007). This kind of performance is constituted by the Profile author, digital applications, comments, testimonies and posts left on the Profile page.

A central concept which appears in the literature about self-representation on web pages, is the idea of ‘virtual bricolage’ which involves the appropriation of cultural imaginary in the form of online material –graphics, sounds, text– for the creation of a personal web page (Jenkins, 1992; Chandler & Young, 2000). On FB, a variety of available digital resources such as photos, graphics, speech, music, made available through the ease of point and click interaction mobilizes users to take active decisions about the way they classify themselves and others, the way they organize their surroundings.
Without saying that there are no controls imposed by the software itself, the user is free to claim an identity, support it, contest it and even change it. Users insert information about themselves in the form of free text, photos or videos. FB users can also erase or add information on their Profiles. Due to a lack of time constraints existing in face to face communication, on FB the user has plenty of time to compose the desired and even ‘take it back’. FB Profile pages are not static artefacts but mutable, fluid textual constructions in which their author can add, replace or delete features (Jenkins, 1992; Chandler & Young, 2000). After all, ‘a web page is a media form which is never entirely finished just as identity compositions are’ (Kennedy, 2006: 869).

Both the possibility for ‘revisability’ of online material and the possibility for compiling a virtual bricolage are processes which facilitate an internal dialogue concerning previous and revised self-representations, a dialogue that can be constructive for identity (Chandler & Young, 2000). While versions of the self in cyberspace may be easily erased (Zhao, 2003) they also enable self- description in a creative and constructive way. That is because when writing online, users sustain a narrative of identity that explores a number of different stories of the self (Merchant, 2006), internalize their representations and are thus immersed in a ‘sense of self-discovery’ (Dominick, 1999; Papacharissi, 2004; Blood, 2004; Stern 2004; Chan, 2005).

As Mátyus (2008) notes, users on social networking applications can also represent themselves creatively. The study of new media production has pointed out to the processes with which users appropriate and transform dominant media images through creative practices (Storey, 1999: 124). These creative processes are often carried out through re-utilization or recycling of existing media texts or images and can be understood as acts of ‘secondary production’ (Michel de Certeau, 1984) or even better as acts of ‘remixing culture’ (Lessing, 2008). Remix culture is a term introduced by Lessing (2008) to describe the process of reusing copyright material resulting in derivate works. Secondary production attaches new interpretations to existing products (Willis, 1990). The act of identity shaping involves active participation in manipulating or reshaping the original symbolic meaning of texts (Mátyus, 2008). Lessing argues that the production of cultural capital is essentially tied to this participatory remix process.
Naming and labelling are also practices essentially tied with the process of cultural production. For example, naming practices that users employ on FB are types of everyday linguistic behaviour which might reflect shared cognitive representations and larger forces in society. Naming practices provide an important window on the construction of cultural identities. Irvine & Gal argue that ‘acts of speaking and acts of describing both depend on and contribute to the work of representations’ (2000:79).

‘Engaging in any activity requires acts of self-identification by relying on repertoires that identify and contextualize speakers/writers along varying socio-cultural categories, often compared to mental or linguistic representations (→ Schemata) that are less fixed depending on context and function’ (Bamberg, 2010:1).

Naming acts are never neutral, but they exist in a dialogical relationship with social cognition and social behaviour and are always dependent on and contribute to their representation and to the representation of the parts involved (Smitherman, 1991:117). On FB, individuals use a range of naming practices when creating a FB Group or fill information about themselves. FB Groups are studied as naming acts. The study of naming practices is an integral part of identity work (cf. 1.2).

1.6.3 Interaction on Social Network Sites

There are two kinds of dialogue taking place on FB: the dialogue between the software and the user who edits his/her Profile in response to default questions, and the dialogue or multilogue among interconnected users. Whereas the first kind of dialogue enables the presentation of the self (cf. 1.6.2), the second one enables socialization and the creation of interpersonal networks and social spaces. However, both processes can be constructive for the self. It has been argued that the process of editing the self on personal homepages may prompt an internal dialogue of self-exploration (cf. 1.6.2). The interactional process can be equally constructive for versions of identity.

Socialization on FB is also expressed in two ways: a subtle one, according to which Profiles are performances for the ‘others’, and a direct one –as users interact by sending Wall posts, private messages, comment on their Friends’ status, send them virtual presents, chat in a synchronous mode etc–. On FB, the Wall is the most common place where Friends can
interact with each other in a public (or semi-public) view. Communication on a FB Wall takes the form one to many or many to many. In a Wall, messages posted are displayed along with the time and date they were composed. One can answer to these messages, or view others’ comments to these messages. The Wall message exchanges are visible to all the Profile’s Friends or Group members who can also add their comment by typing in the space just underneath the SU (cf. 1.6.2) or follow a comment made. A Wall thread is comprised of a sequence of Wall Posts. In a Wall thread, posts are displayed according to temporal sequence (however in reversed order) thus following the rules of a conversation, a structured and organized form of communication between two or more people.

Interaction on social network sites has been studied mainly through the lenses of social network theory. It has been argued that the kind of ties activated on FB have an effect on the creation of social capital. According to a typology of ties, weak ties can be precious for information transmission, whereas stronger ties bring reliability to the Profile (Boyd & Donath, 2004) and are the most importantly linked with the formation of social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007). Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe (2007) emphasize the ‘strength of weak ties’ on FB and empirically demonstrate a robust connection between intense FB usage and indicators of offline social capital, especially of the ‘bridging type’.

While some researchers conclude that both strong and weak ties are maintained in social network sites (Lenhart & Maden 2007, Ginger 2008), others point out to the fact that social network sites are technologically inclined to increasing weak ties one can maintain, cheaply and at a low personal cost (Boyd & Donath, 2004; Golder et al. 2007) and stresses a relative scarcity of strong ties in environments like FB. While bonding in group connections facilitates ethnic ties and can be beneficial for immigrant groups (Wilson & Portes, 1980;

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8 The term social capital broadly refers to the resources accumulated through relationships among people (Coleman, 1988). More specifically it refers to ‘the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:14). The accumulation of social capital has implications both for the individual and for the community. However the term has been associated with a variety of definitions and across multiple fields. For example, Bourdieu defines cultural capital as the accumulated resources of a culture that exist beyond any one individual’s social circle, conveyed through education and other broad social institutions.

9 Weak ties are ‘loose social ties’, ties that have the potential to allow users to create and maintain larger, diffuse networks of relationships from which they could draw resources (Wellman et al. 2001; Boyd and Donath, 2004; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe 2007)

10 Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue’....a society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital (Putnam, 2000: 19).

11 Putnam distinguishes between two types of social capital: the bridging and the bonding (Putnam, 1995). The former is created between individuals who share a weak connection, thus may share useful information or new resources or perspectives. Bonding social capital is linked with individuals who share close relationships and emotional support or access to scarce resources.

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Jenkins; Artes & Ward 1984), bridging connections\(^\text{12}\) are studied as fundamental to wider forms of civic participation and engagement (Putnam, 2000; Parker & Song, 2006). Although social network analysis would produce valuable insights for this study, such an approach was beyond its scope and scale. Literature on the web audience has also provided valuable insights on the process of identity formation on the web.

1.6.4 Concepts of the Web Audience

Research has demonstrated that audience awareness affects the process of self-presentation (Tice, 1992; Schlenker, 2003; Kelly & Rodríguez, 2006). Hine recognizes that performance on the personal web pages is ‘a display for the others’ (Liu & Davenport, 2005), and stresses that the audience is a complex category found in the heart of the production process. Notions of web audience and the way that it can impact upon online performances and identities have been established through Gofmanian terms. Drawing on Mead and Goffman, Robinson argues:

‘The cyberself is the emergent product of social interaction in which the self masters the ability to be both the subject and object of interaction. In this way, cyberself-ing creates the virtual ‘I/me’couplet. Online, the homepage allows the ‘I’ to present the self to the cyberother; in fact, the very construction of the homepage presumes the expectation of the virtual ‘generalized other’. In Goffmanian terms, the ‘I’ constructs the homepage with expressions given by choosing text, photos, and digital formatting with the other’s reaction in mind….Once the ‘I’ perceives the cyberother’s reaction, this reflexive constitution produces the cyberme’ (Robinson, 2007:104).

In a personal web page or blog, the audience might be the general public or a target population –depending on the nature of the web page–. The composition and the perceived qualities of the audience might also affect self-presentation. Hine (2001) describes a web page’s audience as an ‘imagined audience’, a group of people who are presumed to have similar tastes and interests. Zhao argues that ‘others on the internet constitute a distinctive looking glass’ (Zhao, 2005:1) and conceives the ‘digital self’ as being formed under the salient impact of the e-audience. Gonzales and Hancock employ a computerized linguistic

\(^{12}\) For a number of scholars, bridging social capital is productive for social cohesion as it supports a ‘universalistic sort of trust that transcends the clannish particularistic ties assumed to bind strong networks in ethnic groups’ (Parker & Song, 2006:126). Parker argues that when people associate mostly with people of their ‘own kind’ social capital can be excessively bonded and ethnic groups can be too cohesive.
analysis to find that making oneself identifiable on a publicly accessible blog is a process that may generate subtle shifts in self-perceptions of identity may in turn influence future social interactions (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008). Notably, identity shift is found to be stronger when someone presents oneself in public rather than in a private manner (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008).

In the case of the public presentation of the self, the idea of public commitment (Schlenker, 2003) which stems from a social need of the self to maintain consistent, creates an obligation to the person to take on the presented identity. However, the way that visibility may be experienced online is an area that has been debated. Whereas images of the audience may be less salient in virtual interaction (Dubrovsky, Kiesler & Sethna 1991), the lack of physical cues may also intensify the effect that a minimum amount of information about oneself has, and thus to activate social identity (Douglas & McGarthy, 2002).

On FB, a Profile’s list of Friends provide context by offering users an ‘imagined audience’ to guide behavioural norms (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs 2006). Boyd argues that FB audience rather than being imagined is also implied and anticipated (Boyd, 2007). A FB Profile without any connections – Friends – would have no reason of existence. As everything on FB is centred on Friends, a Profile’s number of Friends adds value to the Profile and legitimizes it. In 2008, a freshman on a FB affiliated college network would have a mean of 125 Friends (Stutzman, 2008) – a number which describes only the initial audience of a Profile –. More Friends are being added as a user’s social circle is expanded, meaning that the Profile’s audience is being constantly transformed in terms of size and composition. Consequently, this might affect the controls that the user has over the content published.

The nature of a Profile’s audience can also take a variety of other properties. For a Profile page of a FB user who has lived in more than one nations (e.g. Greece and UK), there might be multiply audiences, heterogeneous set of FB Friends, who might carry with them different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, work environments and qualities. A Profile’s audience can be local, national or international. The Profile’s audience effect on cultural production on FB has been underlined by theorists, since on FB individuals are expected to imagine their audience and speak to the generally accepted norms of that audience (Boyd, 2007). Since participants in this study are editing their Profile pages infront of a heterogenous and
geographically dispersed audience –their FB Friends–, this study presupposes that information concerning the composition of a Profiles’ audience – e.g. Friends’ ethnic background– are vital elements in the study of interactional practices on FB (cf. 3.6).

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the main theoretical concepts which inspired this study and also provides the theoretical background to approach the study’s research question: how individuals project and practice aspects of their ethnic identity on the social network of FB. Theoretical fields developed in the chapter correspond to each part of the research question: identity, ethnicity and new media.

Following an interdisciplinary approach to identity, literature review began with the broader notion of identity (cf. 1.2) to be narrowed down to particular versions of identity –such as ethnic, diasporic and transnational– (cf. 1.4) and then examined identity, ethnicity and diaspora in the face of new media (cf. 1.4.1). By placing the study of identity in a constructivists’ framework (cf. 1.2), I understand participants’ ethnic identities as shaped and constantly transformed in the conjunction of two distinct processes: everyday online practices for self-presentation –also interaction and participation– and the experience and practice of their ‘in-between’ status in a transnational setting.

The notion of ethnic identity and its by-products –diasporic and transnational identity– have served to uncover the broader dialectics between technology and identity in the era of new media. Recognizing that ethnic identity is multifaceted, I dissolved the notion of ethnic identity into its main components as a starting point to describe how these serve to approach the research question. So, literature has traced ethnicity in the process of self-categorization and labeling, in social practices and social interaction, in discourses of the ‘other’ and in the process of self-exploration (cf. 1.3).

The process according to which virtual spaces have mediated and transformed the diasporic experience of home and place (cf. 1.4.4), space (cf. 1.4.5) and connectivity (cf. 1.4.3) has
offered a background to unfold the relationship between the diasporic self and new media. Literature on virtual diaspora has shown that new media play a crucial part in the formation and sustenance of diasporic identities, transnational social spaces and communities (cf. 1.5.1). Although the participants live in an environment in which different types of media co-exist and interact, the study focuses particularly on social networking applications and the way they mediate the diasporic experience. Since there is only limited amount of literature on social network sites from a sociological perspective, theoretical discussion has reviewed the characteristics that distinguish social network sites from other new media applications and suggests that online social networks create a new backdrop from which identity can be studied (cf. 1.6). A variety of interactive tools for the presentation of the self and a range of communicative affordances offered by the network allow for a stronger interplay between online and offline dynamics. Studies should thus re-examine the relationship between online versions of self and identity, by paying attention to the practices of constant crossing between online and offline interactional contexts, new perceptions of the web audience, publicity and visibility.

To examine how identity is put into practice on FB, I borrowed theoretical concepts and tools (e.g. self-presentation, performance, banal nationalism, transnational networks of practice, web audience, interactionism, representation strategies, labeling practices, symbolic creativity etc.) from a range of disciplines (e.g. cultural studies, media studies, sociology etc.). In the same interdisciplinary manner, the study’s methodological design relies on a combination of analytical traditions and methods.
2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

2.1 Introduction

To examine how ethnicity in diasporic setting is mediated by FB use, the study’s methodology relies on the triangulation of mixed qualitative and quantitative data and aims to capture the following dimensions of interaction on FB:

1. **The presentation of the self and the projection of ethnic identity:** Having at their disposal a wide array of tools and applications, the participants displayed aspects of their identity on their Profile pages. To study digital production on the Profile and Group pages, I employed both qualitative and quantitative multimodal methods and combined online and offline data.

2. **Practices of interaction:** While Profile data and online questionnaires produced numerical information about the participants’ communicational practices, interviews and fieldwork provided qualitative evidence about the dynamics of interaction and the way that notions of Greek ethnicity emerge in these interactions.

3. **The intersection between online and offline practices:** To examine the way that the participants’ online practices blend with offline contexts and vice versa, analysis relies on online data, ethnographic fieldwork and interviews.

One may approach the first two dimensions described above using simple methodological tools. However, to capture the way that online actions extend in offline settings researchers tend to include real world settings into the analysis (Hine, 2000). For example, Fay (2007) finds research online as the only possible way to explore how versions of belonging interact with mobility and emerge through virtual spaces. Accordingly, she argues that in order to understand certain expressions of offline experiences such as mobility, it is necessary to take into account the interaction of online and offline experience. As shown in 1.6, aspects of virtual life problematize the use of conventional techniques of social research for the study of online phenomena. For example, difficulties of observing online actions, the lack of face to face interaction, the lack of a place to ground fieldwork, as well as the question of how to
combine heterogenous data into the analysis, are several of the practical aspects that complicate research on online environments and call upon creative methodological approaches.

Using social network sites as a platform for research has the potential to overcome the difficulties mentioned. On FB, a considerable amount of personal data –content transmitted in asynchronous form– is retrievable and can be systematically extracted and saved in digital form. In addition, constraints of anonymity and deception are somewhat eliminated as users tend to represent themselves with real names (Boyd, 2007; Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Fieldwork can also be grounded geographically since users are likely to reveal the place in which they live, their hometown etc. (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). This allows researchers to approach FB as a digital space where social signs and meanings are circulating among the Profile pages and interact with aspects of social life (cf. 1.6.1).

The chapter’s second section (2.2) provides the overall framework according to which I deal with the methodological challenges that social networks pose for the study of identity. The third section (2.3) describes the sampling strategy and methods for recruitment. The fourth section (2.4) presents the different types of data, the variety of methods for data collection and introduces the participants of the study. The chapter’s fifth section (2.5) reflects on the study’s methodological choices and explains how I dealt with pressing issues such as: to approach the boundary between offline and online worlds, to build my relationship with the participants and to deal with ethnical concerns for research online. The next section focuses on the methods used for data analysis and reflects on the process of compiling the amount of heterogeneous data into a single frame.

Methods for analysis are presented in 2.7 where I explain why I combined quantitative and qualitative methods to approach the research question (2.7.1), how I worked with content analysis (2.7.2), discourse analysis (2.7.3) and why I employed mixed methods following a multimodal approach to the analysis of heterogenous data (2.7.4).
2.2 Virtual Ethnography

To investigate the complex connections between online and offline spaces, I follow the method of virtual ethnography. Virtual ethnography, a method which ‘transfers the ethnographic tradition of the researcher as an embodied research instrument to the social spaces of the internet’ (Hine, 2000:1), has been a common methodological option used by a number of disciplines for researching the cultural dimensions of virtual phenomena. Virtual ethnography –otherwise stated as online ethnography (Cavanagh, 1999), cyber ethnography (Dominguez et al., 2007), web ethnography (Puri, 2007), netnography (Kozinets, 2006) – uses the virtual environment as a site of the research (Evans, 2004). Although ethnography is typically routed in anthropology and investigates human experiences represented through 'webs of meanings and cultural constructs’ (Geertz, 1973), the method has been transformed in the context of web environments and makes use of different tools for data collection (e.g. computer assisted methods of data collection) and a variety of analytical methods.

Hine's approach to virtual ethnography was developed as a response to the need to study online communities, notably the extent to which these may been seen as communities in the ethnographic sense (Hine, 2000:1). Thereafter, different understandings of virtual ethnography have emerged since 'methodological issues are closely interrelated with theoretical issues: a given theoretical stance opens up particular methodological possibilities and choices while foreclosing others’ (Baynham & Georgakopoulou, 2006:1). Especially in the environment of social network sites where the intersection between online and offline settings of experience is blurred (cf. 1.6.1), the virtual ethnographer is not limited to do research infront of the screen. In order to explore how online activities are inserted in the everyday lives of the participants, screen data has to be combined with physical observation in multiple sites.

Howard (2002) introduces the term ‘network ethnography’ as an amalgam of traditional ethnography and social network analysis that allows researchers to expose how people build culture from the ‘bottom up’. Hine (2007) names it ‘connective ethnography’. In this sense, virtual ethnography –rather than examining complex types of interdependencies in online structures– is further supported by qualitative analysis that investigates the process of filling social spaces and allows researchers to express all open questions that render ‘a sketch of
interaction that even captures details on incommensurate yet meaningful relationships’ (Howard, 2002:1).

As discussed in 1.6, Rybas and Cajala (2007) argue that neither invisibility nor mutability of online identity make it possible to escape real world identity completely and we cannot help but bring our own knowledge, experience, and values with us when we log on (Rybas & Cajala, 2007). In this direction, they propose ethnography of ‘doing’ as a method which highlights the intersection of online identity and offline identity in social networks and investigates individual practices as they extend in online environments of interaction. Androutsopoulos (2008) stresses the strength of examining different types of data together in virtual environments and proposes a discourse centred online ethnography (DCOE), a method which goes beyond what is observable on the screen to examine the participants’ discursive practices, patterns and perspectives, and the meanings that the participants attach to their online actions. A discourse centred ethnographic approach relies on a range of ethnographic techniques and a wide variety of heterogeneous types of data to disclose aspects of online interaction that are difficult to elicit in an interview. This study uses discourse centred online ethnography at the degree which serves the research questions posed.

2.3 Sampling Strategy

The participants are FB users who have joined a FB Group for Greeks in London. Historically, the presence of Greek speakers in Britain goes back in the 1950s and 1960s when the majority of the immigrants came in UK mainly for economic reasons. Today, there are approximately 150,000-180,000 Greek speakers and more than 100 Greek communities—including Greek Cypriots— in UK13. According to official statistics -UK census, 200114- in 2001 there were 112,163 British residents in UK born in Greece15 whereas other sources

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/born_abroad/countries/html/greece.stm

14 People Statistics > Greek diaspora > Number of Greeks in all countries > Number of ethnic Greeks (most recent) by country

15 This figure includes only Greeks born in Greece (35,007) and Cyprus (77,156). The actual number of Greeks (and especially Greek Cypriots) in the UK is much higher.)
report that there are between 280,600 and 310,000 Greek speakers in Greater London (Baker & Eversley, 2000). The exact amount of Greeks living currently in London cannot be easily estimated with accuracy, as immigration might be occasional, and today there is a continuous and temporal transnational movement between the two countries for reasons that often imply a short stay. For example, large parts of this population are students. Indicatively, in 2006/07 there were 16,050 Greek students attending UK universities\textsuperscript{16}. These figures are only indicative of the population’s size under study.

For a transnational population with high levels of mobility across borders, it would be complicated to estimate accurate figures and design a representative population sample. In this respect, the sample consists of randomly selected individuals who have joined a FB Group about Greeks in London and have an active Profile page. Demographic information such as age and gender, were collected through the questionnaires. The particular ethnic group under study was chosen for the reason that I am a speaker of Greek language who lives in London –thus making possible an ethnographic inquiry into this community.

In the lack of a FB tool that can trace the number of Profiles of Greeks registered on FB, alternative methods had to be found. FB Profiles with a Greek origin are identified through FB Groups created for Greeks in London. Every user can create a FB Group to represent a theme of personal choice. A Group theme can be anything ranging from social or funny statements, complaints, petitions, to places and geographical regions. For the requirements of this study, I searched for Groups inviting Greeks living in London to join. When entering the search terms ‘Greeks London’, FB’s search engine listed 77 Groups\textsuperscript{17} addressed to individuals who identify as Greeks and live in London (cf. 3.7.3) –at the time of the data collection–. Most of them were publicly accessible. Their names were presented along with a photo and membership figures (cf. Figure 3 in 2.4.2).

Group membership ranged from 1640 members (e.g. ‘Greeks in London’) to 1 member (e.g. ‘London Greeks’). ‘Greek Professionals in London’, ‘Ellinares sto Londino (Greeks in London)’ and ‘London Greek connection’ were the three most popular Groups for Greek diaspora in London and it is among their members that I selected randomly 100 Profiles to

\textsuperscript{16} UK Higher Education Statistics Agency statistics. Retrieved from http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1897/239/

\textsuperscript{17} Groups with less than 10 members were excluded from the sample.
invite to participate in this study. The number of the selected Profiles does not claim to be representative of the whole population of Greeks living in London on FB, but ‘telling’ of a specific case and settings. Notably, a wider inclusion of participants would produce a large amount of data which would be difficult to handle.

For the requirements of this study, I created a Researcher’s public FB Profile page (Screen 1) so that I could maintain a professional relationship with the participants. It is through the ‘send a message’ function of the Researcher’s Profile that I contacted the selected participants with a short recruitment letter. When compiling the recruitment letter, I was faced with the challenge to keep a balance between formal and intimate way of addressing the future respondents. An overfriendly recruitment letter would pose doubts over the validity and legitimacy of the research whereas a purely official style would discourage future participants. Meanwhile, the creation of a Research Project Web page to host all the relevant information about the study was regarded as an efficient way to reach the participants. The FB message tool – although it allows unlimited text to be transferred – does not allow users to attach a document or any form of graphics. For this reason, I had to redirect the participants in the Project’s Webpage (Appendix 2) where they could find further details for the study. I also created a FB Event to invite users to participate and attached the Project’s webpage in the Event (Screen 2). FB users could find the Invitation on the Researcher’s Profile page, find out who accepted the invitation and follow the link to the Project’s Webpage.

Figure 1: The Researcher’s Profile
In the Project Webpage, users could find the research Information sheet (Appendix 1), the informed consent sheet (Appendix 1) and an online questionnaire (Appendix 2). When redirected to the Project’s Webpage, participants were asked to read carefully the information about the study in progress and to tick the relevant boxes giving their informed consent in accordance with Data protection Act 1998. Technically, it was necessary that they had ticked these options before being redirected to the questionnaire\(^\text{18}\) (cf. 2.4.2). A variety of conditions can impair the individual’s ability to consent to the research (e.g. age, mental disorder etc.).

As part of this electronic invitation, recipients had a choice to ‘opt out’ of the research and any future contact related to the project\(^\text{19}\). They also received a FB ‘Friendship request’ in their Profile page. ‘Friendship’ is a function that interlinks the Profiles. When A accepts a friendship invitation from B then he/she grants access to full Profile information while at the same time gains access to B’s detailed Profile data. The software implies that this is a mutual

\(^{18}\) In terms of vulnerability and potential harm, it seems that the kind of information gathered did not have the potential to cause any harm to individuals or the community. Procedures were straightforward, were not involving manipulation and there were no major issues relating to confidentiality or sensitive information. An extended literature on research ethics online (e.g. Hamelink, 2000; Friedman, Felten & Millett, 2001) argues that in the case collected information does not involve sensitive data; the consent form may be obtained electronically. In addition, respondents who decide to take part in the research and give their consent online, have the option to print, sign and post the consent form.

\(^{19}\) The potential participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason. This was clearly stated in the consent form. Participants who have given me access to their Profile pages still had the right to withdraw from the study. As the study will extend over 10 months, it is likely that participants change their minds, decide that they do not longer want to maintain/update their Profile page, or they may wish to withdraw from the study for other reasons. In this case, they could remove the researcher’s Profile of their contacts without giving any notice or they could contact me by mail to state that they did not longer wish to take part.
exchange of information between two individuals. A FB Friendship means that the two users agree to share with each other the information exhibited in their Profiles. Thus, by accepting the friendship request the participants provided me with full access to their Profile data.

In this initial stage, there was a low response rate (1 out of 5). Therefore, I decided to resend the recruitment mail to invite more users. Among the corpus of the questionnaires collected, I selected the respondents that met the following criteria a. they stated a Greek origin b. they had been living in London for more than a year c. they were over 18 years old. Thus, an amount of respondents (1/8) who were either Greek Cypriots or newcomers in London were excluded. There were no respondents below 18 years old.

### 2.4 Types of Data and the Process of Data Collection

Data was generated both online and offline and data collection extended over a period of 10 months (December 2008 – October 2009). Offline data was collected through a) 7 semi structured interviews (IN1-7) b) a group interview with 3 FB Friends (G.IN) c) participatory observation. Online data was generated by a) a set of online questionnaires (Q1-30) b) screen observation of activity on FB Profile pages and FB Group pages. Table 1 summarizes the different types of data used.
Table 1. Types of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Data</th>
<th>Offline Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FB Profile Data of 30 Participants</td>
<td>Interviews (IN1-10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Ethnospecific Profile Photos (PH1-10)</td>
<td>Observational Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>211 Ethnospecific Status Updates(^{20}) (SU1-211)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 Wall Threads (W1-56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Greek Friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB Group Data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB Group Names related to Greek Ethnicity (17630)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77 FB Groups for Greeks in London</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Group Walls (GW1-3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Questionnaires (Q1-30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online data extracted from the participants’ Profile pages were collected and examined at two phases: firstly screen data was extracted from the 30 participants’ Profiles and secondly, this data was further examined for a predefined content category: ethnospecific content (cf. 2.4.1).

2.4.1 Ethnospecific Content

By the term ‘ethnospecific content’, I refer to digital content related to an ethnic culture – in this case Greek or British –: textual and visual elements that reveal shared history, cultural practices beliefs and objects, values and predispositions in relation to the common place of

\(^{20}\) Out of 466 SUs found in the Profile pages.
origin or settlement. My position as a Greek native who lives in Britain has helped me identify elements of both the Greek and the British culture in the participants’ digital production. Textual or visual markers of Greek culture are key words or phrases by which the participants identify or relate to a common and distinctive national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage such as products, popular national figures, music and cultural artifacts or events, geographical places, cities, ethnic subgroups, idioms and linguistic features. Also, the participants’ choice of language in their posts (e.g. writing in Greek language) has been classified as an indicator of ethnospecific content. More particularly, ethnospecific content was identified by searching for words or phrases across the data of SUs, Wall Threads and Group Names.

- **Related to Greek culture:** a. Geographical places (e.g. Greece, Athens, Chios Pilio, Nissi beach, Lesbos volos, Myconos, Creta, Arachova, Tzia, Salonica, Kerkira) b. Adjectives (Greek, Hellenic) c. Cultural and traditional symbols (e.g Parthenon, marbles, acropolis, feta21, frappe22, zembekiko23, Greek wedding) d. Popular people, groups and cultural events (e.g Thalassa White party, Natalie Thanou24, Panathinaikos25) e. Cultural specific phrases, words or sayings (e.g. lyrics in Greek).

- **Related to British culture:** a. Geographical places (e.g. London, Notting Hill, Soho Theatre, Canary Wharf, British museum, Islington academy) b. Adjectives (English, British) c. Cultural and traditional symbols (e.g. British museum, pub) d. Popular people, Groups and cultural events (e.g. Bank Holiday).

### 2.4.2 Online Data

A close observation of the structure, technical characteristics and the unique organization of features on FB, was central in understanding how the disseminated content may enable (or not) different kind and levels of dialogue and participation, encourage (or not) the reduction of interpersonal distance, enhance (or alter) communicational experiences. The system’s

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21 A variety of Greek white cheese  
22 A kind of cold coffee  
23 Greek traditional dance  
24 Greek Olympic champion  
25 Greek football team
‘actual affordances’ – the properties that determine just how the system could possibly be used (Norman, 1999) – were treated as background data incorporated into the analysis.

A. Online Questionnaires

As shown in 2.2, future participants were invited to visit the Project’s Webpage (Appendix 2) by clicking on the relevant link found in the mail they received. Respondents who wished to participate in the study would tick the relevant box which asked for their informed consent after having read the Study’s Information Sheet (Appendix 1). The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions of multiple choice and two open questions (regarding age and ethnic origin).

Questions were structured into five sections:

1. Personal Data (1-4)
2. FB usage and frequencies (5-7)
3. Perceptions of privacy (8-9)
4. Friendship behaviour (10-12)
5. Ethnicity (13-21)

Questionnaires assisted analysis in two ways: by collecting personal information about the participants –information to be used in combination with other data– and by gathering data to be analysed quantitatively. Questionnaire data was statistically analysed to provide numerical information and figures regarding tendencies and frequencies (e.g. how often the participants communicate with others, how often do they log on, which are the most common activities on their Profiles, how often do they update their Profiles).

B. Profile pages

Profile pages of 30 participants (P1-30) were systematically observed over a period of 10 months and their data was extracted and stored in digital form. The examination of the Profile pages started at a broad-spectrum level to be narrowed down to more specific features. At a general level, a close observation on the participants’ Profile pages has helped me to detect individuals who log on FB regularly, the participants who share a form of connection to each other, and identify a number of individuals and interactional situations to study closely. The Profile’s Recent Activity, SUs, Wall Threads, Profile photos, Info and Friends have been the main types of screen data used (cf. Table 1).
**Recent Activity:** The feature ‘Recent Activity’ lists the user’s recent activity on the Profile page. To quantify features of the participants’ Profile pages (the Profile’s Recent Activity), I grouped them into categories: activities that facilitate the presentation of the self, communication between users or participation in groups. Actions such as updating the Profile’s Status, changing the Profile photo, editing Info about oneself, uploading Photos, taking a Quiz etc. were considered as acts for the ‘self presentation’. Commenting on a post, writing on someone’s Wall, liking something or sending a Wall post to someone, were grouped as acts principally enabling ‘interaction’. When the participants would state to be attending an event or write in a Group’s Wall, they would complete an act of ‘Participation’. Table 2 presents the Profile’s features that were quantitatively analysed and the types of Recent Activity in which they were grouped.

**Table 2. Types of a Profile's 'Recent Activity'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-presentation</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status Updates, the Profile photo, Info about oneself, Become fun of, Upload photos, Take a quiz.</td>
<td>Comment on a post, Write on someone’s Wall, Like something, Send an application.</td>
<td>Join a Group, Comment on a Group’s Wall, Create a Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Status Updates:** A Status Update (SU) is a short text entry, a message with which individuals share something that they consider as worthwhile for all their Friends to read (cf. 1.6.2). A user's most recent SU appears on the Profiles’s Wall and Homepage. A SU allows users to inform their Friends of their current status (situations, feelings, actions etc.). Initially, users were required to refer to themselves in the third person when typing a SU (e.g. Anna ‘is nearly sleeping’ or ‘Nikos is enjoying his holiday’). Later, the feature was removed and the question ‘What are you doing right now?’ was introduced. It was soon that this changed again and was replaced by the question ‘what’s on your mind?’. Since the collection of data extended from 2008 to 2009, the participants’ SUs were all typed as a response to these default questions. During this period, there were 466 SUs found in the participants’ Profile pages. These were examined for content related to Greek or British ethnicity, ethnospecific content (cf. 4.2).
Out of the 466 SUs found on the participants’ Walls, 211 were characterized as ethnospecific (45% of the sum of the SUs). The complete list of ethnospecific SUs can be found in Appendix 5. It should be noted that out of 211 SUs with direct references to Greek or British culture (e.g. names of ethnic groups or popular places and traditional markers of each culture) there were 7 cases where the meaning of the post was defined as ethnospecific only when examined in relation to the contextual elements surrounding the actual statements. For example, Anna (P25) is ‘arranging her return to the North’. The word ‘North’ could only be categorized as ethnospecific after reading her clarification in a subsequent post: ‘It’s the North of excellent cheese filled pies and people who love their ‘L’s too much’ (W11). The sum of 211 SUs has been analysed using content analysis (cf. 4.4.4) to examine which were the prevailing themes and concepts surrounding the notion of being Greek and living in UK (cf. 4.4.4).

**Wall Threads:** Similarly to the process followed for SUs, Wall Threads (cf. 1.6.2) were examined for references to places, names, figures, symbols and products, values and norms related either to a Greek or to a British cultural background (ethnospecific content) and resulted in a corpus of 56 items (Appendix 6). These were analysed using content analysis (cf. 2.7.2) and discourse analysis (2.7.3) to find out how the participants negotiate issues related to their ethnic origin through interaction on their FB Walls and in which resources do they draw on when talking about aspects of ethnicity (cf. 5.2).

**Profile Photos:** In the upper left corner of a Profile page, one can find the Profile’s photo. It is a photo that the user uploads while editing the Profile page. The user has to select and upload a photo that thinks it represents him/her. Among the 30 Profile pages examined, 28 participants had uploaded a Profile photo and some of them, also changed it throughout the period of the study (cf. 3.3). Out of 36 photos found in the Profiles during the period of the study, there were 10 photos (Appendix 4) with ethnic references (cf. 4.3.2).

**Profile Info:** A user’s personal Information is displayed in the ‘Profile’s Info’, a section where the participants typed information about themselves in the form of the text –e.g. information related to one’s current location, hometown, activities and interests, work and
education etc (cf.3.3, 4.4.2). Information related to the user’s hometown and origin supported the process of the interviewees’ selection.

**FB Friends:** The list of a Profile’s Friends appears in the left side of a Profile page and it displays the names and photos of the Profile’s contacts in alphabetical order. For each participant, this list was examined for Greek surnames. The purpose was to find out whether the participants’ Friends were also Greeks and to examine whether there was any relation between the levels of ethno specific digital content circulated on the participants Profile pages and the amount of Greek Friends that these Profiles had (cf. 3.4, 4.2).

**C. FB Groups**

A FB Group is a page created within FB which is based around an interest, a physical location, a person etc. Users join a FB Group to declare an affiliation with its content (cf. 1.6.3). A Group’s name can be anything ranging from an organization to a claim, an idea, a though, the name of a nation etc. Members of a FB Group can share and exchange posts on relevant themes, discuss relevant topics, find information on a topic, communicate between each other on the basis of the topic, share photos or multimedia content etc. In this study, FB Groups are treated as a significant aspect of new media production on FB.

To this end, a corpus of screen data emerges from the sum of FB Group names that refer to Greek ethnicity (cf. 4.3.1). The FB search engine has been the basic tool for this inquiry (Screen 3). Search terms used (‘Hellenic’ ‘Ellinas’, Elliniko’, ‘Ελληνας’, ‘Ελληνικό’ ‘Greece’ ‘Ellada’, ‘Hellas’, Ελλαδα’) were typed both in Greek (also Greeklish) and English. At the given time, search results returned about 17.630 Groups related to Greek ethnicity. Their names were presented in the form of a list along with the Group’s description photo and membership figures. FB Group names were then coded into thematic categories according to their content. Groups’ descriptors –e.g. photos and membership figures– were used as a supplement for meaning when necessary for the analysis.

However, there were particular practical limitations on the available numerical information for FB Groups. Accounting for the fact that new Groups were being created on a daily basis, data collection had to extend over a limited period. On the first hand, it has been difficult to

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26 Groups with less than 10 members were excluded from the sample.
keep pace with the dynamic speed that new Groups were created and rhythm in which their membership was expanding over time. On the other hand, the search engine’s limited capacity\textsuperscript{27} made difficult the collection of precise numerical data. It should be noted that more than 10,000 FB Groups were not treated as meaningful data and thus were excluded from the sample. Groups excluded from the sample were those that refer to a) geographical locations in Greece: neighbourhoods, towns cities, regions, places, islands b) student groups, abroad – overseas groups (e.g. Budapest Greek Students), classes and departments, graduate groups, study groups (e.g. Ancient Greek Drama study group) c) Professional groups (e.g. Greek opticians, Greek shipping industry), companies, employment groups, marketing and advertising, property d) a specialized institution or organization, educational institutions, public or private organizations e) Fan clubs f) a common interest or hobby, sports and recreation (e.g. Greek Volleyball, Greek Soccer).

The textual evidence of FB Group names has been examined through the lenses of content analysis (cf. 2.7.2). An examination of the naming practices for FB Groups related to Greek ethnicity will provide a bottom–up account of the prevailing issues, symbols, icons, practices used to represent ethnicity in the popular naming practices for FB Groups, textual statements which serve as ‘identity markers’ in the participants’ Profile pages. A different search was carried out to identify the FB Groups created for Greeks who live in London. The search engine returned about 77 results. Content analysis groups their names according to their point of reference (cf. 3.5.2).

**FB Groups for Greeks in London:** Among the 77 Groups addressed to Greeks living in London, I selected the most popular of them – in terms of membership figures – to examine closer. Therefore, I look into 3 FB Group and seek to describe their properties (cf. 3.7.3, 3.7.4). More particularly, looking at the Groups’ Info section, Walls and Discussion boards, I searched for data describing how these online spaces suit the needs of their members and what functions do they serve for diasporic populations (cf. 3.7.4).

\textsuperscript{27} Results returned were often of no relevance to the keyword entered. Also, numerical information about the search results appeared in the form: ‘1-10 of over 500 results’.
2.4.3 Offline Data

**Individual and Group Interviews:** As a result of systematic Profile observation and fieldwork, I identified participants to invite for interviews. Out of the 30 participants, I observed online, I selected 10 to interview. Interviewees were chosen on the basis that they had responded to the questionnaire, exhibited high levels of activity online and some of them shared a connection to each other. Individuals to be interviewed were also identified with the assistance of relevant personal networks. Most of the invitations were made electronically. Face to face interviews were used as the main data collection tool to obtain a richer sense of the individual’s perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. In this sense, interviews seek information about the settings from which users access the internet, rituals of information sharing, users’ perceptions of what the service offers and their expectations, frequencies and patterns of FB usage (cf. 3.2, 3.3). In these semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to comment on specific instances of their online interaction, talk about their sense of ethnicity and their ethnic practices (cf. 4.4.1), their FB Friends and their experiences related to their diasporic situation.
Semi structured interviews with 10 participants were recorded and transcribed. During the interviews, I observed interviewees’ behaviour infront of the computer screen and their online actions were discussed as they occurred (cf. 4.4.2). Open ended questions were used to elicit open responses and capture diversity in meaning. An open format allowed for immediate follow up questions to increase understanding. Along with the interviewees’ informed consent, I asked for their signed permission to observe screen behaviour. Interviews were carried out at different time points and occasions throughout the period of this study so that they complement observational data and correspond to a variety of online events (for example, Maria was interviewed for a second time after having uploaded a Profile photo of herself posing infront of a monument in London).

Considering the implications of the interview locations on the dynamics of interaction, interview locations had to be chosen carefully. Most of the interviews were conducted in front of a computer, allowing interviewees to discuss their online actions. Interviews with the participants were held at the college’s library, where it is more convenient to use a laptop. In the group interview (G.IN), participants had to agree on the interview location. In the case that the participants were interviewed more than once, I had to ensure that the subsequent interviews were taking place in the same setting. This would help to create a sense of sequence and make the interviewee more familiar and confident with the subject of discussion.

The Group interview (G.IN) –which had the form of a discussion– took place towards the end of the fieldwork. Three participants (IN 3, 5, and 8) –individuals who share a connection to each other and communicate regularly both online and offline– took part in the interview. Interviewees were asked to discuss events, their communicational habits, to negotiate the meaning of certain online actions with their friends and also to pass opinions on issues and findings that I identified during fieldwork (cf. 4.4.2).

