Suddenly I felt like a migrant: Identity and mobility threats facing European self-initiated expatriates in the UK under Brexit

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, several countries have undertaken political initiatives aimed at reducing immigration. For self-initiated expatriates living in these countries, we lack a clear understanding of how these initiatives are interpreted and responded to. The United Kingdom's 2016 "Brexit" referendum decision to leave the European Union presents an example of one such initiative potentially impacting the mobility, UK identification, and future aspirations of European SIEs living in the UK. We draw on 41 in-depth interviews with SIEs from 18 European countries who had voluntarily chosen to relocate to the UK to analyze how they interpreted the Brexit vote, as well as to assess its impact on their identities and migration plans. We identify four types of SIEs based on their perceived mobility and identification with the UK at the time of the Brexit referendum, each of which was associated with a distinct reaction pattern related to the outcome of the Brexit referendum. Our findings have implications for the study of SIEs, as well as for talent managers charged with their retention. We suggest directions for future research in SIE management.

Keywords: Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), mobility, identification, identity threat, identity work, Brexit

Introduction

Over the past three decades, increasing globalization has contributed to a 77% increase in international migration (IOM, 2020). While benefiting many, growing migration has more recently led to a populist backlash in many countries, such as former US President Donald Trump's attempts to build a wall with Mexico, or the rise of anti-immigration parties in many countries in the EU and Asia. The United Kingdom (UK)'s 2016 "Brexit" referendum decision to leave the European Union (EU) was similarly driven in part by concerns about migration (Miller, 2019; Kerr & Sliwa, 2020). For the EU citizens living in the UK at that time, the referendum result and its aftermath represented a significantly unsettling event (Ryan, 2019), suggesting an end to their ability to seamlessly migrate to, work in, leave from, and return to the UK. For some, it led to a rethink of their relationship and identification with the UK (White & Goodman, 2021), although the nature of these reactions and any related consequences for their residency or employment decisions remain unclear.

This paper analyzes how macro-political initiatives encouraged by anti-immigration movements impact highly-skilled resident foreigners who might not have envisaged permanent migration, that is, "self-initiated expatriates" (SIEs). SIEs' more international mindsets and skillsets make them attractive to many employers, although their high degree of international mobility can make them challenging to retain (Doherty & Dickmann, 2013). Given the nature of their contribution to their 'host' countries and the reliance of many employers on SIEs (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), we believe a deeper understanding of how changing national sentiments and rules related to immigration may impact SIEs is needed.

The Brexit referendum presents an instructive opportunity to examine how an immigration-limiting national initiative might impact SIEs. We studied 41 highly skilled European SIEs from 18 countries who had previously relocated to the UK and were living

there at the time of the Brexit referendum, and analyzed how they interpreted and responded to the vote—including any plans to leave their employers or the UK altogether. In contrast to widely held assumptions that SIEs are highly mobile (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty, 2013), or strongly influenced by home country identity (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), our study reveals that neither mobility nor home country identity considerations fully explained the way EU SIEs interpreted and reacted to Brexit. Rather, mobility and identity considerations interacted in surprising ways that have not been the focus of academic study to date. In particular, we found that SIE 'host' country identification with the UK, combined with SIE mobility opportunities and constraints, allowed us to discern four discrete types of SIEs—each associated with a distinct reaction pattern to Brexit. Our typology of SIEs and their subsequent reaction patterns gives rise to further theoretical and practical insights regarding how SIEs are impacted by immigration-related decisions in their host countries, helping us make sense of puzzling and seemingly contradictory SIE reactions. We also anticipate that our findings might assist employers better understand how SIEs are impacted by such decisions, allowing them to develop more effective responses to improve employee morale and retention despite the severe limitations imposed by such political initiatives.

Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)

Studies on self-initiated expatriates in the broader field of migration studies have built on research into 'skilled migrants' and 'expatriates'. As with many skilled migrants, SIEs tend to have university degrees and move to other countries seeking international work or education experiences (e.g., Ceric & Crawford, 2016; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). However, while migrants usually seek to stay permanently in their host country, SIEs typically envisage a more temporary stint (Zikic, 2015; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014).

SIEs have chosen to move to another country for an indefinite duration and on their own initiative—rather than through an employer (Al-Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014). In contrast to other migrants, the status "self-initiated" signals a high degree of agentic power, as SIEs take advantage of employment opportunities outside their home country to prioritize their personal development (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Andresen, Pattie, & Hippler, 2020). Unlike employer-assigned expatriates, SIEs tend to adapt more readily to their foreign environment by developing greater language proficiency and increased cultural empathy, and by better adjusting to the local host culture overall (e.g., Peltotkorpi, 2008; Zhang, Harzing, & Fan, 2018).

Past reviews of the academic literature on skilled migrants have offered limited insights into the inclusion of SIEs in the host country workplace or their management (e.g., Hajro, Stahl, Clegg, & Lazarova, 2019; Shirmohammadi, Beigi, & Stewart, 2019), leading to calls for more research to understand SIEs in particular (Andresen et al., 2020; Crowley-Henry, O'Connor, & Al Ariss, 2018; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020). In particular, very little research has examined the extent to which SIEs might be threatened by the recent backlash targeting "immigrants" and transnational "elites" in many countries (Kerr & Sliwa, 2020). We thus lack a more refined understanding of how such political and legal shifts might impact their decisions on whether to stay or leave their host countries.

SIEs and mobility

In a migration context, 'mobility' is often depicted as the ability to move freely independent of an organization (Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010). The literature on SIEs suggests that they are highly mobile (Doherty, 2013), often motivated by lucrative work opportunities (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) and/or a desire for exploration and excitement

(Dickmann, Suutari, Brewster, Mäkelä, Tanskanen, & Tornikoski, 2018), and may treat national and international contexts as having little importance (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). International mobility is largely viewed as desirable, as it contributes to positive professional and self-development through the accumulation of cultural, social, economic, and career capital (Brimm, 2018; Halvorsen, Treuren, & Kulik, 2015). Indeed, 'internationality' (i.e., international education and work experiences combined with willingness to be mobile) is a commonly used metric for recruitment and selection criteria and career progression (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012). As a result, moving to another country has become increasingly popular both within Europe and elsewhere, with some scholars viewing recent times as an "Age of Mobility" (Skeldon, 2015: 2356–61).