**Observational Data:** With an aim to gain familiarity with the participants and particularly with the interviewees taking part in this study, I collected data as a result of participant observation (DeWalt & Wayland, 1998). Such a method involves a range of supportive research tools: informal interviews with the participants, direct observation, participation in the life of a group of friends, and analysis of their life histories. Participant observation is
regarded as a useful qualitative method ‘for gaining an understanding of the physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which study participants live; the relationships among and between people, contexts, ideas, norms, and events; and people’s behaviours and activities – what they do, how frequently, and with whom’ (Mack, 2001). Three interviewees were also observed during their offline interactions. Since I knew two participants personally, I had the opportunity to follow them in a variety of offline contexts and take fieldnotes. Participants taking part in the Group interview invited me to follow them in two distinct occasions: over a cup of coffee and in a social gathering – party – organized through FB. During both events, I participated actively and I was also keeping fieldnotes with ethnographic observations.

Choosing direct and participatory observation as a method of data collection entails difficulties regarding time, pace and frequency of the observation. In conventional ethnography, continuous observation could not be possible due to practicalities, however in digital environments the collection of data has to be bounded to continuous observation patterns for a long period of time. In this study, participant observation takes place over a time period which extends over two years period and is continuously enriched with fieldwork. This long period allowed me to obtain more accurate information about the participants involved and discover possible discrepancies and inconsistencies between their beliefs and statements and what they actually do. For example, some interviewees think that their Profile page does not reveal information about their ethnic background while systematic observation of their Profile revealed high levels of ethnospecific content circulated on their Profiles (cf. 3.5).

2.5 The Participants

In this part, I summarize the participants’ characteristics –those important for the analysis–. Respondents’ age varied between 18 and 44 years old. There were 19 males and 11 females. Greek experience in UK is a result of a long history of immigration across many generations, an experience which follows various settlement patterns and could not be aggregated into a single analytical category (cf. 2.3). In terms of social categories that emerge across the sample, I identified three groups of participants based on the duration and the reasons of their displacement (questionnaire findings): a. Students (30%=9) and Professionals (30%=9) who
have been living in London for less than 10 years (age ranges from 18-44) b. Greeks who have been living in London for more than 10 years (12%=4) c. British born Greeks, individuals with a dual nationality and those who currently live in London but they were raised in different countries (28%=8). In all these cases, the participants remain influenced by continuing ties to their home countries and their social networks stretch across borders (cf.3.5.3, 4.4).

Most of them have been living in London for less than ten years (approximately 60%). The remaining 40% of the participants has been living in London for more than 10 years (P2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20). Half of those who have been living in London for more than 10 years are British born Greeks (P8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, P16). Two of the British born Greeks define themselves as Greeks (P8, P11). The most common reason they state for living currently in London is working. One third of the sample is students (30%) while a small minority (16%) came in London for family related reasons (questionnaire data). Among these participants, ten were interviewed (IN1-10). The following part introduces the individuals interviewed based on information which emerges from the interviews and questionnaires.

· IN1: Kostas (31 years old) has been living in London for 10 years now. He came in London as a student and he now runs his own business. He travels in Greece often and he is likely to be involved in the organization of events for the Greek diaspora, or take part in a Greek event organized by his friends.
· IN2: Nikos (29) is a professional in London. He moved in London 12 years ago with his family. He travels very frequently back in Greece (to meet relatives or for holidays). He is likely to keep up with the Greek news and watch football games with other Greeks.
· IN3: Maria (28) has been living in London for almost 3 years. She came for a short stay to practice as a doctor. She has never participated in any kind of Greek event or activity and she travels in Athens once a year for summer holidays.
· IN4: Rena (25) is currently a postgraduate student and has stayed in London for 6 years to study. She travels back very frequently and she is likely to take part in a Greek event of large scale or be involved with a Greek community. She often visits Greek places in London (cafees, taverns).
· IN5: Mina (26) came in London for postgraduate studies. Today, she teaches English in a primary school. Being for three years in London she has never attended any kind of Greek event although all of her friends are Greek.

· IN6: Stephen (30) is a Greek born British who has moved in London to study and work. He has been living in London for the last 11 years, all his friends are British and he has never participated in any kind of Greek event or community. He keeps up with Greek news on a daily basis and wishes he could travel back more frequently than he does.

· IN7: Alexandra (24) finished her studies in Athens and came to London to search for a job three years ago. She travels back in Greece every second month and although she is unlikely to participate in any kind of Greek event, all of her friends are Greeks.

· IN8: Grigoris (22) is a British born Greek who uses to travel in Greece for holidays once a year. All his friends are British and British born Greeks. He is very likely to participate in all kinds of Greek events, especially those organized via FB and although he is unlikely to read Greek newspapers, he regularly exercises his religious duties.

· IN9: Polina (26) has been a student in a central London university for the last 4 years. She travels in Greece regularly and she is highly unlikely to participate in any kind of Greek event taking place in London.

· IN10: Tzortzina (35) is a professional in London for the last 11 years. She and her kids are quite likely to travel in Greece or be involved in the organization of events for the Greek diaspora.

2.6 Reflections on the Process of Data Collection

During the process of data collection, decisions had to be made regarding how to overcome pervasive issues such as how to gain access in the field of the study (2.6.1), how to approach ethics of research in social network sites (2.6.2) and how to move between online and offline locations without creating ruptures (2.6.3).
2.6.1 Gaining Access to the Field

FB has created a whole new range of challenges and opportunities for virtual ethnographers. Since the main field of observation was on the screen, I had the opportunity to extract, store digital information about the participants and retrieve it when needed. Being personally immersed in the study field, I had also the opportunity to observe the participants’ action and participate actively or passively in the discourse. Active observation has been a relatively easy task since FB interactive features enabled me to initiate and maintain a relationship with the participants.

Having realized that the quality of data collected would depend heavily on my relationship with the participants; I had to gain their trust and commitment. This can be a relatively difficult task since the relationship had to be initiated online. Therefore, rather than taking the role of the observer –which could affect attitudes observed by letting the individuals know they were observed–, I participated myself in the field of study, where needed. Active observation has enabled me to participate in the process of data collection, control the quality of data collected and also optimize the procedures by allocating time and recourses effectively.

During recruitment, I invited individuals to take part in the study through the Researcher’s Profile (cf. 2.3, Screen 1) so that I could keep a professional and reliable tone when communicating with participants. Gaining access to the field has been one of the difficulties of traditional ethnography. These difficulties are often multiplied when doing online ethnography, since communication with the informants takes place online. FB provides some useful tools –such as the ‘friendship invitation’– to overcome such difficulties. Therefore, the participants received a Friendship request from the Researcher’s Profile. Those who accepted the request, were labelled as ‘Friends’ and thus provided me with access to information displayed on their Profile pages (cf. 2.3).

Although a lot of future participants did not accept the Friendship request (cf. 2.3), others messaged me (on FB) to wish luck with the project and ask for additional information about the research: ‘I'd be happy to participate I'm guessing I just have to check that website you provided and follow the online instructions?!? If you need anything else just let me know.'
Have a good one’ (Appendix 7). Also, there were two cases that the participants apologized for not being able to participate in the project because they had moved back in Greece. Interestingly, a user notified me with a mail that he had added me as a Friend because he noticed that I shared a Friendship with one of his Friends (cf. 3.4). Guided from this case, where someone granted me access to his Profile page on the basis of having common FB Friends, I decided to try and approach participants who visibly shared a connection to each other (FB Friends). Online observation began from a wide sample of Profiles to be narrowed down to a small sample of people and situations whose analysis proceeded with a snowball effect (Polsky, 1971; Wittel, 2000). According to Polsky, ethnographers who start their inquiry with the most popular person in the group can enjoy the cumulating effect of ‘snowballing’, according to which the researcher gets an introduction to one informant ‘who will vouch for others who in turn will vouch still others (Polsky, 1971 :129).

However, to avoid the case that a participant would remove me from his/hers Friends’ list, I decided to keep my participation ‘minimal’ and ‘restrained’ (Emerson, 1981:368). I seldom posted to the participants. There were only few cases that I had to communicate in private with the participants (using their private mail) so that I could gain additional information on their personal stories or online actions. Still, since individuals can practically remove a Profile from their list of Friends, whenever they decide, a couple of individuals did remove me from their lists during the first two months of observation. Two years later, more than twenty participants had removed me from their lists.

Gaining access to FB Group pages has been a relatively easier task. In the case of open Groups, invitations to join were automatically accepted. In the case of a closed Group (e.g. ‘Greeks in London’), I had to request the administrator’s permission to enter the Group. Only when I was accepted as a Group member did I have access to the information displayed on the Group’s page. Similarly to traditional ethnography, gaining access to the field was a complicated process and ‘gatekeepers’ (Wittel, 2000) hold the key to this process. Participants who were well connected to other users (users with large amounts of FB Friends) were more likely to accept the friendship request and allow me to access their Profile page. Also, Friends of a well-connected Profile which had confirmed Friendship with me were more likely to add me as a Friend and participate in the research. This ‘snowballing
effect’ enabled by networking technology has proved a useful tool for the ethnographer’s task.

2.6.2 Ethical Considerations

Since new online applications are created at a very fast pace, ethnics of online research remain an area largely unexplored. The internet has provided new locations from which to observe human behaviour and new tools for data collection. However, online research that focuses on humans as subjects may cause implications for the individuals involved, their inner or social life, thus there is a necessity for researchers to apply research ethics relevant to those used for traditional research. Consequently, one of the main difficulties in internet research is probing the balance between potential harm caused to the participants and ensuring the reliability of the research.

FB users disclose a vast amount of information on their Profile pages (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Since the network was lunched, academic discussion has been extensively occupied with users’ privacy pointing to the unique way in which social network sites –especially FB– thrust personal issues into public realms. The increasingly blurred boundary between public and private digital spaces is posing questions for this study with regard to defining levels of potential risk for the participants. Since FB users tend to reveal their personal data on their Profile pages (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), research on FB should take into account the possible risks and find a way to deal with the ethical issues involved. For example, the researcher’s intrusiveness in the participant’s private sphere has been a central concern for online researchers, since invasion into one’s privacy could cause harm for the individual. Moreover, what is perceived as public and what as private on the web is not always clear.

One common way to approach the public versus private dichotomy on the internet is to refer to the accessibility of online spaces. Considering the accessibility of the participants’ Profiles, it turns that the participants have a mean of 243 Friends who can view their Profile content. Half of the participants characterize their Profile pages as ‘public’ (questionnaire
results). I accessed their Profile pages spaces after gaining each participant’s informed consent.

A kind of implied informed consent is obtained as the respondents choose to add the researcher’s Profile as a Friend. In addition, participants’ awareness of taking part in the study is possible to affect future findings and the quality of data collected. Considering the tension between surveillance and the user’s individuality and freedom online, I placed emphasis on collaboration and trust building between the participants and the researcher. This was further sealed as I was also sharing some of the results with the participants who took part in the research. At any point, the individual could choose to hide information, delete content or even remove my Profile from the ‘Friend list’.

From another point of view, the lack of physical presence makes it easier for the participants to deceive the researcher. This creates ethical concerns about the integrity of the research. In anonymous virtual environments, concerns have been raised about how identity can be verified (Johns et al. 2004, cf. 1.6.1). To overcome such concerns, I verified information retrieved online by triangulating heterogeneous data.

Although online surveys and questionnaires are a common tool of obtaining research data, there are concerns about the appropriateness of this method (Nancarrow et al., 2001). When research involves possible physical, psychological or economic risks for the participants, online research tools may further complicate the issues to be discussed. In this project, however, since the potential risks for the respondents are minimal, the participants returned their consent online28 (Nosek et al., 2002; Hudson & Bruckman, 2004). The participants could find online a detailed Information sheet (Appendix 1) which gave them explicit assurance of confidence and informed them that all their responses would be given anonymously and could not be traced back to them in any way. In addition, I ensured the participants that their data would be processed with the use of proper anonymization techniques, and would not be associated with any specific individual. Unlike internet communities and newsgroups where a message could be retrieved by search engines and betray clues about the individual (e.g. mail), content exchanged over FB cannot be retrieved

28 This study falls into the category of ‘surveys and questionnaires that are determined by the IRB to involve perception, cognition, or game theory and do not involve gathering personal information, invasion of privacy or potential for emotional distress.'
by research engines, therefore, privacy cannot be violated unintentionally. This allowed me to use verbatim quotes extracted from the Profile pages – provided that were anonymized –. Names, pseudonyms and other identifying details such as names of institutions, workplaces, and organizational names have been changed beyond recognition. Details that could be sources of potential harm to individuals have been also omitted. Details that may lead the members of a group to guess who is being discussed were either omitted or disguised in suitable ways.

The issue of ‘list mining’ is a topic that has lately created a lot of discussion on internet research ethics. List mining is a method that uses messages sent to an internet-based mailing list for the purposes of scientific research (Till, 2006). The question here is: should these people who participate in an FB Group be regarded as ‘research subjects? In this project, prospective participants were chosen randomly among other members of specific FB Groups. At that point, the names and contacts of the members of an open FB Group could be viewed by all FB users and were visible to the public. For example, members of the Group ‘Greeks in North London’ were aware that they can be publicly identified as members of the Group. Consequently, they participated in an ‘open mailing list’, and this allowed me to contact them with an invitation to participate in the research. In the case of a closed FB Group, I had to send a request to join the Group and wait for the administrator to accept my request and grant me access to the Group (cf. 3.5.1).

2.6.3 Moving Between Online and Offline Research Settings

Research on virtual environments has problematized the conventional notion of a research setting (cf. 2.2). The study’s research setting is not confined to online environments – e.g. a Profile page, a Group page etc. – but also includes offline settings in a way that it is not bounded to a site but is multi-sited (Androutsopoulos, 2008).

‘Online life is usually held to present particular problems for ethnography as it is hidden and ambiguous, and boundaries are not clear. However, ethnography and online daily life are similar procedures in which people go about constructing ’culture’ to make sense of others and interact with a degree of predictability. Ethnographers can learn about culture and society by learning how people themselves go about understanding and making those processes. We further, do not have to expect that the reality we describe will be completely ordered; even though the simplifications of
constructing ‘culture’ might make this seem inevitable. Disorder can be socially important’ (Marshall, 2010:1).

To capture the participants’ experience, I followed individuals through their online and offline meetings. Conversations and data collection involved real places, as well. I visited participants at their homes, interviewed them, took notes during these meetings and compared the notes with online observations. However, difficulties concerned the pace of observations and consistency of observing actions as they extended in offline settings.

While in offline settings, continuous observation could not be possible due to practicalities, in digital settings, the effect of time, frequencies, pace and consistency of online actions may produce valuable observations and assist findings. For that reason, the collection of data had to be bounded to continuous observation patterns extending for a long period (cf. 2.3). However, ensuring continuity of observation for online actions alone was not enough for the requirements of the study. To examine data related to the participants’ online actions, I had to observe the continuities of online and offline settings and situations. Therefore, online fieldwork and pilot observation served as a starting point to highlight areas for further investigation. Fieldwork began online and then extended to offline settings in a complementary way.

To take into account the interaction of the virtual world with the social context within which it was produced, I had to adopt a variety of research methods corresponding to distinct fieldwork situations. For example, I attended a meeting at a café following a post on a Group’s discussion board and observed the participant’s Profile page after the meeting had occurred. I observed the participants’ Profiles and made them discuss their actions in a group interview (Appendix 3). Observing a couple of participants in a variety of offline contexts (e.g. at home, meetings, at university etc.) and taking fieldnotes has been a key task which has helped me comprehend online behaviour.
2.7 Methods of Analysis

The process of data collection resulted in a body of heterogeneous data which emerged from diverse sources, both online and offline. For this reason, each set of data was analyzed using different analytical tools. The different approaches used to interpret meaning were chosen not only in respect to the distinct nature of research questions examined, but also with regard to the nature of data collected. This section presents the different types of analysis according to which each set of data was processed. Ethnospecific textual and visual data collected (Group names, SUs, Wall Threads, Profile photos) were analyzed with qualitative methods (such as content analysis and discourse analysis) and combined with observational data. Online questionnaires and certain features displayed on the participants’ Profile pages (The Profile’s ‘Recent activity’, number of Friends etc.) were analyzed using quantitative methods. Observations and findings emerging from those distinct analytical traditions were then synthesized into a coherent picture. Section 2.7.1 explains why I combined quantitative with qualitative methods, section 2.7.2 demostrates how I worked with content analysis –the main method employed– and 2.7.3 presents discourse analysis, the complementary analytical traditions used to interpret each set of data. In 2.7.4, I will explain how I approached and analysed different kinds of data.

2.7.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

While a qualitative approach to data aims to provide a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) and a rich understanding of the case under study, a quantitative approach serves to provide more positivist, structured and controlling account of the case. Quantitative techniques for data analysis are a result of controlled observations (e.g. laboratory experiments, mass surveys) which arrive at objective conclusions (Basley, 1970) stating precisely the variables under investigation (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992) and minimizing subjectivity or judgment (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). The strength of quantitative methods is that they are designed to produce numerical, reliable data which describes tendencies across the sample and quantifies variation in a way that claims objectivity and generalizability.
In this study, quantitative analysis operates at two levels: firstly it was used to identify trends and tendencies across the sample that call for further investigation, and secondly, confirmed or contested qualitative findings, claiming representativeness and objectivity. Certain questions (e.g. regarding the length of time that the participants stay connected on FB, how often they update their Profiles, common practices related to their ethnicity etc.) were examined based on quantitative evidence. Overall, quantitative information has helped me to identify themes for further examination, select the participants and assess the validity of qualitative findings. It has also facilitated judgments regarding the extent to which cases examined were representative. Online questionnaires and certain features of a Profile page were analyzed with quantitative methods.

However, quantitative analysis alone would fail to provide information on the context of the case studied. As quantitative analysis evolves in a structured environment—such as questionnaires—, inability to control the environment where the respondents provide the answers to the questions in the survey and failure to provide an evolving and continuous investigation of a research phenomenon are some of the weaknesses of the method (Matveev, 2002). Given the complex and open nature of the study’s research question, quantitative analysis alone could not provide an explanation of the phenomena observed. Thus, it was only used at a small scale as a starting point for further qualitative observations and analysis.

Qualitative research has been broadly defined as ‘any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The strength of qualitative methods is that they provide a complex textual description of human experience—often behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions—, examine relationships and identify intangible factors—such as social situations, roles, norms, ethnicity and religion—and shed light on phenomena by studying in depth single cases. With an aim to accurately describe, decode, and interpret the meanings of the phenomena occurring in their normal social contexts and routines (Fryer, 1991), qualitative techniques obtain a more realistic account of the world and provide a holistic view of the phenomena (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Patton, 1980). According to Ting-Toomey (2005), qualitative research is the study of contextual principles that people use to make sense of their symbolic activities such as the roles of participants, the physical setting and a set of situational events that guide the interpretation of discourse (Matveev, 2002). While one of the greatest strengths of qualitative
approach is the richness and depth of explorations, its main weakness is that the method has a tendency to reflect the subjective experience of the researcher (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

The study employs a range of qualitative techniques for data analysis and interpretation. It mainly relies on content analysis –following the tradition of media studies– and uses discourse analysis where needed to assist observations. Discourse analysis was used to examine how interviewees construct versions of ethnic identity, ideas and perceptions on SNS use. As it will be explained below (cf. 2.7.3), discourse analysis was only applied to a small degree for the examination of certain types of data (e.g. Wall Threads and Profile photos and Interview extracts). The main method used for data analysis was content analysis.

### 2.7.2 Content Analysis

Content analysis can be broadly defined as ‘a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of manifest content of communication’ (Berelson, 1952:74), a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text and systematically compress many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Weber, 1990). A more inclusive definition of the method comes from Neuendorf:

‘Content analysis is a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity, intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalisability, replicability, and hypothesis testing) and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented’ (Neuendorf, 2002:10).

In content analysis, text is usually summarized by counting elements of the text and applying a classification scheme. Frankfort – Nachmias & Nachmias (1996) define these elements or recording units as words, themes, characters, paragraphs or items. In this respect, there are different types of content analysis depending on the method and unit for coding. For example, when the elements being considered are words, then the analysis consists of simply counting the number of times each word occurs. This study relies on heterogenous textual data in a variety of forms: the text of transcribed interviews, textual short statements (SUs), message exchanges in the Wall Threads, Profile textual information, name of Group, names
of a Profile’s Friends etc. Apart from words, elements examined are also concepts and themes.

It has been argued that there are two methodological approaches (Bernard & Ryan, 1998) for analyzing free-flowing text. The first tradition uses words as units of analysis (keywords in context, semantic networks, and cognitive maps) and the second uses codes/themes as units of analysis (grounded theory, traditional content analysis). Content analysis, which uses words as units of analysis, differs from methods using codes/themes. Therefore, if the context of the recording unit is a major influence on the classification applied, then it may be more appropriate to count the number of times a theme is used. For example, if the context of an interviewees’ statement about his/her language practices on FB (e.g. his/her mother tongue) is a major influence on the classification applied, then theme based analysis was considered more appropriate.

Thematic coding methods used for reducing text data into manageable summary categories or themes is commonly used for making inferences about a sample, for identification of re occurring themes or metaphors in dense types of texts and interview transcripts. However, it heavily relies on schemes that are created a priori (e.g. the researchers’ question on whether interviewees express their creativity on FB) and implies an existing method of classification according to the researcher’s mental model (Krippendorf, 1980; Weber, 1990). Although this method can be less objective, it does allow the data to be placed within relevant contextual groups.

Methods using words as units for the analysis have several strengths, since they represent meaning in text using natural meaning embedded in language structures. While searching for ethnospecific content (cf. 2.4.1), I relied on words as units for analysis. For example, a systematic search for occurrences of the words ‘Greek’ and ‘Greece’ throughout the interview transcripts, SUs, Wall Threads, Profile Info and Profile’s Recent Activity, provided me with information about the different contexts that the word was used. Such methods often use tools provided by computing (e.g. software for information retrieval, data mining computational analysis etc.) to process digitized or digital data.
Computational linguistics deal with the statistical modelling of natural language employing computer assisted coding (Wallis & Nelson, 2001; Manning & Schütze, 2002; Jurafsky et al. 2008). Time saving automation, improved reliability of coding and expanded opportunities for units of analysis (e.g. co-occurrence of word units to identify clusters of concepts as well as relationships between them), are only some of the advantages of such methods when used for text analysis. A growing amount of researchers in digital humanities not only have realized the opportunities found in integrating computational tools to research methods but also point to the ways that computational analysis may challenge current theoretical paradigms and lead to new ones (e.g. McCarty, 2005).

However, since this study relies on multiple forms of data and a complex set of open research questions, thus computational methods, which use key words as units of analysis, were considered as inadequate. Selected methods did not require the use of any specific software and analysis was carried out using a pencil and a paper. Different types of content analysis (using words as units of the analysis, using codes as units of the analysis or both) were employed for each different set of data (cf. 2.7.3).

As shown in the examples above, the study combines methods which use words as recording units and methods using themes. This combination can be best described as concept mapping content analysis, the main type of content analysis used. Concept mapping is an alternative approach for the content analysis of semi structured interviews and open ended surveys (Jackson & Trochim, 2002) used mainly in organizational research to gather new information about an experience or topic, to clarify quantitative findings and to explore different dimensions of respondent’s experiences. Concept mapping is a kind of theme based content analysis which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative elements. Neale and Nichols (2001) have used this kind of analysis when studying virtual environments to understand and evaluate detailed information about the users’ behaviour and experiences, to evaluate virtual environments and guide technology design. Based on a blend of methodologies –coding using both themes and words and units of analysis–, this kind of analysis is particularly well suited to the study’s exploratory nature of questions and helps to develop a coding scheme for the examination of an area for which there is little existing theoretical coding.
Concept content analysis originates from the conventional content analysis. It is considered appropriate for this study since there is only a limited amount of existing research literature on the type of online communication being studied. Concept mapping methodology combines the strength of both word based and theme based methods while eliminating some of their weaknesses:

‘it is a hybrid method that uses original intact respondent statements as units of analysis solicits the actual survey respondents or respondent proxies who use pile sorting to code the data, aggregates quantitatively across individual conceptual schemes, and enables data structure to emerge through the use of multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis of the aggregated data’ (Jackson & Trochim, 2002:309).

The method proved particularly useful when analysing interview transcripts and textual data derived from the Profiles. For example, the word ‘diaspora’ – which appeared in several times in the interviews’ transcripts – was examined both as a key word in context (signifying frequency of occurrence) and in combination of the conceptual framework in which it was placed each time. Concept content analysis was also used to develop coding schemes for questionnaires and content for follow up interview questions. Also, allowed me to compare findings resulting from the analysis of one group of data (e.g. Profile data) with other types of data (e.g. interviews or fieldwork). For example, I combined data regarding the level of ethnospecific content circulated on a Profile with information about the resonance for living in London (questionnaire) or frequency of travelling back (interview).

2.7.3 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method of text analysis developed by social constructionists (cf. 1.2) to study any form of spoken or written language (Fassold, 1990:65) - naturally occurring language, conversation, talk, communicative events, speech acts etc.. It aims at studying language beyond the level of the sentence and at revealing the underlying social structures which may be assumed within the text. Slembrouck refers to discourse analysis as a method that:

‘attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units such as conversational
exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers’ (2005:1).

Discourse analysis is considered an appropriate qualitative method to answer the question of how the participants construct versions of their identity and experience hybridity. I use discourse analysis as a complementary method to content analysis for the study of the transcribed interview data (cf. 3,4), as well as for the study of the Wall exchanges (ch.5). This method has helped me identify features in the text, ideas, views, roles, commonly shared discursive resources and interpretative practices through which the participants construct versions of their actions online (cf. 4.4). The approach of discourse analysis I found useful for the purposes of this study, pays attention on the social context of SNS use and discourses that support identity construction on FB.

I analyze interview data at the macrosocial level as social texts. Analysis aims to ‘surpass the dichotomy between subjective meaning and objective reality as well as the dichotomy between user-centered and system centered research’ (Tajla, 1997: 2). Analysis of interview talk and online exchanges identifies existing discourses, looks for patterns within broader contexts taking into account the context-dependent nature of interviewees’ answers and approaches language use as a process which is socially situated (Candlin, 1997).

Discourse analysis was regarded as the most appropriate method which could stress the participants’ identities as hybrid constructions. The method treats the subjects not as statics and sovereign but as individuals who in different contexts and situations use variable linguistic resources and move between different discourses naturally ( Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

2.7.4 Mixed Methods and Multimodality

The study rests upon a multimodal approach which understands representation and communication to be more than language: it includes the visual and spatial aspects of interaction and environments as well as the relationships between these all of which contribute to meaning (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2009). As a method for analyzing the full repertoire of meaning-making resources that people use in their interactions, multimodal
research has been key in understanding how semiotic resources of visual communication are used to articulate discourses across a variety of media. Especially in the realm of digital media, multimodal research makes a significant contribution to research methods for the collection and analysis of online data (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011).

A FB Profile page is consisted by different components such as texts, pictures, videos, online exchanges etc. A multimodal methodology involves looking at these multimodal texts and communicative events both separately and in combination. In the following lines, I explain in detail how I worked with different sets of data: Interviews, Profile pages, online questionnaires, SUs, Wall Threads, Group names, Profile Photos.

**Interviews:** Interviews with the participants produced a large amount of data which was transcribed and analyzed according to concept content analysis (cf. 2.7.2) and where needed, discourse analysis. Although questionnaire data, observational and Profile data provided me with information about the participants’ experiences and practices, data obtained from interviews aimed at detecting new or unusual types of experiences and practices. For example, Mina (P5) was using her Profile page as a way to find out more about her students and learn how they use English language in their everyday interactions (cf. 3.2).

Once interview data was collected, I approached the text by making notes on impressions and thoughts that came directly from the text and also highlighted key words. They became the initial coding scheme. Instead of using preconceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), coded categories came directly from the participants’ narrative responses and were allowed to flow from the data (e.g. creativity, Greek friends, use of Latin characters etc.). Apart from coding words embedded in the participants’ language structures, there was also a need to retain the context of these words or phrases and a need to describe the mental models of the individuals (cf. 4.4.1, 4.4.3).

The process of theme definition and classification is a process according to which the researcher groups the data according to common raw themes that emerged from the participants responses, making any adjustments where possible. Firstly, I created a unit of analysis, a phrase containing only one concept. Then, concepts were sorted into piles of similar statements. Codes where then sorted in categories based on how different codes were
related and linked. Emergent categories were used to organize codes into meaningful clusters (Patton, 1980). Proxy sorters were also used when considering the following criteria: how the participants’ background and experiences were similar or different and how this may influence interpretation of units. At another level, I label the clusters and interpret the concepts that have been coded into themes or categories based on the clusters. The result of the analysis is a map of thematic clusters (e.g. friendship behaviour, language use, frequency of log on, self-definitions etc.). The text was represented in thematic clusters according to a process in which the participants’ statements were sorted into piles based on conceptual similarity (Weller & Romney, 1988). As concept analysis evolved, relationships among categories were identified, additional codes were developed and the initial coding scheme was revised and refined several times.

In quantitative terms, the number of responses falling in each theme was also indicated. Becker et al (1984) describe a quasi-statistics approach to calculate the frequency with which statements fall into particular themes and also examine the contexts associated with the statements. Inferential codes and frequency counts were used to indicate the commonality and popularity of a theme. However, frequencies were calculated on the basis of the number of respondents rather than the number of comments, as a way to avoid underrepresenting or over representing the distribution of meaning in the sample (Kraut, 1996). When presenting these thematic clusters, the use of actual quotes from the interviewees is considered as a powerful and useful means of conveying the issue. Keeping the original word based data together with any numerical based coding was a way to ensure that essential characteristics and qualities of the data were not lost (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and to avoid misinterpretation of single words taken out of the context in which they originally occurred. Interview data, especially data related to the process of identity construction (cf. 4.4.1, 4.4.2) and language use on FB (cf.4.4.5) was also analysed using discourse analysis. As described in 2.7.3, discourse analysis has helped me identify the participants’ interpretative repertoires, patterns of variability and inconsistency, background assumptions, absences, how the participants legitimate their views, different subject positions or temporary identities.

**Profile pages:** The Profile’s Recent Activity and the number of the Profile’s Friends were measured and processed using simple statistics. As shown in Table 2 (cf. 2.4.2), a Profile’s ‘Recent Activity’ has been grouped into categories: activities for the presentation of the self
(uploading a photo, taking a quiz, editing Info about oneself, becoming fun of, posting a SU, changing the Profile photo), activities for Interaction (commenting on a post, writing on someone’s Wall, liking something), actions for Participation (joining a Group, commenting on a Group’s Wall, creating a Group). This categorization assisted findings regarding the prevailing practices on FB: practices for self-presentation, interaction or participation (cf. 3.2). Numerical information provided additional information regarding the most common activities on the Profile pages; the mean of a Profile’s Friends, the number of Friends with Greek origin, prevailing patterns of communication, ethnospecific content on the Profiles etc. (cf. 3.2, 3.4).

Levels of ethnospecific content found on the participants’ Profile pages were also a result of quantitative analysis. The Profiles’ Recent Activity was examined for ethnospecific content (cf. 4.2). The levels of ethnospecific content for each Profile is a percentage which expresses the proportion between the overall amount of actions taken on the Profile page –during the given period under study– and the amount of actions with ethnospecific content. The measure served as an indicator of the amount of the content that the participants shared online in relation to Greek or British ethnic culture. Although the measure cannot provide meaningful information itself, it can thus be combined with other kind of data to produce valuable insights (e.g. the level of ethnospecific content circulated on a Profile page in relation to the number of the individual’s Greek FB Friends).

**Profile Photos:** Searching through the participants’ Profile photos, I found 10 photos with ethnospecific content (e.g. ethnic symbols). Assuming that meaning is not inherent in those photos but comes from their relationships with their surroundings, Profile photos containing symbols of an ethnic culture (either Greek or British) were examined in relation to other types of data (e.g a Profile’s Info, interview data, screen data). My aim was to describe how the participants perform their ethnicity (cf. 4.3.2) through their visual online production.

**A Profile’s Info section:** The Profiles’ Info section has led me to identify participants to study closer. Information about the participants (e.g. basic information, activities and interests, hometown, work, education etc.) was combined with interview data and screen data to provide a comprehensive picture of each participant’s background (cf. 3.3, 4.4.2).
A Profile’s Friends: The list of the Profile’s Friends was analyzed with simple quantitative tools to point out to the mean of a Profiles’ Friends. Also, I searched the lists of a Profile’s Friends to find out how many Friends had a surname of Greek origin. This process provided me with information regarding the ethnic background of the participants’ FB Friends (cf. 3.4).

Online questionnaires: Online questionnaires were processed using simple statistics. Results provided numerical information regarding the frequencies and tendencies across the sample of the participants: e.g. how often do they communicate and with whom, how often do they update which part of their Profiles, which are the most common ways that they practice their ethnicity, what are they most likely to do when on FB etc. The results were analysed, placed in tables and figures and further used to complement findings regarding patterns of FB usage and the participants’ prevailing practices (cf. Ch. 3).

Status Updates (SUs): The sum of the participants’ SUs posted on their Walls during a period of 10 months was examined for ethnospecific content (cf. 2.4.1). The central idea was to reduce text in a predefined category. According to content analysis, I searched across the textual data of 466 SUs for key words and phrases that revealed ethno specific content. SUs containing the words or phrases characterized as ethnospecific were singled out and formed a considerable manageable amount of data consisting of 211 SUs. The corpus of 211 SUs was then examined using conceptual content analysis to establish the existence and frequency of concepts in the text taking into account the context in which key words appeared in. In addition, among the corpus of 211 SUs, I singled out those that received a response to answer questions regarding the dialogical nature of the SUs (cf. 3.4). At another level, I examined the SUs in terms of time of reference –present, past of future– (cf. 3.4) and I examined them in terms of language used (cf. 4.4.5).

Wall Threads: Textual data of the Wall Threads (Appendix 6) found on the participants’ Profile pages were also examined for ethnospecific content in the same way that SUs were. While searching for key words according to the predefined category (ethnospecific content), I identified 56 Wall Threads and coded the context in which these key words where used. Analysis pointed to 5 categories which revealed the contexts in which the participants draw on when referring to ethnicity on their FB Walls (cf. 5.2). From each category, I selected a
Wall thread to analyze further, using discourse analysis. For example, I selected a Wall thread to analyze out of 9 Wall Threads that were coded in the category ‘Negotiating collective memory, history and belonging’ (cf. 5.2.5). At this point, discourse analysis was used at a limited degree in order to provide a more thick description of how the participants bring off social actions through their talk (Hutchby 2001, Sacks 1992) and investigate the interpretative resources in which the participants rely on to produce the contributions and understand other’s contributions. Analysis of the selected Wall Threads provides an insight into the process according to which ethnicity emerges as an interactional outcome: how the participants make sense of aspects of ethnicity, the contexts in which ethnicity emerges in their Wall exchanges and the way that the participants talk about ethnicity in their everyday social interactions (cf. 5.2).

**Group names:** Textual data corresponding to the sum of FB Group names was analyzed using content analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to describe the prevailing ways in which Greek ethnicity was represented in the names of FB Groups. Users’ labelling practices for FB Groups related to Greek ethnicity can be a valuable source of information about digital production related to the Greek ethnic culture on FB. Coding categories were identified using a range of techniques such as key words in context, word repetitions (e.g. Greek Culture, Greek food). The process relied on open coding; therefore categories emerged from the data by looking at the text of the name and identifying recurring issues, themes and the frequency of their occurrence. Emerging categories revealed patterns or themes indicative of the range of contexts in which key terms (e.g. Greek, Greece) occurred. The next step was to group the list of the categories into higher order categories by collapsing those categories that were similar. This process has helped me to confine a large amount of data (cf. 4.3.1) in a few categories and subcategories (e.g. Greek culture, food) and combine this information with other pieces of data (e.g. the FB Groups that each participant has joined).
2.8 Conclusion

The methodological design of this study brings together heterogeneous data collected in multiple locations –both online and offline– and processed with an array of analytical traditions, to point out to different ways that the participants project versions of ethnicity on FB. Quantitative findings –emerging both from the questionnaires and online observation– have helped me to identify tendencies, prevailing practices and trends across the sample of the participants. These results were further complemented with qualitative observations –a product of fieldwork, interviews– regarding the participants’ practices, beliefs, perceptions etc. As I immersed myself in the culture of the group of the participants I was studying, I found that the task of combining observations from online and offline settings of research, issues related with ethics of online research and gaining access to the research field required careful decisions, strategic planning and flexibility on the part of the researcher. Ethnographic observations carried out in multiple locations have provided the kind of ‘glue’ when analysing and composing distinct sets of data into a coherent picture. Content analysis and discourse analysis have provided the main analytical traditions employed in this study. Once data was analysed, results had to be synthesized into a single narrative. Findings are presented according to the themes that analysis revealed.
3. SELF PRESENTATION, INTERACTION AND PARTICIPATION ON THE PROFILE AND GROUP PAGES: AN OVERVIEW

3.1 Introduction
Questionnaire data has served as a starting point to investigate the participants’ online practices. This chapter presents the key questionnaire findings and triangulates them with screen data to provide an overall picture of the participants’ practices on FB. The first section (3.2) describes how FB is embedded in the participants’ daily routines and presents frequencies regarding log in and Profile activities.

In 3.3, findings suggest that the participants’ use their Profile mainly as a tool for self-presentation. Relying on quantitative findings which are further supported by interviews, 3.4 focuses on the participants’ interactional practices and reveals communication patterns across the sample of the participants. The section asks who communicates with whom and what determines the dialogical/hyperlink dimension of the Profiles. Analysis of screen data also presents findings regarding wider communicational patterns in a diasporic context, friendship behavior, the composition of a Profile’s Friends etc.

The chapter’s final section (3.5) examines how and whether FB enables participation practices in online collective formations such as FB Groups. In 3.5.1, discussion focuses on the participants’ motives for joining or creating a FB Group, and section 3.5.2 provides a short description of the Groups related to Greek culture on FB, their themes and functions – while focusing on those that the participants have joined.

The observation that there existed 77 FB Groups about Greeks living in London has been a starting point for this study. It evoked questions regarding whether FB Groups can provide social spaces where the traditional characteristics of physical diasporic communities might emerge online. To examine this, I identified the Groups available for Greeks in London (3.5.2) and investigated the conditions under which the participants would join a Group for Greek diaspora, their motivations for joining and expectations, how they participated in these Groups, in which degree and with what consequences intergroup dynamics and practices were carried over offline (3.5.3).
This chapter triangulates data emerging from various locations, both online and offline, to provide an overall picture of the participants’ practices on FB. Findings serve as background information which supports further analysis into the participants’ online practices related to ethnicity and also provide an introductory point to unravel the participants’ distinct stories.

### 3.2 Patterns, Frequencies: Key Questionnaire and Interview Findings

To describe how FB has been integrated in the participants’ daily routines, I relied on the questionnaire and interview data which provided information about patterns, frequencies and practices on FB. The majority of the questionnaire respondents log onto FB on a daily basis. Half of them visit FB more than once a day (cf. Figure 4). Figure 4 presents data regarding how often the participants access their Profiles and Figure 5 presents data related to the length of time they stay connected on FB.

**Figure 4. Log-in Frequency on the Profiles**

![Figure 4. Log-in Frequency on the Profiles](image)
Eleven (11) participants log on FB everyday and 9 participants (out of the 28 participants who answered the question) log on their Profiles more than once a day. Questionnaire respondents were estimated to spend on average one hour per day (62 minutes) connected on FB (Figure 5). Such figures suggest that the network has become an integral part of the participants’ daily lives. About 17% (5 out of 30) of the participants stay connected on FB more than two hours per day (Figure 5). The amount of time the participants spend on FB yet depends on their activities and lifestyle.

Grigori’s (IN8) daily workload does not leave him with any free time to spend on FB. He remembers that when he was a student he would spend hours on FB, as it was the easiest way to keep up with events and people in the university. When asked what exactly are they doing when logged on, interviewees reported a similar sequence of actions to what Kostas (IN1) claims:

‘I log onto my profile every day, sometimes twice a day. When I am on the web, I will always check my inbox which is usually full of facebook mails, I click on the mail links. Then I will check what is happening there. Even if I do not receive any facebook mails, I will log onto my profile anyway. I open facebook in the same manner that I switch on the TV. To see what’s going on. It is addictive. There are days that I stay connected the whole day, but I usually stay for 10 minutes…then I will check the homepage, initially looking for events and photos…I read the messages, others’ status updates, I might make a comment every two days…But the chances are that I start chatting with people who are also online’ (IN1).
Kostas (IN1) parallels FB with a television set, a medium embedded in our daily routines and a place to connect with the rest of the world. Nikos (IN2) also notes that FB has become a daily habit: ‘Every afternoon when I return from my office I will always check my page since FB is not permitted at the office’. Maria (IN3) checks her FB page as soon as she arrives in her office. During the interview, Rena (IN4) logged on to her Profile to discuss her actions with me. The first thing she did was to check her homepage and find out about her Friends’ activities. She explains that when an activity is of interest to her, she will click to find out more or she will post her comments. She is more likely to comment on SUs coming from her friends. During the interview and as she was navigating her FB homepage—a page displaying Friends’ ‘Recent Activity’—, she stopped to click on links uploaded by her FB Friends. She explained that:

‘Though I might find the uploaded content interesting, I will not click on this to find out more, unless it is something that my close friends or people that I really care have posted….or unless I have plenty of time to spend. I really do not have all that time to look at each post carefully so I would rather pay attention to some of them, usually those coming from my close friends’ (IN4).