Mobility can be enhanced or constrained through legal and regulatory policies. In the European context, EU passport-holders have the freedom to make choices regarding the member state in which they live—rights that extended to the UK when it joined the European Economic Community in 1973. The Brexit vote to leave the EU thus threatened the ability of British SIEs to live in continental Europe, and of European SIEs to relocate to the UK. EU SIEs residing in the UK at the time of the vote faced a particularly delicate situation, in which they were largely made to choose whether to settle in the UK permanently, or to leave the UK without the facilitated ability to return. Although this referendum result created mobility-related conflict for these SIEs (Bräuchler & Ménard, 2017), it remains unclear how mobility considerations impacted their ultimate reaction patterns, or indeed if other factors may have influenced these choices (Kilkey & Ryan, 2020).

SIEs and identity

An individual's identity is informed by roles, relationships, and memberships of broader groups or "social identities" (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

Individuals can *identify* with collectives—including national collectives—in cognitive, affective, and evaluative ways (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), ultimately developing a sense of "we-ness" or "one-ness" with those collectives with which they identify. An individual's various social identities can be nested within each other, or they can be cross-cutting, with different social identities cued by various events that can lead their salience to shift (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001).

The additional complexity of managing an international career means that SIEs often find themselves in situations where their *national* affiliations or identities can become particularly salient, although their relationship with national identity and identification may be complicated (Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020). Miller (1995) notes that national identity is not a particular state, but rather a subjective affiliation driven by the self-identification that individuals develop between themselves and one or more national groups. More specifically, individuals can identify with either "ethnic" or "civic" aspects of a national identity, with "the latter referring to the ability to 'choose to which nation they belong'" (Kunovich, 2009: 590). Civic notions of national identity can thus largely be considered 'achieved' rather than 'ascribed' identities, meaning they are based on decisions that are voluntary in nature (Petriglieri, 2011). Identification with a national identity can therefore be highly complex and multidimensional (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), with considerable variation in salience across individuals.

For EU SIEs based in the UK at the time of the Brexit vote, it is unclear to what extent they would have interpreted the referendum result and its aftermath as threatening to any identification they had with the UK (Botterill & Hancock, 2019). Identity "threats" are "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri, 2011: 644). The literature on identity threats suggests that if an individual's national identity or sense of identification with a nation is threatened, he or she

might respond in a number of ways, including by criticizing the source of the threat, concealing or otherwise 'protecting' this identity, or by altering the meanings, importance or even existence of the identity, i.e., 'restructuring' (Petriglieri, 2011; Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). These responses, particularly identity restructuring, would constitute "identity work" (Brown, 2015; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), that is "processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity, and struggle to come to terms with … the various social identities which pertain to them" (Watson, 2008: 129). Identity work can therefore involve changing one's association with a collective or changing the meanings that one associates with that collective (Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018), including altering one's level of identification with a nation. For international migrants, such identity work processes may evoke emotional aspects of identification with national identities, as highlighted by some scholars of transnationalism (Conradson & McKay, 2007:167). In her study of Romanian migrants to Spain, Marcu (2015), found informants' initial experiences of home country longing and loss were often supplanted—through their very mobility—by a stronger sense of European identity. Quassoli and Dimitriadis (2019) noted considerable home country identification, and minimal host country identification, amongst the southern Europeans living in London and Berlin in their study. It is thus unclear to what degree SIEs—as highly agentic and employment-driven individuals—might experience identification with their host country, their home country, or the EU, and to what extent such identification might impact their reactions to events such as Brexit.

Organizational responses

The interplay between globalization, the international nature of businesses, and increasing international mobility has increased the complexity of human resource

management (HRM) for many organizations (Scroggins & Benson, 2010). Hiring SIEs is a way many organizations choose to access skilled workers and address labor shortages (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). SIEs' high levels of talent, human and social capital can be central to the internationalization process of international companies (Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011). Compared to individuals rooted in a single national context, individuals with multiple national affiliations have been shown to display greater cognitive flexibility, adaptive capacity, and relational understanding (Brimm, 2018), making them good cultural brokers and facilitators of knowledge sharing and innovation (Doherty, 2013; Levy, Lee, Jonsen, & Peiperl, 2019). Due to their high levels of skill, human and social capital, SIEs have become sought after in the global marketplace for talent.

However, SIEs can be challenging to manage due to their highly individualistic, self-reliant, and self-directed tendencies (Brimm, 2018). The boundaryless careers of many SIEs can raise questions about the employment relationship, with employers encouraged to provide additional mentoring and administrative support (Sarpong & Maclean, 2019). Managers often find it difficult to develop a long-term retention strategy for SIEs (Doherty, 2013; Hussain & Deery, 2018), as they can be tricky to socialize and retain (Tharenou & Kulik, 2020; Crowley-Henry, Benson, & Al Ariss, 2019). Inkson and colleagues (2008) suggest that the relationship between SIEs and companies be understood as a mutually beneficial partnership. However, some companies avoid employing highly skilled migrants as they are seen as a "potential threat to organizational norms and practices" (Risberg & Romani, 2021: 1). Even if they do hire SIEs, employers frequently lack a strategy to manage them that generates benefits for both parties (Guo & Al Ariss, 2015).

As European SIEs in the UK absorbed the impact of the Brexit decision, their employers were forced to confront potential issues related to workforce morale and ultimately retention in a context that was largely unprecedented. Relatively few scholars have

studied how organizations might best manage SIEs in such macro-political contexts where, among other things, they face the possibility of expatriation. As such, it responds to calls for more contextualized study of international talent management (Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2018), by providing employers with additional insights into SIEs and how they respond to macro-political events induced by immigration concerns.