During the Group interview, discussion about the site’s technical characteristics turned to be the interviewees’ favourite subject as they wanted to exchange information and find out more about certain applications and technical procedures. For example, Maria (IN3) was not sure whether the photos she uploaded recently were visible on Mina’s (IN5) homepage, and Grigoris (IN8) asked Maria whether he could remove a tag from a photo uploaded. Such questions reveal their anxiety to gain control of their communication on FB, since they are aware that their online actions might affect certain aspects of their relations offline. For all the interviewees, FB Friendships were anchored in real life relationships and 84 % (25 out of 30) of the questionnaire respondents believed that having a FB Profile has influenced certain aspects of their relations to others. Kostas (IN1) was reluctant to remove some of his FB Friends as he does not know whether there is a function that informs them whether they were removed from his Friend list.

When the discussion turned to interpersonal relations and FB, everyone had a story to tell. Interviewees provided me with lively examples of how their actions online had interfered with their daily routines and relations:
‘you have to be very careful with what you publish online. Once I went back in Greece for a week, and it was something that a certain person should not find out. Unfortunately, someone who saw me in Athens posted something on my profile page. It was not like addressing this to me, but talking to my 200 friends at the same time!’ (IN2).

Although all interviewees expressed their awareness of privacy issues related to extensive FB usage, they would still publish a great deal of information about themselves on their Profiles. Out of the 30 Profiles examined, there were only 4 Profiles with relatively low activity (less than 10 posts) and 11 Profiles with high activity (more than 50 posts).

Each Profile’s hyperlink structure is a unique combination of text, image, video and links. Despite all Profiles were structured following a similar format, each Profile empowered its author in different ways. For example, Philip (P11) used to post funny stories to describe his experiences and Argiris (P16) consistently invited friends to events taking place in his Greek tavern. In Laki’s page (P30) one can find only sophisticated quotations posted on the Wall. In his ‘Profile motto’—an introductory phrase—he states that he will be deleting any Wall comment posted. While Lakis was using his Profile as a personal blog, to promote and exhibit his political and philosophical views and concerns, Nikos (P2) mainly used his Profile to play online games on a daily basis and Baso (P22) to post interesting videos. Each Profile displayed certain patterns and styles regarding the character, content and frequency of SUs. Dimitris (P21) types his SUs to promote his religious views and Baso (P22) commented on Wall videos she posted. Kostas (P1) posts very short SUs, without verbs, usually to let others know how he feels or where he is. Fotis (P18) used to post sophisticated phrases and comments regarding social and political events and Stella (P17) used to type her SU in Greeklish. These observations provide a first indication of how some participants appropriate their Profile page to suit their personal needs for expressivity or interaction (cf.4.4.3).

Certain repeated patterns of usage were evident in almost all Profiles under study and some participants were aware of their persistent choices. For example, Maria (IN3) discussed her habit to take FB quizzes29:

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29 e.g. ‘Ποιός απο τους 12 αρχαίους θεούς του Ολύμπου είσαι?’ and the result is ‘Είσαι ένας ημίθεος ο Ήρακλής!’ ( = ‘which of the 12 ancient Olympians Gods are you?’ and the result is: ‘You are a demi god! You are Hercules’) or ‘ΑΕΓΕΑΝ OR O.A?’ and the result is ‘ΟΛΥΜΠΙΑΚΗ FOR EVER!!’ or ‘Where in London do you belong?’ and the result is ‘Islington’ or ‘Poaso emeines stin agglia?’ and the result is ‘You stayed. You should call for a van and move’.

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‘Well I know my page is full of quizzes, I like answering questions… I would have deleted them from my profile page, but it seems that they reveal something about me… I search for quizzes through FB database…usually about something I want know about me. For example, the other day I took a quiz ‘in which area in London do you belong?’ It was when I was searching for a new room and I thought that it could help me... The funniest part however was my friends’ comments on the result. I am always longing for these comments…they either validate the questionnaire’s outcome or they reject it’ (IN3).

Maria (IN3) also took the quiz ‘How long did you stayed in UK?’ and she discussed that rather than using the quiz’s result as an authorized source of information about herself, her aim was to evoke her Friends’ comments on the subject and initiate interaction.

Mina (IN5) uses FB to meet different personal needs. She is searching for British slang. She is a fresh English teacher in a primary school. She spends hours looking into her students’ FB Profiles in an effort to understand their culture, to keep up with their language codes, slang terms and expressions used by youngsters in London. Nikos (IN2) and Maria (IN3) comment that certain uses or practices in the Profiles might as well be affected by culture. For example, Maria (IN3) thinks that their British FB Friends upload too much information about their lives on their SUs while Greeks are more likely to upload photos.

All interviewees agreed that they spent a considerable amount of time searching their Friends’ Profiles and checking information about them. For some (IN1, IN9), browsing their Friends’ Profiles provides them with an insight into norms of the social world and helps them navigate their social environments (also Boyd & Donath 2004). Rena (IN4) noticed that she spends more than half an hour per day checking her homepage. Maria (IN3) finds it interesting to know who communicates with whom. She explains that she is motivated ‘out of curiosity’.

For some participants (IN1, IN2, IN8), curiosity has been the main reason for joining FB. Mina (IN5) and Nikos (IN2) find it difficult to remember why and how they joined. Mina (IN5) notes ‘It was when I started receiving my friends’ FB invitations…I finally made a Profile page… I did it mainly out of curiosity, to have fun. Before I even realize it, day by day I started using my profile page systematically and the number of FB friends would grow in a great pace’ (IN5). When asked why joining, most interviewees stressed their need to be
in contact with their Friends who also had an account (IN1, IN2, IN 3, IN 5, IN 7, IN 8, IN 9, IN 10). For Nikos (IN2), Maria (IN3) and Mina (IN5), constructing a FB Profile was also a result of peer pressure. They also admitted that they had to spend some considerable amount of time and effort to become familiar with FB’s technical characteristics. Despite they use FB extensively for their communication, yet they are not familiar with all the applications and tools offered by the service.

3.3 Practices for Self-presentation on the Profiles

Although all interviewees state that they mainly use FB to communicate with their friends and manage their contacts, systematic observation of the Profiles suggested that the participants spend a considerable amount of effort to create, manage and exhibit information about themselves (update their status, join Groups and Causes, become fans of pages, post videos, links and photos on their Wall, update basic information about them etc.). Screen data suggests that the participants use FB mainly as a tool for self-presentation rather than as a tool for interaction or participation (cf. Figure 6). Figure 6 presents data related to the mean percentage of activities that enable self-presentation, interaction and participation counted in the Profiles.

Figure 6. Activities for Self-presentation, Interaction and Participation in the Profiles
Figure 6 demonstrates that the vast majority of the activities in the Profiles enable self-presentation (65%). A 27% of the activities counted were enabling interaction and very low percentages of activities suggested participation in Groups (8%). Only 3 participants were using their Profile mostly to interact and participate (P18, P25, P26). On the Profiles examined, an average of 65% of the actions taken, have been actions for self-presentation. It should be noted that these observations were only based on the available screen data, thus not taking into account other possible forms of interaction on FB, such as private messaging and online chat – for which there was no accessible or retrievable data— (cf. 2.4.2).

Questionnaire results suggest that the participants tended to update their Status more frequently than anything else, changed their Profile Photo on average every six months and updated personal information once a year (cf. Figure 7). Figure 7 presents the Profile sections that the participants updated more frequently, as well as the frequency of renewal.

In terms of gender differences in ‘types of self-promotional domains’ (Mehdizadeh, 2010) observed across the sample, men were more likely to update their Status than women and women were more likely to change their Profile Photo. Some participants would chose to update their Profile photo more frequently than others or would show a preference for certain FB features, according to their distinct needs and tastes.
Screen observations suggest that the participants update their status inconsistently, sometimes leaving long time gaps before editing their SUs. Four participants (P7, P21, P29, P3) had updated their status only once or twice over the period of ten months and two participants had never updated their status, though they were taking other activities on FB – e.g. joining Groups or posting Wall comments. During the summer, Kostas (IN1) updated his status twice a day; normally he would update his status once a month. Maria (IN3) notes:

‘it is rarely that I need to express something on FB … usually when I want to let others know about a trip or when I am very happy about something… I do not spend too much time on that, if I think of something I will write it, but this does not happen often’.

In terms of their time of reference, SUs were more likely to report on events expanding in real time. A 67% of the SUs were phrased in present tense or in present continuous tense. They presented actions, feelings, situations as if they were taking place ‘right now’. For example, Gina (P24) ‘is half way to the beach’ or Dimitris (P16) is ‘Having a real greek FRAPPE’. These findings reveal that the act of writing a SU supports a discourse where the present moment achieves significance. As a result of a wider media environment – where new media users are increasingly describing what they ‘are doing’ rather that what they ‘have done’ or ‘will do’ – FB makes possible the continuous uploading in real time and thus enables ‘constant revelations of the self in a real time’ (Boyd, 2008).

However, apart from referring to real time events, the participants were also likely to make announcements for future events (e.g. ‘will be in Greece next week dogging molotovs and drinking cocktails’) to report on the past, describe a situation that has occurred or narrate a story. They were also quoting cultural specific phrases, expressing questions, addressing their FB Friends, performing, and using their SUs in creative and unexpected ways (c.f 4.4.4). The various ethnospecific resources in which the participants draw to express themselves will be examined in 4.4. The next section looks into the participants’ practices for

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30 e.g. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3.. with Greek summer around the corner, a clip from my archives depicting how I spent it last year lol,’My attempt to go to work on Monday morning. I managed to arrive at Liverpool St but as the conditions were pretty bad I took the next train back home’.

31 e.g. ‘And I quote: Σας παρακαλούμε να παρεσρεθείηε απαραπάνω εκλογικό ημήμα μια ώρα πρίν την ανατολή του Ηλίου’ (= ‘And I quote: Could you please be in the above electoral division an hour before the sun rises?’)

32 e.g. ‘If you have any contacts among the Greek community of Perth please let me know–its for an article I am researching!’

33 e.g. ‘Rania koi’ (= ‘Rania look’)

34 e.g. ‘Takes the ball, Cotsis passes to himself, dribbles around the players, what subliminal skills – he shoots, he scores….. and its an own goal! D’oh (but at least Greece won in the soccer)’

35 e.g. ‘Pame’ (= ‘Let’s go’).
interaction on their Profile pages, practices that enable a hyperlinked connection between the Profile pages.

3.4 Interactional Practices and the Dialogical Dimension of the Profiles

In response to a recruitment mail and friendship request coming from the researcher’s Profile, Philip (P11) replied with a private message indicative of his reluctance to add unknown people to his Friends list: ‘I don’t normally accept friend requests from people unless I know them or they can juggle...but I noticed u have Alex as a friend and you are in London! So welcome to my crazy world, might see you around!’ (Appendix 7: M1). For Philip, having common acquaintances and living in the same city –London– are in this case two of the criteria in which he based his decision to add my Profile as a FB Friend. This statement replicates a basic principle of social network theory which Granovetter calls ‘the triadic closure of social network evolution’: ‘If two people in a social network have a friend in common, then there is an increased likelihood that they will become friends themselves at some point in the future’ (Granovetter, 1973: 348). Once Philip moved from London and as soon as I removed Alex from my Friends’ list, he also removed me from his Friends.

The participants’ friendship behaviour was also found to depend heavily on whether they perceived their Profile as public or private, on their personal views on privacy and on a variety of other factors that relate with interactional contexts offline (e.g. whether they were residents of the same place, had common Friends, worked together, attend the same university etc.). All interviewees agreed that they mainly interact on FB with people that they already have a kind of pre-existing relationship. It is only in exceptional circumstances that they would add as a Friend someone who they did not know in person. For example, Alexandra (IN7) has a couple of Friends from whom she gets useful information about art events in London, and though she did not know them in person, she found they were useful contacts. Moreover, each participant had different lines of action when it came to friendship behaviour on FB (IN2, IN8, IN10).
Kostas (IN1) finds himself communicating on FB with people that although he knows, he would not keep in touch with them otherwise. Grigoris (IN8) also states that he usually communicates with people that he cannot meet often. Alexandra (IN7) reports that people with whom she communicates via FB ‘are not people that I meet everyday... although I know them quite well...we prefer keeping up on FB’. For Tzortzina (IN10), it is also that online Friends are not the same with offline friends: ‘I meet my close friends everyday, I talk to them on the phone for hours, on FB I mainly communicate with those that it is hard to keep contact with, and I cannot easily get them on the phone’ (IN10). Kostas (IN1) meets people when travelling and thinks that FB is the only way to keep in touch in them, exchange information and share experiences. Maria (IN3) who lately travels a lot, thinks that FB gives her the opportunity to keep in contact with friends who are away ‘when I am back in Greece it makes it easier to keep in touch with those in Britain and vice versa’ (IN3). For these participants, FB enables communication mainly with weak ties –e.g. acquaintances– rather than strong ties –e.g. close friends or family members– (cf. 1.6.3). For Nikos (IN2) though, FB is a way to interact mainly with close friends:

‘I communicate with other Greeks living in London on everyday basis. They might even live next door but it is easier to talk on facebook instead. There is no specific subject... we talk about what we are doing right now... share Greek news...while coming back from home’.

Interviewees were also comparing FB with other media services such as live messenger or telephone. Grigoris (IN8), Nikos (IN2) and Stephen (IN6) stated that they were using FB as a supplement to their face to face encounters, in a similar way that they would otherwise use the telephone. For Stephen, FB is a time and cost efficient way to let his friends and acquaintances know that he is thinking of them. He states that instead of using the phone to arrange a meeting, he often used FB (IN6). In the following Wall Thread (Appendix 6: W1)

Thomas and Stelios use the FB Wall in a similar way as if they would have been using the telephone to catch up with each other. In line with this example, 10 questionnaire respondents state that they communicate with other Greeks on FB to express whatever they would otherwise say on the phone (Appendix 2).
Extract W1

Thomas: perimenei na parei adeiou ton aprilio
(=is waiting for his annual leave in April)
16 March at 22:43
Stelios: tha ertheis kata Greece?
(=are you coming in Greece?)
16 March at 22:47
Thomas: ela reThoma! Ti nea? Mallon tha rtho...tha xo adeia boliki...konta 3 ebdomades. Esi ti kaneis re?
16 March at 22:50
(=Thoma! What’s up? I might come..my annual leave suits me.. about 3 weeks. What are you doing?)
Stelios: kala re filaraki esi ola kala?
(= Fine my friend, what about, you is everything ok?)
16 March at 22:52
Thomas: nai kala eimai .. To palevo!!elate re kamia volta apd edo to Pasxa me to Vasili kai ton Nikita. Ego tha exo adeia apo 10 Apriliou
(=yes I am fine… I am trying!! come for a visit here this easter with Vasili and Nikita. My annual leave begins on 10 April)
16 March at 22:55
Stelios: kala de nomizo kala tha itan. Kala na pernas file an ertheis ellada tha ta poume
(= I don’t think so, it would be nice if I could. Have a nice time my friend if you come in Greece we will talk) 16 March at 22:57
Thomas: kai esi re..tha ta poume apo konta
(=you too… talk you) 16 March at 23:08

It seems that both Thomas and Stelios were concurrently in front of their computer screens, exchanging messages on FB Wall. Instead of using the live chat FB function, they posted their messages on the Wall. Although FB Wall enables asynchronous dialogue (cf. 2.4.2) in this case, dialogue takes a form very close to synchronous communication. The dialogue’s temporal density (the dialogue unfolds from 22:43 to 23:08) partly accounts for the conversational character of this exchange. Also, the expressions used are very similar to the phrases they would exchange as if the interaction was taking place in different situational contexts e.g. over the phone or in face to face settings. The fast pace in which message exchanges are taking place –close to synchronous mode–, the organization of speech, the content and the language used (e.g.‘re’, ‘tha ertheis kata Greece?’), intimacy markers between the contributors (kala re filaraki esi ola kala?), all create similarities to a typical phone conversation. In this case, the participants worked out a new function for FB Wall and
used it in an unanticipated and inventive way. According to Livingstone (2008) novel practices associated with ICTs use reinforce a sense of ‘newness’. Also, this example is indicative of the way users may draw upon practices encountered in different communication mediums or face to face settings to interact on a new social space.

Nikos (IN2) and Kostas (IN1) find that interacting on FB is more convenient and practical than talking on the phone for an extra reason: FB provides a given context for conversation ‘You don’t have to ask your friends what is happening in their lives. You already know it, and this often provides the reason to contact them...for example is someone’s birthday or you find that someone posted something with which you do not agree.’ (IN1). Nikos notes that communication via FB chat saves his time and it is a way to avoid all the typical openings and greetings required when starting or finishing a conversation over the phone:

‘On FB communication is more direct, there is no cost and the conversation is more impersonal than on the phone. You can write two or three slogans funny or silly, conversation is more condensed and fast...you say whatever you want to say...For example what happened today and then you might log out without having to explain why. You can finish a conversation without being rude. Your friends suppose that you have a good excuse and they do not expect all the concluding or welcoming that you would use over the phone. Sometimes they already know what you are doing; just looking at your status updates and chat begins straight away with a subject already’ (IN2).

Fieldwork suggests that participants make heavy use of the FB chat function, especially when arranging meetings or events with people they do not know well. While collecting fieldnotes, I arranged a meeting with Nikos (IN2) and Polina (IN9). We met at a Greek café in London and all the details of the meeting were organized and agreed via FB chat. Nikos (IN2) prefers to arrange gatherings or meetings via FB chat with people he does not know very well and finds that FB is ‘impersonal and clear just as the sms is’. Instead of using the phone, Panos (P26) posted an invitation on his FB Wall to address a larger audience (SU164).

Although the participants’ maintain large lists of Friends in their Profiles –sometimes even difficult for them to enumerate or mentally access– they actually interact only with a small amount of these contacts (IN: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9). Interviewees also state that they mainly
communicate with those that is hard to keep in contact with otherwise – e.g. friends who are moving between different countries (IN7) or friends who live abroad (IN, 4, 6, 5, 3, 1, 9, 10).

Though they are not always the same as offline friends, FB Friends apart from giving validity to a Profile (cf. 1.6.4), are a very important asset of the Profile for an additional reason: they provide context by offering users an ‘imagined audience’ to guide behavioural norms (cf. 1.6.4). A closer examination on the kind of social ties activated on FB and their frequency could produce a more accurate picture regarding what brings people together online, what are the things that they already share and those that connect them on everyday basis.

Questionnaire results provide a general picture about the kind of ties that the participants activate and their frequency. Evidence in Figure 10 suggests that Greeks living in London tend to communicate more frequently with other Greeks, rather than with their Friends of other ethnic backgrounds. Figure 10 presents data related to the frequencies of communication between the participants and different categories of a Profile’s Friends: other Greeks who live in London, British, friends of other ethnic backgrounds, Greeks who live in Greece.

Figure 10. The Participants' Communicational Patterns: Questionnaire Data
The results indicate that 47% of the questionnaire respondents (14 out of 30) interact with other Greeks living in London once a week, 33% (10 out of 30) communicate with Greeks living in Greece almost every day and 20% (6 out of 30) once a week. When it comes to communication with their British friends, results are more equally distributed along categories. Equal parts of the sample (26%; 8 participants) interact with other British once a month, once a week and once every two weeks, while there is only a small minority who interacts once a year or almost every day. Less respondents (9) state to communicate once a year with FB Friends of other cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Questionnaire results demonstrate a preference for interaction among Greek natives who either live in Greece or in London. The links that are enacted on an everyday basis are those with other Greeks living in Greece and not in London. This is also in line with screen observations on the participants’ Walls (Appendix 6: W1-56). Nikos’s FB Friends are primarily Greeks, however as he notes, they do not necessarily live in London but are ‘scattered around the world’ (IN2). He keeps contact with them so that they can arrange trips, summer vocations and special events.

Questionnaires also provided data related to the reasons why the participants communicate with their Greek Friends on FB. Out of the 30 respondents, 14 were communicating with other Greeks to comment on a photo or a SU, 13 (43%) to make a statement about themselves or their current status, 11 participants (37%) to share information online and 10 to express whatever they would otherwise tell them over the phone. Others would come in contact with their Greek Friends to post something interesting (7 participants), to express their views in relation to a social political event in Greece (4 participants) or UK (3) and invite their Friends to join a FB cause, event or Group.

Writing a SU - textual constructions used to inform Friends about one’s status or actions- is the most common way of conveying a message to a Profile’s audience. Interviewees though, state that they also typed their SUs with an aim to involve their audience –Friends– (IN4, IN1, IN7, IN9, IN10). Relying on the same corpus of selected SUs (Appendix 5: SU1-211), I also examined SUs’ dialogical dimension, and investigated the parameters and contextual factors that could affect their ability to evoke dialogue.
It was observed that while some SUs resulted in a Wall exchange with more than 5 contributions (e.g. Appendix 6: W4.5, W4.9, W4.13, W4.16, W4.19, W4.28, W29 etc.), others did not receive any comments. Although Grigoris' question (IN8) ‘Why am I the only Greek supporting Hammas?’ remained unanswered, Philip’s SU – also in the form of a question – received more than 6 comments. This observation raised an inquiry: what could determine whether a SU would receive an answer or prompt dialogue?

Among the 211 SUs, only a 38% (83 SUs) had evoked Wall comments. The number of Wall contributions to these SUs ranged from 1 to 7 posts. Users can also react to a post by clicking on the ‘like’ box which appears underneath the SU text. However, the ‘likes’ that each SU received were not treated as data since the ‘like’ feature was only introduced after the process of data collection for this study had started. There were also a number of alternative ways to follow a SU (e.g. private messages, sms, face to face etc.) which were not possible to trace, and thus were not part of the data.

When examining why some SUs were more likely to receive comments than others, it emerges that their mode of address (e.g. question) was not a determinant of their dialogical nature. However, since the corpus of data was limited, wider inferences regarding tendencies across the sample would be lacking validity. It was also observed that SUs referring to the present tense were more likely to receive comments than those referring to the past. However, what was rather determining a SU’s possibility to evoke dialogue were the contextual factors surrounding its creation, thus the structural and social characteristics, the situations and circumstances that influence the process of communication. Interestingly, a first observation across the sample is that some participants more than others were likely to receive comments for their SUs (e.g. P1, P4, P7, P9, P11, P12, P15, P17, P23, P28).

Notably, these participants were those updating their Status more frequently than the others and whose Profiles contained rich information about themselves (e.g. photos, interests etc.). For example, Kostas (P1), Philip (P11) and Ntinos (P23) maintained a large list of FB Friends; displayed intense activity in their Profile page and updated their status regularly. Kostas (IN1) states that he spends more than an hour per day logged on his Profile. Philip (P11) and Ntinos (P23) are likely to update their status more than twice a day (questionnaire data). Their ‘recent activity’ record displayed a rich set of acts for self-presentation and
interaction. It appeared that the more the participants revealed themselves on their Profiles and interacted with others, the more friends they engaged in their Profiles. Profiles displaying greater numbers of SUs were those more likely to receive answers in their SUs posts.

While other participants could hardly get a response in their SUs (e.g. P2, P8, P21, P22, P16, P26, P6). Philip’s SUs succeeded in engaging his Friends. They were humorous, entertaining and creative pieces of text, often expressed in a narrative form, containing stories, images and symbols used in an innovative way (Appendix 5: SU1-47), derived from his personal experience of traveling in Greece.

However, it could be also argued that the interaction surrounding a SU depends partially upon the author’s popularity and kind of bonds that maintains offline. Polina (IN9) believes that a person’s popularity and sociability is well reflected on his/her Profile page not only in the Profile’s number of Friends but primarily on his ability to maintain these ties and ‘invent’ common grounds on which to initiate interaction. From another point of view, Alexandra (IN7) considers that ‘since you have a few close friends who have plenty of time to comment on your posts; you can have a rich Profile’ (IN7). She also believes that conversations on her Profile are a way to ‘perform’ the friendships and kind of bonds that she shares with some people in front of the Profile’s audience. Polina (IN9) also states that she is more likely to respond to a SU edited by Friends with whom she shares a number of common Friends – since there is increased likelihood that more people will be involved in the conversation-. Interviewees also note that it is their close friends with whom they are more likely to interact (IN6, IN8) and that ‘the more close friends someone has added on FB, the more active his Profile is’ (IN9).

The above extracts point to the reciprocal relationship between offline events, situations and relationships and online socialization. It seems that interaction on FB Wall takes place to complement the participants’ personal networks. The participants’ shared experiences are serving as contexts for their online exchanges and in the same way, actions taken online may feed back to real situations and events. Thus, acts of socialization on the Profiles to a large extend, reflect offline socialization. However, when taken online, interaction has to adjust to terms and conditions which differ from those of face to face interaction (cf. , cf ) and are
shaped by the forces of online socialization. This will be best exemplified in ch. 5 where I analyse how online exchanges on FB Walls, project and re-articulate the participants’ experience of Greek ethnicity.

In 4.4.5, the study of the relationship between the language in which the SUs was phrased (Greek or English) and its ability to evoke comments would also add evidence regarding the significance of the contextual factors in shaping communication online. As it will be exemplified in , the language in which a SU was written is also determined by contextual factors closely related with the participants’ diasporic experience.

In a sum, the dynamic nature of the SUs was considered as a result of two combined elements: contextual information surrounding a SU’s creation –such as interpersonal relationships and situations anchored in real life– and the degrees of each Profile’s hypertextual structure (which is defined by number of Friends, interactional activity, degrees of FB usage, amount of time that a user spends connected etc.). It appears that the content of a SU, has not been a strong predictor of its ability to evoke dialogue. Participants’ interpersonal relationships as they extended offline, degrees of FB usage, a Profile’s unique mixture of weak and strong ties (cf. 1.6.2), the qualities of the Profiles’ audience and a number of other contextual factors, specific for each case, were affecting the dialogical dynamics of each Profile.

3.5 Practices of Participation

As shown in 3.2, while the majority of the activities on the Profile pages enabled self-presentation, there were 8 % activities which suggested participation in wider collective online structures such as FB Groups. Joining a FB Group has been the most common activity of participation. Section 3.5.1 provides information regarding the motives for creating or joining a FB Group. Section 3.5.2 focuses on FB Groups for Greeks in London, their themes and reason for creation. Seeking to find out how the participants create the meaning of their actions in FB Groups and how their needs are met, analysis in 3.5.3 focuses on three Groups for Greeks in London, their structure and their distinct characteristics.
3.5.1 Creating and Joining a FB Group

Joining a FB Group has been one of the participants’ favorite acts in their Profile pages (cf. 3.2). When Alexandra (IN7) accepted an invitation to join the Group ‘Greek bloggers in London’ the Group’s name became a tag in her Profile page, visible to all of her contacts who now assume that she is a blogger, she is Greek and lives in London. Observation of screen activity on the participants’ Profile pages suggested that although they joined FB Groups frequently, they rarely participated in these Groups (cf. 3.5). A mean of 38% of the Groups that each participant had joined was related to Greek ethnicity. However, the majority of the participants rarely participated in a Group (a mean of 8% acts of participation). It thus emerges that the names of FB Groups serve mainly as texts which flag points of affiliation such as preferences, actions, causes, ideas and stances in the participants’ Walls.

Interviewees provide valuable insights into their motives for joining or creating a Group. Kostas (IN1), Nikos (IN2) and Rena (IN4) had created their own FB Group. They all found the process very easy and quick; however they believe that maintaining a Group page is a difficult and time consuming task. Kostas created a Group page to advertise, promote his company and expand its client-base. He thinks it has helped him to promote his web portal and increase its ranking in the global search engines. Nikos (IN2) and Rena (IN4) also created FB Groups to search for their former classmates and keep in touch with them. Nikos notes:

‘it was out of nostalgia… I tried to search for my old classmates and I did finally found most of them ...we shared some old pictures taken at school, tagged each other and then I met some of them in person...Talked about how are things now…but that was all... this Group has been inactive since then and the members... have nothing to do with each other’ (IN8).

Rena’s case is different. She took the initiative to invite a few former classmates into the Group she created (‘12th Lykeio: class of 99’36) and claims that it has been ‘a very successful group’ (IN4). In the Group Wall she communicates with her classmates on a regular basis, but she finds that:

36 (=12th Lyceum: class of 99)
‘that is only because we had always kept contact since we left school…we use to spend our holidays together…and keep up with each other’s lives during the winter…when I created this group, our contact became more frequent…and we would do new things such as upload pictures of our holidays and comment on these…it is also that the Group is a closed\textsuperscript{37} one… so that only the seven of us have access to it…we would like everything to stay between us and feel more freedom to express ourselves and share comments’ (IN4).

Thus, it appears that the character of the Group (open or close), the purpose that it serves, membership and participation figures are important parameters that define what members can do in these Groups. However, in the cases stated above, what mostly defines the success and continuation of each Group is the kind of contact that Group members maintain in offline settings.

In an effort to bring together members with the same origin, Nikos (IN2) created a Group named after the village he comes from (e.g. ‘Sinarades Kerkiras’) and invited a few of his Friends – people with whom he had grown up with in Sinarades– to join the Group. Apparently, Nikos was surprised to find out that very soon the Group had reached about 300 members: ‘the strange thing was that people who had nothing to do with this place would join the Group, just because their friends had also joined’ (IN2). Nikos also noticed that despite the unexpected number of members, only two of them used the Wall to upload photos.

Interviewees mention different reasons for joining a Group. Grigoris (IN8) finds that FB Groups provide reliable sources of information and seeks up to date info about concerts or events that he plans to attend in London: ‘Before planning my holidays, I use to check Groups about the places that I visit…searching for testimonies and real stories…reliable…sometimes administrators provide really accurate updates about transport or events in these places’ (IN8). He checks the Group’s Wall, the number of administrators and officers and the number of members to be convinced that the Group is regularly updated and reliable. Although Grigoris (IN8) finds the Groups he joins through FB search engine, all other participants discuss that they principally came to know about certain Groups through their Friends’ pages or by receiving an invitation to join. Alexandra (IN7) comments:

\textsuperscript{37} Most Groups are open for everyone to join voluntarily. Users who wish to join a ‘closed’ Group should request the administrator’s approval in order to be granted access.
‘The majority of the Groups that I join are Groups I came across while looking at what my Friends have done on their Profiles ...It takes me two seconds to decide whether to join a Group. If the title appeals on me, and I want this to appear on my page, I join the Group...sometimes without even checking its content’ (IN7).

Kostas (IN1) receives Group invitations on a daily basis: ‘invitations come mainly from friends who have their own business...they invite me to join their Group...in most cases I cannot decline the invitation ... otherwise they might get offended’ (IN1). Polina (IN9) has her reasons for joining a Group: ‘it gives me a sense of belonging... even if I do not know all members involved’ (IN10). A year ago, Alexandra joined the Group ‘I hate Greek pop music, it’s made for idiots’ however when interviewed about her music preferences she expressed moderate views on Greek pop music. In the same manner, three of the interviewees (IN6, IN3, IN10), members of ‘Greeks in London’ do not recall joining this Group. The following section reviews the Groups that the participants have joined and provides information regarding the total production of FB Groups related to Greek ethnicity on FB.

3.5.2 An Overview of FB Groups for Greeks in London

Community organizations of Greek diaspora in London have a long presence. Their activity aims to sustain ties among Greeks, maintain the population’s cultural identity and links with the homeland. As agents through which the diasporic culture is produced and disseminated, diasporic communities, organizations and networks have traditionally been tied to a place and required face to face contact to fulfill their purposes. Electronic communication not only has facilitated the growth of transnational networks and linkages, but also has enabled diaspora’s participation in social life and has supported its organization in wider communities and networks that no longer require face to face contact to sustain a common sense of belonging. As it has been discussed in the theoretical chapter (cf. 1.5.3), a wealth of studies define online communities as computer assisted spaces where people interact socially to satisfy their needs for information exchange or perform special roles. A shared common purpose, rituals and laws guide interaction so that they facilitate a sense of togetherness (Pierce, 2001).
Unlike earlier immigrants who dwelled in specific neighbors in London, the modern Greeks are likely to be spatially distanced from each other. A number of studies have shown how online diasporic communities can be ‘imagined’ around shared cultural practices without spatial proximity to be a necessary condition for interaction (cf. 1.5.2). Transnational online communities and networks of diaspora might be created in relation to issues concerning the homeland, common interests, practices, customs or rituals or even in relation to a common place of settlement (cf. 1.5.2). Individuals’ need to belong to a space with shared language and systems of meanings, can be traced in the growing number and membership figures of FB Groups inviting Greeks who live in London to join.

The proliferation of FB Groups about Greeks who currently live in London, suggests that there exists a real or imagined relationship among dispersed individuals in London which is sustained online and it is grounded both on the need to identify with a distant homeland and with the place they currently inhabit, London. The search about FB Groups for Greeks in London returned 77 results. Table 3 places these Groups into three categories –according to their point of reference– and presents the Group names along with their membership figures (number in brackets).
Table 3. FB Groups for Greeks in London
(data collected: 11th June 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFERENCE/ THEME</th>
<th>GROUP NAMES AND NUMBER OF MEMBERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place/Location (30 Groups)</td>
<td>North London Greeks (437), Greek school of London students (217), Apollo restaurant tavern the best bouzouki in London (115), The original Elysee restaurant in London (114), South London Greeks (111), Hellenic and Cypriot society of London Metropolitan University (98), Elysee restaurant in London (99), Thalassa white party London (87), Greek and Cypriots in Westminster (84), Greek secondary school of London (67), Byzantium cafe (64), I study at the London school of Greekconomics (47), Byzantio cafe London (52), People from Thessaloniki Living in London (32), St Sophia Greek school London (24), I went to Greek school at St.Mairy (Wood Green London) (24), King’s London Hellenic society (21), St Andrews Greek school Kentish town London (21), North London Greeks (21), ABACULUS cafe (21), Queen Mary university of London Greek community (18), North London &amp; Greek (13), Brunel University of London – Greek alumni (13), London Hellenic Centre 2008 (13), How many Greek Cypriots are there in East London? (13), Andy’s Greek restaurant London (12), I bet everyone knows at least 1 Greek in North London (11), Imperial College London- Greek Society (10), Greek playgroup in West London (8), Greek arsenal fans in North London (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of affiliation (29 Groups)</td>
<td>Greek Professionals in London (564), London Greek Radio LGR 103.3 (1287), Greek film festival Friends (991), Bouzoukia in London (620), London’s Party the Greek way (423), Greek Professionals in London (303), London Festival of Greek drama (64), The London Greek language meet up Group – Greek Professionals (53), Greek events in London (44), London Nikos Leonidas, The oxford Street Fiddler, The blind violist, The legend (31), Camden Radio Greek students (30), Greek film TV professionals in London (30), Greek and Cypriot students in London (29), Greek original pita gyros in London (23), Ionian Society in London UK (17), Gay Greeks and Turks in London (12), London Greek film festival team (11), Greek journalists in London (11), Greek Bakouria Society of London (10), London Greek news (9), Aegean Greek tv spot London (8), Greek love for London ’s pizza pomodoro (8), Greek Lawn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first category includes Groups (30) that refer to geographical places, place-based institutions, establishments and locations in London (e.g. a cafe, a tavern, a university, a club, a university, a school etc.). The vast majority of FB Groups about Greeks in London referred to places in London. While in the Group ‘Greek playgroup in West London’ future mums share information and try to organize a playgroup for their kids, in ‘Byzantium cafe London’ –a cafe where Greeks in London meet–, regular visitors exchange online comments on the varieties of deserts and coffees offered (cf. 5.3). As it will be further demonstrated in 3.5.3, in all these cases, members rather than seeking online interaction purely on the basis of ethnicity they also seek social relations and resources tied with local everyday settings in London. In 5.3, analysis of members’ encounters in the Group’s Walls points to the dynamic role of place as an anchor of identity.

The second category includes Groups addressed to Greeks in London that share common qualities, interests, hobbies, professions and practices (e.g. bloggers, students etc.). The third category includes Groups with names that address all Greeks living in London in a general manner (e.g. Greeks in London). It appears that although there are more Groups referring to locations and places, when looking at Group membership figures they tend to collect smaller amounts of members. Groups referring to a common affiliation point collect the majority of members (more than 5250 in total); however, Groups referring in general to Greeks living in London have proportionally attracted the greatest part of the population (more than 4600 members across 18 Groups).
The variety of Group names for Greeks in London was reflecting the diversity of diasporic experiences. For example, students and newcomers professionals were likely to join different Groups (e.g. ‘Ellinares sto Londino (Greeks in London)’ from those that a second generation immigrant would (e.g. ‘North London Greeks’). A closer look on the Groups’ Walls provides evidence for membership patterns. Kostas (IN1), a professional who moved in London only a few years ago, noted:

‘My needs are very different from those North London Greeks... for example they would search for a traditional Greek night out with good food, while I might be searching for a housemate... they maintain a traditional image for Greece and that’s it... But I have seen that things there are very different back there from what they have in their minds.’ (IN1).

Questionnaire results provided information regarding the reasons why the participants join Groups of Greek diaspora. Half of them join these Groups to meet other Greeks in London and 40% of them states that their purpose is to exchange information. One third of the participants became members of a Group about Greek diaspora ‘out of curiosity’ while a minority (2 participants) claimed to have joined because their Friends did so or because they felt it would be impolite to decline the invitation (7%). Maria (IN3) did not remember joining such a Group, while Leonidas (P13) stated that he only joined because ‘a friend was the organizer of the Group’ (Appendix 2).

The great majority of the questionnaire respondents’ participates in FB Groups for Greeks in London to search for events in London (70%: 21 participants), a 27% (8 participants) to search for photos related to these events, and a small minority to post messages in the Group’s Wall or discussion board (14%: 4 participants) and upload photos (2 participants). Five participants do not recall participating in a Group and two of them have never participated in a FB Group about Greeks in London. In addition, a respondent states to have created the Group ‘Greeks of South East London’.

Membership for FB Groups grows virally with the ease of a mouse click: each time a user joins a Group, the action appears on his Friends’ homepages. Each Group is formed under distinct conditions, empowers its users in different ways and thus has different life length. Stephen (IN6) has long been involved in the Greek Orthodox organization of SE London and
Kent and has also recently joined the organization’s FB Group. He notes that although he was already familiar with most of the Group’s members there were some of them whom he had never heard of. The Group’s administrators welcome members with a short note:

‘GOYO would like to offer an opportunity for the young people in our area to get to know each other through networking and social events. We hope this will encourage all who join to maintain strong ties with their cultural roots as Greeks and friends of Greeks living in the SE & Kent and promote the continuation of our rich culture and heritage’.

A few months after its creation, members have been abandoning the Group and the Wall remained inactive for a long period. In another case, the Group ‘Save the Department of Byzantine and modern Greek studies at Kings’ was a students’ initiative and in less than an week reached more than 1200 members. During the first month of its creation, the Group prompted members to sign an online petition, members posted links to newspaper articles and official announcements regarding the issue at stake but despite its dynamic initial growth in membership it remained inactive since then.

However, apart from Groups that principally serve to support causes or to extend existing offline networks of Greek diaspora (e.g. Greeks of North London), the most popular ones addressed all Greeks who live in London in a general and inclusive manner (cf. Table 3). At that particular time under study, the most popular Groups for Greek diaspora in London were ‘London Greek connection’ with 1114 members and ‘Ellinares sto Londino (Greeks in London)’ with 1645 members. The unequal distribution of members across Groups suggests that membership grows according to the ‘network effect’ in which the value of the Group to a new user is proportional to the number of the Group’s members. For example, when Maria (IN3) first moved in London, she decided to search for a Group where she could post an advert for a Greek housemate. She posted the ad in the Wall of the most popular Group ‘Ellinares sto Londino/ Greeks in London’ so that it could be visible to the larger audience possible.

To cater for more specific user-audiences such as students, there existed 13 Groups (e.g. Greek students in London). Although the number of Greek students in London stands for the majority of Greek population in London (cf. 2.3), these Groups displayed very low membership figures and a minimal activity on their Wall. Greeks in London show a strong
preference for Groups dedicated to the promotion and organization of events and parties (e.g. ‘London parties the Greek way’, ‘London concierge guide’ or ‘London by Hellenic parties’). These Groups are constantly updated and have certain things in common: numerous Wall photos and videos from parties and events, an active Wall and a constantly growing membership. The organization and follow up of events and parties appears to be a vital activity for Greek diaspora in London. Members can register in Greek nightclubs’ guest lists and concerts, make reservations for Greek restaurants or find offers for fashion shows, fitness clubs memberships etc.

Groups that united nationals around political issues and news related with Greek life in London were comparatively fewer (2). Even fewer Groups existed to unite Greeks around an activity or hobby or an occupational category (e.g. ‘Greek journalists in London’, ‘Greek bloggers in London’) dating and networking, hobbies and sports (e.g. dancers, tennis association). They also had very few members. Therefore, it turns out that Greek diaspora meets online to socialize and organize large scale activities, share and exchange information in large, inclusive forums.

This section has provided an overall picture of FB Groups for Greek diaspora in London, their themes and properties. In the following section, I will examine the Walls of three Groups for Greek diaspora in London; seeking to answer how members participate in these Groups and how their practices support or substitute practices of local communities and networks of diaspora.
3.5.3 Transnational Practices on FB Groups: Building Networks of Practice

‘Ellinares sto Londino (Greeks in London)’, ‘London Greek Connection’ and ‘Greek Professionals in London’ were the most popular Groups available for Greeks in London to join at the time the study was carried out\(^{38}\) (cf. Table 3). Both ‘Greek Professionals in London’ and ‘London Greek Connection’ are ‘open’ Groups, thus free for everyone to join. ‘Ellinares sto Londino (Greeks in London)’ is a ‘closed’ Group – members should request the administrator’s permission before they are allowed to join. It is also the most popular Group with 1.645 members. Kostas finds that the administrators’ gate keeping method reinforces a sense of belonging to the community: ‘I felt I was going to share information that was not widely available and accessible…also that someone was taking care of this Group.. it looked like a community.’ (IN1).

The following message reflects the conditions under which the Group ‘Greek professionals in London’ was created. At the beginning of 2008, Tomis posted a Wall message (originally in Greek) on ‘Greeks in London’ Wall, addressing publicly the Group’s administrator.

‘Mon amiAvgoustine, I guess apo ti stigmh pou yparxoun tosoi ellhnes se ayto to group kai parallhla gnwrizeis poly kosmo (:-)) mporeis na apey8yneis mia evreia prosklhsh se olous tous professionals tou londinou na kanoun join to group ‘Greek Professionals in London’ kai later on diorganwnoume kai kati special sto Cafe...’ \(^{39}\).

Alex and Spiros were negotiating collaboration so that Greek professionals in London could have their own Group. It seems that the creators of these large groups maintain face to face contact and are quite popular among young Greeks in London. It emerges that networks of Greek diaspora on FB were initiated and operated by specific individuals who took a leading role in the organization of events. Also, the same few individuals (consisting the Group’s administration teams), not only participated regularly in both Groups but also organized events and promoted them in both Groups – ‘Greek Professionals in London’ and ‘Greeks in London’ –. For example, ‘Hellenic Parties’ were regular events taking place every Friday and Saturday at a specific venue in the center of London. Group administrators, officers and

\(^{38}\) A different picture emerges in the following year: the Groups ‘Greek London Concierge guide’ (2608), ‘London Greek Film Festival – Friends’ (1132), London Greek Radio LGR 103.3FM (1698) are the most popular in this category.

\(^{39}\) (‘Mon ami Spyros, I guess since there are so many Greeks in this group and since you know a lot of people(:-)), could you address an open invitation to all the professionals in London to join the Group Greek professionals in London and later on we can organize jointly a special event in Cafe...’)
other FB users—usually the administrator’s Friends—promoted these events by posting weekly FB mails to the Group’s members. Being a member of both Groups, I used to receive these invitations once a week. It thus appears that the creation and popularity of the Groups under study heavily depends on pre-existing networks of Greek diaspora in London who are now able to reach a larger proportion of the population by coordinating their activities in more than one Group.

‘London Greek connection’ invites Greeks or Greek Cypriots that live in London to join. In June 2009, the Group counted 1143 members and in June 2010 it grew by 259 members. In the introductory note, the administrator provided the Group’s description using a personal and informal tone. Again, the administrator assumed the role of the gatekeeper: ‘I will allow you if you are outside but have an interest in UK Greeks as well’. In the Group’s description visitors can also read what they can do in this Group ‘you can post relevant information for people interested in networking with other London Greeks or Cypriots, for Greek business in London and receive info and news on Greeks and entertainment, on places to go and Greek hotspots’. The administrator’s message concluded: ‘Let’s build the London Greek empire (pass this onto the London Greek Cypriot friends on facebook’.

Following the Group’s basic description, there was a board with recent news and a board displaying members’ Profile names and photos. As one would scroll down the page, discussion boards display topics such as ‘Greek schools’ where did you go? Funniest stories?’ (19 posts) or ‘You know you are a Greek in London when...’ (9 posts) or ‘How about a Greek night on ministry of sound?’ (2 posts).

In the discussion boards, Group members drew on common experiences related to being Greek, exchanged stories with each other, compared their experiences, expressed their emotional support for each other etc. In the period under study, it was observed that there were 65 posts left on the Wall. On average, members would send a new post every 8-9 days. It was very rarely that members followed a previous post. Postings extended over 1, 5 year and their topics varied. Members asked for information about Greek football games in London, concerts and singers, posted ads about jobs—especially jobs seeking Greek speakers—suggested relevant websites, organized friendly football games and parties and
recruited scientific experiments. Also, members uploaded and shared photos, video and links related with Greek social issues and external politics.

With 1645 members, ‘Ellinares sto Londino (Greeks in London)’ was the most popular group. This was a highly active Group with 293 Wall posts, 108 past events, 12 administrators and 2 officers. When reading the Group’s name, one may notice that the carefully chosen term ‘Ellinares’ is not the exact equivalent for the word ‘Greeks’. Literally being the superlative form of the word ‘Greek’, it is an adjective that suggests a strong rooted ethnic background and inflexible cultural traits and it is commonly used to describe modern Greeks in a humoristic and sarcastic manner. Apart from a self-referential name phrased in an entertaining tone, the Group’s description stated that the Group was created ‘for all those Greeks who study, live and work in London. Please feel free to list any Greek related event and venues that you may be aware of in order to make our short stay in London more pleasant’. The author of this text presupposed that Greeks who live in London had been expatriated only temporarily. The text treated Greeks in London as a group of ‘tourists’ whose return to their homeland was given and invited them to engage with local events so that they could enjoy their short stay. The text is indicative of the population’s increased mobility between the two countries and also treats the members’ experience in London as a temporal event defined by instant transnational movement across borders (cf. 1.6).

Messages on the Group’s Wall were coded to themes according to their content. Group members used the Wall for a number of reasons. The majority of the posts concerned the organization and promotion of Greek parties, events and concerts (more than 50 posts) and football games. Members were searching for networking with other Greeks, were asking for information and advice about life in London, how to exercise religious practices, legal issues, housing and locations in London. FB members were searching for future flatmates, posting ads about jobs, promoting ethnic music and videos, selling cars or recruiting scientific experiments, exchanging information about their flights etc. They also posted political messages and links for online voting. Two major political and national issues prevailed: the return of Parthenon marbles and the diplomatic dispute concerning the official name of the region of Macedonia.
The discussion that unfolded in the Group’s Wall since it was created was growing along with the Group’s size. At the beginning—the Group counted only a few members—posts were more personal in tone, new members were introducing themselves and asking to find other Greeks in London who lived in their area or attended the same university. The Group’s opening theme was referring to a party that almost all members attended. Initially members kept a face-to-face contact with each other. Later on, and as Group membership was growing, posts were becoming more official and impersonal in tone—e.g. promoting other Groups, causes and links or announcing upcoming events. Also, the frequency of the postings diminished considerably and members were less likely to address each other.

There were 124 members participating in the Group’s Wall, out of which only 12 had placed more than 3 posts. Wall Threads unfolded principally among the Group’s administrators, an officer and few members. The majority of the posts were authored by one of the Group’s administrators and one of the Group’s officers. There were in total 56 posts equally distributed between the administrator (27) and the officer (28), individuals who knew each other before creating this Group. In the beginning, Group administrators and officers exchanged messages which addressed each other and encouraged other members to post messages on the Group’s Wall by asking open questions and inviting people to take part in conversations. Later on, administrators kept a lower profile and limited their role in answering the member’s questions. Members kept posting inquiries that sought advice on selecting a university course, housing in London, info about prices in London, Greek places in London and mainly sport events. Administrators assumed the role of experts when answering these questions. For example, Eli asked ‘hello...I been over a year in London and I didn’t manage to meet any Greeks!! How can I change that?. Then an administrator posted a list of common practices among Greeks in London:

‘Eli mou den einai kai toso duskolo sto londino na vreis ellines...mia volta apo to bayswater na kaneis ...ena kafe sto saint christopher place napieis savvato apogeyma..ena poto sto eclipse kuriaki.. kai fisika paraskevi kai savvato sto cafe royal :-’) ⁴⁰

⁴⁰ ‘My Eli, it is not so difficult to find Greeks in London... you should try a walk in basewater...drink a coffee in saint Christopher place on a Saturday afternoon or and have a drink at eclipse on Sundays... and of course every Friday and Saturday in cafe royal:-)’.
Individuals who were better structurally embedded in the network, were more likely to provide answers for others’ posts. Still, a number of Wall posts were left unanswered. As Polina (IN9) stressed, ‘there was a lot going on the people’s personal mail boxes...administrators use to reply personally’. She recalled that when she came in London she joined the Group to find information about areas in London that she could settle: ‘I thought that these people would answer my questions and guide me better than anyone else…we have the same background, I was sure that they had been in my situation before and they could tell me what to avoid, what to expect or what to look for’ (IN9). Members of the Group, rather than seeking emotional support or solidarity they mostly joined to look for information and develop networks that could help them deal with practical aspects of their everyday living in London. For example, Thanasis had been trying to collect interview data for his coursework and invited other Greeks to an interview, Popi was searching for housemates, Nina was looking for a Greek speaking assistant and Fotis was interested for advice on employment law in Britain. Others were looking for advice or company for their traveling back to Greece, information on how they could vote for Greek elections, or suggestions for salsa courses in London.

About 35% of the Group’s Wall posts were written in Greek. There were only 4 posts written in both Greek and English while the majority of the posts (60%) were written in English. For advertisements, recommendations, invitations, announcements; promotion of national issues the language commonly used was Greek. Only 2% of the Wall posts were written in Greek alphabet. Section 4.4.5 will further investigate the participants’ language practices on FB.

The most prominent theme that generated dialogue in the Group’s Wall concerned the administrators’ evaluations of the Group’s growth and activity. Administrators being aware of their central role in the Group, were trying to keep the discussion going to engage more members in the Group’s Wall. Since the Group’s first steps, administrators and officers were highly concerned with low participation in the Group’s Wall. At the point that the Group has already reached 1000 members, the most active discussion was triggered by the question ‘why is this such a quiet group?’ and carried on with comments such as ‘there are 1005 people in this group and it is only A and B that talk’. Conversation on the subject begun in English but soon it switched to Greek and grew to include more members. In an effort to regain control of the conversation and change the subject, one of the administrators posed
another question which generalized the problem of low participation in the Group’s Wall: ‘why do Greeks that live in London do not want to talk to other Greeks?’ or ‘do you think maybe people who arrange things on other London Greeks type groups should be encouraged to post here or would that be stepping on toes?’ In the same manner, a member admits: ‘Personally, I find it hard to believe that there are these many Greeks in London, especially in London and on facebook. Imagine how many haven’t succumb to the addictive nature of this place yet...’. Similarly, another member observes that: ‘not a student... lol not a student... didn’t realize there are so many students here..lol’.

The second largest thread of postings concerned football games. A case of discrimination towards Greek football fans in London had mobilized discussion among three members. Apart from supporting football teams, members asked for information about the availability of football tickets, commented on game scores and asked for places in London where they could watch live football games. The most frequently discussed socio-political issue was the long diplomatic rivalry between Athens and London for the return of the Parthenon marbles which are currently hosted by the British Museum. Members were likely to circulate petitions for the return of the marbles in Athens, collect virtual votes for the name of the region of Macedonia, report on Groups with anti-hellenic logos etc. Although these topics appeared quite frequently in the Groups’ Wall, they were unlikely to generate discussions and debates.

When interviewees were asked about their levels of engagement in public political issues, all agreed that they were interested in political issues and events; however some of them (IN10, IN9) think that FB is not a suitable place to express their concerns. Polina comments ‘I would avoid to discuss a political matter on a FB Group...these Groups are mainly for entertainment...even in the groups about Greeks in London you cannot start a serious conversation when the previous Wall post is about the party last night’ (IN9).

Common ethnic origin was often the principal reason for interaction: ‘guys lets organize a meeting, as I want to talk with people that view the situation in Greece from a distance and understand Greece’ or ‘help me out people I am the only jamaican/greek I know I am trying to find others. I cannot be the only one!!!!!!!!’. Members’ questions posted on the Wall were
usually referring to practices related to ethnicity e.g. ‘where could I buy cigarettes with 3 euros?’ or ‘where could I watch a Greek football match?’, ‘why we always come in London with a few bags and fly back with more?’. Some members addressed the general public with their posts (e.g. ‘I guess that everybody is leaving London on 21st isn’t right? I cannot stand it here...’). Others were searching for experiences similar to those that they had back in their home country: ‘Hi all, I was wondering whether anyone knows any nice ouzadika or rebetadika in London. I am looking for something like the ones in psyry in Athens...’.

Members did not only communicate with individuals they already knew, but they also initiated conversation with a purpose to make new contacts. New members were introducing themselves on the basis of their current location – the part of London in which they lived – and how ‘fresh’ they were in London. This suggests that members were mostly interested to meet people that lived close to their neighborhood. In some cases, they also revealed their profession or which university they attended so that they could meet other students or co-workers. Geographical proximity appears to be a precondition for online interactions among members who wished to carry the interaction in offline settings (e.g. ‘Any Greeks in Richmond area?’ or ‘Are there any Greeks in South London or do they all live in North London?’).

However, the study of FB Groups for Greeks in London did not provide evidence that participation in these Groups were related to offline physical communities and places. Although there were certain cases that interaction on Group Walls was symbiotically linked to physical sites (cf. 5.3) available data and fieldwork does not provides a ground to identify community features. However, it emerges that FB Groups for Greeks in London assist offline networks of diaspora and enhance transnational networks of practice (cf. 1.5.2) for the members involved.
3.6 Conclusion

Focusing on the Profile and Group pages, this chapter has provided an overview of the participants’ practices for self-presentation, interaction and participation. Analysis has presented key interview and questionnaire findings and triangulated them with screen data to point to how the participants use FB to suit their needs for interaction and participation. Data suggested that FB has become an integral part of the participants’ daily lives and is strongly embedded in their everyday routines. The vast majority of the participants (69%) log onto their Profiles on a daily basis and stay connected for more than half an hour (67%).

Interviewees discussed the reasons they joined FB, the locations from which they log on, the way they perceive their ethnicity, and commented on their online actions. They recognize that FB has affected certain aspects of their lives and relationships, they seem particularly interested to explore the technical features of FB, and they provided me with lively stories of how their actions on FB interfere with their daily routines and relationships. Each participant uses his/her Profile in different ways, showing a preference for certain features according to their personal tastes and communicational needs. Although they all claim that curiosity and a need to connect with others motivated them to join FB, the majority of the actions they take on their Profiles are ones of self-presentation (e.g. updating info about oneself, uploading a Profile photo, etc.) rather than ones of interaction with others (e.g. commenting on a SU or posting something on someone’s Wall). Screen data indicated that the participants engaged mainly with activities for self-presentation and impression management on their Profiles. Men were more likely to update the section ‘info about me’ and women were more likely to update their Profile photo.

Posting a SU has been the most common way to initiate interaction. Writing a SU was not treated as a static act, but as a dynamic form of cultural production whose meaning remains to be completed in the ensuing interaction. The majority of the SUs were found to be referring mostly to actions unfolding in real time, marking a discourse where the present moment achieves significance. A SU’s possibility to evoke dialogue was rather dependent on the contextual factors surrounding its creation. Some participants were more likely than others to update their Status and thus receive comments. Their interpersonal relationships, degrees of FB usage, unique mixture of weak and strong ties, language use, offline activities
and a person’s popularity were found to be stronger determinants of the dialogical dimension of a SU than its content.

All the interviewees state that they interact with people with whom they already share a kind of pre-existing relationship. Participants’ friendship behaviour was also found to depend on whether they perceived their Profile as public or private, their views on privacy, and a variety of other factors that relate to a user’s structural position within a social network. Questionnaire data revealed that the participants were more likely to communicate with other Greeks rather than with their Friends of other ethnic backgrounds. They were also more likely to communicate with other Greeks living in Greece than with Greeks living in London.

Profile data quantitatively analysed suggested that the participants rarely participated in FB Groups they joined. There existed 79 Groups for Greeks living in London grounded on that population’s need to identify with their distant homeland. The majority of these Groups refer to geographical locations or physical sites in London suggesting that ‘place’ remains an important resource for identity.

Groups that emphasize a transnational look such as ‘Greek Professionals in London’, ‘Greeks in London’ and ‘London Greek connection’ are the most popular Groups. Analysis has shown that these Groups, rather than connecting members solely on the grounds of a distant homeland, enable the construction of place-based networks in the host city (London) which support their member’s lifestyle, social relations, need for information, entertainment and transnational resources. In this ‘in-between’ space (cf. 1.4.5), engagement with sociopolitical issues is minimal. Although online practices on FB Groups are well embedded in their members’ everyday lives in London, they are still rooted in cultural practices related to their homeland.

This chapter has provided the background ethnographic information regarding the online practices of a diasporic group of Greeks living in London. The next chapter will focus more closely on ethnicity and the way the participants project their ethnic identity on their Profile pages through representational material and language choice.
4. REPRESENTATIONS OF ETHNICITY IN THE PROFILES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ethnospecific content that the participants circulate on FB. As clarified in 2.4.1, the variety of visual and textual means by which the participants refer to Greek or British ethnicity – words or phrases that reveal shared history, cultural practices, beliefs and objects, values and predispositions in relation to the place of origin or the place of settlement – have been classified as ‘ethnospecific content’, a category devised to single out content that is relevant to Greek ethnic culture. Particularly, I examine a corpus of 10 ethnospecific Profile photos and 211 SUs collected over a period of 10 months (cf. 2.4.2). Interview data and fieldwork further complemented quantitative and qualitative findings with contextual information about the participants’ diasporic experiences. This cross-linkage of data allowed me to observe cultural production and its relation to the distinct conditions of its creation. Ethnic identity is at the centre of the chapter’s attention. Evidence presented in the chapter’s first section (4.2) suggests that the participants’ Profile pages are full of ethnic references, symbols and indications of Greek origin.

As stated in 1.5.3, ethnic identity online is traditionally understood in representation. To examine how ethnicity is articulated on the Profile pages, I searched for representations of ethnic identity (ethnic symbols, images and texts), studied the participants’ perceptions and attitudes online, and observed their language choice online, since language use can be a powerful marker of ethnic identity.

This investigation aims to add to the empirical work related to the representation of ethnicity on the internet (cf. 1.5.1). It aims to explore the relationship between ethnicity and the web by revising previous work in the light of emerging social networking technologies. In 1.5, I reviewed existing theoretical frameworks regarding how ethnic identity is expressed on the web. Modern approaches to virtual ethnicity view the web as a space which fosters and reproduces existing accounts of ethnicity, reinforcing stereotypes and enabling homogenizing forces. Modernists, who view identity as fixed, linear and hierarchical in its construction, recognize the web’s possibility to reflect power relations and hierarchies that
exist offline. Data presented in 4.3 supports this approach and points to the ways in which Greek ethnic culture is symbolically reproduced through images and texts shared on the participants’ Group and Profile pages. In 4.3.1, I review the stereotypical representations of Greek ethnicity in the text-titles of the available FB Groups, and in 4.3.2, I examine ethnospecific Profile photos as indications of banal nationalism (cf. 1.5.3).

However, along with this, mainly quantitative, evidence which points to the way that the Greek ethnic identity is being stereotyped, there is also a great amount of data which suggests a more complex process of ethnic identity construction in relation to the participants’ ‘in-between status’. Evidence presented in 4.4 is in line with postmodernists’ accounts (cf. 1.5.1) which approach ethnic identity on the web as fluid, nonlinear and opaque. According to postmodernists, since the bodily markers of ethnic identity are absent on the anonymous web, the boundaries of ethnic identity are created and recreated by other markers such as language, visual and textual representations. Thus, virtual ethnicity becomes a product of self-assignation: fragmented, situational and subjective. Acknowledging that postmodernists accounts of virtual ethnicity were anchored in web environments in which users participated anonymously (cf. 1.6.1), I examined whether postmodernist perspectives would be relevant for the study of the ethnic self in the environment of a social networking site where users tend to reveal their real characteristics.

Discourse analysis of interview extracts is the main method used to provide access to the process of identity construction online. The section asks whether online representations of the participants’ ethnic identity are coherent with the way they experience and practise their ethnicity offline. Throughout this section, the focus remains on the participants’ position between the two cultures and the way in which it is manifested through textual and visual production in the Profiles.

Though all participants identify as Greeks in London (having joined a FB Group about Greeks in London), they are experiencing their ethnic background in a number of different ways – according to the distinct conditions of their displacement and the way they perceive their ethnicity (4.4.1). Participants’ ‘in-between’ status (Robinson, 2007) is well reflected in their Profile pages, not only through the transnational connections and networks they maintain (cf. 3.5.3), but also through various creative practices of remixing cultural content,
producing alternative texts and referring to both Greek and British culture interchangeably (4.4.3). While presenting their selves in their Profiles, participants are likely to draw on both cultural frames of reference – the British and the Greek – and selectively display preferred aspects of both ethnic backgrounds.

Section 4.4.4 identifies the prevailing contexts in which Greek ethnic identity emerges in the SUs and points to the various resources on which the participants draw in order to engage with life in London. Language choice in the Profiles – a significant marker of ethnic identity – is considered a key element when examining the practices of ethnic identification online. Part 4.4.5 further investigates how hybrid and postmodern identities are enacted through language and code-switching practices (4.4.5.2).

### 4.2 Ethnospecific Content on the Profiles

Systematic observation of the Profiles’ recent activity suggested that the participants’ ethnic status as Greeks was evident in their Profile pages, even if they would not state it in the ’Info section’. While the vast majority of the audio-visual content that the participants circulated referred to a global culture, 45.2% of the Status Updates found on the Profiles contained ethnospecific terms (cf. 2.4.1). Each Profile was found to display a certain percentage of ethnospecific content, thus content related to an ethnic culture, Greek or British. Particularly, content related to British culture corresponded to 5% of all ethnospecific content found in the Profiles. The remaining 95% of ethnospecific content found referred to Greek ethnic culture.

Half of the participants circulate moderate levels (cf. 2.7.3) of ethnospecific content (20–50% of all the content circulated) on their Profiles, 7 of them share high levels (50–80%) and 8 display low levels (0–20%). Among the Profiles examined, it emerges that 3 Profiles with high levels of ethnospecific content shared a connection with each other. Figure 8 presents the percentages of Profiles with low (0-20%), moderate (20-50%) and high levels (50-80%) of ethnospecific content.
Figure 8. Levels of Ethnospecific Content on the Profiles

Figure 8 suggests that ethnic identity is an important aspect of identity that penetrates actions online. As it will be shown in 4.4.1, the participants are also highly aware of how their ethnic status is reflected in their Profiles. In a number of ways, participants also stressed their local identities when on FB. Anna’s Profile is full of indications regarding her origins in Crete. She became a fan of Crete, she has joined Groups and pages about places in Crete, uploaded photos about weddings in Crete, and has been taking quizzes about Crete.

However, the most explicit marker of the participants’ ethnic identity was the number of a Profile’s Greek Friends. Screen data suggests that the participants have an average of 46% Greek Friends on their Profiles. In the light of this finding, it emerges that ethnic background is a basic determinant for friendship on FB (also 3.4). Figure 9 illustrates questionnaire data regarding the percentages of Friends with Greek names that a participant states he/she has.
According to Figure 9, 12 of the respondents estimate that 80% of their Friends are of Greek origin and 10 respondents believe that their Greek Friends represent 20–40% of their Friends. Comparing different sources of information, it emerges that screen data derived from the Profiles corresponds to questionnaire findings, thus revealing that the participants are well aware of the composition of their Profile’s audience.

Also, one would expect that the higher the number of a Profile’s Greek Friends, the higher the percentage of ethnospecific content circulated on the Profile page. Findings suggest that there is no correlation between the number of Greek Friends and levels of ethnospecific content circulated. In some cases, participants who had only a few Greek Friends displayed high percentages of ethnospecific content in their Profile pages, whereas in other cases they had almost 80% Greek FB Friends but very low percentages of ethnospecific content (e.g. Maria’s Profile).

Although ethnospecific SUs were found in 23 Profiles, some participants were more likely to produce SUs with cultural references than others. Screen data suggested that 69% of the corpus of ethnospecific SUs was created by just 7 participants. More specifically, 22% of the SUs with ethnospecific content were extracted from Philip’s Profile (P11).  

\[P11, P1, P23, P19, P15, P18, P27\]
The systematic Profile observation has left me with a rich set of screen data comprised of cultural symbols, textual constructions and message exchanges with ethnic references. The question that underlies the study of this representational material is whether online representations are consistent with the way in which the participants experience their ethnicity in their everyday settings, or if they are fragmented and disengaged from their reality and are projections of an ideal self. The following section investigates how the participants use stereotypical symbols of Greek ethnicity to describe themselves on their Profiles.

4.3 The Symbolic Reproduction of Greek Ethnic Culture on FB pages

To answer the question of how ethnicity is projected on FB, I had to investigate ethnic symbols and representations of Greek ethnic culture. This investigation started with an extensive search on the FB Groups related to Greek ethnicity available for FB users to join. The great majority of Group names were categorized as expressions of conventional and stereotypical accounts of Greek ethnicity (4.3.1). Along with FB Group production, Profile pages were examined for stereotypical images and symbols related to Greek or British culture. In 4.3.2, I examine how the participants use these symbols in their Profile photos and whether they are consistent with the way they are experiencing their ethnicity in a diasporic setting.

4.3.1 Stereotypical Ways of Identification in FB Groups

When typing the words ‘Greek’, ‘Greece’, ‘Hellas’ or ‘Hellenic’, the search engine returned over 12,570 Group names (cf. 2.4.2). Terms entered in the Greek language returned over 4,400 Groups and when typed in English returned 562 results. Thus, the majority of Groups about Greek ethnicity have an English name to address a global audience. Participants may choose among a vast amount of Groups signifying Greek ethnicity and use them as identity resources in their Profile.
The majority of Groups related to Greece draw on conventional accounts of Greek culture (e.g. lifestyle, national pride, history, holidays, tradition, history, music, food, etc.) and make a habitual usage of ethnic symbols (over 1,000). The majority of the participants (17) had joined Groups related to Greece such as ‘Greek life’, ‘big fat Greek’, ‘Greek pop’, ‘Greek cuisine’, all of which suggested specific characteristics or stereotypes related to Greek culture. Two of the participants had also joined Groups expressing nationalistic discourses (such as the Group ‘I am proud to be Greek – ναι ρε είμαι περήφανος που είμαι Ελληνας’ with 32882 members).

The most prominent category in the Groups’ sample had to do with FB Groups flagging Greek nationality. More than 1,000 Group names contained solely words such as ‘Greek’, ‘Simply Greek’, ‘Greek Patriots’ or ‘Greek pride’, expressed national pride and were related to issues of cultural maintenance, expansion, solidarity and resistance. Apart from their impressive number, their membership was also remarkable high. The combination ‘Greek and proud’ appeared in more than 200 Group names and users who wanted ‘Greece united’ could choose among 100 Groups to join. Their Profile photos were usually well-recognized national symbols such as the national flag, monuments, ancient temples, etc.

The impressive amount of Groups that displayed strong national feelings of identification with a homeland suggests the existence of a kind of nationalism based on hereditary connections rather than common cultural values and shared cultural knowledge. With the exception of very few Groups which provided cultural arguments or reasons for which members they should feel proud of (e.g. ‘Greeks invented everything’, ‘Proud for Greek pilots’, ‘Proud to be orthodox’), members identify with the property of being Greek solely on the grounds of their origin. In addition to these Groups serving as spaces that host patriotic sentiments and feelings, there were also an impressive amount of Groups suggesting action in an imperative form (e.g. ‘Go Greek’: 409 Groups), seeking cultural expansion, and inviting people to join the sorority or follow the Greek life. An examination in the corpus of FB Groups referring to Greek culture reveals that there is a great number of Groups that serve as expressions of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), everyday representations of Greek

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42 (‘I am proud to be Greek - yes I am proud to be Greek’)
43 If viewed in analogy with the country’s population and size, this is an impressive number.
44 For example there were 9 Groups that reached more than 2,000 members each.
nationality which construct an imagined sense of solidarity and belonging (cf. 1.5.2). The effectiveness of these symbols is based on their constant repetition through unnoticed, routine practices and ideological habits which enable the daily symbolic reproduction of nationhood. However, as it will be shown in 4.4.3, participants in this study tend to join Groups which offer alternative modes of relating to Greek culture.

4.3.2 Banal Nationalism: Profile Photos as Personal Signatures

Billing’s notion of banal nationalism was discussed in 1.5.2. In this study, it serves as a conceptual tool which points to how a sense of belonging and identity is communicated and maintained through cultural production on the Profiles as a transparent, taken-for-granted background. The effectiveness of these symbols is based on their constant repetition through unnoticed, routine practices and ideological habits which enable the daily reproduction of nationhood (cf. 1.5.2).

The most apparent location in which one can trace acts of banal nationalism were the participants’ Profile photos. Questionnaire results suggest that participants update their Profile photo less often than anything else. They were likely to change their Profile photo, on average, every six months (cf. 3.3).

Drawing on Derrida’s definition of signature as an active utterance and an act of performativity (Derrida, 1982), Profile photos were viewed as participants’ signatures. Derrida analyses personal signatures in terms of their relation to the present and to the source:

‘By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now, in general, in the transcendental form of nowness (maintenance). This general maintenance is somehow inscribed, stapled to the present punctuality, always evident and always singular, in the form of the signature. This is the enigmatic originality of every paraph. For the attachment to the source to occur, the absolute singularity of an event of the signature and of a form of the signature must be retained: the pure reproducibility of a pure event.’ (Derrida, 1982: 307-330).
Profile photos as personal signatures have a repeatable form and unique content. The Profile photo appears along with every single action taken on the Profile. According to Derrida, a signature, in order to function, should be detached from the present and singular intention of its production: ‘It is its sameness which by corrupting its identity and singularity divides its seal’ (Derrida, 1982). Sunden (2003) extends this notion of personal signature to argue that digital signatures have a double function: the author writes the text but the text also writes the author.

Apart from their function as personal signatures, Profile photos serve also as identity recourses. Choosing a Profile photo to represent oneself is a creative practice with symbolic meaning (cf.4.4.3). Along with conveying information about physical appearance, the participants are also using cultural symbols – objects that represent something else by association, resemblance or convention – as an attribute for their identity. I examined the participants’ Profile photos searching for indications of a national identity (ethnospecific content) and I found 10 Profile photos in which the participants were representing themselves with some kind of reference to national and cultural symbols, Greek or British (Figure 13, 14).

Figure 13. Ethnospecific Profile Photos Related to Greek Culture

Index of Profiles Photos

PH1: Argiris (P16), PH2: Panos (P26), PH3: Nicholas (P15), PH4: Antony (P14), PH5: Leonidas (P13), PH6: Grigoris (P8), PH7: Philip (P11)
In this set of Profile photos (PH1–PH7), the participants employ traditional symbols of Greek ethnicity to create connotations with Greek history and nationality (the flag, an ancient temple, Greek gods, ancient warriors, a tsolias\textsuperscript{45}) and with symbolic surroundings (the sea, a typical blue and white scene of a Cycladic island). These pictures exhibit some of the stereotypes of Greek culture, standardized and simplified conceptions of what it means to be Greek, symbols mainly reproduced by popular media. Participants express their identification with these symbols: by becoming part of the surroundings (including themselves in the picture), by impersonating a Greek God (PH5) or a tsolias (PH1), by wearing a T-shirt with a Greek flag (PH7). A close examination on these particular symbols suggests that they have been using these symbols habitually. An ancient temple is not part of everyday reality in Greece but, besides being a symbol for Greek history, is a scene for touristic attraction such as is the Cycladic island’s setting in blue and white. Greek gods are mythical creatures, part of a cultural imagination and it is almost impossible to find people dressed up as ancient Greek warriors or Gods on the streets. What is more, the image of a tsolias (PH1) might be used in media texts to represent Greekness in a traditional sense, however in Greece one can hardly find one. In fact, one can see people dressed up as a tsolias only in national celebrations, festivals and traditional events.

Apart from photos with profound references to Greek culture, there were also Profile photos revealing certain aspects of London (Figure 14). Ntinos (P23), Alexandra (P7) and Stephen (P6) have, for some time, been using Profile photos with reference to British nationality, e.g. Big Ben, the Tower Bridge of London, the British flag.

\textsuperscript{45} A member of the Greek military that fought to liberate Greece from the Ottoman Empire. Today the tsolias is guarding the tomb of the unknown soldier of the Syntagma in Athens. He wears a fancy uniform made of a skirt ‘foustanella’ and leather shoes ‘tsarouxia’.
Participants in Profile photos PH8–PH10 employ signs of well recognizable London attractions to denote their relation to London. Stephen (PH10) makes use of an institutional cultural symbol to display his identification with UK: he is wearing a British flag and displaying his muscles as if he were superman, a fictional superhero and a cultural icon known for his mythic qualities. In a symbolic manner, he presents himself as a superhero empowered by the British flag, a traditional icon which is reused as a piece of clothing in this photo.

A deconstructive reading of the selected photos demonstrates how real-world norms and stereotypes circulate as infinite texts whose meaning is reproduced according to the participants’ distinct experiences. Big Ben, the British or Greek flags, the Tower Bridge of London, the typical blue and white Greek scenery, the tsolias and the ancient temple are all part of a semiotic system which signifies national pride through everyday representations of national solidarity.

However, an investigation into the wider context and situations that surround the production or selection of these Profiles photos provides interesting findings. When combining information about the participants – retrieved by interviews and questionnaires – with the Profile photos they chose to upload on FB, it emerges that there is an inconsistency related to the way they represent their identity online. It was observed that in the first set of Photos, Leonidas (P13), Arigiris (P16) and Philip (P11), display identification with Greek traditional culture despite the fact that they are all British-born Greeks. With the exception of Panos’s
photo (PH2), photos with ethnospecific references to Greece were uploaded by British-born Greeks who have lived for only short periods of their life in Greece. Argiris, Philip, Grigorios and Nicolas have also got relatively low numbers of Greek Friends on their Profiles. An inconsistency between their actual experience of the country and modes for the display of the ethnic self is also evident in relation to the second set of photos (Figure 14).

Conversely to what was observed in the previous set of photos (Figure 13), Alexandra, and Ntinos have registered a Greek hometown and have been living in London for less than four years. Stephen has dual nationality and has been living in London for about 10 years. Stephen displays his identification with British nationality in a powerful and creative way (picturing himself wearing a British flag) and Alexandra (IN7) has uploaded a Profile Photo of herself with a popular view of Tower Bridge. She explains that she chose this photo so that she can let her Friends know that she is now living in London. However, when she travels to Greece, she keeps the Profile photo. Observing this pattern and taking into account that the majority of Alexandra’s FB Friends are Greeks, one could assume that she employs cultural symbols of London to emphasize that London comprises part of her everyday experience.

The observation of the Profile photos shows that the participants have chosen to emphasize aspects of their ethnic identity which are not always consistent with their experiences and actual practices. They update their Profile photos to serve various purposes and needs related to different social environments and contexts. Due to their ‘in-between status’ they are likely to identify with different aspects of Greek ethnicity or construct hybrid identities.

4.4 Enacting Hybrid Identities in the Profiles

The notion of hybridity, a cultural effect of globalization (Kraidy, 2005; Pieterse, 2004), has been closely linked to postmodern approaches on identity which challenged modernists’ accounts of fixed and stable identities. Hybridity has been discussed in the theoretical chapter (cf. 1.4.2) as a process of cultural mixing: ‘the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the
According to Bhabha, hybridity is an evocative term for the formation of identity: a disruptive and productive category, ‘a code for creativity and for translation’ (Bhabha 1994: 226). In 1.4.2, it was shown that hybridity is more than the simple mixing of cultures. A ‘third space’ (cf. 1.4.4) emerges from the interweaving of cultural elements and gives rise to unique aspects that challenge the fixity and validity of an essentialist cultural identity. This process of hybridization, the product of complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes, not only problematizes boundaries but also implies an unsettling of identities (Earley & Ang, 2003) and the creation of a dynamic new cultural identity in transition. New media and globalization processes have played a crucial role in the formation of this ‘third space’ for diasporic populations (cf. 1.4.5). This section examines how the participants enact hybrid identities in the social space of FB and how their hybrid practices might encompass creativity.

It has been demonstrated in 1.3 that the study approaches ethnic identity as a socially constructed category which is not determined at birth, but can be a product of self-designations and also attributions made by others. The study moves away from essentialists’ views of identity and searches for participants’ identities in the process of self-categorization and labelling, the process of self-exploration and in their social practices for interaction. Since ethnic identity is viewed as a practical accomplishment and a social process (Street, 1997), the study pays particular attention to the participants’ online practices as embedded within specific contexts and as they interact with wider circumstances and situational factors.

To investigate the process of identity construction and how FB use may complement this process, I had to move away from the screen and search for the participants’ perceptions, everyday practices related to FB use and ethnicity, their ideas, values and communicational needs (4.4.1). Chapter 3 has already provided background quantitative information regarding the participants’ practices online, patterns and frequencies, and has shown how well FB use is embedded in the participants’ everyday routines. This section relies on discourse analysis of interview data to investigate the participants’ online practices and strategies of ethnic identification, paying attention to the context of their online performance. In 4.4.2, I treat the
process of projecting ethnicity online as a constructive and self-exploratory process which operates in dialogue with the wider social context that underlies the participants’ diasporic experience. The study of screen data in 4.4.3 suggests that the participants are also likely to creatively produce alternative representations of Greek ethnicity, in a way that is consistent with their ‘in-between status’ or hybrid identities.

In 4.4.5, the study of language choice online also offers valuable insights regarding the process of identity construction online. Based on screen, interview and questionnaire data, I review a range of practices – such as code switching – by which the participants flag ethnic affiliation and enact their ethnic identities.

The participants’ ‘in-between status’ can be most accurately traced in their SUs. In 4.4.5, I investigate the resources on which the participants draw when they edit ethnospecific SUs. The purpose is to find out how they refer to their Greek or British background through their online practices and how their hybrid identities are enacted online. This investigation has produced interesting findings which are further analysed in Chapter 6 in relation to conclusions regarding the transnational experience of the participants and the way that FB mediated this experience.

4.4.1 Participant's Perceptions and Practices Related to Ethnicity

Participants in this study have all joined one of the FB Groups for Greeks in London and use it as an identity marker in their Profiles (cf. 2.3). However, this observation did not provide me with information about their relation to a homeland, the nature of their diasporic experience, or the degree of their assimilation into UK culture.

Since the beginning of the data collection process, I realized that the diversity in participants’ diasporic experiences would pose difficulties for the study of this population as a single and unified narrative (cf. 2.5). Being a Greek student in London is a multicultural experience very different from that a Greek professional in London might have. In addition, a British-born Greek in London is likely to experience Greekness differently from a Greek who lives
in London by personal choice, or from a British-born Greek who is travelling a lot. Interviews and questionnaires have provided me with ethnographic data about the participants’ views, insights into their ethnicity and everyday practices – all data which has helped me examine the representations they produced on the screen as a narrative (cf. 1.2).

As it was shown in 2.5, the majority of the sample consists of young participants (mainly professionals and students) who have been living in London for more than 3 years – and less than 10 – and who have a variety of reasons for settlement. Among the participants, there are also British-born Greeks who have been raised in London or lived in different countries (e.g. Philip’s case, P11) and distinct cases like Stephen’s (IN6) who was raised in Greece but characterizes himself as British.

According to questionnaire data (Appendix 2), the participants, despite being settled in London, follow a range of practices related to their Greek background. Respondents were more likely to keep in touch with Greek news on the internet (77%: 23 out of 30 respondents), travel in Greece regularly (70%: 21 out of 30), read Greek newspapers (70%: 21 out of 30), take part in a Greek event organized by their friends (70%: 21 out of 30), visit a Greek restaurant(64%: 19 out of 30), take part in a Greek event of large scale (54%: 16 out of 30), participate in a FB Group about Greeks in London regularly (50%: 15 out of 30) or be involved in a Greek community (50%: 15 out of 30). They were less likely to be involved in the organization of events for Greek diaspora (40%: 12 out of 30), to exercise their religious duties (27%: 8 out of 30) and work for a Greek company or organization (27%: 8 out of 30). Overall, these results pointed to: (a) a tendency for participants to exercise their ethnicity individually rather than participate in collective activities related to Greek diaspora (e.g. a FB Group, a Greek community, an organization of diaspora, religious practices, etc.) and (b) a tendency to exercise their ethnicity following transnational practices and engaging with activities across borders (e.g. travelling or reading Greek newspapers).

The next step was to investigate how the participants talk about their current status. Almost all interviewees\(^6\) were self-defined as Greeks. As a general observation, interviewees found

\(^6\) With the exception of Stephen (IN6)
it a difficult task to talk about how they were experiencing their ethnicity in London. The most apparent way to talk about their Greekness was to draw on a dichotomy between those Greeks who try to assimilate and incorporate themselves with life in London and those who are ‘stuck with life back there’ (IN1).

Some interviewees attempted to protect themselves from appearing nationally proud (IN4, IN1, IN7, IN9). Rena (IN4), Alexandra (IN7), Kostas (IN1) and Polina (IN9), while trying to distance themselves from expressions of over nationalistic sentiments (what Rena calls ‘the hardcore Greeks in London’), point to a category of Greeks in London who overstress their Greek origin, follow Greek traditions and ethics, and practise their nationality in an ‘unnatural’ and ‘extreme way’ (IN9).