METHODS

Research Context

The Brexit referendum resulted in 51.9% of the UK population voting for the country to leave the European Union, potentially ending the right for British citizens to live and work freely in the other 27 EU member states, while calling into question the right for EU nationals to freely move to and live in the UK. This referendum result had broad repercussions in politics and businesses, but it was particularly salient to the 3.6 million Europeans living in the UK and the 1.3 million British citizens residing in the EU. In a widely reported speech in 2016, Theresa May, then British Prime Minister, appeared to target an international and mobile elite living in the UK with her statement that "*If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere.*" By questioning the loyalty or commitment of international professionals living and working in the UK, this comment appeared to go further than other elements of the Brexit campaign focused on stopping the movement of low-skilled European workers, so called "migrant workers". Ultimately, this speech and other Brexit-related political developments following the referendum led the authors begin to investigate the potential impact of SIEs' national identity affiliations, as well as how they perceived their mobility was impacted by potential changes to their residency status.

Data Collection

Informed by the above-mentioned definition of SIEs (Al-Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Andresen, et al., 2014), we sampled EU nationals with university degrees who had moved to the UK for an indefinite period. We thus focused on highly educated professionals who personally initiated their relocation to the UK (Andresen et al., 2020).

We recruited an initial group of participants through our network of SIE acquaintances, and then engaged in snowball sampling by asking our informants at the end of each interview if they could suggest others who fit our criteria to be interviewed. As our data collection progressed, emergent theoretical ideas informed our sampling criteria in an iterative fashion, consistent with principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, in the early stages of our study we interviewed six non-European SIEs (from Canada, China, and Australia) living in the UK. We noted a significant difference in identity threat levels stemming from the Brexit referendum result between non-EU and EU citizens, and realized this difference may have been due to the different ways these groups were impacted by the referendum. We thus decided to focus our data collection exclusively on EU citizens and omitted non-EU citizens from our dataset. Further interviews caused us to question whether age or stage of life factors might impact mobility, and thus influence how informants viewed the referendum result. At this point, we directly sought out informants at different career stages (e.g., early, mid, and late career), having different personal circumstances (e.g., whether they lived in partnership with a British or non-British partner, had family in or outside the UK, or owned property or other investments in the UK), working in different industries and locations in the UK (we sought informants in London, larger cities such as Edinburgh, and regional areas). Later in our data collection, we noted that although much discourse surrounding the Brexit referendum focused on migrant workers from central and Eastern Europe (Miller, 2019), our sample had a preponderance of informants from Western Europe. We thus sought out more informants from Central and Eastern EU

countries, ultimately interviewing eight. In total, we conducted interviews with 41 SIEs from 18 EU countries living and working in the UK at the time of the referendum. We note that our sampling method may have led the SIEs in our sample to have above average levels of education, with nine holding PhD degrees at the time of our interview. However, although we cannot claim that our sample is fully representative of EU SIEs living in the UK, our sample is considerably broader than other studies of this population (Kilkey & Ryan, 2020; Rzepnikowska, 2019).

Our participants included 18 males and 23 females ranging from 25-55 years of age (see Table 1 for informant information). These EU citizens had lived in the UK between 3.5 and 20 years, having an average of four years of UK work experience. Participants worked in a range of industries, including consultancy, banking and finance, public sector, health care, research institutions, and universities. At the conclusion of our study in March 2020, 33 of our informants continued to live in the UK, while two split their time between the UK and another country, and six had left the UK permanently. The breadth of home countries, age, personal circumstances, work experiences, and industries in our sample helped us gain insight into how reactions and coping mechanisms developed within and across a variety of backgrounds. Our participants had different levels of language skills, willingness to move, and job market opportunities in their home or other countries, factors which in many cases were interlinked. For example, linguistic considerations were considered particularly important for participants working in healthcare, due to the importance of strong local language skills in this sector.

With our research focus cutting across a number of different theoretical perspectives, and little knowledge of how macro-political developments impact individual identity and subsequent reaction patterns including migration intentions, our approach to data collection and analysis was exploratory and drew on principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss,

1967), anchored in a constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2006). Following other scholars who integrated contextual and personalized information from informants (Inal & Karatas-Özkan, 2011), we sought to understand our participants' experience of living as EU citizens in the UK during a time where questions of national identity had been pushed to the forefront.

We began by developing and pilot testing an initial semi-structured interview protocol that was quite broad, focusing on informants' professional backgrounds, national identity affiliations and the potential evolution of these over time, as well as on their reactions and those of their employers in the aftermath of the Brexit vote. As we asked about national affiliations, we noted that some (but not all) informants stated that they also identified with the UK. We explored this question in greater detail with subsequent informants. As our project advanced, we further refined our protocol to explore other emergent areas of theoretical interest, such as reasons to remain or leave in the UK and changes in their local social network. The interviews were conducted between November 2018 and March 2020. One was conducted in person, with 40 conducted by video on Skype, Facebook, or WhatsApp. Each interview lasted between 30 and 105 minutes and all were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

We uploaded our interview transcripts into NVIVO software, and divided up the first 30 transcripts between the three co-authors to conduct a preliminary analysis of 10 interviews each, independently generating a set of initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). We then discussed these codes and developed a preliminary shared code dictionary, which guided our coding of the remaining interviews. Subsequently, we transferred the transcripts between us for a second round of coding and again discussed areas of difference across team members, at

times updating code definitions or adding entirely new open codes as we progressed. Each interview was independently coded by at least two members of the research team.

Working in the constructivist tradition, our overall coding approach involved attempting—to the greatest extent possible—to understand the way our informants interpreted their lives and careers in the UK before and after the Brexit vote. Following Charmaz (2006), we engaged in constant comparison as we moved back and forth between emerging data codes and categories related to identities and reaction patterns. For example, we began to discern connections between changes in national identity affiliation and responses such as making plans to leave the UK or applying for a British passport. As we worked back and forth from the data to the codes and emergent categories, at times we merged or split categories. For example, we merged codes related to mortgages, dual careers, and school-aged children into the category of "reasons to stay in the UK".

We began to notice that while some informants perceived themselves as quite mobile, others felt much less so. For example, *"Both me and my partner, we have moved around a lot and lived in many different countries. […] We want to continue that"* (#14, Swedish) was coded as "high" in mobility, while, *"I mean, in a sense, we have a very good deal here. Because we both have found work here […] That's what made us stay"* (#41, German) appeared to indicate a lower level of perceived mobility. We linked our category of "reasons to stay in the UK" to the overarching theme of mobility. Mobility considerations were repeatedly mentioned, especially by interviewees who could move any time if they wanted. Some of these were considering or preparing to move in the near future, while others saw their mobility limited due to professional or personal circumstances. At this point, we returned to the literature on SIEs and identified 'mobility' as an important theme, although our data also led us to consider factors not normally associated with mobility in other studies. For example, we also noticed that when many informants discussed Brexit they reacted quite

emotionally and personally, which when we turned to the literature appeared to indicate elements of a perceived identity threat. For example, the following passage was coded as "high identity threat":

> *"Before that---we were just all Europeans. And now---It's almost like a divorce. You know? It's like your partner saying, 'Oh, I don't want to be with you anymore.' […] It's a good comparison, actually. Because also when you go through a breakup, you have to re-establish your identity. Because you are no longer part of a couple. You are single again. You know? So you have to re-establish your identity, and you have to frame it. And it has to change."* (#19, German)

In the same vein, we also noticed that informants expressed varying levels of identification with the UK, and so we began to code for this. For example, "*I see myself as being 100 percent Danish. Obviously, I've lived in the UK for quite a while, […] but I don't identify myself as British in any way*" (#24, Danish) was coded as "low" in UK identification, whereas the following informant was coded as "high:" *"I feel still Italian, and part of me also feels British. I can operate in both cultures"* (#1, Italian).

After having coded our full dataset, including the final rounds of interviews, our categories largely stabilized, and we reached the point of theoretical saturation, with our final interviews not providing significant additional insights. It had become clear that perceived mobility combined with identification with the UK—rather than with home country—combined to produce a four-quadrant typology enabling a richer understanding of the reactions of UK-based EU citizens in the aftermath of Brexit. We returned to the literature on identity, identity threats, and the mobility of migrants and expatriates a final time and realized that these theoretical lenses had not previously been inter-linked to effectively explain the reactions of SIEs to anti-immigration political movements. This insight gave rise to our typology as well as our organizational-level implications for talent management of SIEs.

FINDINGS

The 41 skilled SIEs from EU countries in our study represent a broad range of national backgrounds. The vast majority of our informants came to the UK in pursuit of attractive educational or career opportunities, with some moving to the UK initially to undertake study at well-regarded universities and staying on after graduation for professional or personal reasons. Others chose to move to the UK directly to take up more varied and attractive paid job opportunities. Many interviewees claimed that they could not have realized the same professional opportunities and experience, job security, and/or ability to work with their partner in the same city as easily in their home country as in the UK.

Nearly all informants stated that they were affected in some way by the result of the Brexit referendum, with the majority commenting extensively on how the vote had impacted them on a personal and professional level. Nonetheless, we also noted that the magnitude and duration of the reaction to the Brexit vote varied among informants, which subsequently led to different ways of dealing with the result. We identified two key dimensions that together helped explain differing ways that the Brexit vote was interpreted and acted upon by EU SIEs in the UK: 1) the degree to which they identified with the UK prior to the referendum (and thus perceived the vote as an identity threat), and 2) the extent of their perceived mobility (e.g., professional opportunities or concrete job options abroad). These two interpretive dimensions gave rise to four different categories of SIEs (see Figure 1), with each category reacting to Brexit in different ways. We note that these two dimensions each indicated distinct factors related to identity and mobility, but that they were also interlinked, that is, SIE perception of an identity threat was intrinsically connected to their degree of mobility, and this sense of mobility informed the way they interpreted and dealt with the identity threat. In the following section, we describe the four types of SIEs in the UK at the time of the Brexit referendum, and their reaction patterns.

Insert Figure 1 here

Departing Europeans (high mobility and identification with the UK)

Identities and mobility

We refer to the first group of informants (12 interviewees) as "Departing Europeans." These SIEs were characterized by high levels of identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum, and perceived few restrictions on their personal mobility: "*When I talk about 'home,' I always think about London and the UK because I've spent the last 15 years in the UK"* (#22, German). The informants in this group also identified with their home country and to a large extent with the European Union. The majority of these informants had come to the UK for educational opportunities—often at prestigious universities— and had then stayed to live and work in the UK. Few of them faced restrictions in their mobility such as having children in school or mortgages in the UK. Some had previously worked or studied in other countries than the UK. Overall, this group can be described as mobile within Europe with a considerable identification with the UK, EU, and their home country.

Reaction pattern

The perceived UK skepticism towards European immigrants following the Brexit vote led many Departing Europeans to doubt whether or not they wished to continue to live in the UK: *"And then Brexit happened. And I felt so insulted that my first reaction was, 'So, if you don't want me, I don't want you back. I don't need you'"* (#16, Portuguese). Departing Europeans reported a clear sense of rejection as a result of the vote: "*So if they don't want me, I am so ready to go. And I would take my passport and leave* (#10, German). This sense of personal rejection and hurt were closely connected to the realization that their status in the UK had changed from that of citizens enjoying equal rights to British citizens, including

unlimited freedom of movement, to that of more restricted migrants from any third non-EU country:

> *"I think when the […] political situation changes, your own perception of yourself and your role in the country changes. For example, I think I am less willing to give a lot of my time and life, now, to this country, because it has so strongly expressed its view against having European migrants."* (#30, German)

Some informants clearly stated how appalled they were by the prospect of being treated "like a foreigner" in the future: *"Working here and contributing and then still being treated like a foreigner or having, maybe, needing visa or something like that. No, it's not going to happen. I just feel, 'No'"* (#19, German), As a result of the Brexit vote, Departing Europeans explicitly distanced themselves from Britain and the prior feelings of identification with the UK they have had. As these interviewees explained: *"I definitely don't feel British…I could say I feel European first, before anything. And that has a lot to do with Brexit. I wouldn't say I'm English anymore"* (#20, Belgian). Some participants commented that they became more aware of differences between the UK and other European countries after the Brexit vote.