‘I come from Greece and I feel Greek, even after having stayed for 5 years in London. After all, I travel very often back in Greece. Watch Greek news and read newspapers. Now ... although my friends are not exclusively Greeks ... I know all these details reveal a lot about my Greek origin ... but I am not one of those ‘hardcore’ Greeks who live in London’ (Rena, IN4).

In this extract, Rena, although she emphasizes her Greek origin and attachment (the word ‘Greek’ appears 4 times) she also tries to keep a distance from ‘those hardcore Greeks’ in London. An emphasis on her Greek origin and practices reveals an inconsistency with the way that she tries to protect herself from being characterized as ‘one of those’. She wants to convey an image of an open-minded person who appreciates the multicultural experience, but she also values her origin.

Alexandra (IN7) talks about this group drawing on exclusionary markers:

‘I believe they are very obsessed ... more than Greeks ... anyway it seems that they are very homesick ... But I am not really sure ... I do not know much about this space ... I just prefer when I am in a foreign country to live like the locals do ... going out with hundreds of Greek people would not make me feel that I am in Greece’ (Alexandra, IN7).

Assimilation and integration with the host culture and life in London are regarded as the optimal way to get to know a different culture, while Greeks who stay attached to their experiences and interact only with other Greeks in London are viewed as a marginalized group, a ‘space’, a community. Alexandra makes an excuse for them on the basis that they feel really homesick so they therefore seek to revive their experience of Greece in London.
by socializing with other Greeks. However, it seems that she cannot understand them. The phrase ‘when I am in a foreign country’ stresses the temporality of her stay in London and, in combination with her wish to ‘live like the locals’, suggests a discourse of cosmopolitanism (cf. 1.4.1) and transnationalism which differs from that of the diasporic (cf. 6.4).

In addition, some of the interviewees (IN1, IN7, IN9) were uncomfortable with the term diaspora. When characterized as ‘diaspora’, Alexandra (IN7) reacted: ‘I do not think I belong to diaspora, I came here to work for a few years, have a new experience, I also travel back in Athens very often …’. She thinks that there are three main features that distinguish her from a diasporic individual: (a) the prospect of a return to home after a short stay in London; (b) the fact that she feels open to new experiences – in a way similar to a tourist; and (c) the practice of frequent travelling between London and Athens which allows her to maintain linkages with her home city. In the same manner, Kostas (IN1) believes that Greek diaspora refers to ‘those who are born in London and have been raised here, not me’. He defines diaspora on the basis of the length of experience and the degree of assimilation into the host culture.

Grigoris (IN8), a British-born Greek, was the only interviewee comfortable with the term diaspora. Although he has only got a few Greek Friends in his Profile page, he mainly interacts with people from other cultural backgrounds, and shares very low amounts of ethnospecific content on his Profile. He is likely to participate in diasporic Groups and during the interview he referred to himself as Greek diaspora. It seems that Grigoris, although part of the Greek diaspora, does not belong to this ‘space’ that Alexandra and Rena call the ‘hardcore Greeks’.

With their comments, interviewees have tried to demarcate themselves from Greek diaspora ‘people born here’ and a group of Greeks in London who ‘have stayed for many years’, ‘feel homesick’, ‘want to feel as if they were in Greece’, ‘go out with other Greeks’, ‘listen only to Greek music’ or ‘hung out in Greek places’. These interviewees have tried to present themselves as Greeks who enjoy a multicultural experience in London.
Although these participants maintain strong linkages with life in Greece, when in London they nevertheless try and live as locals do. These attitudes to the experience of dislocation are closely related to the reasons that made them move to London (studying, working) and are linked to the wider forces of transnationalization which enable them to stay connected with life in Greece. Section 6.4 further investigates this discourse, and links these findings to the literature surrounding the terms diaspora and transnationalism (cf. 1.4.2). A possible alternative to characterize the group of participants would be to view them as a ‘transnational population’ (cf. 1.4.2), though this term still does not account for cases like Argiri’s case (P16) – a British born Greek who very rarely travels back ‘home’.

However, rather than grouping under the same term all kinds of distinct experiences, the aim of the analysis is to point out to different sets of experiences. It is only towards the last chapter (6.3.2) that the participants’ profiles as stories become clearer, distinct population categories emerge and allow for broader conclusions regarding the nature of the participants’ experience – diasporic or transnational – as mediated by FB.

### 4.4.2 Presenting Ethnic Identity: a Process of Self-exploration

Impression management is a key process taking place on the participants’ Profiles (cf. 1.6.2), since they are trying to influence others’ perceptions by carefully shaping their public image. As shown in Figure 6 (cf. 3.2), evidence suggests that the participants’ take the majority of actions on their Profiles to present themselves rather than interact or participate. These results are in line with an amount of literature on self-presentation on FB Profile pages (cf. 1.6.1) which analyses FB Profiles as spaces for the performance of the self (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), outlets for self-promotion (Mehdizadeh, 2010) and also as narcissistic expressions (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008).

It has been discussed in 1.6 that both asynchronous and synchronous editing tools on FB allow users to carefully sculpt versions of themselves, even idealized versions (Ellison et al., 2006). As stated in 2.4.2, interaction on FB Wall begins when a user posts a SU, a short text
which describes a situation, a moment, a feeling, a thought; an experience, etc. (cf. 2.4.2). In the upper part of their Profile page, users can type a text of their choice, which is introduced by the software default ‘is’ (which changed to ‘what are you doing right now?’). By referring to oneself in the third person (e.g. Maria ‘is tired’) or by answering the default question ‘what are you doing right now?’ a SU’s original function is to inform a Profile’s Friends about one’s current status (cf. 2.4.2). Boyd (2006) understands them as ‘constant revelations of the self’. The process in which the user has to choose the right words or phrases to report a version of his/her current experience and compose a SU is occasionally a time consuming – though constructive – practice (cf. 1.6.1). According to Boyd (2006), users are ‘writing themselves into being’ when composing a SU or completing the Info Section of the Profile. Rather than acting spontaneously to fill the blank space on their Wall, participants might spend some time creating a phrase that is likely to impress their Friends or elicit comments.

To investigate the process of editing their Profiles, I had to ask interviewees whether their Profile represented them accurately. For Nikos, the act of editing his Profile is an act towards presenting an idealized version of himself, carefully having to balance different personas. When on FB, he feels that users are likely to take up multiple personalities, to express different aspects of themselves.

‘On Facebook you might come with different personas, most of us take up a variety of personas … there are only few who are really themselves when online. You usually impersonate something better than you actually are … Or sometimes worse … as for me, I assume that it is for the better’ (IN2).

He believes that Facebook does not reflect one’s ‘real self’ but provides a space where everyone tries to project an idealized version of oneself, flawless and unrealistic. He edits his Profile according to the person he wants to be and not his real self, and so do others, since it is very rare to keep a balance between different versions of the self and be ‘real’ on FB. His views are in line with postmodernist theories of identity construction online where identity online is treated as hybrid, full of contradictions, flexible, playful, fluid and short time-oriented (cf.1.4.1). In contrast to modernist orientations of identity, where identity online is considered as linear, socially-embedded, coherent and uniform, the virtual self on FB emerges as a hybrid construction.
As with any discussion about online identity, the tension between the online and the offline was often present in the interview data. Interviewees appear to be concerned with issues regarding the authenticity of their Profiles. It was often that they attempted to discuss the link between their sense of self and the one that they projected on their Profiles (IN1, IN2, IN4, IN9). The issue of authenticity — whether the Profile matches the true personality and spirit — was raised when talking about others’ Profiles. For example, Mina (IN5) points out:

‘we all know that these people who appear to have this perfect virtual life on FB might be nothing but users who just spend too much time on FB, and this life and quantity of friends and connections might have nothing to do with their everyday reality’ (IN5).

Again, the fact that users try to manage the image of themselves by carefully sculpting their Profile pages appears as common knowledge for Mina. FB is treated as a performative sphere, a performance which requires time and effort on the part of the Profile author, who tries to project an ideal self and be perceived as such by others. However, it seems that other users (e.g. Nikos, Mina) seem to appreciate/value the ‘authenticity’ of a Profile page, its ability to reflect ‘real’ aspects of the author’s everyday life and ensure a continuity with offline versions of the self. Realizing that their performance takes place in front of an audience composed of their contacts and friends, they try to project a version of themselves closer to the reality, one which is continuous with real settings and situations. For example, despite the fact that Nikos (IN2) would like to present an ideal self on his Profile, he tends not to fictionalize his Profile as all of his contacts know him in person. For Rena, the process of editing her Profile is not restricted by the social setting but it appears as a process of self-exploration:

‘I still do not know who is Rena in fact, so I cannot give you a definite answer whether my profile represents me accurately. Information on my profile corresponds to some elements of my personality – especially those concerning my good sense of humour and my various activities; however, I cannot really tell whether what others see in my profile is 100 per cent the real me.’ (IN4).

In this extract, the self is treated as a continuous project and Rena acknowledges that her Profile can only represent some aspects of her personality, especially those which are mutable. When I checked Rena’s Profile page to find out whether it represents her, I was quite puzzled as I could not make any comparison to Rena’s personality, except for bits of information that I ignored. Questions of authenticity and representation have long been a problematic area for scholars, since when stressing claims to an authentic voice, there are
dangers of undermining the complexity of the discourse at hand (Griffiths, 1994). In computer-mediated environments, where users can reverse their previous actions (cf. 1.6.2) and even delete traces of the self, issues of representation of the true self become even more complicated. Kostas (IN1) comments:

‘I have uploaded some videos which are not representative of me ... That moment I liked them, now I listen to different kinds of music ... I was surprised when I found these videos on my profile page ... So I erased them ... This is exactly what I also do with postings coming from people who are not my friends anymore’ (IN1).

The same applications that enable self-description rather than leaving permanent online traces can be modified or erased. In this respect, FB Profiles may be viewed as personal identity ‘archives’ formed through a systematic, temporal process in which the user makes modifications and additions (cf. 1.6.2). The process of re-versioning published positions facilitates an evolving sense of the self, a sense of the Profile becoming ‘part’ of the author and also becoming a dynamic extension of the self (Chandler, 1996).

Rena (IN4) spends a great deal of time updating information about herself, her interests, hobbies, everyday concerns, etc. She repeatedly revisits her Profile to change or delete information that she regrets publishing or that she thinks no longer represents her (e.g. her hobbies). Being continually revised, the online text becomes a living evolving entity which is updated to reflect Rena’s changing status. This possibility for ‘revisability’ of online material (cf. 1.6.1) facilitates an internal dialogue concerning previous and revised self-representations, a dialogue that can be constructive for identity. That is because users, when writing online, sustain a narrative of identity that explores a number of different stories of the self, internalize their representations, and are immersed in a sense of self-discovery (Papacharissi, 2004; Stern, 2004; Ellison et al. 2007). The following incident, which occurred during the group interview, is indicative of this process.

It was during the group interview (G.IN) that I asked Maria (IN3) to discuss whether she thinks that Mina’s Profile (IN5) represents her. Although Maria has been Mina’s best friend in London and they communicate with each other on a daily basis, she found it difficult to recall the distinct elements in her Friend’s Profile page. To provide accurate comments, Maria decided to log onto her FB account and visit Mina’s Profile page. Once she entered Mina’s Profile, the first thing that she checked was the number of Friends she had and then
the kind of Groups she had joined. Maria confirmed that Mina is a very popular person with 112 FB Friends, and she was surprised to find out that her Friend had joined the Group of AEK, a Greek football team, the Group ‘Proud to be Greek’ and various other Groups about her hometown in Greece. Maria revealed that this was an aspect of Mina’s preferences that she totally ignored and asked Mina what was she thinking when joining these Groups: ‘I had no idea that you even like football or value your hometown as “the most beautiful in the world”’ (IN5). Mina looked at her Profile with surprise and replied ‘I do not know what I was thinking when I joined these groups, football has never been in my interests and my hometown is certainly not the most beautiful in the world ... I must have been feeling really homesick!’ (IN5). Later on, interviewees opened a conversation about Greek football teams and Mina presented herself as a supporter of AEK. It seems that Mina finally supported her online actions and uses the football team as a way to refer to herself.

The above examples and extracts have demonstrated how the self on FB becomes a reflexive and continuous project sustained through a revisable narrative of self-identity which unfolds in both offline and online settings. Participants are highly aware that they are using their Profile pages as ‘stages for the performance of the self’ (Liu, 2007) in which they project idealized and multiple versions of themselves. Interview data combined with screen data show that FB is likely to provide a space which enables the authoring of the self according to postmodern conceptions of identity as a fleeting construction. An examination of how the participants are likely to project their ethnic identity provides further insight into this process.

Screen evidence has been the starting point to trace the participants’ ethnic background. The most profound place to search for the participants’ ethnic background on the Profiles was the ‘Info Section’. In this section, users can choose within prescribed options how to present themselves in terms of gender (e.g. male or female), their relationship status, etc. They may type their personal interests, hometown, current location or neighbourhood. Participants enter information related to their ethnic background in the category ‘hometown’. Out of 30 participants taking part in this study, only 5 had filled information about their hometown (e.g. Athens, Mitelene, Thessaloniki, etc.) and 12 edited their current location as ‘London’. Participants were more likely to enter their current location than the place of their origin (hometown).
Polina (IN9) comments ‘people want to know where I am and what I am doing right now, not where do I come from … after all, those who know me, also know where do I come from’. Tzortzina (IN10) also adds ‘It only makes sense to edit where I am so that people can find me and meet me here in London … they know the rest’. For these two interviewees, ethnic background is taken for granted in their interactions and they feel that information regarding their current location is more important than information regarding the place of their origin. This realization is in line with findings in 3.4 which suggest that FB supports a discourse where the present moment acquires significance.

Stephen (IN6), was unsure whether to call himself Greek or British. He was raised in a Greek town by a British mother, and he only came in London eleven years ago to study and work (cf. 2.5). He travels to Greece more than three times a year. When first interviewed, he finds that his Greek background is evident in his Profile:

‘Just by a quick browsing on my profile page, one can see clearly that I have something to do with Greece … I have a lot of Greek friends and despite that I never write in Greek, people are posting things in Greek on my profile page … in the info section about myself … I found it difficult to complete it with a simple word … Greece means certain things for me and UK other things; I would not be able to decide what to write in the box asking for my hometown … so I’ve left it blank.’ (IN6).

Being unsure how to characterize himself in terms of ethnicity, he chose not to reveal his ethnic status on FB. He thinks that his hybrid status is exposed through his Profile content and practices. However, screen data revealed a different case. Indications of Stephen’s Greek origins were almost absent from his Profile. When interviewed for a second time, he revealed that he had removed posts or comments made in Greek from his Profile page ‘because his Friends would not understand’ (IN6). Although initially he states that he cannot control the way his hybrid status is reflected, it seems that in practice he has attempted to control his self-image by deleting indications of his Greek background on his Profile page. He explains that he did so because he thinks that his Friends would not be able to understand Greek. However, in the first interview – which took place a month before – he stated that he has got a lot of Greek Friends in his Profile. Stephen’s statements reveal a contradiction between his actual online practices related to his ethnicity and the way he perceived them. In one instance, he was unsure which aspect of his ethnic background he wanted to stress and in another instance, he takes deliberate actions to manage the ethnospecific content his Friends
share on his Profile. This example could also support postmodernist approaches of virtual ethnicity as a fluid, non-stable construction, full of inconsistencies and discontinuities.

Philip’s example is also indicative of a postmodern construction of ethnic identity, since he defines himself as a British-born Australian-bred Greek. He completed the online questionnaire and gave me full access to his Profile page where I found a wealth of, sometimes confusing, information about his ethnicity. In the ‘Info’ section of his Profile, one can find that Mytilene is his hometown. Browsing through his page one may notice a few references to his Australian background, references to London as the place he currently lives in (e.g. ‘London is where I live, I drink, catch flights from and count the minutes of daily sunshine!!’) and plenty of mentions of Greece as the place of his origin. For example, his Profile moto\(^\text{47}\) gives detailed information on his ethnic roots: ‘Θημηθείτε Σμύρνης και την Μικράς Ασίας, 86 ετών. Οι πρόσφυγες ήταν οι πραγματικοί ήρωες. Αt the end of the day I am one of those refugees. Smyrna and Aibali are in my heart’\(^\text{48}\).

Although all his Friends can understand English, he phrased his moto in both languages and expressed different meanings in each language (cf. 4.4.5). He has lived in Greece for only one year; however, he maintains strong emotional ties with places in Greece, which he defines as ‘his roots’. Philip (P11) updates his status once a day and sometimes he would even post 2 or 3 SUs in the same day – usually when on holiday. His SUs often take the form of a narration, are written in sequences, and report on his personal stories, information about his current status feelings, situations he finds himself in, and experiences – as if he were keeping a diary. While his SUs sometimes reveal strong nationalistic feelings related to Greece, there are also cases in which he is being critical or expressing his disappointment about certain aspects of his Greek background. In an effort to comprise versions of his Greek identity with everyday lifestyle in London, he creatively points out to cultural differences drawn from his unique ‘in-between’ experience. As it will be shown in 4.4.3, his SUs are full of metaphors, mental images and emotional language with which he expresses his longing for short returns to Greece, e.g. ‘Is 6 weeks away from returning to the land of the rising

\(^{47}\) Just under the Profile photo, a FB user may add a quote or a phrase which represents him/her. This was introduced as ‘my moto’.

\(^{48}\) (‘Remember Smirai and MinorAsia, 86 years old. Refugees were the real heroes. At the end of the day I am one of those refugees. Smyrna and Aibali are in my heart’).
frappe and drinking himself silly in Psiry, Athens (wish I could go now)’ or ‘Until he returns to the land of periptera, tavli, hairy chests and donkey express’).

Antony is another British-born Greek who states that he is half-Greek and half-British (questionnaire results). His Profile is dominated by English content as he interacts with his British Friends (93% of all his Friends). Half of the Groups he joined referred to Greece and 30% of the content he shared is ethnospecific. He exercises his diasporic practice by participating in the Group ‘North London Greeks’ and attending events organized by the Group.

In the case of Nicholas (P15), a British-born Greek who travels very frequently back to Greece, and has also stayed there for short periods, his ethnic origin was mainly traced in his SUs, e.g. ‘always forgets how much he misses the land where civilization begun’ or ‘wants to thank everyone for your nameday wishes’. The main activity on his Profile is editing his status. When he travels to Athens, he updates his status with information regarding the different locations he visits and situations he finds himself in (e.g. Appendix 6: W3).

Theodoros (P19) has been living in London for more than 10 years. As a pilot, he travels all around the world. His SUs refer to a variety of places around the world, he informs his Friends about the locations he is currently in, and usually uploads photos related to places he visits. SUs such as Theodoros ‘is on his way home, Athens’ or ‘is expecting Friends to practise his Greek’ and ‘akouo ploutarxo kai exo kosmo’ imply his Greek background. Although he has only got 13 Greek Friends (out of 134), it is them who mainly contribute with comments on his Wall.

Argiris (P16) is a British-born Greek who owns a Greek restaurant in North London. He was raised in London by Greek parents and has visited Greece a few times. Although he also maintains a different FB Page for the promotion of his tavern, he often uploads events (e.g. live concerts taking place in the tavern) on his Profile page. His has uploaded a photo of a Greek tsolias (PH1) for his Profile photo (cf. 4.4.1). He has more than 1,500 Friends (88% Greeks) and it emerges that 66% of the content circulated on his Profile is ethnospecific. Also, 62% of the Groups he had joined were related to Greece (e.g. ‘London Greek radio’),

49 (=’I am listening to Ploutarxos while having visitors’)
‘Greek friends in London’, ‘Ἡ ελληνικὴ ἀλφάβητος δὲν εἶναι τυχαῖα’, ‘οταν οἱ ευρωπαῖοι ἐμαθαν νὰ γράφον οἱ ελληνες εἶχαν ἡδη χολιστερινη’, ‘Acropolis Museum – the Parthenon marbles’, ‘As Greek as it gets’). He also participated in these Groups (14% of his activities). In the majority of his SUs, he invites his FB Friends to his restaurant, but rarely communicates with them on his Wall.

All the cases presented above demonstrate that ethnicity is not a quality expressed as users fill in the blank box in the Profile’s Info section, but it penetrates all activity in the Profile and is projected in a number of practices which are closely related with offline practices (e.g. participation in diasporic events, travelling across borders, promoting a Greek restaurant, practising the Greek language, etc.). In addition, the cases of Philip and Stephen suggest that ethnic identification online can also be a product of self-designations and choices that suggest a discontinuity with the contexts within which they were produced. The section has shown that identity on FB is anchored according to both modernist and postmodernist accounts (cf. 1.5.1). In both cases, the participants are likely to express creativity through a range of practices which are described in the next section.

4.4.3 Creative and Alternative Strategies of Ethnic identification on the Profiles

While investigating the process of updating a Profile page with the interviewees, the concept of creativity came up several times. Most of the interviewees initially articulated their concerns that FB does not allow for their creativity to be expressed. Four participants feel that rather than being creative, they end up having Profiles which are all similar to one another and adopt each other’s communicational strategies and content (IN2, IN4, IN8, IN9). Perceiving creativity as the ability to produce work that is both novel, original, unexpected and appropriate (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999), the participants feel constrained from the software’s technical features which do not allow for great degrees of freedom and innovation. Reflecting these beliefs is Rena’s claim (IN4):

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50 (= ‘the Greek alphabet is not random’)
51 (= ‘when Europeans learned writing, Greeks already had cholesterol’)

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'I believe that I do not express myself on FB, I do not feel creative at all. Apart from the fact that I have created a FB group with categories and themes that I have chosen myself, I believe that FB is very limiting considering what you can do to be creative. One possible way to be creative is to write on someone’s Wall something funny … However, in general terms, I find FB very limiting … Now … if I think better … The only case that I felt kind of creative was when I was choosing my profile photo. That was a difficult decision for me, but I am finally very proud of my innovative decision to use a picture taken when I was still a baby’ (IN4).

In an innovative and playful way, Rena’s profile photo, instead of referring to a present state, depicts herself in the distant past. In 4.3.2, the Profile photos were treated as personal signatures with updated information about their author. The participants tended to upload photos to reflect their mood, the places they are in etc. These photos were all displaying conventional symbols of ethnicity; however, some of these symbols were deployed creatively.

For example, in his Profile photo (Appendix 4: PH1), Argiris instead of reproducing the original image of a typical tsolias he turns it into a cartoon, a graphic representation, a narrative form which works in a different manner than a photo. Rather than imitating traditional representations of tsolias, in this digital work, Argiris reuses the image in an active and transformative way. In this modern representational form, the image of tsolias is now detached from its original historic context and acquires a new meaning which can be interpreted in a variety of different ways (e.g. superficial, sarcastic, etc.). The use of a self-referential cartoon suggests the existence of a different discourse than that of a photo. Cartoon pictures are key narratives of contemporary visual culture. Humour, satire, exaggeration, irony and parody are the main elements of a cartoon which serves as a ‘metapicture’ (Mitchell, 1995). A metapicture destabilizes the authority of a stereotypical image as a resource for identity representation and allows for alternative readings.

In the same way that selecting the right Profile photo can be a creative and also constructive process, the act of creating a Group proved also to be an inventive task in which the participants invested time and effort (cf. 3.5.1). Interestingly, the participants in this study show a preference for Groups which suggest alternative ways of identification with Greek culture. Despite the fact that FB Groups which offered stereotypical and habitual ways of identification and belonging comprised the great majority of FB Groups
The participants showed a preference for Groups which suggest alternative ways of identification with Greek culture. Makis joined the Group ‘Half Greek, half English, what a combo’ and Panos became a member of ‘London Greek Radio LGR 103.3FM’. In addition, the participants have joined a number of Groups which expressed originality and a give fresh look on situations related with social and political life in Greece. These Groups were inspired either by current issues emerging in the country’s political and social life (e.g. ‘The marbles in London are Greek and must return home’), debates and current developments, or were created as counter discourses in response to Group activity taking place on FB52.

For example, at the time that Rena joined the Group ‘Would a Greek comply with the ban?’ (12,433 members) a recent policy decision to ban smoking in public places in Greece triggered the creation of 110 Groups. Smoking appears to be a hot subject for Greeks, as a large amount of the population are heavy smokers (e.g. ‘Greece: a smoking paradise’). Following the dialogue between Groups opposing the ban and others supporting it, there existed 42 names that supported the non-smoking law and 32 names that suggested discarding the smoking ban and continuing smoking53.

Debated issues related to Greek language have also caused intense Group activity. The most debated issue is the use of Greeklish (cf. 4.4.5.1). For example, Kostas joined the Group ‘Goustaro na grafo me greeklish’54. Groups about Greek language reflected an ongoing debate about the use of Greeklish. Sotiris and Soula had joined Groups related to the longstanding issues of the return of Parthenon marbles (which are now kept in the British Museum) in Greece: ‘No marbles no flame’ and ‘Demanding the return of Parthenon marbles to their rightful place’. There existed 107 FB Groups supporting this cause and their membership was as high as 73,403 members55. This demand was also phrased in relation to

52 The dialogical dynamics underlying the creation of FB Groups was best reflected in the case of Groups created to address the issue of Macedonia. The long standing unresolved dispute over the international name of the ancient region of Macedonia – which now belongs to a former Yugoslavia republic – has inspired over 385 Groups. The majority of Group names attempted to establish Greece’s territorial rights by stating that ‘Macedonia is Greece, Kosovo is Serbia’ and collect supporters, e.g. ‘I bet I can find 35,000,000 people who do not want FYROM renamed Macedonia’ (130,744 members). There was also a Facebook protest joined by 67,310 users. The existence of a FB network called ‘FYROM’ had prompted users reactions and resulted in the creation of the Group: ‘Greeks demand from the network of FYROM to use FYROM as a name and not Macedonia’. About 85,498 users had added the Group ‘Greek network Macedonia now: we join the network and press them’ while another Group was addressed to FB: ‘Thanking Facebook for calling Macedonia by its rightful name and not FYROM’.
53 e.g. ‘Let’s start smoking from the 1st of July’, ‘I will continue smoking even after 2010 in Greece wherever I like!’
54 (= I like writing in Greeklish)
55 There were 12 Groups with more than 2,000 members.
the forthcoming Olympic Games in London. Group names were either expressing a blackmail (e.g. ‘No marbles no flame’), or prompted their members to boycott the Olympic games in London\textsuperscript{56} and the British museum as a reaction to the British refusal to return the marbles to Greece. In all cases described above, Groups that the participants joined were created as a reaction to offline situations and ongoing events. In addition, the participants had joined Groups which invited for social action such as ‘Save Agia Sophia in Constanople’, ‘Stop anarchists that destroy people’s fortunes’ or ‘Stop taking our history’.

Active verbs such as ‘save’, ‘protect’, ‘protest’, ‘stop’, ‘help’, ‘delete’, ‘demand’ and ‘support’ appeared with high frequency across the sample of Group names (over 1000 Groups). These verbs were phrased in the present tense and in imperative form to prompt users to act with regard to a situation or issue, to support a cause, to call for protests against occurring issues, etc. To point to the possible directions of political and social action and protest related to Greek culture – as reflected in the sample of FB Group names – I identified the following broad themes: (a) Preservation of the environment and animals; (b) Everyday life and practices; (c) Political and historical issues: The main political issues concerned the return of the Parthenon marbles, the international dispute over the name of Macedonia/FYROM, friendship with Turks in Greece.

In addition, the participants had also joined Groups such as ‘Why young people leave Greece to stay abroad’, ‘pao kai go gia fagito meta apo xenikti ston after fourno tou thoma’\textsuperscript{57}, ‘The Mad Greek in Baker Street has better Greek food than in Greece’ and ‘τρώει και η δική μου οικογένεια μεσημεριανό μετά της 17.00’\textsuperscript{58}. In general, the participants were more likely to join Groups referring to emerging local or ethnic practices related to a number of recurring situations in their daily lives as well as wider sociopolitical issues concerning the UK and Greece (e.g. the Parthenon Marbles) rather than Groups which reproduced well established aspects of Greek culture. Groups for Greeks in London also offered an alternative way of identification for participants.

\textsuperscript{56} 11 Groups suggest solutions such as ‘Let’s change our marbles with the Olympic flame 2012’.
\textsuperscript{57} (= ‘I also visit Thoma’s bakery after a night out’)
\textsuperscript{58} (= ‘My family is also having lunch earlier than 17.00 in the afternoon’)

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Screen data showed that the participants also expressed originality when writing their SUs, a process according to which they creatively use the language and make spaces for the negotiation of meaning (cf. 4.4.5). Rather than being confined by the default question (which prompts them to fill the blank box with what they are doing right now), participants were using the feature in a variety of alternative and inventive ways which suit their needs and serve different communicational functions (cf. 3.4). Stephen notes:

‘I try to come up with something funny or interesting … to involve my friends on that … do not like to repeat myself or copy others … although I do that occasionally … it might take up to fifteen minutes before I decide what to write on my status … Most of the times it is a random thought …’ (IN6).

As stated in 4.4.1, writing a SU is often a time consuming task which aims to trigger comments and interaction between users. The majority of the SUs studied refer to the present tense as users fill in the blank box with information regarding their present status or experience (cf. 3.4). Findings in 3.4 also suggested that the content of the SU (e.g. mode of address) was not able to predict whether the SU would trigger dialogue. Various contextual parameters surrounding the creation of a SU were related to a SU’s ability to elicit comments. However, users invest time and effort in posting interesting SUs which will impress their Friends.

In his SUs, Philip (P18) uses the symbol of frappe59 in a playful and inventive way: ‘in need of a holiday from his holiday – back in Athens to enrol in a frappe making course’. Although Argiris (P16) also uses the word frappe frequently in his SUs (e.g. ‘Having a real greek frappe’) for Philip, the word acquires a range of different meanings and uses as he refers to it 23 times and situates it in a variety of contexts and stories creatively: ‘A long, long time ago, in a place, far, far away, our hero was up to using his jedi mind tricks again … only this time no one was paying attention except Princess Leah who agreed that a frappe at this time of the day is a good idea’.

In another case, Philip commented on a video he uploaded on his Wall: ‘Of all the frappe joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine … gamato play it again Sam!’ The video was an extract from a well recognizable scene taken from the American movie ‘Casablanca’ where the starring actor, Sam performs the popular lines ‘of all the bars in the

59 A variety of iced coffee
world she walks into mine’. Philip has adapted this famous phrase by replacing the word ‘coffee’ with frappe, adding a humoristic and entertaining tone. In this way, he takes a global text and makes it local, thus modifying it to make it available for local readings. The text is now being removed from its indigenous cultural context, and takes on meanings that are significantly divergent from its original meaning. For some scholars, (Lipsitz, 1998; Rodriguez, 2006) cultural appropriation implies a strategy of anti-essentialism, thus the calculated use of a cultural form to define a minority culture and a strategy of resistance to a dominant culture by a marginalized one (Marcus, 1997). For others, cultural appropriation is a natural effect of increased cultural segmentation in a heterogeneous society and implies a strategy which promotes assimilation of the immigrant’s cultures into a homogenous ‘melting pot’ (Rogin, 1998).

In several examples, participants were also engaging with cultural difference in a creative way. The construction of difference has been a substantial part of identity politics (cf. 1.4.1), as identification is always a binary process: it means both identification with something and demarcation from or exclusion of something else (Mátyus, 2008). In her SU, Rena (P4) reproduced the well-recognized binary between London rain and Greek sunshine60, and Argiris (P16) employed oppositional strategies to distinguish between ‘us’ and ‘them’ where ‘us’ referred to Greek diaspora in London and ‘them’ referred to Greeks living Greece61. For Philip, cultural difference is situated in his daily practices: ‘what I hate most about London aside from the bad weather and the girls that make me cook is not being able to watch my favourite series’. On another occasion he posted: ‘Made the worst mistake of my life (worse than dating psychotic Greek girls) went to an English hairdresser … and the result is disastrous, I just never learn …’. In these examples, the ‘other’ is represented as an English hairdresser who destroyed his hairstyle, girls in London who make him cook, the weather in London, or Greek psychotic girls. Thus, for Philip pointing to cultural differences does not always imply a subtle identification with Greek ethnicity, but rather suggests a practice according to which he selects particular aspects of his Greek and British cultural frames of reference to display on his SUs. However, in Philip’s Profile one can find also find indications of banal nationalism and a variety of stereotypical symbols related to Greek

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60 e.g. ‘Is singing in the Londonian rain (and swearing for not being where she should be on August day: lying on the beach’.

61 e.g. ‘Xronia polla to all who celebrate today wishing them all a good day, those in Greece that are roasting lamb on the spit think of us who can’t’. 

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ethnicity (cf. 4.3.1). A closer investigation on the way that the participants talk about their ethnic status in their SUs has produced a list of resources which are the focus of the next section.

4.4.4 Contextualizing Ethnicity: Emerging Themes and Issues in the SUs

Thematic analysis of the ethnospecific content identified in the participants’ SUs produced a list of frames and points from which the participants engage with Greek ethnicity and aspects of their lives in London. Table 4 describes the main thematic categories in which ethnospecific SUs were grouped.

**Table 4. Ethnospecific Status Updates: Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mobility and Travelling across Borders | ‘Is getting ready for his trip in Athens for 5 days’ (SU84)  
‘Is on the ferry to Athens … 12 hours to go!!’ (SU93)  
‘Is back in London with a nasty cold’ (SU102)  
‘Has just finished redrafting and is now ready to spend a couple of weeks in Athens’ (SU161)  
‘Is in Athens. Using my English number for now’  
‘Will be in Greece next week dogding molotovs and drinking coctails’ (SU152)  
‘Is heading to heathrow. Big bird is awaiting on other side to pick me up and drop me over Greece somewhere … Icarus here I come …’ (SU95)  
‘Is just 6 sleeps (not including obligatory naps) away from a return to Athens, frappe, pollution which my lungs really crave, a wedding, donkeys kai trela re gamato’ (SU4)  
‘Just one week away from sitting on a beach doing nothing but ordering frappe and wondering why I can’t remember the night before, Greece here we come!’ (SU38)  
‘… should have been landing in athens in 5 minutes … well that shot to sit!! +Imaoo !!!’ (SU119)  
‘I cant wait till Friday to flight to Athens for a short break’                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 34%         |
|                           | (71 of 211)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |             |
| Experiences in Greece | ‘Just hours left: Myconos’ (SU55)  
‘Is back to reality in London and in the middle of a cyclone’ (SU85)  
‘Is enjoying the 35 degree heat in the ancient land of Athens bring on Friday as its gonna hit 39’ (SU113) |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       | ‘A combination of no sleep, frappe, donkey spotting, beautiful Greek women who think I’m gay and watching the boys drink Heineken for Breakfast is catching up with me. Now to work out what island to visit tomorrow.  
‘Is cursing at the greek vodka and tequila shots … how can it be to feel drunk after two days!!! Athens is a forbidden destination for my next trip’.  
‘Is at the acropolis and marvelling at what his ancestors achieved’ (SU109)  
‘Definitely knows he is in Athens. Green man comes on for pedestrians to supposedly allow them to cross the road in safety but low and behold the Athenian drivers take that as a cue for them to also carry on driving … next step casualty’ (SU110)  
‘I am back in London but I left in Athens … a gift from God’ (SU73)  
‘Nissi beach was banging … no comment lol’(SU43) |
| Football              | ‘Jumpions of the euro 2009, jumpions of Greece 2009 Greek cup winners 2009! Triple crown … the show must and will go on’ (SU59)  
‘Is proud to be Panathinaikos fan … 5th European Cup in Basketball … 5th Star on the chest!!!! Respect Europe to the Champions’ (SU78)  
‘Is gunning for everton just for Nick Liagos, he has been waiting for this for his whole life! :)' (SU154) |
| Greek History         | ‘Tuesday, May 29, 1453: to the immortal Emperor and all the heroes (both sides))! (SU16)  
‘Greece Athens at the acropolis was the school of ROME!!! the god Mars!!!’ (SU202) |
| Sociopolitical Issues in Greece | ‘Everybody’s wealth is taxed even if you don’t have much. The church has plenty It should be taxed as it profits |

**6%** (12 of 211)

**9%** (18 of 211)

**2%** (4 of 211)

**4%** (8 of 211)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience of Locations and Events in London</th>
<th>The Weather in London</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Is off’ to Soho Theatre for a comedy … Lets have a bit of laugh :)’ (SU89)</td>
<td>‘Is singing in the Londonian rain (and swearing for not being where she should be on August day: lying on the beach)’ (SU157)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Had a great time in Nicos Vertis Concert in London last night!!!!!’ (SU87)</td>
<td>‘Thinks a. london has crap weather b. can’t understand why he ever brought summer clothes with him c. hates wearing jumpers everyday d. its fucking cold e. all of the above!’ (SU46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Is at the British museum’ (SU104)</td>
<td>‘Londres in snow’ (SU67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Had fantastic time in Southbank. Thank you guys’ (SU106)</td>
<td>‘Maritime Greenwich campus with snow!’ (SU131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Is in Notting Hill carnival, having fun in the sun with good company’ (SU122)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘London bus slogan : ‘there is probably no God now stop worrying and enjoy your life’ (SU125)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Sunday Bank Holiday Food and Coctail Party … gardens … I decided to organize it’ (SU166)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘London Coffee time…’ (SU71)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Just get me out of canary wharf !!’ (SU68)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘London is where I live, I drink, catch flights from and count the minutes of daily sunshine!!’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘This is me dancing to a zembekiko at my old school dinner and dance on Sunday 14th June 2009’</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data suggests that the most common way in which the participants refer to Greece is related to their travelling between Greece and UK for short trips or holidays. Stella (P27) mainly

\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{62}}\]  \text{\textquoteleft Everybody\textquoteright}s wealth is taxed even if you don\textquoteleft t have much. The church has plenty It should be taxed as it profits from this wealth. Tax for the church legacy\textquoteright)
edits her status when she wants to let other people know where she is: ‘in Greece almost’ or ‘back in big island but still using the Greek phone’. Almost 34% of the SU’s are indicative of the participants’ mobility between Greece and London. They announce the places they are in, exhibit details regarding their trips back to Greece, express their enthusiasm and count the minutes for their occasional ‘return’ to their homeland. Using a variety of textual structures, the participants announce their travelling plans (e.g. ‘Is leaving to Greece in 16 hours’, ‘is off to Greece till Sunday evening ... to vote!’), ‘Is back in Mytilene’, ‘... Is at Athens airport killing time, its 23 c’, ‘Should have been landing in Athens’, ‘Getting ready for my holidays in Lesbos’, ‘Back to London’, ‘In Greece almost’, ‘Is heading to Heathrow. Big bird is awaiting on other side to pick me up and drop me over Greece somewhere … Icarus here I come …’). In many cases, SU’s reveal the participants’ eager and enthusiasm for their travelling: ‘Just one week away from sitting on a beach doing nothing but ordering frappe and wondering why I can’t remember the night before, Greece here we come!’ ‘I can’t wait till Friday to flight to Athens for a short break’, ‘Is just 6 sleeps (not including obligatory naps) away from a return to Athens, frappe, pollution which my lungs really crave, a wedding, donkeys kai trella re gamato’, ‘Just hours left: Myconos’). For Rena (IN4), updating her status with details of her travelling is a practical necessity: ‘every time that I make a trip back in Greece I would post a status update so that others know where I am. This is the kind of information that I prefer to reveal on Facebook since others might be searching for me’ (IN4).

British-born Greeks were also likely to report on bits of their ‘unusual’ experiences when travelling in Greece: Ntinos (P24) writes ‘definitely knows he is in Athens. Green man comes on for pedestrians to supposedly allow them to cross the road in safety but low and behold the Athenian drivers take that as a cue for them to also carry on driving … next step casualty’ Ntinos’s lively story pointed out to cultural differences viewed from a humoristic angle. Philip (P8) also used his SU to tell funny stories about his holiday in Greece: e.g. ‘What’s that you want zaxarini (sugarine) in your Frappe?!’ The waiter looks at me in disgust and says ‘but this is not a real Frappe (said in a very Greek accent)’. When on holiday, he regularly updates his status (sometimes twice a day) and posts up-to-date details of his experience to his international Friends, e.g. ‘Is now on Greek island number 38 and let me tell you they are all different except for the fact that girls still refuse to take my phone
The next day he posted: ‘Was ecstatic to find goats and just as pleased when he discovered he forgot his bank card on another island’.

The impressive amount of SUs concerning the participants’ travelling between Greece and London suggests the existence of a transnational population with high mobility. There is a continuous flow of information, human and social capital, physical movement between the two countries – the country of origin, Greece, and the county of destination, the UK. Under these conditions of constant border crossing, both cultures constitute the participants’ ‘lived’ spaces. The place of origin, rather than being ‘imagined’ (cf. 1.4..3) is actually ‘lived’ and personal experiences of the place are being transmitted as real time reports. For the population under study, ‘home’, rather than being a distant and mythical place, is constructed through both real and virtual experiences (retellings) and practices as they interfere with a new cultural frame of reference: the British. Section 6.4 further discusses the consequences of the participants’ mobility across borders and FB use for theorizations of home and ethnic belonging.