> "*I think Brexit increased the awareness of being in a country that is different from continental Europe. And since Brexit happened, I started to notice even more the differences that exist between the UK and the rest of Europe."* (#21, Italian)

One informant in this group had decided to leave her job in a mainly British workplace outside of London, after her colleagues joked that she would "have to leave soon". Although the informant reported this behavior to her manager and received some support, the interviewee reported not feeling comfortable working in what she described as a "very British workplace" and took a new job in London. Other interviewees expressed their disidentification with the UK by an explicit refusal to apply for a British passport, even though most of them met the legal requirements or considered it previously to the referendum:

> *"When the referendum happened, I had already been here for six years. So, I could have applied [for a British passport]. And I actually thought I would, just*

> *for the potential benefits...And then Brexit happened...I decided not to apply for a passport. That was the big one."* (#16, Portuguese)

Many Departing Europeans also experienced a growth in their identification with an "EU identity" following the vote:

> *"Since Brexit, I really have this feeling of 'I am European, and you are not European.' And 'you' being British, of course. And not just because I feel like I don't belong, but really, it's kind of a reaction to you guys, the British people, saying, 'We don't want to be in the EU, and we don't feel European.' So, I have this counter reaction of, 'Great. I agree.' You know, it's very childish, but I actually feel it quite strongly."* (#13, Dutch)

The combination of a strong sense of threat to their UK identification before the referendum and a high degree of perceived mobility meant Departing Europeans, more than those in the other three groups, had either left the UK or started a migration process to a new European country:

> *"Job wise, we always were planning to move to the Netherlands. But I think this [Brexit] gives us a little boost. I'd say more than giving a boost, it reduces the appeal of staying. Because, if you see as a push and a pull, the pull to Europe was always there, to the Netherlands, to Portugal, was always there."* (#13, Dutch)

Others actively considered leaving as an option for the near future:

> "*There are many factors that I started to be aware of only after Brexit. Before Brexit I knew them, but I never paid attention to them. After Brexit, I started to realize that Europe—continental Europe or the European Union—is actually a good place to live*." (#21, Italian)

Among the Departing Europeans, two informants had moved back to their home countries by 2020, while six others had taken steps to move to another European country (e.g., France, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland). For example, a German informant who had completed all her studies including a PhD over 15 years of living in the UK, decided to move to France:

> *"I think it changed the way I felt about the people in the country. You know, I always felt welcome in the UK...And then suddenly I felt like a lot of people were so proud about being British, and it came up in the news every single day, that it's such a great nation. And I don't know, I just started thinking, 'Well, I pay taxes there,' and I thought, 'You know, I'm a good citizen. So why do people suddenly start questioning why I'm in the country?'...For me, it became very personal very quickly…And then in*

> *April, I was offered my new job in Paris. At that point, I knew I was leaving. And I think on top of that, there was this, a bit of like resentfulness, that I felt like, 'Okay, if you make it so difficult for me to stay here, then you know, I don't have to stay here. I can go somewhere else,' basically."* (#22, German)

Their reported disidentification with the UK following the Brexit vote led most Departing Europeans to strengthen their identification with the supra-national EU identity, thus widening the number of countries they identified with at the expense of the UK. From this perspective, their renewed sense of identification with something larger than the UK may at least partly explain the fact that many explicitly chose *not* to take British citizenship, despite their eligibility for it. Combined with their high levels of mobility, many of the Departing Europeans either planned to leave the UK or had already done so.

Local Cosmopolitans (low mobility and high identification with the UK)

Identities and mobility

As with the Departing Europeans, the "Local Cosmopolitans" (13 interviewees) identified with the UK before the referendum:

> *"I felt much more British two years ago. [Laughs.] Just because it was a positive choice, and I think, you know, I felt very comfortable with British society. And where the values were… I was quite comfortable with both identities."* (#8, French)

These informants shared high pre-Brexit identification with the UK with the Departing Europeans, and many had similarly moved to the UK for career opportunities. However, Local Cosmopolitans perceived their mobility to be more restricted than that of the Departing Europeans: *"We are more tied down…We have a very good deal here, because we both have found work. That's what made us stay…I see us staying here for quite a long time, because we have two interesting jobs here"* (#41, German).

In terms of mobility, informants in this group frequently had lived in different host countries before moving to the UK, such as the US, Switzerland, or France. While they often had the experience and language skills to move, these interviewees indicated that they needed

to stay in the UK for personal reasons. They raised one or more of the following factors restricting their mobility: 1) dependent school-aged children who could not easily be moved to another national school system; 2) a mortgage and/or property in the UK, on which they would lose money after Brexit; 3) the informant's partner did not speak the same non-English languages, making a move together to one of the two 'home' countries or another EU country problematic for one of them; 4) both partners had successful and satisfying careers in the UK, which would be difficult to recreate in another European country, 5) or they did not want to commute between their work and home in two different countries. Overall, these informants had identified with the UK before the Brexit referendum, but also felt they had limited options to move countries at the time of the data collection.

Reaction Pattern

Local Cosmopolitans' responses to the referendum began with difficulty in accepting the Brexit decision. Like the Departing Europeans, they often interpreted the vote as a threat to their identification with the UK:

> *"I do struggle to understand how I can be here and not agree with the country trying to detach itself from, well, Europe, in the first place. But especially, the reasons for the retreat from others, the 'We are special.'"* (#2, Romanian)

This second group of SIEs reacted in a seemingly paradoxical manner. While disidentifying with the UK and, in particular, "little England," their reaction involved narrowing their focus of identification to a particular city (e.g., London or Edinburgh) or region (e.g., Scotland) that had not voted for Brexit and/or were perceived as cosmopolitan: "*I do think that one sort of snuggles into a London identity these days, because England has changed. It's a different place"* (#41, German). Local Cosmopolitans reported an upsurge in the importance accorded to a more localized identity after the Brexit vote:

> "*It [my identity] has evolved…depending on how the political environment changes. Because at the moment, with Brexit, I don't necessarily want to be associated with being pro-British, because, yeah, they have chosen Brexit,*

> *and I don't agree with that…So this is why I call myself a Londoner, rather than a British citizen."* (#6, German)

These narratives often described London as the epitome of a global cosmopolitan city clearly distinct from "the rest of Britain," or Scotland as not being England and therefore continuing to be a viable place for them to live in the future. This reaction frequently included statements that an informant would "happily apply for a London passport." Somewhat paradoxically, many SIEs reacting along these lines obtained British citizenship, in spite of the fact that they were appalled by the Brexit vote. They explained this as a purely instrumental and pragmatic action to ensure "*that I will continue to have the work options I used to enjoy before*" (#5, French). Another informant expanded on this:

> *"I am acquiring it [British citizenship] because, from a professional perspective, I don't want to be in the situation where I don't have the right to work here. Because the UK is facing a difficult political future, and while they are negotiating the Brexit deal at the moment, it doesn't provide me with any certainty how people who don't have a British passport will be treated in the future. So, it is basically just to secure my status quo."* (#6, German)

Many in the Local Cosmopolitan group openly admitted that they would never have applied for citizenship without the Brexit vote: *"Would I have gone for the British passport without Brexit looming over my head? I wouldn't have done it. No, I wouldn't have done it"* (#40, Austrian). As with/for the Departing Europeans, the narratives of Local Cosmopolitans clearly revealed how the Brexit vote had changed their sense of identification with the UK. A French-British citizen who had taken British citizenship two years *before* the Brexit vote explained how the vote had affected him and triggered a shift in his identity:

> *"I felt like I am lucky to have a British passport, and I'm happy I did it when I did it, before it was a political choice...I would say I am still going through a disconnect with the sense of British identity...I have felt more disenfranchised from the British, my British side, since Brexit…While before I was quite happy to say, 'I'm French and British,' I would now say that 'I am French, with a British passport.' Which is not the same."* (#9, French)

To cope with the threat to UK identification created by the vote, Local Cosmopolitans actively reinforced their cosmopolitan lifestyles by surrounding themselves with like-minded

people, constructing a global city identity in which they could co-exist, despite an overall environment that had shifted against immigration and foreigners. These "Londoners" also constantly reiterated to themselves that London or Edinburgh continued to be the global, welcoming, and international place they had been attracted to in the first place, long before the referendum. Their identity work and actions were geared towards the re-creation of their personal status quo before the Brexit decision. One of the Local Cosmopolitans moved to a more international employer with more international colleagues to reinforce their cosmopolitan identity.

Many informants of this group consciously claimed they lived in a cosmopolitan "bubble," which did not require them to make changes in their professional life since their work environment continued to be very international and cosmopolitan:

> *"Well, the first thing is I have not really been in situations where I was directly confronted with people who are clearly against this kind of multicultural way of thinking. So, most of the people I see, most of the people I interact with, are still very much in that kind of logic. So, I'm not having to adapt in any way."* (#5, French)

While living in a cosmopolitan bubble, some informants were aware of the changing environment around them. They became conscious about having a different nationality and speaking a different language:

> *"On paper, it [Brexit] hasn't bothered me. But I feel inside, I guess, it is all much more conscious now, about the fact that I'm not British, but living with a Brit. Um, for example, like I tried to raise my kids bilingual. And now if I speak with my daughter on the train in German, I'm just aware of it. I'm aware that there might be some people around me who might have voted for Brexit."* (#40, Austrian)

Many noticed hostility towards them that they had not experienced before the Brexit referendum:

> *"We live in London. We've been living here for 15 years, but I never heard anything against me being Italian. And after the referendum, there were some people on the street, they had a conference about me, talking Italian to my children. That never happened to me before…Almost like, 'Go away' and things like that. It happened three, four times. That's after the referendum."* (#1, Italian)

Aside from ensuring their rights to stay in the UK by applying for a British passport, Local Cosmopolitans also lived out their disagreement with Brexit in their personal lives:

> *"I clearly feel that Brexit has shaken something. I still can't tell you exactly how and where. But that's why I gave you the example, because when I realized that I'm cheering for any football team that opposes England, and I do it on a regular basis, that tells me something about how much…Probably it explains my gut reaction to, 'You do this, then I can do this.'"* (#2, Romanian)

Aside from ensuring their rights to stay in the UK by applying for a British passport, Local Cosmopolitans developed ways to cope with the tension of living in a country where a majority had voted for Brexit. They lived out their disagreement with this decision in their personal lives. Some reported not inviting children's classmates with Brexit voting parents to their birthday parties, or systematically supporting *any* soccer team playing the UK.

Unlike the Departing Europeans, interviewees who believed their mobility was limited, yet who experienced an identity threat resulting from the Brexit vote, tended to narrow their identities to the more geographically limited area in which they lived. These Local Cosmopolitans coped by identifying with cities inhabited by other like-minded internationals, in which they could still find a place for themselves, while at the same time disidentifying with the UK. These more novel collective identities (e.g., "Londoners") permitted Local Cosmopolitans to redefine themselves in a way that allowed them to continue to live in a country that in their opinion had ostentatiously rejected them, seeming to move away from the values and beliefs they held by embracing more ethnic than civic notions of UK national identity (Kunovich, 2009). While applying for citizenship of a country with which they were disidentifying may seem paradoxical, their lack of mobility compelled many Local Cosmopolitans to apply for British passports as an "insurance policy" to safeguard their rights, rather than due to any lingering identification with the UK.

Reconciled Migrants (low mobility and low identification with the UK) 

Identities and mobility

The third group of informants we identified were characterized by low identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum and low mobility, i.e., fewer opportunities to move, a group we labelled "Reconciled Migrants" (eight interviewees). Even though most had lived in the UK for many years, Reconciled Migrants remained rooted in their home country, in terms of their national identity: "*I was born in Hungary. I was raised in Hungary. I'm definitely a Hungarian"* (#36, Hungarian). Their identification with the UK was minimal to non-existent:

> *"Definitely not English. No, I have lived here a long time, but I can fully tell you that I feel like I'm a Spanish person living in the UK...I don't think it is a transference of national identity."* (#17, Spanish)

However, of all informants we interviewed, these SIEs were most inclined to accept that they were migrants in the UK: "*I'm Italian and that is my main identity. And I feel that I am a migrant here in the UK"* (#18, Italian).