The great majority of the SUs under study concern the participants’ daily lives at the micro level: expressing feelings\(^{63}\), addressing practical questions\(^{64}\) reporting on humoristic incidences, making announcements\(^{65}\), sending wishes\(^{66}\) quoting phrases and Greek lyrics. 9 \% of the SUs referred to football games\(^{67}\): According to Billig (1995), national football teams and global sporting events are an integral part of everyday routines through which the ‘nation’ is reproduced (cf. 1.5.3). Drinking frappe\(^{68}\), cooking Greek food\(^{69}\), learning Greek language\(^{70}\), visiting the pub\(^{71}\), dressing up as Greek gods\(^{72}\), listening to Greek music, dancing

\(^{63}\) e.g. ‘Thelw napetajw twra’ (= I want to fly now’)
\(^{64}\) e.g. ‘Why am I the only Greek supporting Hammas’?, ‘Any Greek know what the word MALAKA actually means???... I’m getting confused!!!
\(^{65}\) e.g. ‘Open again, greek food and coffee’
\(^{66}\) e.g. ‘Xronia polla to all Helleni and constantinos may you all have a great day’
\(^{67}\) e.g. ‘Vamos ala Ganar…Panathinaikos’, ‘Is proud to be Panathinaikos fan …5\(^{th}\) European Cup in Basketball …5\(^{th}\) Star on the chest!!!!!! Respect Europe to the Champions :)), ‘Is gunning for everton just for Nick Xenos, he has been waiting for this for his whole life’ :)
\(^{68}\) e.g. ‘Cooling off with a nice Greek coffee’
\(^{69}\) e.g. ‘Acknowledges he is the worst cook in London but at least I haven’t poisoned anyone in months and I am now willing to start using ingredients that do not include the term ‘made in Greece re’ on the packet’
\(^{70}\) e.g. ‘Is expecting friends to practise his Greek’
\(^{71}\) e.g. ‘Back from the pub and watching Rambo’
\(^{72}\) e.g. ‘Has dressed up as a Greek god tonight! I’ll go as Hades or maybe I’ll just go as myself!’

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Greek dances\textsuperscript{73} and travelling to Greece to vote\textsuperscript{74} are some of the participants’ practices as revealed in their SUs.

Greek history was a less common theme (4\%). Also, participants were not likely to publish SUs with references to events taking place in the sociopolitical sphere of Greece. During the period under study, major sociopolitical events with international appeal occurred in Greece. Although national presidential elections created lively discussions among Greek FB users who live in Greece (observations emerging from my personal Profile page), it appears that for the participants, these were of little importance. There were only two SUs that referred to Greek elections\textsuperscript{75}. To express his indifference towards politics, Philip (P11) inserted in the Profile section asking about his political views: ‘free frappe, more public holidays, more 007 films, free xaplostres, bring the sun to London party’.

Rena (P4), Philip (P11) and Fotis (P18) were likely to engage in a critical way with politics in Greece, e.g. Philip ‘Thinks that both Greek political parties are crap, crap, crap crap, crap, corrupt, full of nepotism and neglect the environment. They should all be tossed out and a council of ephors (comprising women for a change and young people) should rule or simply bring back Solon!’. Rena expresses the view that Greek politicians are not effective and Fotis believes that the Greek Church should be taxed as well. In December 2009, violent and mass demonstrations in Athens were still an issue high on the media agenda; however, there was only one post referring to these events (cf. 4.4.5). Fotis (P18) has been living and working more than ten years in London and occasionally he engages with Greek political life in his updates: ‘Everybody’s wealth is taxed even if you don’t have much. The church has plenty. It should be taxed as it profits from this wealth’. This SU was posted during a scandal in which the Greek Church was involved. Although the scandal dominated the Greek media for more than 3 months, this was the only reference in the corpus of SUs. There was a lack of posts regarding social or political life in UK among the sample.

\textsuperscript{73} e.g. ‘This is me dancing to a zembekiko at my old school dinner and dance on Sunday’
\textsuperscript{74} e.g. ‘Is off to Greece till Sunday evening … to vote …’
\textsuperscript{75} A few days before the elections Stella writes in her status: ‘… and I quote: Σας παρακαλούμε να παρεσρεθείετε στο παραπάνω εκλογικό τμήμα μια ώρα πριν την αναλήψη του Ηλίου……’ (= ‘and I quote: ‘Please appear in the above election centre one hour before the sun rises’). The phrase she quotes in Greek characters has been traditionally a part of the ritual of the elections.
It has been demonstrated (cf. 4.2) that the great majority of ethnospecific content found on the Profiles referred to Greek ethnicity (82%). Only 18% of the corpus of ethnospecific SUs was found to be referring to UK culture (ethnospecific content related to the UK). In this category, the majority of the SUs also pointed to the participants’ mobility between Greece and London. Participants were announcing their return to London expressing in certain cases their discontent. Also, participants were referring to places they visited, events they organized or attended. The weather in London was also a common topic (4% of the SUs).

Although the participants were not likely to make any comments related to social or political life in the UK, there were a few SUs commenting on everyday experiences of life in London: such as moving houses, visiting a concert or a museum, using the services of a telecommunications company, or commenting on their daily routes to work.

### 4.4.5 Language Choice on the Profiles

This section focuses on the participants’ language choice when on FB. Participants are likely to use both their mother tongue (e.g. Greek) and the language spoken in the host country (English). Stephen (IN6) and Grigoris (IN8), both British-born Greeks, mostly use English in their daily communications and they seldom speak Greek. All other interviewees use the

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76 e.g. ‘Back to London…Back to basics’, ‘Really appreciates the entire cast and crew who made the greek summer so brilliant and now its time to return to the reality that is, London. The tears stream down my face – actually that could be sweat as I forgot to pay for my train ticket and now the inspector is chasing me’, ‘In London and back to work’, ‘I am back in London but I left a gift from God’, ‘is back to reality in London and to the middle of a cyclone’, ‘is back in London with a nasty cold’, ‘back in the big island but using the Greek phone’.

77 e.g. ‘Is leaving Greece what a great experience this was’, ‘I am back in London but I left everything in Athens’, ‘I really enjoy life in Athens … dont want to go back in London ;);)’.

78 e.g. ‘Is off to Soho Theatre for a comedy … Lets have a bit of laugh ;);)’, ‘Thalassa white party ‘Had a great time in Nikos Vertis Concert in London last night!!!!’, ‘In Notting Hill carnival, having fun in the sun with good company’, ‘Sunday Bank Holiday Food and Cocktail Party … gardens … I decided to organize it’, ‘The White rose movement will be playing at the islighton academy on the 6th of June. I have 2 X SE guestlists spaces but cant go to see them. Who wants to go? Give me a call or let me know here …’.

79 e.g. ‘Londres in snow’ ‘loves the snow in London today’ ‘is singing in the Londonian rain (and swearing for not being where she should be on August day: lying on the beach)’, ‘Thinks a. London has crap weather b. can’t understand why he ever brought summer clothes with him c. hates wearing jumpers everyday d. it’s fucking cold e. all of the above!’, ‘Got the most of London’s today’s sunshine driving around topless and he missed the dream team. For coffee. Shit’.

80 e.g. ‘Interesting fact – just about everyone I know in my neighbourhood is moving out and all my London friends live on the other side of town. Could it be the Brut 33 I wonder … time to change colognes’.

81 e.g. ‘Had fab time at the museum and photographing London by night’, ‘These are some photographs taken during the 6thFluer Distribution outside the British museum’.

82 e.g. ‘Is hoping for the demise of Virgin Media’, ‘Is still without tv internet and phone, Thank you Virgin media, 5 days and counting’.

83 e.g. ‘London bus slogan: ‘there is probably no God now stop worrying and enjoy your life’.
Greek language as the main language in their daily interactions (except when at work\(^{44}\)). However, when they type on their Profile pages, different patterns emerge.

**Figure 11. Language Choice on the Profiles: Questionnaire Data**

The great majority of the questionnaire respondents state they use both English and Greek on equal terms when on FB (Figure 11). Although the participants claimed to be speaking Greek in their daily communications, on FB they chose to type their SUs also in English, since English is a ‘lingua franca’, an international code for communication, a way to be understood by all of their Friends (IN1, IN7, IN3, IN9). Examining participants’ SUs (Appendix 5), it emerges that only 17% of them are written in Greek. While the great majority of the SUs examined are written in English (83%), questionnaire respondents’ stated to be equally using Greek and English language on FB (Figure 11). Interviewees explained that they mainly use English to write a SU, while when typing Wall posts or making comments the language they use depends on the situation (IN1, IN2, IN3, IN9, IN10). These claims were also confirmed by screen observations.

\(^{44}\) IN1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9
4.4.5.1 The Use of Greeklish

Almost all Greek content found on the Profiles was typed in Greeklish. The term ‘Greeklish’ is employed to denote the transliteration of Greek in Latin characters. In computer-mediated environments, ASCII code facilitates the use of languages based on the Roman alphabet and precludes the use of non-Roman alphabetical characters when composing digital texts online (Danet, 2000). Greeklish was the result of such a technological constraint. ‘Online Romanization’ (Danet & Herring, 2007: 10), the process of transliterating native scripts into Roman script, occurs in various linguistic contexts such as Arabic and Greek (Paolillo, 1996; Androutsopoulos, 2000; Palfreyman & Khalil, 2003; Tseliga, 2007; Spiolioti, 2009). The main feature of Greeklish is ‘spelling variation regarding the transliteration of Greek characters with Roman equivalents; a “phonetic system” of transliterating orients to the acoustic/sound quality of the original Greek letters’ (Spilioti, 2009: 396). Androutsopoulos (2009) coins the term computer-mediated digraphia to refer to the simultaneous use of both the native Greek and the Latin script in computer-mediated interaction.

In sociolinguistic research, the use of Greeklish in computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been treated as a specific discursive phenomenon (Georgakopoulou, 1997b; Androutsopoulos, 2000; Tseliga, 2002), a social practice by which individuals enact local identities at a global level. Since ‘writing is not simply a means of recording the spoken word, but is also a cultural symbol’ (Koutsogiannis & Mitsikopoulou, 2003: 3), research has approached the use of Greeklish as a wider sociocultural phenomenon and points to discourses emerging from the clash between technology use and local culture (Androutsopoulos, 2006: 428-430). Koutsogiannis & Mitsikopoulou (2003) investigate these discourses as they emerge in media texts and find that discussion in media and in the academic realm treat the intrusion of Latin alphabet into Greek language as a threat to the integrity of the Greek language, leading to the deterioration of language standards and a threat to national identity. Greeklish as a non-standard language variety does not reproduce Greek orthography closely, so texts are full of bad spelling, abbreviations, poor grammar and are less aesthetically pleasing. Thurlow (2006) characterizes these views as ‘moral panics’ regarding new literacy practices, a result of exaggerating the newness of what young people

85 A non-Greek speaker/reader can guess this by this example: "γιοσζοσλνηρινηδις" would be the way to write "you should read this " in English but utilizing the Greek alphabet.
do and write online. Also, there is a growing academic work which treats Greeklish as a
global practice and a practice of emergent standardization from below (e.g.
Androutsopoulos, 2009).

The debate surrounding the use of Greeklish is well reflected in the names of FB Groups
created to engage with the issue. At the time of the study, there were more than 49 FB
Groups opposing the use of Greeklish. For example, Groups such as ‘γράφετε ελληνικά γιατί
με τα greeklish θα ξεχάσουμε και αυτά που έχουμε’86, ‘No Greeklish’, ‘Σταματήστε να
γράφετε greeklish στο ελληνικό facebook – Αντίδραση τόρα’87, ‘Να γράψουμε επιτέλους τη
γλώσσα μας και όχι greeklish’88 consist of more than 5,000 members in total. There were
also 19 FB Groups which supported the use of Greeklish such as ‘goustaro na grafo me
greeklish’89, ‘γράψω και γώ με greeklish’90, or ‘Greeklish λέξεις που δημιουργούν οι νέοι’91.
Although FB Groups which oppose the use of Greeklish argue that Greeklish is a danger for
Greek language, Group names that support Greeklish do not present any other argument
apart from the fact that is a creative type of language.

Screen observations suggested that almost all Greek content on the participants’ Profiles was
typed in Greeklish. These results are in line with Androutsopoulos’ findings (2000: 85)
according to which email users continue to write their messages in Greeklish, although
technology now offers the option to use Greek characters instead. According to screen
observations, there was only a very small amount of Group names and applications (e.g.
quizzes) in Greek characters. Only three SUs were written in the Greek alphabet92. These
were written by different participants (e.g. Stella, Rena and Panos) who changed between
English and Greek when updating their Status.

All the participants’ names appeared in Greeklish. Interviewees were well aware of the fact
that FB names tend to appear in Greeklish. Rena was surprised to notice that Friends of hers
who lived abroad had switched their Profile names from Latin to Greek characters. Knowing

86 (=’Write in Greek because greeklish will make us forget our language’).
87 (=’stop typing in greeklish in Greek facebook – resistance now’)
88 (=’we should write in our language and not in greeklish’)
89 (=’I like to write in greeklish’)
90 (=’I also write in greeklish’)
91 (=’greeklish words created by young people’)
92 e.g. Συμπεριλαμβάνονται οι Νεροποντή, το καινούργιο εκπληκτικό cd του Αλκίνοου’ (=’without any reservation she recommends
Neroponti, the new cd of Alkinoos’)

176
these individuals, she interprets it as a way for them to highlight their ethnicity rather than an obsession with Greek language and its preservation. As Harrison (2000) stresses, naming practices provide an important window to the construction of ethnic identities and they may also serve as indicators of macro-forces in the sociocultural realm. In this case, users’ choice to type their name in Greeklish serves as an affirmation of ethnic identity, influences and reflects the emerging ethnolinguistic identity.

Alexandra (IN7) interprets the situation from a different angle. She finds that people who phrase their FB name in the Greek alphabet are those who ‘want to be viewed as different and stand out from others or they might want to oppose the widespread use of Greeklish’. Similarly to what Rena believes, Alexandra considers that writing the name in Greek characters is an unconventional and unusual practice which deviates from the accepted and might also have ideological functions reflecting a set of beliefs and feelings about the threat that Greeklish poses to the Greek alphabet.

When interviewees were asked why they chose to write in Greeklish on FB, they displayed a number of different reasons. Alexandra thinks that if she wrote in the Greek alphabet, it ‘would look like a fly in the milk. Other people would regard me as weirdo’. Writing in Greek characters is presented as an obsolete and outdated practice whereas typing in Greeklish is considered as an established practice, modern and widely accepted. While Alexandra chooses Greeklish so as not to spoil her image, Mina prefers writing in Greeklish for practical reasons: ‘I use the kind of informal language that I use when talking on the phone … you know friendly things … some words that do not exist in proper Greek’ (IN5).

According to Mina, typing in Greeklish offers convenience, makes her feel less restricted by language conventions and free to express herself as if in her oral communications. FB is depicted as a space where dialogue takes the form of informal, natural talk in a way that resembles conversations over the phone (also cf.3.4). Kostas also mentions that he has practical reasons for typing in Greeklish: ‘I would better use Greeklish and say whatever I want to say, add more characters in the words, give emphasis on things’ (IN1). Greeklish is regarded as a language type that allows more freedom, openness and directness in the expression since the author does not have to think about orthography, can intervene and alter
the form (e.g. add more letters in the words to express extra meaning) in a way that resembles everyday talk.

She finds that she can use new words which cannot be articulated when using the Greek alphabet and can be creative with language. Indeed, it was observed that the participants would use some words which are established on FB – jargon – and could only be phrased in Latin characters. Looking at Mina’s Profile page, I could single out some words for which there was no equivalent in Greek, but which were commonly used online (e.g. ‘heyyyy’, ‘weirdo’). She would also mix English and Greek words or Greek and French (e.g. ‘mon ami’). In general, interviewees argue that they write in Greeklish because it is easier to express themselves, it is quicker and saves them time while allowing for innovation, inventiveness and freedom from conventional language (IN1, IN4, IN5, IN6). The corpus of SUs showed that SUs phrased in Greeklish in many occasions display non-standard words and phrases, indecent language, exclamations and spontaneous language (e.g. OeOE OEprotathlimames to Pale\(^93\)). It was interesting to observe the creative ways in which the participants would mix English and Greeklish in their SUs (e.g. Einai kaneis gia national exhibition sto national theatre simera I aurio?\(^94\)) or they switched between the languages. The next section provides an insight into this process.

### 4.4.5.2 Language Choice and Code Switching Practices

Questionnaire results suggested that students were more likely to use Greek on FB than professionals. Students have an average of 54% Greek Friends while professionals have an average of 35% Greek Friends on their Profiles (screen data). However, the choice of language in the Profiles was not found to be dependent on the practicalities of addressing an ethnic audience. For example, 12 of the participants, despite having more than 80% Greek Friends in their Profiles, claimed to be using both Greek and English on equal terms (Figure 12). Figure 12 presents questionnaire data related to the number of Greek Friends that the participants state they have and data related to the language they state they use when on FB.

\(^93\) (= ‘OeOE OEchampioniship…’)

\(^94\) (=anybody wants to visit the national exhibition today or tomorrow?)
While some participants used English language with consistency when editing their SUs (P11, P15, P18, P14, P20, P24, P29), the majority switched between English and Greek. Those who mainly use English when typing their SUs are mostly professionals who have been living in London for more than 10 years. Interview evidence suggests that apart from each participant’s distinct diasporic experience, there are additional parameters that may influence language choice online, such as situational factors. As shown in 3.4 contextual factors specific for each Profile page play a major role in defining the interactional dimension of a Profile page – rather than the content itself. However, when it comes to language, the content/meaning of the SU and the target audience in which the SU is addressed are both determinants of the language chosen.

Interviewees explained why they write in Greek. Some of them observe that words come more easily in Greek (IN4, IN1, IN10), while others claim that most of their Friends are Greek and so they write in Greek (IN2, IN9, IN10, IN7).

Rena (IN4) writes in the Greek language to express personal issues or share experiences with Greek Friends so that others do not understand. By using the Greek language, Rena wants to exclude her non-Greek Friends from the conversation, since the content of her post may not be relevant to them. Maria (IN3) will also think about who she wants to address before typing a SU. Addressivity is a basic concept in communication since the act of communication has an intended recipient. According to Bakhtin, every word is directed...
toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates (Bakhtin, 1981: 280). By understanding the SUs as utterances whose style, mode and context is defined by addressivity, it becomes possible to see in each ‘the influence of the anticipated response’ (Bakhtin, 1986: 99). For example, Rena (IN4) realizes that articulating specific content in Greek automatically excludes her international Friends from the conversation. When she decided to post in English and express her views on a political event of that time (W4), she was surprised to receive comments coming from her British Friends who could now be involved in the online conversation. This example shows that the content and theme of the message also influences its addressivity and language choice.

The examination of the corpus of SUs (Appendix 5) provides information regarding the contexts in which the Greek language is used. There were particular subjects which kept coming up in Greek, such as football issues95, and phrases with culturally specific meaning and references such as lyrics, famous quotes, idioms and slogans96. SUs in English were more likely to refer to everyday-life situations, comment on the weather97 or broader social and political issues98.

Nikos (IN2) claims ‘I mainly use Greeklish ... Although it depends ... When the phrase seems better in English ... or it suits to be expressed in English ...’. For Nikos, it is the meaning that he wants to express in his SU that affects the language in which he will phrase it. While logged onto his Profile, he discussed that he posted the SU ‘epistrofi stin kathimerinotita’99 because it was not easy for him to transfer the exact meaning of this phrase in English. When asked why he chose to write the SU ‘worst day ever …’ in English and not in Greek, he explained that he typed in English not only because he wanted his British colleagues to understand it, but also because the English phrase was shorter than its Greek equivalent (=η χειρότερη μέρα που είχα ποτέ).

95 e.g. ‘etsi kernaei i leoforos’ (=‘this is how the highway celebrates’)
96 e.g. ‘Min me xipnas apo ta exi’, ‘Eimai full eroiteumenos gia tin parti sou’, ‘Se opoioin areosoume gia tous allous den tha mporesoume’, ‘Auto pou leme xazo paidi xara gemato’
97 e.g. ‘is enjoying the 35 degree heat in the ancient land of Athens bring on Friday as its gonna hit 39’, ‘Loves the snow in London today’. Got the most of London’s today’s sunshine driving around topless and he missed the dream team. For coffee. Shit.
98 e.g. ‘London bus slogan: there is probably no God now stop worrying and enjoy your life’, ‘GAY PROTEST IN LONDON today!!! full of fun, imagination and clever affirmations! Well done guys!!!’, ‘34 European countries do not include homosexuality in their workplace forms= homophobia= shame!!!’.
99 (= back to everyday life)
Alexandra’s (IN7) reason for typing in Greek has to do with her concern of being consistent with previous versions of her linguistic identity. She admits that ‘the majority of my friends are living back in Greece … I would not like them to think that I have changed my spoken language … They will think that I am being snobbish’ (IN7). Alexandra believes that changing her linguistic behaviour would be perceived as an attempt to demonstrate Britishness and deny her Greek background. Concerns regarding how her Friends would characterize her for not displaying consistency with her offline linguistic behaviour, explain why she types in Greek. Interestingly, when Anna took a quiz in English (P25), one of her Friends posted her a comment asking for the Greek translation of the result (although she could understand English).

Another example which demonstrates the effect of a Profile’s audience is the case in which Anna’s (P25) Friend reacted when she took a quiz in English and posted her a comment asking for the Greek translation of the questionnaire result. Although the number of Greek FB Friends would not determine whether a participant would write in Greek or English, the user’s perception of Friends’ expectations was found to be shaping language choice on FB.

Data displayed above suggests that there are inconsistencies between the participants’ linguistic identities and linguistic attitudes online. Contextual parameters surrounding the participants’ SUs, such as addressivity as well as the SU’s theme, were likely to influence language choice on the Profile pages. Participants were also selectively foreground and background elements of their linguistic and ethnic identities through code switching practices.

Code switching refers to the practice according to which a speaker uses more than one language or linguistic system (Haugen, 1953). Code switching has been studied extensively among sociolinguists (Gumperz, 1982; Clyne, 1991; Auer, 1995; Heller & Carol 1996; Muysken, 2000) and its definition was later extended to include instances of ‘alternate use of two different writing systems in a discourse’ (Myers-Scotton, 1998). While code switching in conversation ‘is considered to be rapid, largely unconscious, and used for communicative effect’, code switching in written texts is ‘a conscious choice since it entails a physical switch when changing the typing systems’ (Huang, 2011). However, this is not the case in the study’s data since participants mostly write in Latin script, in Greeklish (cf. 4.4.5.1).
study of language choice and code switching in written interaction in CMC – email, chat, discussion boards – draws on interactional sociolinguistics and has provided a resource for the study of identity in bilingual communities (Georgakopoulou, 1997b; Paolillo, 2001; Androutsopoulos, 2006; Hinrichs, 2006).

Code switching can be used as an important index of ethnic affiliation in socialization practices. Since ‘ethnicity cannot be understood if it is abstracted from concrete social practices’ (De Fina, 2007: 1), analysis of code switching strategies provide a resource for the examination of the process of identity construction. In this section, I present some examples of how the participants switch between Greek and English language when typing online. However, I recognize that code switching analysis has multiple dimensions and functions and an inclusive account of the participants’ code switching practices is beyond the analytical scope of this study. As Androutsopoulos notes ‘While a general tendency of bilingual communities to prefer one language over another with respect to particular situational factors may hold true, this relationship entails ambiguities and complexities, which only a sequential examination of language alternation in interaction can illuminate’ (Androutsopoulos, 2007: 341).

In the frame of this study, a sequential analysis of code switching practices would require different and additional kinds of data obtained. For this reason, I identify cases in which the participants mix Greek and English in their SUs. For example, Philip (P11), a bilingual British-born Greek typed: ‘sikoseto to *meno, den mporo, den mporo den mporo na perimeno – ok I know wrong victory song but it’s better than what Sakis Rouvas will be singing in Eurovision (go Azerbaijan)’\textsuperscript{100}. He typed the lyrics of a famous Greek song in Greeklish and then he switched to English to express an opinion. In another example, he switches from English to Greek: ‘Tuesday, May 29, 1453: to the immortal Emperor and all the heroes (both sides)! To the immortal Emperor and all the heroes of the great siege you will live for ever Byzantium’\textsuperscript{101}. While both parts of the SU have similar meaning, it appears that the phrase ‘both sides’ is omitted in the Greek version and also the part expressed in Greek is emotionally loaded. He also mixes Greek words in his SUs, e.g. ‘Our

\textsuperscript{100} Philip types the lyrics of a popular victory song created for euro 2004.

\textsuperscript{101} (= ‘Tuesday, May 29, 1453: to the immortal Emperor and all the heroes (both sides)! To the immortal Emperor and all the heroes of the great siege you will live for ever Byzantium’).
hero is spending his weekend thinking of ways to get to Greece sooner … otherwise it’s just a few more weeks until he returns to the land of ‘periptera’102, ‘tavli’103, ‘hairy chests’ and ‘donkey express’. ‘Periptera’ and ‘Tavli’ are only some of the Greek words that he consistently chooses to type in Greek while composing his SUs (cf. 4.3). Both words refer to culturally specific objects and practices which have almost no equivalent in English language. The creative practice of mixing Greek words in English and inventing phrases such as ‘donkey expresses’ is a result of Philip’s hybrid ethnic status (cf. 4.4.3).

Grigoris (IN8), also a bilingual British-born Greek reacted to the events taking place in Greece during ongoing social unrest in December 2009 by typing: ‘is horrified with the situation in Greece. Na blepw tous sumpatriotes mou na skwtonontai etsi meta3i tous’104. Grigoris uses English at the beginning of the sentence and then turns into Greek. In the first part of the SU, Grigoris reported his emotion in English and took a distance from the situation in Greece while in the second part he typed in Greek to explain the source of his anger, expressed his objection about the events and used the word ‘compatriots’ to express a form of connection and solidarity with Greeks.

To address separately his Greek and international Friends, Panos (P26) posted the same SU in both languages: ‘Einai kaneis gia national exhibition sto national theatre simera I aurio?’ and ‘Is anyone interested for photo exhibition in national theatre today or weekend? It’s open until the 31st August’. Since his Greek Friends in London would be in a position to read and understand the invitation in English, language choice does not depend on the linguistic knowledge of the audience. He typed the invitation in Greek to address his Greek friends particularly.

In the Wall Threads examined, there were also cases that the switch from one language to another occurred within a single conversational turn (e.g. Appendix 6: W13, W32). For example, in W32 Fiona posted: ‘How can I be cool and still Greek Orthodox at the same time? LOL Mate, nisteoume, exoume saracosti … ase mas me tis elies kai pswmaki mas na

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102 (=kiosks)
103 (=backgammon board)
104 (‘is horrified with the situation in Greece. Watching my compatriots fighting each other in this way’)
to euchristiethoume … theleis na gineis Cool tora????’

She placed the question in English in an objective manner and then she answered the question in Greek displaying subjectivity, emotions and adopting a more intimate and straight way of talk. In the following Wall exchange (Appendix 6: W2), contributors post their short comments in Greek.

**Extract W2**

**Rena** says: ‘If only Greek politicians could be as persistent, inventive and effective as Palaiokostas …!

4 people like this

**Marios:** εύστοχο

(= intelligent)

22 February at 23:48

**Michael:** τουλάχιστον, ο παλαιοκόστας κρατάει τον λόγο του …

(=at least Palaiokostas kept his promises …)

23 February at 07:47

**Rena:** Μεταξύ κατεργαρήδων … ειλικρίνεια!

(= there is honour among thieves!)

23 February at 21:45

In this extract, Rena initiated the conversation in English to get comments in Greek, and notably typed with Greek characters. Marios agreed with her ‘intelligent’ observation while attempting to distance himself from Rena’s SU by diverging in terms of language choice. Rena finished the Wall thread quoting a Greek idiomatic phrase typed in Greek language and with Greek characters. It should be noted that this is one of the three cases across all the sample in which the contributors type in Greek characters. Rena has switched from Greeklish to the Greek alphabet. Both Michael and Rena were clearly adapting to Mario’s code switching pattern. According to speech accommodation theory (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Holmes, 1992) when people are motivated to improve communication and seek approval, they make efforts to adopt the language patterns or speech of the other party, thus their speech patterns converge. In the following example (Appendix 6: W3), participants’ code switching practices present a more complicated case.

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105 (= How can I be cool and still Greek Orthodox at the same time? We are fasting, we have saracosti … leave us alone to enjoy our olives and bread … do you wanna become cool now????)
Extract W3

Kostas: London Coffee Time…
15 November at 15:39
Panos: Piase kai to tavli re
(=fetch me the backgammon board)
15 November at 15:45
Kostas: Ki ena frappe parakalw! Eftaseeeeee
(=and a coffee please! It is comingggg)
15 November at 16:04
Panos: Paikse mia wra re malaka! Kai mi tsimpas ta zaria!
(=Don’t be late, this is your turn to play! And don’t cheat with the cubes!)
15 November at 16:09
Glands: Drink water Dude
15 November at 17:34
Kostas: To be honest, I can’t remember the last time I had water …
15 November at 19:07
Sherif: Water is good you should try it sometime
15 November at 19:55

Kostas (IN1) and Panos (P26) are close friends, Greeks who currently live and work in London. Glands and Sherif are Kosta’s international Friends. Kostas’s SU was in English, was enigmatic and invited various interpretations – the ellipsis at the end of the phrase suggests that meaning is unfinished. Panos interpreted the post on his own terms and he started a role play simulation. The imaginative setting for his role play was in a Greek traditional café. In his post, he imitated the type of talk taking place in a typical traditional Greek café. He asked for a backgammon board, a game for two players, a common practice in Greek cafes. ‘Re’ is a conversational discourse marker that signals informality, a type of Greek jargon language, a strictly spoken form of language. Kostas entered the game to order a frappe – Greek iced coffee – and imitated the waiter’s typical loud answer. Panos replied using two idiomatic nonstandard expressions in the same phrase ‘paixe mia wra’\(^{106}\) and ‘min tsimpas ta zaria’\(^{107}\). These slang expressions are indicative of two usual practices among Tavli players: they delay making a move on the board, or they try to affect the result of the dice. Panos was so immersed in his role as Kostas’s co-player that he uses his imagination to construct details of the situation and perform them verbally in the form of a nearly

\(^{106}\) (= do not delay, play)
\(^{107}\) (= do not cheat)
synchronous dialogue with Dimitris. The dialogue was in Greek slang language and thus excluded everyone who cannot speak Greek. However, an hour later Glands entered the conversation to respond in English to Kosta’s SU – ignoring the posts in Greek. He suggested that Kostas drink water instead of frappe. Kostas answered back and then Sherif also made a suggestion to Kostas. Although the Wall thread unfolded in Greek, it succeeded in engaging Dimitris’s international Friends and continued in English. In another case (Appendix 6: W27), Felicia – Kostas’s Friend – intervened in a Wall thread to express her objection about the fact that everyone was sending the posts in Greek. Following a Wall comment in Greek, she posted: ‘Welcome in England, now speak English’.

Since a comprehensive account of the parameters that shape the participants’ language choice online would require a multilevel in-depth analysis of instances of interaction and their contextual frameworks, I selected to analyse only a small number of examples indicative of the participants’ language practices which provide an insight into the way that ethnic identity is enacted through language use. The examples discussed above, although not exhaustive, provide a general picture about the participants’ practices related to language choice online. However, code switching analysis has multiple dimensions and functions and an inclusive account of the participants’ code switching practices was beyond the analytical scope of this study.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined – both in quantititative and qualitative terms – how the participants’ ethnicity is being projected on FB. Quantitative evidence about the ethnospecific content that the participants share on their Profiles suggests that the participants’ ethnic status is revealed in the Profiles in a wealth of textual and visual elements (images, videos, texts, and interactional data). I analysed the amount of ethnospecific data I collected, using a multimodal qualitative discursive approach and combined this data with interviews and observational material to answer whether ethnic identity on the social network is constructed according to modernism approaches or postmodernism perspectives.
Especially in the context of a social network, where interaction is bounded to offline settings, issues of identity and representation become even more complicated. Postmodern perspectives of identity online have dominated the realm of digital media studies (cf. 1.5.1) in an era where digital communication was principally conducted in anonymous forums and users could mask their identity. Virtual identity in a postmodernism perspective is free from any conventions: fluid, unstable, a fleeting construction, non-linear and opaque. However, since social network sites have introduced a new set of technological characteristics and affordances (cf. 1.6) which blurs the boundaries between online and offline experience of the self, one could expect that identity on FB could also be in line with the modernists’ line of thinking and users would be more likely to carry online a set of fixed characteristics and fundamental attributes of their ethnic identity.

Examining the titles of FB Groups related to Greek ethnicity, it emerges that the great majority of these Groups serve as ‘labels’ in the Profiles which signify identification with Greek culture by reproducing the familiar forms of nationhood, well recognizable symbols of Greekness, and traditional accounts of being Greek. This evidence shows that there is a link between identity and the nation state, expressed by clear-cut boundaries and definitions of what Greekness means. Quantitative evidence suggests that the participants take actions (e.g. join a FB Group) and share content (e.g. upload a Profile photo) on their Profiles that reproduce the ethnic stereotypes related with being Greek. They are likely to experience belonging and attachment to Greek identity, reproduce the fixed sum of traits that account for Greekness and extend them unproblematically to a large population (cf. 4.3.1). Available FB Groups for Greeks offer a plethora of locations for identification with traditional aspects of being Greek (cf. 4.3.1). In 4.3, FB Groups were studied as indications of banal nationalism reproducing the everyday representations of the nation and building an imagined sense of national solidarity and belonging. The study of FB Profile photos (cf. 4.3.2), also points to examples where banal nationalism is flagged in everyday contexts. Such evidence alone would support modernism understandings of identity construction on the social network, which focus on the process of constructing sameness and presuppose that users project a fixed, unified and coherent self.

However, when examining the wider context in which the participants use these national symbols – combining screen data with interview testimonies and ethnographic observations...
– it appears that the participants, rather than projecting a self according to well established ethnic definitions and boundaries, were also likely to project hybrid identities full of inconsistencies and conflicting information on the way they were experiencing their ethnicity. The study of the Profile photos revealed such an inconsistency between the national symbols they actually used as their personal signatures and the way they were experiencing ethnic identity in a diasporic setting. Thus, members of diaspora being raised and having lived in the UK were exploiting stereotypical symbols of Greek ethnicity in their Profiles, while newcomers to London drew on well recognizable symbols of London to present themselves in their Profile photos (cf. 4.3.2).

Evidence that emerged in the interviews sheds lights into the participants’ perceptions, values and ideas about their ethnicity and online practices (cf. 4.4). The triangulation of interview, observational and Profile data showed that versions of ethnic identity on FB may also be constructed according to postmodernist accounts (cf. 4.4). Especially for those participants who undergo a sort of cultural hybridity, ethnic identity becomes a discursive category socially constructed in a complex and controversial way. For these interviewees, what it means to be Greek has come to be defined both by their understanding of it and by others’ perceptions of it. Interviews have revealed that there is a kind of internal dialogue going on when they edit their Profile pages. This dialogue is a process towards an idealized version of the self and is influenced by the contextual parameters that surround each communicational act on FB. According to these situational factors, as well according to everyday practices that unfold in real time, the participants selectively foreground or underplay certain aspects of their ethnic background on their Profiles in a way that expresses both continuities and discontinuities with the way in which they perceive ethnicity.

The participants’ language choice online – a significant aspect of ethnic identification – also provides a window into how they project versions of identity that are not always consistent with their offline practices. Whereas Greek would be the default choice in their face-to-face encounters, on FB they also use English (cf. 4.4.5). They state that they type both in Greek and English on equal terms, however, SUs appear mainly in English. Motivated by situational and pragmatic reasons, they mix linguistic repertoires in their interactions. Issues of addressivity, the post’s content, contextual parameters and technological restrictions influence the choice of code – Greek, English or Greeklish.
The evidence displayed in 4.3 and 4.4 shows that ethnicity on FB is a discursive category socially constructed rather than an electronic project, an entity separated from offline experiences (according to postmodernists’ accounts of virtual identity) or a product of social attributions, linear logical and hierarchical (according to modernists). The participants were likely to project multiple identities, on some occasions controversial and flexible versions of the self, however when creating online selves they were not seeking to transcend the fundamental aspects of their identities but supplement offline practices and social interactions.

Mixing elements from both the place of their settlement (London) and the place of their origin (Greece), they were likely to use cultural and ethnic symbols not only as stereotypical images, but also as creative derivative works, acts of secondary production which allow for alternative meanings and interpretations. With an aim to project an idealized version of themselves, they were carefully balancing different personas and hybrid versions of their identity and employing a variety of strategies such as cultural appropriation, remixing strategies to engage with their transnational identities while immersing in a process of self-discovery (cf. 4.4.2). Along with an impressive amount of Group names relying on stereotypical and conventional accounts of Greek culture, one could notice the dynamic expansion of Groups that refer to everyday realities in Greece, practices and a number of recurring issues, invitations, petitions and appeals triggered as a reaction to contemporary events (both online and offline) and ongoing social situations. The participants were more likely to join FB Groups that offered new possibilities for collective identification and expanded the cultural repertoires available for Greeks.

Hybridity was also revealed in the SUs the participants posted in their Profiles. Examining the different contexts in which the participants’ ethnic status is revealed in their SUs, an interesting finding emerged: in the majority of their SUs (34%), the participants celebrated their transnational mobility between Athens and London, announced details of their short trips in Greece, commented on the places they visited, expressed nostalgia and enthusiasm for their travelling, and counted the minutes for their ‘occasional’ return in Greece. While on holidays – or during their short returns in Greece – they updated their Profiles with their experiences of life there. As a result of this almost symbiotic relationship between the text
and the lived time, ‘home’ emerges no longer as an imagined place of desire, but becomes a place which is also lived and transformed through digital storytelling (cf. 5.3). Apart from experiences related to their travelling between Greece and London, the participants were also likely to comment on the weather, on football games, on events occurring in the transnational field between London and Greece (e.g. the return of the Parthenon marbles in Athens) and less likely to express their critical opinion about social and political life in Greece. Aspects of life in London rarely appeared in their SUs (18% of the SUs). There was a complete lack of posts regarding issues that emerge in the UK’s sociopolitical sphere.

While in this chapter the focus remained in the representation of ethnic identity, in the next chapter, attention lies with the process of socialization on FB, a process with metamorphosizing powers for the content of ethnicity itself.
5. DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AND PLACE: INTERACTION ON THE WALLS

5.1 Introduction

Having analysed self-presentational (cf. 3.3) and interactional (cf. 3.4) practices in terms of observed frequencies and tendencies, in this chapter, I examine closely the process of interaction taking place on FB Walls. Therefore, I rely on data that emerged in the interaction: a corpus of Wall Threads extracted from the Profiles and Groups for Greeks in London (Appendix 6). Chapter 3 has demonstrated that interpersonal relations as they extent offline affect the dynamics of interpersonal interaction online. This chapter will examine how interpersonal dynamics enabled on the participants’ Profile pages shape the content of the interaction online and contribute to the creation of new meanings for versions of place and identity.

Versions of the participants’ ethnic identity are examined as dialogically constructed and produced in linguistic interaction. As it was shown in 1.3, the framework I adopt views identity as the product of semiotic and social practices, indexed through labels, stances, linguistic styles and systems (Bucholz & Hall, 2005). In the discursive environment of a FB Wall, the participants relationally display and negotiate aspects of their ethnic identity. To demonstrate the process by which the participants negotiate aspects of ethnic ethnicity, — symbols, ideologies, habitual practices, similarity and difference etc—. I examined asynchronous Wall exchanges on the participants’ Profiles for ethnospecific content (cf. 2.4.1) and collected a corpus of 56 Wall Threads in which the participants were either referring to Greek ethnicity or to aspects of their life in London. Then, pieces of the Wall Threads were thematically coded in the emerging categories. Thematic coding of the selected Wall Threads produced a list of five categories; resources in which the participants draw when engaging with their ethnicity in their Wall posts (cf. 5.2). Discussion in 5.2 is structured around these thematic categories. For each coded category, I selected to present a few Wall Threads as indicative of the variety of positions and discursive frames in which Greek ethnicity emerges in the Wall exchanges. Since attention lies with the processes under examination —rather than with frequencies of occurrence—, Wall extracts presented in the following sections are randomly selected from a larger sample of Wall Threads (which is
available in Appendix 6). Recognizing that ethnic identity construction is a complex process that cannot be described within a single analytical framework, the study of the Wall Threads only provides an insight into the process according to which ethnic identity can be relationally constructed in the process of online interaction.

While the participants interact on the FB Wall, ethnic identity is likely to emerge in the overt references of categories; in the predispositions regarding being Greek or living in London, post contributors’ evaluative positions, their roles and conversational features, the way they re-contextualize ideas and schemata, delineate the ‘other’ and invent alternative narratives emerging from the two distinct cultures of reference: the British and the Greek. Following a discursive approach to identity construction (cf. 1.2), analysis points to a number of emergent positions in which identity is located and relocated according to the specific human dynamics enabled in each Wall exchange. In particular, I attend to versions of ethnic identity as expressed in a variety of linguistic interactions on FB Walls and follow the process according to which the meaning of ethnic identity – the things that ‘Greekness’ includes – is constantly shifting and evolving depended not on the participants’ internal states but on external factors such as the context of the conversation, the contributors, live accounts of their experiences etc. At a complementary level, analysis pays attention to the organization of talk and discursive strategies that the participants employ to display, counteract, negotiate or dismantle aspects of their Greek identity. Using discourse analysis (cf. 2.7.3), I will explore how the process of including and excluding meaning is not only constituting of identity but is also transforming or dismantling existing identity discourses related to ethnicity.