Compared to the two previous groups, the Reconciled Migrants identified much less with the UK before the referendum, nor did they strongly identify with the EU or any other global or supranational identity. Their strongest identification and national affiliation remained to their home country. Although these interviewees welcomed the opportunities, they felt the UK offered, they also sought to stay connected with their home country nationality through the local community in the host country, the varieties of restaurants and stores offering the cuisine of their home country or sharing of home country habits with colleagues and friends. Many of these interviewees had initially come to the UK either to gain a particular educational experience: *"I wasn't thinking so much about why I wanted to come to England. It was more because I wanted to do that particular [Master's degree]"* (#17, Spanish), or for professional opportunities: *"I'm in a very good job. I wouldn't be in as good a job in Ireland. So, I'm here to get some experience to craft my profession"* (#28, Irish).

Regarding mobility, most interviewees of this group had only lived and worked in their home country and the UK, and they would not consider relocating to another (EU) country. For example, *"I don't plan on staying here. I plan on going home"* (#28, Irish). Most of them fully expected to stay in the UK for the near future due to superior job opportunities in the UK than in their home country. Some would consider returning to their home country once they had enough experience to gain a senior level position. Yet they also voiced doubts about how realistic such a move back to their home country might be. Ultimately, they perceived their mobility options as limited.

Reaction pattern

Although they expressed general displeasure with the referendum result, this third group of informants did not interpret the Brexit vote as personally targeted at them. With a low level of identification with the UK in the first place, the vote was not perceived by them as a form of identity threat, and they came to accept the result more easily. As one interviewee explained:

> *"I don't think it is personal hatred for people of certain nationalities. I think it is a reaction to a situation, to a number of factors, institutional factors, or to the economy. But it hasn't affected my identity, because I can separate things. And I do not think that suddenly people here hate you because you are Spanish."* (#17, Spanish)

Members of this group expressed their worry about the Brexit vote in terms of what this meant for their future in the UK, and for the future of Britain's economy. However, they did not experience any personal rejection or hurt, nor did they feel the need to revert to a global or European identity. This group thus did not engage in any identity work:

> *"I mean, it doesn't feel personal in the sense that…the only way it can feel personal is to the extent that it's about immigration. But to the extent that it's about immigration, every time you talk to a leaver or someone who is anti-immigration, they always say, 'Oh, you're Danish. That's fine.' Because you're not Eastern European or whatever. And equally, 'You have a job. So that's fine. You're paying your taxes' and things."* (#24, Danish)

Informants from this group largely accepted the idea that they were 'migrants', and hence found it easier than any of the other SIEs to refer to themselves using this term. If Reconciled Migrants applied for citizenship, as with the Local Cosmopolitans, they considered it a means of ensuring they could remain in the country without facing any disadvantages, with one explaining her decision to apply for a UK passport the following way:

> *"The political situation in the world is so uncertain. The British politicians don't seem to know what they want…So because of that, anything can happen. And it is so that we know that whatever happens, we can stay. Or leave on our own terms."* (#35, Hungarian)

Some of these informants reported that they were aware that they had enjoyed certain privileges and they preferred not to talk about Brexit and politics with others:

> *"I'm very much of the opinion that the UK voted to leave, so they should leave. I know some friends of mine are very, you know, 'Oh, our rights. And are we going to have the same access to health care and whatever?' But I mean, at the end of the day, I am actually really strongly of the opinion of that that we chose to move here, and we are, you know, as EU citizens, we are all from very well-functioning countries. So, at the end of the day, we can just move home. I only have sympathy for the people who have properly settled with kids and things. But people like me are very independent and don't have any responsibilities to other people… It's an issue for the British people to sort out."* (#24, Danish)

Despite their broad acceptance of the referendum result, not all Reconciled Migrants were willing to tolerate all work situations. One Reconciled Migrant who had worked for a local business with mainly British colleagues at the time of the Brexit vote subsequently moved to a European employer to decrease her discomfort with pro-Brexit colleagues, and to feel more included in the workplace:

> *"It was worse in my past workplace, when the referendum came…The majority of my colleagues voted for Brexit. And so, there were a lot of discussions about, 'Should we open another office in XY or in ZY?'…I didn't actually enjoy these conversations."* (#18, Italian)

The perceived low levels of mobility and UK identification left the Reconciled Migrant largely unperturbed by the result of the Brexit referendum. Unlike the Departing Europeans or the Local Cosmopolitans, Reconciled Migrants had not developed a deepened

sense of identification with Britain; hence, the referendum did not trigger any identity work. While they assured themselves that the Brexit vote was not directed against them personally, they nevertheless took pragmatic actions to secure their legal status, especially because they felt they lacked the mobility to seize options abroad.

Global Citizens (high mobility and low identification with the UK) 

Identities and mobility

The "Global Citizens" (nine interviewees) were characterized by low identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum and a high perceived mobility. This group strongly identified with cosmopolitanism or being a global citizen. *"This is a tricky time for people like me and like you who recognize themselves as citizens of the world" (#8, French).* They also typically identified less with any national identities:

> *"I don't really care how people perceive me, when it comes to national identity. I don't care how I perceive them. If that makes sense. It just doesn't seem important to me. I don't see how that's relevant." (#15, Dutch)*

The majority of interviewees in this group grew up in an international context, either as children of expatriates, having moved across countries often during their childhood or grown up with parents of different nationalities, and/or having attended international schools. One stated: *"I also went to an international school at the age of 10. So, from 10 to 18, I lived in an English-speaking environment, where I spoke more English than German"* (#34, Austrian). This often resulted in a more global mindset: *"I actually identify myself from the Eurasian because I have Asian values but a European mindset. I find that a lot of my friends are Asian, a lot of my friends are Europeans"* (#23, Austrian).