Similarly to versions of ethnic identity, aspects of place online are also contextually depended. Section 5.3 examines how the participants contribute in the Wall of FB Groups referring to places in London (Appendix 6: GW1-3). It asks how certain places in London acquire a new meaning online as they intersect with the participants’ diasporic practices. In this study, place is treated as a social construct (Harvey, 1993), a site in which power arises from the convergence of global, national and regional forces interacting with the local physical, historical, cultural, socioeconomic factors. More than a physical territory, an empty and undialectical background, ‘place’ is re-conceived as the locus of experience, a complex process and a dynamic arena constitutive of the social (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005). Section 192
5.3 highlights the dialectics between online and an offline setting as reflected in the Walls of three Groups which are related to places for Greeks in London and will examine this space’s potential to support situated identities.

5.2 Interactional Resources on the Profiles’ Walls

Conceptual content analysis (cf. 2.7.1.1) pointed to five thematic areas\(^\text{108}\) describing the resources in which the participants draw when interacting on the Wall:

1. Beliefs, stereotypes, predispositions of being Greek (33%: 18 of 56 Wall Threads)
2. Symbolic resources (33%: 18 of 56 Wall Threads)
3. Life in London and everyday experience of place (29%: 16 of 56 Wall Threads)
4. Current national and socio-political issues (11%: 6 of 56 Wall Threads)
5. Common historical past and collective memory (8%: 4 of 56 Wall Threads)

It was observed that 86% of the Wall Threads (48 out of 56 Wall threads) were carried out in English language. In addition, while 89% of the contributors had Greek names, only 10.5% of the posts were typed in Greek (or mixed Greek-English). Since the Wall exchanges are public, the participants are more likely to use English as a lingua franca (cf. 4.4.5). Discussion in the following subsections (5.2.1-5) is structured around the thematic areas displayed above. Discourse analysis (cf. 2.7.3) with an emphasis on the assumptions that govern the negotiation of meaning was regarded as the most suitable method to examine the selected Wall Threads, demonstrate how identity resources are framed, legitimated, dismantled or recontextualized in the process of interaction.

\(^{108}\) Wall Threads that included more than one theme were coded in more than one category.
5.2.1 Building on Ethnic Stereotypes

The most common way in which aspects of ‘Greekness’ emerged in the Wall Threads was related to ideas, predispositions and beliefs related to Greek ethnicity. Across the sample, 18 Wall Threads\textsuperscript{109} (33\%) included phrases with which individuals expressed attitudes, images, values, mentalities related to being Greek, while drawing on personal experiences. They referred to the Greek generosity and hospitality (W8), ‘complacency’ (W10), ‘corruption’ (W10). In Greece, ‘swear words are the first you learn’ (W21, W22), waiters behave impolite (W25), Athenians drive risky (W53), locals in the islands are ‘innocent’ have ships and commute with donkeys (W24, W19, W16), know how to drink the ‘real frappe’ (W17, W3). Helen drew on images of ‘the gypsy paliatzides\textsuperscript{110} who drive up and down each street 23 times with a loudspeaker asking you to bring out your dead (appliances)’ or the ‘13hr parties with the ubiquitous skyladika songs every time a major name day comes up’ (W51). In other cases, the participants discussed the attitudes of Greek girls (W35) or looks of Greek boys (W28) as ‘still looking that Miami Vice look alike’ (W16) and expressed their comments reproducing stereotypes: e.g. ‘you must be the only Greek in the world saving yourself from marriage..’(W47). These examples show that the participants engage with cultural stereotypes as subjective and unverifiable truths and reproduce them in their interaction while also creating spaces for their meaning to be contested.

In the following extract (Appendix 6: W8), Philip reported on an incident he experienced while on holidays in Greece, and discussed it with his Friends –also Greeks in Britain–.

**Extract W8**

Philip was ecstatic to find goats and just as pleased when he discovered he forgot his bank card on another island – I think the word I would use in clear Greek would be gamoto

3 people like this
1 September at 12:18

Marina: was not the clear word for it * or something similar? Sorry for my French, I don t speak the language. So what are you doing now to get your card back?

Natasa: you could always moonlight as a busker… anyway Greek hospitality is renowned for generosity, especially in the islands and villages


\textsuperscript{110} (= men who collect and sell old things)
In extract W8, contributors negotiated the meaning of a well-established aspect of Greek national identity: the generosity and hospitality. These qualities and values have been traditionally regarded as properties of Greek mentality. However, as it appears in the Wall-thread, their meaning is revised in the face of current conditions. In this sequence of Wall posts, the center of the discussion is Philip’s experience during his holiday in Greece when he discovered that he had forgotten his bank card on another island. He expressed his frustration (using a popular Greek word), his Friend Marina asked about his plans and Natasa advised him to rely on Greek ‘hospitality’ and ‘generosity’. Although Natasa posted in English, she switched to Greek when referring to hospitality (using the words ‘filotimo’ and ‘filoxenoun’) –not being able to find the English equivalent–. Philip’s personal experience of Greek hospitality –is different from what Natasa imagines– and he notes that unlike ‘how it used to be’, Greek generosity now ‘only extends as far as paying for your bills’. Natasa was surprised to hear that hospitality ‘had to mature at some point’, though she expected the change and expressed her sorrow about the new situation.

Greek hospitality —as described in the Wall exchange—, exists especially in the islands and the villages, is closely linked with Greek tradition and is now threatened by modern living conditions. It however emerges as a stereotype situationally challenged and transformed by the conditions of modernity. As post contributors exchange their experiences, common ideas and values referring to Greek culture were destabilized and subverted. The following extract (Appendix 6: W11) points to a different case: interaction reinforces stereotypical notions of the participants’ local identities.
Iro had been living in London for a few years before announcing in her SU that she was arranging her ‘return’ back in the North of Greece. Sotiris asked her to clarify the meaning of the word ‘North’ reproducing widely held negative stereotypes associated with food and accent in the north of Greece. He also stereotyped food habits in UK and swine flu\(^{111}\) (‘the North of Bacon Sandwiched and Swine flue’). In her answer, Iro rejected the negative stereotypes and replaced them with positive ones, but her position again remained as stereotypical (‘It’s the North of excellent cheese filled pies and people who love their L’s too much’). This extract is indicative of how stereotypes exist in dialogue with current conditions (e.g. ‘swine flue’) and how they can be creatively used as resources for identity.

### 5.2.2 Drawing on Cultural Symbols

A symbol is a device that represents something else by association and a tool by which ideas are transmitted between people who share the same culture (Swidler, 1986). According to Bartlett, symbols secure the preservation of a group, act as a medium for the transmission of culture, and prevent social sentiments and ideals from becoming vague and lifeless abstractions (Bartlett, 1925). In 33% (18) of the Wall Threads examined, the participants draw on well recognizable symbols and signifiers by which nationality is constantly flagged and embedded in the everyday presentation of the self. Acropolis, Mykonos\(^{112}\), sun, sea, beach, donkeys, Byzantium, Caryatid, Tavli, feta, tavern\(^{113}\), souvlaki, malaka\(^{114}\), frappe, ouzo,

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\(^{111}\) An influenza spread in UK  
\(^{112}\) (=Greek island)  
\(^{113}\) (=Traditional restaurant)  
\(^{114}\) (=Greek swear word)
kataifi\textsuperscript{115}, mythos beer\textsuperscript{116}, tsolias have been some of the signifiers of Greek identity as they emerge in the corpus of Wall Threads. These words appear in 18 Wall Threads. Names of Greek singers (e.g. Rouvas, Sakis, Kourkoulis) and geographical places (e.g. Myconos, Mytilene) are also cultural manifestations of a Greek identity. Philip uses some of these words repetitively in a variety of contexts. Although he writes in English as a rule, he often quotes words (e.g. katsikes\textsuperscript{117}, gaidouri\textsuperscript{118}, mpugatsa\textsuperscript{119}, paralia\textsuperscript{120}, parea\textsuperscript{121}) in Greek (cf. 3.6.2) to underline the special meaning that these words acquire for him.

For example, in the following Wall Thread (Appendix 6: W17), the exchange that unfolds is indicative of how ‘frappe’ acquires new meanings which differ from its literal meaning. The process of signification depends heavily on the word’s repetitive use in several instances throughout Philip’s Profile (cf. 4.2.2).

**Extract W17**

Philip: is practicing his Greek vocabulary: frappe, gadouri, frappe, diopota me pago, frappe, paralia, ela re malaka, frappe. Oh yeah Greece is around the corner, epitelousgamoto.

(=is practicing his Greek vocabulary: frappe, gadouri, frappe, two drinks with ice, frappe, beach, come on malaka, frappe. Oh yeah Greece is around the corner, finally).

09 June at 22:13

Natasa: to frappe blepo einexeia sto lexiologio…..

(= I see that you always use the word frappe)

09 June at 00:20

Stamatia: Kala re Philip den exei frappe stoLondino???????????

(= so Philip, can’t you find any frappe in London?)

09 June at 04:37

Natasa: Yes, bloody. Lucky you…..here is some Australianisms to introduced to the Greeks: fully sick mate

09 June at 05:29

Philip: What can I say guys, frappe here is not the same boo hoo (though I now have a frappe kouti in my kitchen). Natasa –no one here understands the fully sick re concept lol

09 June at 10:31

Philip: I should also add there is nothing like sitting at the paralia, with chill out playing in the background, talking crap with your parea and having a frappe, and with that in mind I am there very soon!

\textsuperscript{115} (=a variety of desert )

\textsuperscript{116} (=Greek beer brand)

\textsuperscript{117} (=ships )

\textsuperscript{118} (=donkeys )

\textsuperscript{119} (=Traditional Greek pie)

\textsuperscript{120} (=beach)

\textsuperscript{121} (=company)
In his SU, Philip exploited a group of words to summarize what Greece means for him. Symbols tend to appear in clusters and depend on one another for their accretion of meaning and value. The word ‘frappe’ is part of a group of words which Philip often uses to provide an image of what he will experience in his holidays. Natasa commented that he frequently used the word ‘frappe’ in his Profile, and Stamatia was wondering what was so special about this kind of coffee that Philip could not find it in London. Philip found it hard to explain what was different about frappe in Greece and presented frappe as part of a habitual practice.

It was also observed that there existed more than 30 FB Groups referring to ‘frappe’ (cf. 4.3.1). The names of these Groups provide an overall picture of how the word is used to enact further associations with specific aspects of modern Greek culture and lifestyle. Frappe was described as a kind of coffee that only Greeks drink to the point of addiction (e.g. ‘Frappe, sex, bouzoukia and facebook...that’s what we are’). Rather than focusing on the coffee’s taste, Groups were presenting frappe as a kind of religion (e.g. the Group ‘I believe in a frappe’ has 2,993 members) that reflects a set of values, beliefs and attitudes (e.g. ‘Frappe’s beliefs’). Its consumption appeared bounded with rituals rooted in Greek culture for a relaxed way of living (e.g. ‘Cooling with a Greek frappe’). Frappe was also used to signify a break with tradition: ‘I want my frappe modest, my beer cold and the revolution constant’. Also, the word appeared in a variety of contexts, in relation to events and on-going situations in Greece (e.g. ‘while Greece is on riots in Cyprus they drink frappe and lemonade’). Group names also referred to the details and rituals and preferences for drinking frappe (e.g. ‘I bite the straw’, ‘I do not want holes in my frappe’s straw’).

Throughout his posts, Philip creatively used ‘frappe’ in a variety of contexts: refers to Greece as the ‘land of the rising frappe’ (W29), greets his Friends ‘we will be having frappes for you’ (W48) or describes the rituals surrounding frappe (W25).

\[122\] Definition retrieved from [http://www.reference.com/browse/symbol](http://www.reference.com/browse/symbol)
In 4.4.3, I presented Argiri’s case and how he used the image of tsolias creatively in his Profile photo. Also pointing to a postmodern model of identity construction, the following extract shows how Philip reused the traditional symbol of ‘tsolias’ in an inventive way.

**Extract W52**

Philip: is your typical fun filled Tsolia wearing ethnically challenged Lesbian who is struggling to cope with the cold!
19 October at 11:00
Georgos: It seems like you need to put your fishnet top back in the closet
20 October at 08:16
Natasa: hehehehe
20 October at 10:12
Philip: I have……its just too cold for that outfit
20 October at 12:23
Natasa: You could always add layers underneath the netted shirt…maybe leopard print?
20 October at 12:38

In his SU, Philip presented himself as a typical ‘tsolia’ who was wearing a skirt and was struggling to cope with the cold. In this case, Philip’s experiences of two cultures (the Greek and the British) are interfering to create an image of a ‘tsolia’ who lives in London and can’t bear the cold. This example of cultural appropriation is also indicative of how the meaning of a traditional ethnic symbol creatively shifts by being exposed in different cultural frames and at the same time becomes the subject of negotiation, rather than solely consisting an isolated postmodern construction.

The example from Baso’s Profile reveals a very different case. Instead of creatively using a traditional symbol, she referred to St. Agia Sophia in an anticipated way to facilitate intercultural dialogue. In W14, Baso uploaded a video of a religious rehearsal taking place in Saint Sophia in London and a few hours later answered back to one of her international Friends who ‘liked’ the video: ‘I am glad you liked it! On the 15th of august we celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin which is a very big religious celebration like the summer easter!’.

In other cases, the participants exploited traditional symbols in an active way (e.g. the way Maria refers to ‘Solon’ in W10), they point to new symbols as they emerge from social and political developments in Greece (e.g. the way that Rena refers to ‘Palaiokostas’ in W2) or
they attach new symbolic cultural meanings to already existing anchors by repeatedly using them in different contexts (e.g. the way that Philip connects frappe with greekness). The following section presents examples of how the participants draw on everyday experiences of London to co-construct attitudes, beliefs and ideas for Greekness or Britishness.

**5.2.3 Referring to the Place of Settlement**

Participants’ place of residence is London. In this section, I investigate the relation between identity and experience of place of residence (London), as it emerges across the sample of Wall Threads. While the participants draw in a variety of resources to engage with versions of their Greek identity, diasporic experience is prominently revealed through their relation to London as the place of their everyday experience. Though at a smaller degree, in a 29% (16) of the Wall Threads, participants refer to aspects of their life in London and their experiences of the city.123

Chapter 4 has pointed out to a population with high mobility that constantly moves between Greece and London (cf. 4.4.4). It has also stressed that London emerges in the participants’ SUs as the place of destination or a place to return to. The following examples indicate how the participants discuss about London in the Wall Threads. In extract W12, Nicholas (P15), a British born Greek, draws on his experience of a British flight:

**Extract W12:**

Nicholas: missed his flight today due to incompetence of the idiots who work at terminal 5 and let’s not forget how bloody useless British airways are too!!!
03 February at 21.00

John: what happened?
03 February at 21:09

Nicholas: got to the airport, ques were huge, told them that my flight was pretty soon and they told me I had 2 wait. Eventually managed to queue jump but was told I wouldn t be allowed on the plane cause I was checking in 2 late :) – tosersns , how are u ? all good?
03 February at 21:10

Nicholas was born and grown up in London, and only a few years ago he started travelling in Greece on a frequent basis. In W12, he updated his status to announce that he had lost his flight. His Friend John was interested to find out what happened and a few minutes later, Nicholas provided a more detailed description of his experience. When Tasia entered the discussion to suggest him to join the ‘I never fly to BA’ FB Group as a way to express his disappointment, Nicholas agreed and took the chance to express his preference for the Greek flight operator and the greekness of stewarts compared to the ‘idiots who work at terminal 5’. Nicholas draws on dissimilation strategies to construct his version of Greekness. However, having expressed his personal experience of cultural difference, Nicholas also placed himself in the position of an knowledgeable observer who is able to objectively watch both Greek and British attitudes: ‘the greekness of them is so watchable….’, without identifying with either culture.

The following extract (Appendix 6: W13) revealed a very different experience of cultural difference. In the following extract, cultural difference was flagged by a set of ethnic predispositions, perceptions that are taken for granted between Iro and Sotiris, two newcomers professionals in London.
Iro ‘wants to go swimming’, Sotiris makes fun of her wishes. While Sotiris answered back in English, she kept answering back in Greek. She used idiomatic expressions to show that she was disturbed by Sotiris’s bitter language and finally she attributed Sotiris’s bitterness to his ‘increasing Englishness’. It is evident that Iro and Sotiris are experiencing London differently. Iro expressed her desire to do things that she would do back in her country, but Sotiris seems to enjoy London (e.g. ‘Trafalgar square fountains are lovely’, ‘acute Londonitis’). Iro was suspicious of Sotiri’s new preferences and though that he was trying to hide the fact that he was also homesick. She invented adjectives (e.g. ‘londonitikonkitaron = the cells of the Londoner) to describe the process of Sotiris’s assimilation into the culture of London drawing on a biological metaphor (‘your bitter words reveal that there are increased London cells in your system’). She concluded with an English expression commonly used: ‘please consult your local GP’. Sotiris stated that he was enjoying his new identity and he was suffering from acute Londonitis which is an overdose of shopping (‘Oxford Streetus Psonious’). In fact, Sotiris treated his preference for London as a very rare disease which needed antidote and his family was striving to meet medical scientists in Britain to cure him.
Philip also used the word ‘Londonitis’ to refer to a kind of disease related to London (Appendix 6: W45).

In both cases, the participants’ sense of identity competes with other identifications derived from the experience of British surroundings. They enact situated identities drawing on stereotypes related to places and ethnic cultures and they creatively mix elements from both Greek and British background to construct postmodern versions of identity. What emerges is the formation of a hybrid identity which is neither assimilationist neither multicultural but has unique creative properties which borrow from both frames of reference (cf. 4.4). The way that the participants engaged with contemporary social and political issues was also constructive.

### 5.2.4 Engaging with Contemporary Social and Political Issues

As it was shown in 4.4.4, there was a lack of socio-political discussions throughout the Profiles and only a small minority of the participants’ SUs were engaging with recurring political or social events and contemporary affairs in Greece. Across the sample, there were 7 Wall Threads\(^{124}\) (11% of the sample) in which the discussion was centred on recurring Greek events with a transnational appeal (e.g. football games, Parthenon marbles, Macedonia’s name). When commenting on social or political events, the participants were more likely to express criticism about situations occurring in Greece, using dismantling strategies thus de mythologizing existing versions of ethnic identity (Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak 1999).

In extract W2 (Appendix 6: W2), Rena draws on an event –an ingenious prisoner’s (Palaiokostas) escape from the Greek prisons– to express her aspiration: ‘If only Greek politicians could be as persistent, inventive and effective as Palaiokostas…!’ (cf. 4.4.5). Starting from a current event, she expressed her disappointment with Greek politicians who are not inventive, persistent and effective. Irene ended the thread by quoting an idiomatic phrase ‘there is honour across thieves’. Rena’s Friends –Greeks who live in Greece– all

\(^{124}\)W2, W6, W7, W9, W10, W20, W41
agreed with her statement and confirmed her observations. A different pattern occurred in the next example (Appendix 6: W10) as Philip commented on Greek politics and his Friends followed the conversation.

**Extract. W10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philip:</th>
<th>thinks that both Greek political parties are crap crapcrapcrapcrap, corrupt, full of nepotism and neglecting the environment. They should all be tossed out and a council of ephors (comprising women for a change and young people) should rule or simply bring back Solon!</th>
<th>04 October at 20:54</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natasa:</td>
<td>they are all corrupt, and this one thing that drives me nuts about Greece. There is so much going for the country and the people, and then they go and screw themselves over, again and again.</td>
<td>04 October at 22:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip:</td>
<td>They need a broom through parliament followed by a stronger showing by the minor parties</td>
<td>04 October at 23:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasa:</td>
<td>and to get rid of this complacency.</td>
<td>04 October at 23:36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this dialogue, both Philip and Natasa, who have Greek origin—and live in London—made various realizations about corrupted Greek political scenery and exchanged views on what could be a possible solution to the identified problem. Philip criticized Greek political parties for being corrupted, full of nepotism and neglecting the environment. Natasa agreed with Philip’s statement and although she accepted that ‘there is so much going for the country and the people’ returned to her initial position that Greeks destroy what they have accomplished. In her second post, she referred to the ‘country and its people’ in the third person, thus distancing herself from her Greek origin. All the same, Philip carried on referring to the ‘country and the people’ in the third plural person (they) and he offered a possible solution to the problem. It is striking that while in several of his previous posts, Philip employed the possessive pronoun ‘we’ to denote sameness with Greeks, in this occasion, he differentiated himself from the country and its people and tried to offer an objective view and evaluation of the current situation. Contrary to a number of playful claims where he defined his ethnic identity on the basis of his ancestors and celebrated his Greek national orientation (e.g. W9, W19), in this instance, Philip distanced himself from his elsewhere claimed Greek national identity. Like Kostas in W12 (cf. 5.2.3), Philip and Natasa engage with Greek nationality in an objective and critical way and position themselves as ‘experts’ who suggest possible solutions to resolve the situation.
In the above extracts, Wall contributors draw on dismantling strategies (Celia, Reisling and Wodak, 1999) which serve to deconstruct existing elements of Greek national identity, redirect attention to negative features (e.g. complacency), emphasize intra national differences and present negative pictures of a national group in the face of contemporary affairs. This process can be constructive. While in W4, Rena and her Friends engage with Greek ethnicity in a negative and sarcastic manner, in the W10, contributors negotiate an unpleasant political situation suggesting possible alternatives.

A contemporary issue that appears in the participants’ SUs, videos, Groups and applications (cf. 4.3.1, 4.4.4) regards the fact that parts of the Parthenon Marbles are kept in the British Museum of London. Greeks have invested a lot of energy in diplomatic efforts pressing for their return to Athens. Being Greeks in London, the participants are particularly sensitive to the issue. Across the sample of the Wall Threads, there were two instances (W6, W7) in which the Parthenon marbles became the subject of discussion. Indicatively, Foti’s (P18) post raises a question concerning the return of Parthenon Marbles to the Acropolis Museum (Appendix 6: W6). He brought up the subject in a creative way: ‘Hey Neil McGregor, is this the most appropriate angle from where one should appreciate the beauty of the lonely Caryatid? Tell me Neil, is this how the open and universal museum will present the wonders of the past to the future generations? (continued). His complaint was expressed in the form of a polite and ironic question in which he positioned himself as the mediator between Athens and London. The answer came from his British Friend, who supported his cause.

Similarly, Kalli’s Wall video (under the name ‘Greece urges return of the sculptures’) triggered a response coming from one of her international Friends (Appendix 6: W7). In these cases, FB Wall served as a space which supported the externalization of a socio-political situation which concerns the relations between the two countries, Greece and UK and has facilitated the intercultural exchange of opinions on this issue.

In extract W9, Philip brought up the subject about the on-going international dispute over the name of Macedonia (cf. 4.4.5). In his SU, he was arguing that Macedonia is Hellenic drawing on historical and religious facts: is the ‘birthplace of Aristotle, Philip, Alexander, Justinian, Basil, II and the Bulgar Slayer, Cyril (Constantine) and Methodius and more and is the home of Mount Olympus!’ . This post initiated a long conversation which involved six
Friends who typed their answers in English. Contrary to the negotiation process that took place in extract W5, in this case the conversation was loose, lacking focus. Contributors also attempted to make fun of Philip (e.g. ‘that’s right you tell them Philip’ or ‘mpampa mas epiase to patriotiko mas’), changed the subject of the conversation (e.g. ‘hey Philip, how things going man?’) and showed that they were not interested in the subject (‘I ve given up on the Macedonian issue’). Philip’s Friends, rather than ignoring his post, they displayed their indifference about the situation in a number of ways and as a result they dropped the subject. As a result, Philip agreed and picked a new topic. What is interesting in this case is that although Philip’s Friends could show their indifference on the subject by choosing not to post on Philip’s Wall, they did contribute to this Wall exchange. This observation supports findings in 3.4 which suggest that users’ responsiveness in a SU is principally defined by the interpersonal relations and the contextual factors surrounding its creation rather than its thematic affiliation.

5.2.5 Negotiating Collective Memory, History and Belonging

There was only a small minority of Wall Threads, notably 8% of the Wall Threads (W5, W6, W9, W54, W32), in which the participants drew on Greek history and collective memory in their online exchanges. For example, in extract W5 (Appendix 6:W5), Philip recalls events from the national historical memory and invites his audience to remember the immigrants from Micra Asia, Smirni, Pontus Konstantinoupoli and Cyprus, populations who were forced to move out of their countries in the beginning of the 20th century.

Extract W5:

**Philip:** Den xexnametousprostigges, Mikra Asia, Smirni, Pontus, Konstantinoupoli,Kypros. This week was a time to remember and as the grand son of refugees I will never forget but will always work towards Irene kai agape me olous – love and peace for all people no mater what their ethnic origins.

125 (≡ ‘I see you are experiencing a crisis of patriotic feelings’).
126 The post refers to the forced displacement of Greek populations from areas of Asia Minor which were evacuated following the Treaty of Lausanne. The 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey involved approximately 2 million people and was the first compulsory large scale population exchange—and agreed on mutual terms—of the 20th century.
Evagelos: Very nice words kontoxorianne!!!....

Philip: I also spare a though for the Greeks of Aibali and the muslims of Lesbos that effectively swope sides and glimpsed their homeland from across the narrow straights of the Aegean. It would seem that the trauma never ceased and the close proximity of their homeland a constant reminder of the pain.

Philip: very true it was a travesty that people on both sides had to leave their places of birth during the population exchange actually I would call this a disgracefull act of international politicians.

Natasa: very nice sentiments Philip, I agree that the world need more agape and Irene

Marina: I am not going to forgive the Turks who massacered both my grandfathers entire family and left them wounded back only because they were dead…Maybe I would if Turkey bothers to admit it at least one day….definitely not before….sorry

Philip: cheers Natasa it makes sense. Marina they were different eras and different people. In Greece we say perazmenaxehasmena– what’s in the past can be forgotten especially if it leads to stability and neighbourly relations.

Collective memories pass from generation to generation and are implicated in a larger group through a number of ways. Philip’s knowledge of the distant national past stems from him being ‘the grand son of refugees’. Interestingly, he typed the first sentence of his SU in Greek language to involve Greeks in the discussion and the second one in English –his native language–. On the occasion of a national remembrance, he announced that ‘as a grandson of refugees, I will never forget’ and also committed himself to ‘always work towards...love and peace towards all people’. The Wall exchange unfolded among Evagelos, Marina and Natasa, who are all related to Greece in different ways, as their posts reveal. Evangelos was the first to reply and praise Philip’s thoughts. A couple of minutes later, Evans added a new post in which he expressed sympathy for those ‘that effectively swope sides and glimpsed their homeland from across the narrow straights of the Aegean’ using an emotional language to highlight the pain and trauma of these people. In his reply, Philip
draws on the power of reason to attribute the ‘travesty’ to a ‘disgraceful act of international politicians’.

Natasa entered the discussion to compliment Philip on his ‘very nice’ sentiments and agreed that ‘the world needs more love and peace’. It was at that point that Marina intervened to counteract the above statements and expressed a controversial opinion. For the first time in the conversation, Turks were held responsible for the painful event which forced population movement. Although Evans and Natasa’s viewpoint did not originate from personal experience, Marina’s stance was derived from personal testimony, and was connected to her family’s history. Despite Natasa’s effort for reconciliation and the fact that both Evans and Philip had been avoiding to make an overt accusation, Marina blamed Turks for what happened to her family. Although in the first part of this sentence she expressed certainty, a few words later, she was having second thoughts. The first sentence expressed an unfinished though and the next one begun with a modifying particle ‘Maybe I would forgive them’ which emphasized subjectivity and pointed out to the uncertainty of her announcement. In the second sentence, she revised her initial decision not to forgive the Turks under the conditional term that ‘Turkey bothers to admit it at least one day’ but at last she returns to support her initial intention not to forgive the Turks expressing certainty ‘definitely not before’. Her final word was addressed directly to Friends asking them to excuse her for her views.

According to Philip, Marina has been referring to a controversial act of the past – population’s movement– in a way that preserved a problematic narrative of national history. She reproduced a dominant narrative among Greeks, derived out of collective memories and emotions rather than rationality. In the next post, Philip took the role of the coordinator of the conversation, thanked Natasa for her post, while attempted to persuade Marina out of her personal views. To this end, he provided a rational explanation: ‘they were different eras and different people’, also quoted a widely shared idiomatic phrase, a common say and translates it (‘what’s in the past can be forgotten’) so that all his Friends can understand.

Philip and Marina employed differentiation and constructive strategies to talk about Greek nationality. They draw on a conceptual border between ‘us’ and ‘them’ using inclusion marker and possessive determinants (‘we’) to create a feeling of sameness, unity, national
solidarity and also use exclusion markers to present Turks as the alienate part. The different kinds of talk found in this extract describe fundamental orientations that participants can take towards each other and pave the way for the negotiation of meaning. Evans and Natasa, built positively and uncritically on what Philip had said (cumulative talk), Marina expressed disagreement and an individual opinion (disputational talk) and Philip engaged critically and constructively with Marina’s argument (exploratory talk). These different types of talk converge in a single conversation towards an outcome that attempts to reconstruct the common historical past and to compromise different views on the national future.

The above example is also indicative of postmodern narratives of identity construction (cf. 4.4) since the contributors express affirmative and sceptical positions of a grand narrative of history and recycle leftovers from the past (Gross, 2000). The process according to which collective memory is recomposed to encompass new or previously excluded stories and celebrate the past, is a core characteristic of postmodern narratives.

‘The past is recuperated in fragments that can be packaged and consumed at the present time, yet the full context of memory is dismissed and recollection is thus trivialized… The past becomes the ‘other’ of our own era… This is a nostalgia that is atemporal and ahistorical. Our memories are partial, for we are enamored with the idea of old glorious figures and we construct their ‘difference’ from us irrespective of our continuities. What is trivial about our mnemonic reconstruction is not its object itself, but its purpose and character’ (Vannini, 2008:4)

Multicultural and postmodern influence is evident in the continuing debunking of history, the ritual apologies, the politics of regret and negative commemoration (Schwartz, 2005). The contributors are experiencing their identities as fragmented and contradictory and recognize that there is not one but many histories (Currie, 1998: 79; Boje et al., 1996) surrounding the same event. However, apart from postmodern identities, FB users are also likely to articulate situated identities by performing memories of places in London.
5.3 The Social Construction of Place on Group- Walls

As shown in 3.5.2, there existed 30 FB Groups about Greeks in London which referred to a place (e.g. ‘St Sophia Greek School London’, ‘The original Elyzée restaurant in London’). These Groups were grounded in particular social practices common for Greeks in London (e.g. visiting a Greek restaurant, attending a Greek school) and offered possibilities for affiliation and socialization at a local level. By joining Groups which referred to a physical location in London, FB users not only expressed their affiliation with grounded, concrete places and practices – but also gained access to these places under different conditions from those that underlie their experiences of place as a physical site.

Theoretical discussions about identity and place point to the fact that the basic elements that constitute ‘place’ overlap with the everyday practices of actors (for example, home, work, schools, church, and so on) and form nodes around which human activities circulate:

‘Place, therefore, refers to discreet if ‘elastic’ areas in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify. The ‘paths’ and ‘projects’ of everyday life provide the practical ‘glue’ for place in these senses’ (Agnew, 1987: 28).

This section examines three Wall Threads extracted from the Walls of the following FB Groups for Greeks in London: ‘Greek playgroup in west London’, ‘My parents used to make me go to Aylward Greek School’ and ‘Byzantium Café London’. These Groups had only a few members and a few posts. Analysis of interaction taking place in these three Groups aims to demonstrate how members ‘inhabit’ these places online, construct them or reconstruct them through interaction on the Group’s Walls.

It has been demonstrated in 3.5.3 that rather than being characterized as communities, FB Groups for Greeks in London can be described as ‘networks of practice’. Even FB Groups that refer to ‘place’ – a traditional determinant of community – enable different patterns of participation than those required for community (cf. 1.5.2). For example, the ‘Greek playgroup in west London’ was created to organize a playgroup for Greek kids that live in West London. ‘My parents used to make me go to Aylward Greek School’ aimed at reviving member’s memories related to a diasporic site that no longer exists – a Greek school – and the Group ‘Byzantium café’ was addressed to fans of the café. In ‘Greek playgroup in West
London’, interaction begins online to facilitate an offline meeting between the Greek mothers. In the Group ‘My parents used to make me go to Aylward Greek School’, interaction follows the opposite direction: members have co-existed in a location and then share their past experiences online. Finally in the case of the ‘Byzantium café’, members move across online and real settings in a way that their online encounters compliment their online practices.

The creator of ‘Greek playgroup in west London’ describes the Group’s function: ‘Playgroup for greek babies up to 3 years old. Great for practicing Greek!’. The Group used to have 9 members, however in less than a year nearly all members had left the Group. Polina (IN9) found the Group interesting and since she was expecting a baby she joined. In short time, she left the Group. In her interview, she admits that:

‘Initially I thought it would be something more organized...with more members. Eventually, I found out that there was no one coordinating things and it would function as a discussion room where nobody knows each other …so I left the group’ (IN10).

The following is an extract from the Group’s Wall (Appendix 6: GW1):

**Extract GW1**

Ira: hi Sia, i have a 2 year old boy and i am really interested in the playgroup ... i would love some info about it ... by the way thanks elina for finding this ...
14 June at 19:33 ·

Eli: Wow, that's interesting. I'll let a friend of mine know, she lives with her husband and her 2 year old son in North London and I know she would be thrilled :) By the way, I live in SW London (Hammersmith - Barons Court) and would love to babysit if any of you live relatively close to me! I'm good with children (I have ...a lot of nieces and nephews) and I'm a native Greek speaker.
13 June at 23:08 ·

Aleka: Hi Sia! Don't have a baby yet, but ...we're getting there :) 23 weeks in and counting. Where about in W.London are you based?

Sia is the Group’s administrator, and although all members addressed her personally on the Group’s Wall, she replied in their private mailbox. Eli suggested Sia to join this Group; she also informed another friend of hers about the Group and offered to babysit for this playgroup. The location where Sia lived in London seems a precondition for further contact, equally important for both Eli and Aleka. Since the initial purpose of this Group was the
organization of an offline meeting, interaction on the Group’s Wall was restricted only to the essential arrangements that could facilitate an offline meeting.

Whereas in nearly all Groups, members stated their affiliation with a place, the Group ‘My parents used to make me go to Aylward Greek School’ united members who wished to express aversion to a place related with certain ethnic practices of British born Greeks (Appendix 6: GW2):

**Extract GW2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lina</td>
<td>I hear ya Teresa</td>
<td>28 September at 23:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>me and my twin kris had to come to greek school here and we hated it! Lol28</td>
<td>September at 23:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brook</td>
<td>For me it was such a long time ago, icant remember any of there names LOL</td>
<td>11 September at 10:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basia</td>
<td>kiriotisiankarithis..... used to make me sing by MYSELF!!!!!! in his EAR!!!!!! andkiriondino.......grrrrrr......ididnt like him!! oh memories.....</td>
<td>10 September at 23:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brook</td>
<td>LOL, yeah me too!!</td>
<td>10 September at 08:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basia</td>
<td>it was bad enough doing Greek school there,theni went secondary school there so it was like going there 6 days a week!!</td>
<td>09 September at 23:35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the Group has existed for years, there were only four postings in the Group’s Wall and the Wall thread unfolds during a period of 20 days. Members participated in this Group to exchange past experiences and memories of the Greek school that their parents made them attend. Remembered places have often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). In this case, the school serves as a symbolic anchor which unifies members not on the ground of nostalgia but as an unpleasant memory. The way that the participants talk about this place produces qualities and dynamics very different from those that one could find in the physical environment of the school. Member’s memories and experiences reflect social meanings, values and emotions that surround the physical site. Their online narrations about the school they used to attend not only reveals a
version of their Greek identity which they are reluctant to embrace but also produced a new identity for the place itself, one which emerges as an outcome of interaction in this Group.

‘Byzantium Cafe London’ is an example of a Group that represents a private establishment operated by Greeks in London. The traditional historic café is situated close to a central Greek orthodox church of London and this is partly the reason that it has become one of the most popular meeting points for Greeks in London. The following is an extract from an online exchange taking place on the Group’s Wall (Appendix 6: GW3):

**Extract GW3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kali</td>
<td>Is anyone AWAKE???</td>
<td>09:11 on 25 February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lidia</td>
<td>I miss going out there after church so much! Ah London, I miss you</td>
<td>17:27 on 15 January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonis</td>
<td>Fрапэдаки мета ти екклисиа…стадар</td>
<td>06:12 on 14 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Hey Guys…This Sunday theres gonna be a get together at the café at 7-11…. Your all welcome to join. Come down and have some fun…xxx See you there….</td>
<td>04:03 on 14 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>Ok 1 side order of KOPES.with some nice Neraki!!</td>
<td>23:58 on 26 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>KALO…eshitze Koupes….</td>
<td>23:35 on 26 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dina</td>
<td>Neraki…ESHI??</td>
<td>21:28 on 25 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Loukoumades…..and Shamishi me kounes</td>
<td>13:25 on 24 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dina</td>
<td>What is in the menu today?…Koupes!!!!!!</td>
<td>15:47 on 21 September</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case, all members share pre-existing ties and used the Group as an additional point of reference for their interaction. Notably, the Group also includes members who are no longer living in London but take part in the Wall to express their nostalgia for meetings at the café. Dina, Maria and Lena engage with their ethnicity in a playful way as they perform a role-play in their effort to revive a typical situation that has taken place at the café –placing an order–. Then, Maria –a central actor in the Group– takes the lead to organize a get together
after the church. For these members, drinking ‘frappe’ after the church is a traditional way to socialize with other Greeks. Doing fieldwork in the café (cf. 2.4.3), I came to know that meetings in the café were often arranged through communication taking place principally through private FB mails and chat.

The above example best demonstrates how an individual’s experience in the café interweaved with activity on the Group’s Wall. Also, the example suggests that there might exists a potential for this networked environment to support and assist diasporic communities of practice (cf. 1.5.2), provided that small scale networks interacting online overlap with offline networks of individuals who also interact regularly in face to face meetings. However, it has been the sole case across the sample that has provided such evidence.

Each of the examples illustrated above, demarcates a set of distinct diasporic practices followed by members involved in each Group. For example, the interaction among Greek mums who wanted their kids to practice Greek language in a playgroup (GW1) suggested a distinct experience of Greek ethnic identity than the one implied in the Wall exchange of British born Greeks (GW2) who express their aversion for the Greek practices their parents made to follow. While in the first case, Greek mothers were seeking to transmit Greek culture to their kids, in the second case, British born Greeks engage with Greekness as an undesired experience. In addition to these categories, there is a third one, namely dispersed young professionals and students who socialized on the virtual place of a traditional Greek café: they reproduced virtually what was happening in the café and arranged future meetings. However, these three cases under study have been the only cases across the sample of FB Groups for Greeks in London that users participated in the ‘life’ of physical places. As shown in 3.5.3, users join FB Groups for Greeks in London with an aim to search for resources, support and information for life in London and form transnational networks of practice, rather than form and sustain communities. The next chapter will further discuss these findings.
5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined FB Wall Threads on the Profiles and Groups to point to the distinct ways in which the participants referred to versions of Greek ethnicity or to London. Quantitative analysis of the ethnospecific Wall Threads suggested that the participants were more likely to draw on resources related to their personal experiences and ethnic practices rather than collective resources such as history and socio-political issues related to Greece.

In a variety of instances of interaction on FB Walls, the participants exchanged their experiences, opinions, beliefs, stories, views and understandings on the qualities and the symbols that the Greek culture includes. Users that took part in these exchanges have Greek names in their majority (indicating a Greek origin) and wrote mainly in English. These observations are in line with findings in 3.4 which suggest that the participants on FB mainly communicate with other Greeks who live either in Greece or London.

In the examples presented in this chapter, individuals shared their different experiences and practices related to ethnicity and place. Their positions were situationally confirmed or challenged and continuously shaped by the interactional dynamics and contextual frameworks that defined each interactional instance. While the participants exchanged experiences and stories, ethnicity emerged as the product of interaction.

Analysis of the different ways that Wall contributors talk about ethnicity revealed an array of discursive strategies in which they rely to co-construct meaning. The participants used preservation strategies leading to the maintenance of national preconceptions and ideas and differentiation strategies which demarcate cultural properties and construct notions of other. They also exploited dismantling strategies which serve to demythologize aspects of Greek ethnicity and deconstruct established clichés and ideas. In particular, the participants relied on dismantling strategies when referring to the national, social and political issues in Greece and they drew on constructive and ‘othering’ strategies when referring to London. However, there were also cases that they were drawing on multiple cultural affiliations and actively mobilized diverse sources of identification to construct meaning. In these cases, new positions emerged out of the participants’ unique cross cultural perspectives and the negotiation of difference.
Based on what was demonstrated in chapter 4, the ‘third space’ (cf. 1.4.2) that emerges as result of this continuous flow of information on FB Walls, rather than being a mix of national and multicultural positions, displays unique properties. The transformative power of social dynamics over this ‘third space’ was also exemplified in the cases of three FB Groups for Greeks in London –a playgroup in west London, a Greek school in North London, a café for Greek diaspora–. While members socialize in the Groups’ Walls, a new identity emerges for the online version of the place, one that is socially constructed and exists in constant dialogue with the participants’ diasporic practices: organizing a playgroup for their kids, visiting a Greek cafe and sharing memories of a Greek school they attended.

However, it was only in the three cases examined (across the data) that interaction on FB Group Walls was supporting or acting complementary to physical communities or places. As it has been demonstrated in 3.5.3, FB Groups for Greeks in London mainly served to support transnational practices and place based networks rather than diasporic practices. In 1.4.2, I explored the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism. Whereas diasporic practices are likely to rely on community and group aspects of identity, transnational practices account for a wider range of processes that cross the boundaries of national communities and surround the experience of displacement (cf. 1.4.2). Based on this distinction, analysis of the participants’ practices on the Profiles and Groups has provided a solid ground to start thinking whether the concept of diaspora is adequate to describe the population under study. The next chapter undertakes this discussion and presents the study’s concluding remarks.
6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the concluding part of the study, I will link findings to the literature review and follow up the central issues that have started to emerge in the analysis. The first section (6.2) presents reflections on the study’s methodological choices and examines how the design of the study contributed to the wider discussion on methodology issues relevant to internet research. The second section (6.3) provides a summary of the study’s findings with regard to the main research questions: (a) how the social network site of FB mediates the participants’ experience of expatriate (6.3.1) and (b) how ethnic identity is projected on FB (6.3.2). Section 6.3.2 summarizes how this work contributes to the literature related to virtual ethnicity (cf. 1.5). In 6.4, drawing on current findings, I extend the discussion on diaspora and transnationalism which started in 1.4.2. Therefore, I re-examine the appropriateness of the term diaspora when referring to the population under study and suggests the existence of a discourse beyond diaspora to newer forms of transnationalism, fostered by the use of the social network site. Finally, the study’s conclusion suggests areas for further research (6.5).

6.2. Reflections on Methodology

As demonstrated in 1.6, the study of identity on social network sites has to account for a whole new set of parameters of communication enabled on these sites. The characteristics that social network applications enable: a stronger interplay with real world situations and settings (cf. 1.6.1), high levels of editability (cf. 1.6.2) and increasing visibility (cf. 1.6.3) are relatively new features and have posed challenges for the study’s methodological design.
Extending the methodological frameworks used for the study of virtual identity to address the distinct conditions upon the self is constructed; the study’s research design relied on mixed research methods and a multimodal approach to data (cf. 2.7.3).

Treating FB both as the context for social interaction and as an open social space where practices, meanings and identities are intermingled – thus both as ‘a culture of its own’ and ‘a cultural tool’ (Hine, 2000) – I followed the tradition of virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000; Evans, 2004; Cavanagh, 2005; Dominguez et al., 2007; Puri, 2007; Androutsopoulos, 2008), a common methodological option for researching online phenomena from the perspective of social, cultural and new media studies (cf. 2.2). Since methodological issues are closely interrelated with theoretical issues (Baynham & Georgakopoulou, 2006: 1), different understandings of virtual ethnography have emerged in response to the study of diverse new media environments. In search of appropriate methodologies, I was faced with the need to pay attention to the technical properties of the environment under study and take methodological decisions regarding (a) how to gain access in the field of the study (cf. 2.6.1); (b) how to approach ethics of research in social network sites (cf. 2.6.2); and (c) how to move between online and offline locations without creating ruptures (cf. 2.6.3).

Androutsopoulos’s (2008) discourse centred online ethnography (DCOE), a method which relies on a range of ethnographic techniques and a wide variety of heterogeneous types of data to disclose aspects of online interaction, served as a theoretical basis for the study’s methodological design (cf. 2.2). Accordingly, I investigated the process by which participants were filling the social space of FB by examining different types of online and offline data (cf. 2.4, Table 1), both quantitatively and qualitatively, allowing all open questions to emerge. Different tools of data collection – interviews, questionnaires, observation in physical sites, fieldwork and screen observation – obtained information about the participants, their practices, perspectives and meanings they attached to their online actions. A variety of analytical traditions such as content analysis and discourse analysis (cf. 2.2) were used to analyse the data collected. Ethnographic observations and triangulating methods have served as a kind of ‘glue’ which brought together all diverse kinds of data in a coherent narrative.

Such an approach allowed me to trace the implications of network use and also to account
for wider processes in the analysis (e.g. mobility across borders). The case of Greek FB users in London served as an ideal model to examine how FB may support de-territorialized identities. Using the researcher’s Profile to invite participants in the study, I observed the screen activity of 30 Profiles of Greeks in London. Interviews, fieldwork and questionnaires complemented screen observations and provided valuable data about the contextual parameters surrounding the participants’ distinct experiences, their practices related to homeland, and also practices related to the place of destination, London. Recognizing that the social network is not inherently useful, it has been important to ask how participants used FB, what their motives were, perceptions and views, how FB was embedded into their everyday habits and practices, and which were the needs that FB covered for the population under study.

Methodological choices in this study have addressed a need to extend the methodological tools and analytical traditions used for the study of identity online so that to account for the symbiotic relationship of the online world with offline contexts (cf. 2.2). In this direction, it emerges as a key task for researchers to invent distinct and flexible methodologies which address the way that each medium’s technological features rearticulate normative structures of human interaction.

### 6.3 Summary of the Findings

In this section, I summarize findings as they emerge from the questionnaires, interviews, screen data and fieldwork. The first part of this section (6.3.1) points to the processual nature of the participants’ identities between online and offline settings and provides evidence on the degree that FB is embedded in the participants’ daily lives. The second part (6.3.2) presents findings related to how ethnicity is projected on the Profiles and reviews ethnospecific content found on the Profile pages.
6.3.1 Mediating the Diasporic Experience: FB Use, Patterns and Practices

The study’s first analytical chapter (3) has provided an overview of the participants’ practices for self-presentation, interaction and participation while paying attention to the conditions underlying online cultural production. Quantitative analysis of the activity taking place on the Profiles suggested that FB primarily served as a tool which enabled self-presentation and impression management. Interactive activity occurred less frequently. Participation in wider social forms (e.g. FB Groups) rarely took place (cf. Figure 6).

Interviews and screen data suggested that FB is very well embedded into the participants’ daily lives (cf. 3.2). The majority of the online questionnaire respondents log onto FB on a daily basis and about half of them visit the site more than once a day. They spend on average one hour per day (62 minutes) connected on FB, yet the amount of time they spend on FB depends on their activities and lifestyles (cf. 3.2, 3.3, 3.4). About 16% of the participants stay connected on FB for more than two hours per day (cf. Figure 5). They discussed that they updated their Status and checked their Profile from a variety of different locations and settings (cf. 3.2). Since interpersonal dynamics on FB focus on the presentation of the self (Boyd, 2007), participants take certain actions for impression management, identity actions with which they flag topics, stances and personalities that are significant to them, such as ‘joining a group’ or ‘becoming fun of’ pages or links, causes, etc. A discrepancy between the great number of Groups that the participants joined and minimum levels of participation in these Groups, suggested that they mainly use Groups as indexes for identity and affiliation (cf. 3.5.1).

Following literature which treats personal pages as online diaries, non-static, identity archives formed through a systematic temporal process (cf.1.6.2), I investigated the relationship between online and offline versions of the self by examining online representations of ethnic identity and conducting interviews. As demonstrated in 1.6.2, I borrowed tools from literature on the presentation of the self on personal homepages (e.g. the concept of virtual bricolage or revisability) to examine the process according to which the participants were performing aspects of their identity (quizzes, videos, groups) on their Profiles and ‘writing themselves into being’ (Boyd, 2006). Screen data was combined with interview data in which the participants provided explanations about the content they
circulated and the process of editing their Profile pages. While previous research on personal homepages has focused either on the content and form (Miller, 1995; Seale, 2001; Bauman, 2004) or on the author and the process of homepage construction (Abbott, 1999, 2001; Nixon et al., 2003; Stern, 2004), in this study both aspects have been equally examined. Participants’ online production was examined in combination with situations and stories that surrounded it (e.g. the case of Polina’s participation in the FB Group for Greek mothers in London). Interviews have shown that the process of editing the Profile page is a thoughtful and deliberate process affected by the presence of a wide and heterogeneous audience, the Profile’s Friends (cf. 1.6.4).

As discussed in the literature chapter (cf. 1.6.4), concepts of the audience lie in the heart of online production (Hine, 2007). Interviews reveal that perceptions of a Profile’s audience and its perceived qualities were affecting self-presentation on the Profiles (e.g. the consistency between questionnaire results and screen data regarding percentages of Greek Friends on the Profiles suggests that the participants were well aware of the composition of their Profile’s audience). According to questionnaire results, 40% of the Profile pages (12 out of 30) had a percentage of 50–90% Friends with Greek origin (cf. 3.5, Figure 9). Screen data suggested that the participants had a mean of 46% Greek Friends on their Profiles. Whereas participants’ Greek Friends might have affected language choice on the Profiles (cf. 4.4.5), there was no correlation between the number of Greek Friends and levels of ethnospecific content shared on the Profiles (cf. 3.3).

Participants’ friendship behaviour was heavily dependent on their personal views on privacy and on a variety of other factors that related with offline situations and interactional contexts, and were traced by ethnographic participation. Questionnaires and interviews suggested that the participants tended to communicate more frequently with other Greeks than with their Friends of other ethnic backgrounds (cf. 3.4, Figure 10). Also, they were more likely to communicate with their Friends living in Greece than with their Greek Friends in London (indicatively, 14 of the participants communicate with Greeks living in Greece almost every day). Commenting on a post, uploading a photo and posting a SU have been the participants’ most popular reasons for communicating on FB. They were also likely to use FB as an alternative for phone conversations (cf. 3.4). Almost half of the questionnaire respondents stated that they communicated with other Greeks on FB to make a statement about
themselves. An emphasis on self-presentation was also evident in the interviews (cf. 3.3, 4.4.2).

SUs were treated both as textual representations and as speech acts whose meaning was completed in the process of the interaction (cf. 3.4). The interactive potential of a SU was found to be dependent on the contextual factors surrounding its creation: such as interpersonal relationships, degrees of FB usage, a Profile’s unique mixture of weak and strong ties, language choice, an individual’s popularity, etc. This observation suggests that there exists a strong link between online socialization and participants’ social identities.

The study of ethnospecific content found in the Profiles (e.g. SUs, Groups, Friends, Wall posts) has provided a starting point to trace how norms, cultural symbols, ethnic belongings and values circulated between online and offline locations. Examination of the ethnospecific content has been the focus of Chapters 4 and 5. I employed the term ‘ethnospecific content’ (cf. 2.4.1) as a tool which allowed me to isolate online representations of an ethnic culture (either Greek or British) from content which was not relevant to ethnicity. Although the majority of the audio-visual content that the participants shared on their Profiles did not contain direct references to aspects of Greek or British ethnicity (e.g. personalities, places, symbols, etc.), the Profile pages under study displayed an average mean of 95% ethnospecific content related to Greek ethnic background and only 5% related to British culture (cf. 3.5). Also, 45.2% of the SUs contained ethnospecific terms. These figures suggest that ethnicity is an important aspect of self-identification which manifests itself in the Profiles in a number of different ways. The study focused on five categories of textual and visual ethnospecific content on the Profiles: SUs, Wall threads, language choice, Profile photos (visual content) and Friends with Greek origin (cf. 4.4.1). I examined this content in relation to contextual information surrounding its creation such as the participants’ personal stories, conditions of expatriate (cf. 2.5), perceptions of ethnicity (cf. 4.4.1), and practices in London (cf.3.5.3,4.4.1).

As shown in 2.3, where I discuss the study’s sampling strategy, Greek experience in the UK is a result of a long history of immigration across many generations, an experience which follows various settlement patterns and could not be aggregated into a single narrative. Thinking in terms of categories that emerged across the sample, I identified three groups of
participants based on the duration and the reasons for living in London: (a) Students (30%=9) and Professionals (30%=9) who have been living in London for less than 10 years (age ranges from 18–44); (b) Greeks who have been living in London for more than 10 years (13%=4); (c) British-born Greeks, individuals with dual nationality and those who currently live in London but who were raised in different countries (27%=8). In this study, most of the participants remain strongly influenced by continuing ties to Greece and their social networks stretch across borders (cf.4.4.4, 3.5.3).

Students and Professionals who have been living in London for less than ten years represent the majority in the sample. They do not consider themselves as part of a Greek diaspora (cf. 3.4) and they are likely to have settled in London for a ‘short stay’ (cf. 3.5.3). They were more likely to communicate with Greeks living in Greece, they tended to reproduce well-recognized boundaries and cultural stereotypes and they were likely to participate in the most popular FB Groups for Greeks (cf. 3.5.3). They frequently travelled across borders and they edited their SUs to inform their Friends about their short returns to their homeland, occasionally using an emotional language which stresses nostalgic links (cf. 4.4.4). Individuals who have been living in London for more than 10 years displayed higher levels of ethnospecific content on their Profiles, tended to communicate more with other Greeks in London and tended to use English when typing on FB. British-born Greeks and those participants with a dual nationality could not be easily grouped under an umbrella category with common characteristics. Along with British-born Greeks based in London, there was also a burgeoning group of individuals (either professionals or cultural experience seekers) whose movement was characterized from continual migration from city to city and who were likely to develop complicated networks along the way and display hybrid cultural practices on their Profiles.

Although information obtained from the interviews and fieldwork provided valuable insights into the participants’ ethnic status and perceptions (cf. 4.4.1), the focus of the study lies with screen data extracted from the 30 Profiles. SUs have been the most prominent location where I traced participants’ ethnicity on the Profiles. Content analysis of the ethnospecific SUs showed that the participants were likely to edit their SUs referring to the present (cf. 3.4). In the great majority of the SUs (71 of 211), the participants referred to their travelling between Greece and London for short trips and holidays (cf. 4.4.4, Table 4). They were also likely to
comment on their experiences of visiting Greece, football games, Greek history, use cultural specific greetings, quotations, phrases and lyrics, exploit cultural symbols or modify global symbols to make them available for local readings (cf. 4.4.3). In 18% (37 of 211) of their ethnonspecific SUs, they referred to their experiences of events in London and locations. To a smaller degree, they used their SUs to express opinions about events occurring in the transnational field between London and Greece (e.g. the return of the Parthenon marbles to Athens). There were only two posts regarding ongoing issues in Greece’s internal political life. In these posts, the participants expressed their disappointment and critical eye on certain conditions, situations or events taking place in their home country. There was a complete lack of posts regarding issues that emerged in the UK’s sociopolitical sphere. In general, the participants in their SUs were more likely to engage with personal issues emerging at the micro level (cf. 4.4.4).

The study of FB Groups has provided additional findings regarding patterns of socialization on FB. There existed 77 Groups for Greeks in London – 29 Groups addressing Greeks in London who share common interests, hobbies and professions, 30 Groups relating to physical places in London and 18 addressing Greeks living in London in a general manner (cf. 3.7.3, Table 3). The study of FB Groups for Greeks in London addressed questions related to how participation in these Groups met the participants’ different needs (cf. 3.5.1) and how FB Groups reorganized the diasporic experience (cf. 3.5.3). Membership figures showed that the most popular Groups among Greeks in London were those which addressed young professionals and students in London and supported the organization of large scale entertainment events, parties and Greek nights out. Questionnaires suggest that the participants joined Groups for Greeks in London principally to meet other Greeks and find out information about Greek life in London. The majority of the respondents participated in those Groups to search for events in London and, to a lesser degree, to search for photos related to the events they organized, post messages and upload photos (cf. 3.5.1). Evidence also suggested that the participants showed a preference for passive participation in these Groups. The participants would rather search for information and browse photos than actively participate and interact in the Groups (e.g. by posting Wall messages or uploading photos).
Content analysis and observation on the Walls of the three most popular Groups for Greeks in London (cf. 3.5.3) has demonstrated that these Groups, rather than connecting members solely on the ground of a distant homeland, enabled the construction of place-based networks of practice in the host city (London). These networks supported their members’ lifestyle, social relations, needs for information and resources and transnational practices (cf. 3.5). In the Group Walls, engagement with sociopolitical issues was minimum and a plethora of posts suggested that the participants’ practices in London were still rooted in cultural practices related to their homeland (e.g. finding a place to watch Greek football games, searching for cafés in London which bear a resemblance to those back in Greece). Group members were also seeking social relations and resources tied with local everyday settings in London (cf. 3.5.3).

The great number of FB Groups, which referred to physical locations in London, as well as members’ persistent references to local settings and search for local resources, suggested that ‘place’ and ‘locality’ remain important anchors for the experience of ethnic identity in a diasporic context (cf. 3.5.3, 5.3). There were only a few indications regarding the complementary character of online and offline interaction across the sample of FB Groups for Greeks in London. The processual nature of the participants’ identities was best demonstrated in the study of FB Groups’ Walls. Section 5.3 provided evidence regarding how the participants engaged with places in London through FB Groups. As they moved between online and offline places of socialization (e.g. a café, a school, a playgroup), the physical environment represented online was also reconstructed according to the interpersonal dynamics enabled online, resulting in a new narrative for the place itself. A focus on place-making practices unravelled the process according to which immigrants create their own places of belonging and challenged the notion of a dichotomy between the local and the transnational (Ehrkamp, 2005: 348), which proves useful when studying ethnic identity as a cultural process that encompasses multiple sites. The following section presents findings which demonstrate how the participants’ ethnic identity emerged in the Profiles.
6.3.2 Ethnicity and the Third Space on the Profiles

The study’s literature review has begun by exploring the concept of identity through the lenses of the constructivists’ theoretical framework which understands diasporic identity as shaped and constantly transformed in the conjunction of two distinct processes: experiences and practices related to the country of settlement and an individual’s relation to a distant homeland. Therefore, I approached the participants’ identity as a site of struggle between these different positions (cf. 1.2). Following an interdisciplinary approach, the literature review started from a broader angle view of identity to be narrowed down to particular versions of identity such as ethnic, diasporic and transnational (cf. 1.4.1). I reviewed the use of the terms diaspora and transnationalism from the perspective of cultural studies and postcolonial studies and then examined the three main components in the study of diaspora: home, space and connectivity – central actors in the formation of ethnic identities and diasporic communities (cf. 1.4.3-5).

The literature’s fourth part focused on ethnic identity and diaspora on the web. Representation (cf. 1.5.3) and virtual communities (cf. 1.5.2) have offered key sites for the study of ethnic identities online and virtual diaspora. The literature review on virtual identity (1.5.1) has presented the theoretical frameworks for thinking about identity on the web such as the modernists’ view on identity as a fixed category and the postmodernists’ accounts of virtual identity as fluid and unstable. From the modernists’ perspective, researchers such as Nakamura (2002) and Castells (1996) have argued that the web is likely to foster existing discourses of ethnic identity, thus reproduce established accounts of ethnicity, stereotypes and predispositions and reinforce the culturally dominant social networks, cosmopolitanism and globalization.

In line with modernist accounts of ethnicity, data presented in 4.3 shows that digital production on FB can empower existing definitions of what Greekness means, stereotypes and predispositions since FB enables the repetitive use and networked expansion of established symbols and meanings (e.g. dynamic expansion of FB Groups, repetitive use of the Profile picture as a personal signature) as parts of a semiotic system which signifies national pride, flagging symbols and assumptions that reproduce the familiar forms of nationalism (cf. 4.3.1, 4.3.2).
However, in Section 4.4, I argue that the participants also project their ‘in-between status’ and enact hybrid and postmodern identities which are not always consistent with their situated identities. The tension between an online and offline self was often present in the interviews as the participants commented on each other’s actions online and realized their efforts to project idealized versions of themselves in their Profiles pages (cf. 4.4.1). Being aware of the way that FB use might interact with various aspects of their lives (e.g. their relations to others), when editing their SUs, participants were often immersed in a self-exploratory and creative process according to which they selected to communicate different aspects of their identities (cf. 4.4.1). Evidence in 4.4 presents FB as a space which offers liberating possibilities for the expression of ethnic identity, a space where distinct cultures and diverse online depictions of ethnicity coexist and blur the boundaries between self and the other, imagination and reality.

Examining the sociocultural context and combining different types of data, I argue that although there were cases where participants’ online identities were not consistent and continuous with their offline practices (cf. 4.4), representations of ethnicity on FB are not radically anti-essentialist constructions, fluid and non-linear, but are socially constructed categories grounded on the way that the participants perceived and experienced their ethnicity in a diasporic setting. The study of language choice on FB (cf. 4.4.5) best exemplifies this process according to which the participants were projecting situated identities. Whereas interviewees stated to be using mainly Greek in their everyday face-to-face encounters, on FB they were typing both in Greek and English on equal terms interchangeably (questionnaire data) and used mainly English when editing their SUs (83%).

Taking into account the broader global processes in which these identities are functioning and the technological features of FB, I argue that virtual ethnicity on FB is likely to be both expressed as a modern and postmodern construction, but primarily becomes a socially constructed category. The process according to which the participants adopt multiple personas online does not necessarily denote self-fragmentation, since they do seek to transcend the basic aspects of their identity on FB, but to supplement their offline practices and enhance their interactions (cf. 3.4, 3.5). During this process, they reproduce a number of assumptions in their interactions and frame their profiles according to the same categories.
that exist offline. Based on this understanding, I found FB an ideal place to study ethnic identity in a transnational context and the social network’s role in shaping its versions.

Hybridity (cf. 1.4.1) has been a useful concept to describe the participants’ practices in their Profiles according to which they selectively foregrounded particular versions of their identity – either related to a Greek cultural background or to culture and places in the host country. In 1.4, I discussed the notion of hybridization, which has been used in the literature of transnationalism to signify exchanges between cultures and the blurring of cultural boundaries. In 4.4, I traced hybridity in the Profile pages in the process of mixing elements of both cultural frameworks – the Greek and the British. For example, evidence suggested that the Profiles were likely to contain plenty of references to places in London and places in Greece (cf. 4.2), texts in both English and Greeklish (cf. 4.4.5), Profile Photos referring both to British and Greek culture. Remaking strategies (cf. 4.4.3), code switching between English and Greek, practices of cultural appropriation and expressions of national pride co-existed in the Profiles (cf.4.4.5). For example, while Philip uses the Greek flag in his Profile photo (PH7), in his SU, he playfully describes a ‘tsolias’ living in Britain.

Philip’s Profile was indicative of hybridization practices (cf. 4.4.3). As he updated his FB status with details of experiences, places and situations occurring during holidays in Greece, he creatively mixed different elements of his hybrid identity to portray a flexible self. In his Profile, one can find multiple and conflicting acts of ethnic identification expressed in a playful way. It was not possible to define clearly where the ‘British’ started and the ‘Greek’ ended. While editing his SUs, he exposed cultural difference as a natural component of his hybrid identity, a ‘place’ from which he could speak. For Philip and a number of other British-born Greeks and professionals in London, it appears that the Greek and the British identity were not competing elements struggling with assimilation, but they co-existed in a dialectic manner.

Although interviewees believe that they only express creativeness when creating a FB Group, screen data pointed to a number of creative practices according to which they produced symbolic textual and visual content on their Profiles, worked out innovative language practices and functions, and used digital spaces in unanticipated and inventive

127 Traditional Greek soldier
ways (cf. 3.4, 4.4.3, 4.4.4). For example, according to their personal needs for expressivity and interaction, some participants were inclined to use with consistency certain FB features (e.g. posting videos, updating the Status, uploading photos, etc.) or showed a preference for certain practices (cf.3.3, 3.4).

In 4.4.5, the study of the participants’ language choice and code switching practices also pointed to a variety of creative hybridization practices (e.g. the extensive use of Greeklish). Although a comprehensive account of all the parameters that shape the participants’ language choice on a public online space would require an in-depth analysis of the way that multiple aspects of identity coexist (e.g. psychological aspects, genre issues, age, etc.), observations regarding the participants’ language choice and code switching practices in the Profiles offer helpful insights to the kind of hybrid identities enacted (cf. 3.6.2). For a number of sociolinguists (cf. 3.6.2, Bakthin, 1981; Hymes, 1981; Irvine & Gal 2000; Pomerantz, 2002), the mixing of two languages also means the merging of two different cultural word views in a way that disrupts the process of the construction of cultural authority. The clash between the two discursive fields can be profoundly productive and ‘pregnant with potential for new world views’ (Bakthin, 1981: 360).

Conceiving the participants’ ethnicity as a ‘process’ (Street, 1993) which takes place across online and offline sites and in socialization, has helped me emphasize the dialectic relationship between the stereotypical images of ethnicity and a number of creative practices on the Profiles. Bhabha’s concept of the ‘third space’, which describes the process of creating culture in the postcolonial context from the hybrid perspective (cf. 1.4.1), can also be used to describe the space created as the participants interact on their Profiles and cross between online and offline locations.

This space encompasses both hybridity and expressions of banal nationalism and stereotypes, includes both Greeks in London and also Greeks in Greece. The space demarcated by the participants’ socialization practices online does not merely reflect reality (as modernists would argue), but entails creative dynamics and consists of a third space where diverse definitions of ethnicity may coexist and new definitions might emerge. For example, Greek ethnicity for Greeks in London is likely to include different definitions than those for Greeks in Greece. FB has provided a space where definitions of ethnicity viewed by different angles
and lived in different contexts are mixed together. Interaction on this space not only reproduced stereotypes and preconceptions related to being Greek, but also questioned them (cf. 4.4.3, 5.2.4, 5.2.5) and is likely to open up new ways of understanding the relationship between the self and the other, problematize the idea of a naturalized group ethnic identity, and support new articulations of home and cultural belonging. These new positions might emerge as revitalizing for ethnicity (cf. 5.4). Participants’ hybrid practices of representation on the Profiles were, therefore, opening up a space for the negotiation of cultural values, events, symbols. This process was best demonstrated in the study of interaction taking place on the participants’ Walls.

Conceptual content analysis (cf. 2.7.1) of the corpus of ethnospecific Wall threads pointed to five thematic areas that describe the resources in which the participants draw in their online exchanges: they expressed beliefs, stereotypes and predispositions of being Greek (5.2.1), almost equally relied on symbolic resources of Greek ethnic background (5.2.2) and they also engaged with life in London (5.2.3). To an importantly lesser degree, they commented on broader national and sociopolitical issues (5.2.4) and drew on an historic past (5.2.5).

As demonstrated in 1.6.2 and 1.2, to analyse these threads, I drew on the work of the social interactionists and the tradition of discourse analysis, which treats the self as empirically generated in the course of social interaction. Across the sample of the Wall Threads analysed, ethnicity emerged as an interactional outcome, while the participants employed a range of discursive strategies to co-construct meaning: they negotiated the meaning of historical events, traditional Greek values in the light of their updated experience of Greece, engaged with cultural difference and creatively exploited ethnic stereotypes (cf. 5.2). Analysis of the selected Wall Threads has pointed to the transformative power of the interactional processes according to which categorical positions of being Greek were shared, occasionally subverted and rearticulated in the process of interaction. For example, in W8, Philip, Natasa and Marina renegotiated the meaning of Greek hospitality in the context of Philip’s experience during his holiday, and they rearticulated aspects of what Greek ethnicity meant to them in the light of their updated experience of events taking place in Greece.

As the participants were moving between different cultural frameworks of experience and locations (due to their travelling across borders), notions of homeland were shaped and
reshaped in the conjunction of three distinct processes: in respect of the constantly shifting historic circumstances taking place in their home country, the interpretative framework which emerged from their experiences in London, and in the course of their interactional practices as they extended between the two countries and were facilitated by FB. Thus, notions of ethnic identity may be constantly updated as a never-ending project – just as a Profile page is. In the following section, I focus on the three distinct processes outlined above to further discuss the implications that these conditions have for theorizations of ‘home’ and diaspora.

6.4 Beyond Diaspora to Transnationalism

In several parts of the study (cf. 3.4, 3.5.2, 3.5.3, 5.3), it was demonstrated that FB has provided a space where the participants nurture ties across borders, search for local resources and create place-based networks of practice in the place of their settlement. The construction of this space depends heavily on wider phenomena regarding the participants’ experiences – such as increasing mobility across borders supported by the relatively short travelling distance and the expansion of low cost flights – and simultaneously shapes their experience of settlement.

Since the reasons for the participants’ mobility and consequently the duration and intensity of their experience of displacement or assimilation with host culture may vary, an a priori characterization of the population as ‘diasporic’ or ‘transnational’ would pose boundaries to the study. Analysis has paid attention to how the participants’ identities emerge in this transnational space, in a way that enables a ‘bottom up’ description of diversity of experiences and then has attempted to unify them in a single narrative. As it will be exemplified in the following lines, the population under study could be best characterized as transnationals who remain intensely involved in the lives of their country of origin as a result of network use and frequent travelling. At this point, I will refresh the discussion which began in the literature chapter (cf. 1.6) and reconsider the use of the terms ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnationalism’ in the light of the study’s findings. My aim is to accommodate the terms in the context of the modern realities of expatriate experience and explain why the term
‘diaspora’ can only partly correspond to a comprehensive description of the population under study.

In a variety of rapidly growing literature, it has been recognized that not all forms of human dispersal result in the formation of diaspora (cf. 1.4.2). Initiating from Vertovec’s (1997) theorization of diaspora as a type of consciousness, and Butler’s argument that diaspora communities are regarded as being ‘away’ for at least two generations (Butler, 1999), I decided to examine whether the online environment of FB fosters diasporic spheres and practices. The observation that the participants interviewed were reluctant to characterize themselves as diaspora (cf. 4.4.1) has generated thoughts regarding the appropriateness of the term ‘diasporic’ as an umbrella term to describe the participants’ identities. Chapter 1 has stressed the main components of diaspora: a sense of belonging and community which transcends national frontiers, the idealization of return to a distant homeland, and the construction of ethnic identities based on constructing sameness in a de-territorialized context (cf. 1.3). In this part, I will re-examine these theoretical components in the light of the current findings.

As it was discussed in 1.4.2, while transnationalism is often used to place emphasis on a form of border crossing back and forth across borders and its consequences for the experience of displacement (Basch et al., 1992; Guarnizo & Smith 1998), the concept of diaspora signifies a sense of community building, group identities, cultural continuity and refusal to abandon collective ways of identification (Cohen, 1997; Safran 1991). Literature on new media and diaspora recognizes the possibilities for new media technologies to serve community aims (cf. 1.5.2), support imagined communities or enable democratic public spheres that link geographically dispersed populations (Poster, 1990; Papacharissi, 2002; Downey & Fenton, 2003; McKee, 2005; Freelon, 2010).

Although there existed more than 77 FB Groups for Greeks in London, it was in very few cases that these Groups possessed community features. FB Groups representing diasporic institutions (e.g. religious institutions) and diasporic communities (e.g. North London Greeks) displayed very low activity on their Walls and a short life (cf. 3.5.2). It was in very few cases that the interaction taking place in these Groups supported diasporic practices or offline communities (e.g. in the case of a group of Friends interacting on a café’s Wall and
arranging a meeting at the café after attending the church). In addition, Greeks in London taking part in this study were likely to participate at a minimum level in FB Groups (cf. 3.5.3).

Section 1.5.2 has also reviewed literature which claims that new media have posed a detrimental effect on geographically localized communities and have increasingly led to the erosion of territory as a marker of community, since the only space that dispersed diasporas can occupy is the electronic space (Jacobson, 1995; Mitra, 1997; Putnam, 2000). The study’s findings have shown that place remains an important anchor for dispersed individuals. This was best illustrated in the study of FB Groups for Greeks in London (cf. 3.5.2, 5.3).

The study of FB Groups about Greeks living in London suggests that there exists a real or imagined relationship among dispersed individuals in London which was sustained principally online and it was grounded on the population’s need to create place-based networks with practice-oriented goals (cf. 3.5.3). FB Groups for Greeks in London such as ‘Greek Professionals in London’, ‘Ellinares sto Londino/Greeks in London’ and ‘London Greek connection’ collected more than 500 members each (67% of the total members in all Groups for Greeks in London) and coordinated their activities to support the organization of large scale events for Greeks in London (cf. 3.5.3). Group members could search for practical information related to London or Greece, engage in a number of transnational activities at the micro level (e.g. selling plane tickets, searching for houses to rent), post announcements, ads, invitations, promote websites, organize their transnational activities across borders (e.g. their travelling or accommodation) and take part in key events organized by the administrators – well-connected individuals who had a central place in offline networks of Greek diaspora and assumed a leadership role in the promotion of cultural events (e.g. parties, concerts). Members were also involved – to a small degree – with issues that emerged at the transnational level (e.g. return of the Parthenon marbles, football games).

In sum, although FB Groups for Greeks in London facilitated a range of transnational ties (e.g. between Greeks in London and Greeks in Greece) and practices, indications of the way that they supported offline communities and collective identities were rare.

Questionnaire and interview findings (cf. 4.4.1) also indicated a tendency for the participants to engage with practices related to Greek ethnicity at the individual level (e.g. travelling back
in Greece regularly, keeping in touch with Greek news on the internet or reading Greek newspapers) rather than to participate in collective activities and institutional structures (e.g. a FB Group, a Greek community, an organization of diaspora, religious practices, etc.).

Idealization of return and a collective mythology of homeland – significant parts of diasporic cultural imagination (cf. 1.4.4) – are also elements difficult to trace in the online space under study. FB Groups, rather than reflecting a longing for return to a distant homeland, promoted the experience of displacement as a kind of travel, tourism or a short stay (cf. 3.5.3). Participants’ intense mobility across the borders of Greece and the UK – as they fly back and forth for short trips and holidays – was revealed in the interviews, questionnaires and also projected in the majority of ethnospecific SUs (cf. 3.5.3, 4.4.1, 4.4.4). As the participants edited their SUs in the present tense, they publicly announced information regarding their flights, details of their travelling or preparations made. While in London, and before travelling, they often used emotional language to announce the prospect of their short visits in Athens, expressed nostalgic feelings, enthusiasm, provided details about their trips and counted the minutes until their departure. Having arrived in Greece, they were likely to update their Status with information about the places they were in, locations and sites (cf. 4.4.4). These stories were anchored live from ‘home’ to the Profile’s audience in a way so that they were readable to an international audience. When again back in London, they were likely to announce their return.

The notion of ‘home’ has been central in the theorizations of diaspora (cf. 1.4.4). Throughout the diasporic literature, there is a creative tension between the discourse of home and dispersion since in the diasporic imagination ‘home’ becomes a mythical land in which immigrants long to return to (Brah, 1996). However, the participants’ relation to their homeland is lived in a different framework. For the participants, ‘home’ is not a place to return to, but a ‘lived’ place which they frequently visit and publicly share experiences and stories from home in real time (cf. 4.4.4). Due to their frequent travelling, home is no longer a product of imagination but a site of experience.

Experiences of home were also transmitted and shared live with the Profile’s Friends – a mix of Greeks, Greeks in London and international Friends. The participants’ constant border crossing, combined with the opportunity to transmit in real time their live experiences,
stories and feelings of home, may result in new conceptualizations of ‘home’ (cf. 5.2.1, 5.2.5). Thus, ‘home’ becomes a ‘lived’ place embedded in a transnational field which also encompasses multiple other locations as the sites in which the participants’ daily activities extend. While socializing on a Profile’s Wall, participants were likely to engage with cultural difference in distinct ways: drawing on well recognizable binaries and oppositional discourses (e.g. ‘us’ and ‘them’, the ‘self’ and the ‘other’) or creatively engaging with cultural difference in a way which did not indicate a troubled relationship with the majority. Although the participants were rarely involved with sociopolitical issues on their Profiles (especially with events in the UK), when they did, they drew on deconstruction strategies to criticize aspects of political life in Greece and expressed their disappointment taking a distance from the situations (cf. 5.2.4, 5.2.5).

While literature on diaspora points to a struggle for ethnic identification and a process of alienation from the hostland (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997), studies on transnationalism engage with a de-territorialized form of citizenship which transcends state boundaries and dualities (Held & Guibernau, 2001; Beck & Sznaider, 2006). Thus, the notion of transnationalism proves a more appropriate framework to accommodate the participants’ experience as mediated on FB.

One could also argue that the cases under study reveal a discourse of cosmopolitanism (cf. 1.4.2). Beck’s account of cosmopolitanism as a discourse which rejects ‘the either/or alternative between territorial-bounded national and ethnical identities without denying the historical narrative behind them’ (Beck, 2006) creates further questions regarding whether FB may also foster a cosmopolitanism discourse.

The study has pointed to a range of transnational activities, translocal ‘practices’, hybrid modes of cultural production and hybridization practices on FB. However, rather than treating the online transnational space among Greeks in London as a celebration of hybridity, an alternative and productive way to view the emerging discourse of transnationalism would be as a kind of ‘globalization from below’ (Garcia, 1993; Mitchell, 1997) with a liberating potential as it ‘highlights the often unexpected yet fundamental consequences of everyday practices and places, which are linked with the impact of the state and market and the unequal power relations embedded in these processes’ (Sheringham, 2008: 12). Viewing
transnationalism as a form of ‘globalization from below’ enabled by social network technology paves the way for further research on the transformative forces of media technologies for wider processes such as the globalization.

6.5 Conclusion and Areas for Further Research

The concept of ethnicity has served as a tool to uncover the broader dialectics and the complex interplay between identity, technology and culture. In an attempt to situate how ethnicity is mediated by social network use, the study has demonstrated how the social space demarcated by the participants’ practices for self-presentation, interaction and participation on FB was not only reproducing stereotypical versions of Greek ethnicity, but was also involved in the formation of new, hybrid and diverse identities which were consistent with the individuals’ sense of self and offline experience, were transnational in nature and offered opportunities for cultural renewal. The study builds on existing literature on virtual ethnicity by showing that the social network of FB may enable constructions of identity according to both modern and postmodern understandings. However, on a social network site like FB, ethnicity emerges primarily as a discursive, socially constructed category influenced by the technical characteristics of the medium, the wider processes of globalization, and the specific contexts of experience as they unfold both online and offline. Rather than merely reflecting existing identity categories, the social network has mediated the experience of ethnicity, changing the nature of the diasporic experience. A focus on diaspora would not help but hinder ‘a more truly transnational, cosmopolitan imagination’ (Ang, 1996) of what it means to live the world ‘as a single place’ (Robertson, 1992). The network is found to mediate and foster the participants’ transnational experiences rather than diasporic practices and thus it was likely to complement the creation of transnational identities. I argue that in the case examined, FB served as a ‘third space’ which more than providing the possibility to erase previous ethnic boundaries and replace them with a new sense of identity, involved complexities: traditional senses of identity were coexisting and occasionally colliding with new senses of belonging.

However, recognizing that different media technologies are likely to support distinct identity
narratives and that the transnational experience is mediated by a number of different communication technologies, a comprehensive view of how ethnicity can be mediated and reshaped in a transnational or diasporic context should take into account the full implications of connectivity. Rather than understanding new media as a catalyst for new interpretations and alternative paradigms, future research needs to account for wider discourses formed at the interface of new and traditional media, mainstream and diasporic media when engaging with identity formation at a transnational level. In view of this, researchers have to articulate open research questions which enable a ‘bottom up’ account of individuals’ practices on social networks, asking how they appropriate each distinct space to cater for their needs for interaction and practices. Also, research into de-territorialized identities needs to be informed by further ethnographic studies into how individuals’ practices extend across different media – conventional broadcast media, mobile messaging, and other interactive applications – and complement each other.

To this end, the study stresses the need for a further debate on ethnic identity, one that is based on broader and interdisciplinary theorizations of identity (e.g. to account for varied processes that shape identity in the context of modern living such as cultural, political, biological and psychological). Following a proliferating body of research which relies on an interdisciplinary way of thinking about identity (e.g. identity as stories and narratives which extend between online and offline settings), future research has to provide a better understanding of the complex interplays between different and opposing aspects of ethnic identity (e.g. identity roles, interpersonal relationships, psychological factors, identity variables such as age, gender, etc.) and the way they interfere with new media contexts. Attention to the way that the virtual intersects with aspects of real-life, offline practices and settings has been key to this work.

Having pointed to a discontinuity between a territorially defined identity and online practices of identity formation on the social network site of FB, the study suggests that further empirical research is needed to describe how the relationship between identity and place is shaped in the context of different media technologies. The study of diaspora and transnationalism can serve as a conceptual starting point for understanding some of the changes that are being manifested in the relationship between states and collective identities. However, it would also be interesting to investigate how this relationship unfolds for
different diasporas, e.g. to investigate how different groups who use social network sites, experience de-territorialized and transnational identities in different ethnic and cultural contexts.

More importantly, in extending the discussion on the social construction of place online — which started in 5.3 — there is a need for future research to focus on the intersection between physical and online communities and investigate the potential (or challenges) that social networking applications pose for collective and networked identities. This research agenda creates crucial questions regarding the long-term implications that social networking use might have for social identities and collective mobilization.
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**APPENDICES**
(Appendices in the cd)

Appendix 1: Information Sheet and Consent Form
Appendix 2: Project Webpage– Online Questionnaires
Appendix 3: Interview Transcripts
Appendix 4: Profile Photos
Appendix 5: The Status Updates (SUs)
Appendix 6: Wall Data
Appendix 7: Profile Screen Data