These informants often had extensive international experience, or a skillset that allowed them to find jobs anywhere in the world. Global Citizens believed that, if needed,

they could easily move to another country for work, as they felt little attachment to any particular national identity or geographic location:

> *"I am not that invested in staying here or moving anywhere else. I don't mind the uncertainty too much. And especially in my field, in IT, I am pretty flexible and can work anywhere. If anything were to happen, it never seems like they would just throw people out of Britain, like, back to Europe. If anything like that happened, I would just be ready to get a job somewhere else. I wouldn't be too fussed."* (#29, Czech)

As with the Local Cosmopolitans, many Global Citizens felt an attachment to London or Edinburgh, as these locations allow living in an international bubble:

> *"I mean, certainly, living in London, until Brexit, you really felt that you were a citizen of the world...Then, you know, obviously, things changed. But I don't think that the current tension is going to continue. I think we will come back. I think the only possible evolution is towards more fluidity and more multi-culturalism, and less of a focus on individual citizenships."* (#14, Swedish)

They perceived London as a city for global citizens:

> *"London is a melting pot type of a thing. So I feel most at home here in London. Everything here seems to be constantly shifting and moving. I see London as a metropolis of a begillion moving parts. And that is something that I would identify with…Here in London there is always new things happening. And always new people that I'm interacting with.* (#15, Dutch)

Due to their international experience, language skills, and having developed a desirable and transferable skillset, the interviewees of this group perceived their mobility as high while having low identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum.

Reaction Pattern

Similar to the Reconciled Migrants, the Global Citizens did not perceive the outcome of the Brexit referendum as a threat to their identity. They clearly and proudly identified themselves as "global citizens" or "citizens of the world," sometimes commenting on the recent negative connotation of these terms and how this perception was simply a lack of understanding:

> *"When she [Theresa May] said, 'Citizens of the world are citizens of nowhere,' as if that was a bad thing…I thought, 'How short-sighted.' I felt, throughout history, diasporas have often been the people who brought*

> *innovations, who brought cultural influences, who kept things moving, who kept things dynamic. So I thought, you know, 'Those citizens of the world, people who moved from one culture to the next, who speak multiple languages, are the ones able to pass on new ideas, new trading techniques, new innovations.' So, I thought citizens of the world actually had a very important role in human progress."* (#7, French)

Since this fourth group felt little threat to their identity from the Brexit referendum, they did not engage in a lot of identity work.

> *"I feel quite settled in all these different identities. It has revealed a lot about how other people in this nation feel about each other's identities. So, it's been more of a revelation of other people than of myself."* (#15, Dutch)

Although they did not take the decision personally, many of this group expressed their disappointment in the British: *"I mean, I had some respect for them, before they voted for Brexit. Now I have no respect"* (#23, Austrian).

Global citizens reported being largely uninterested in Brexit, and simply avoided conversations about it, especially as they did not want to be drawn into lengthy and possibly confrontational exchanges:

> *"Obviously, it's a long story, a complicated matter, and at some point, when you live in the UK and London, you can't hear it anymore, right? But as soon as this personal, personal/professional issue was resolved on my side, I stopped caring about Brexit."* (#34, Austrian)

Members of this group would express their worry about the Brexit vote in terms of what it meant for future diversity and inclusion in Britain, and the impact on the economy. With little identification with the UK and the certainty that they were mobile if required, they did not feel any need to get a British passport:

> *"Like, 'Would you want to be British?' And I was always like, 'No.' I just--- I don't---love this place, but---first of all, I was in London, which I feel is not representative of the UK. It's like a bubble. And it feels very international. I felt cosmopolitan, in that sense, but I didn't feel British."* (#26, Swiss)

Reflecting on their future, many expressed the possibility of moving again and exploring places where they had not lived before: *"I'm not comfortable to move back. I think I would be more interested in exploring a place where I haven't lived"* (#29, Czech).

Unlike the Reconciled Migrants and Local Cosmopolitans, the Global Citizens felt highly mobile and largely free to move to many places across the world. The Global Citizens did feel connected to a bigger, more globalized international identity largely detached from the UK, which shielded them from experiencing a Brexit-related identity threat. Many lived in London, which they considered a world city largely separated from the rest of the country. Since they had not identified much with the UK even before the referendum, they did not feel any need for identity work. See Figure 2 for a summary of the reaction patterns for the four SIE types.

Insert Figure 2 here

Organizational responses

The employers of the SIEs in our study reacted to Brexit in a number of ways, ranging from doing nothing to offering advice and loans to their European employees, to securing their status in the UK. While the vast majority of our interviewees were impacted by the Brexit vote, most of their employers did not react immediately, and often lacked a strategy to deal with the changing circumstances for their European employees (see Table 1): *"Our management waits. And there is no feeling that there is a plan in place"* (#25, Portuguese). Such lack of (re)action by their employers was not perceived by our informants as reassuring that their employers were on top of the administrative aspects of dealing with Brexit.

Some employers inquired about the passports and statuses of their employees who were EU citizens after the Brexit referendum, emailing them information about their settled

status process[1]. While these employers appeared to try to provide assistance, many informants—particularly the low-mobility Local Cosmopolitans and Reconciled Migrants, perceived their employers were disorganized and unprepared to help them deal with Brexit. A few organizations provided occasional administrative support: "*We were advised as employees to do it [apply for settled status] as soon as possible*" (#23, Austrian). Another informant reported a sense of general goodwill: "*HR organized meetings for Europeans with the message, 'Well, we can't tell you very much right now, because we don't know yet what is going to happen. But we are here for you'*" (#37, German).

Some employers also offered their employees additional support to cope with the consequences of the Brexit result: "*We will support you in everything that needs to be done for you to stay here*" (#29, Czech). Examples of such support included provision of information sessions by external experts to inform on political developments:

> *"I think [employer] was much more pro-active than most. There was a lot of information and they were on top of it. They sent emails about what they were doing, saying, 'We don't know, but we've got your back. We stand by this, by that,' etc. My current employer hasn't done that, which is a failure on their part. People have criticized them for it. If nothing else, some sort of message, saying, 'We'll help you as much as we can, if it comes to the worst-case scenario,' and that sort of thing. It hasn't happened."* (#25, Portuguese)

Some employers offered loans to help SIEs pay for British citizenship applications, thereby acknowledging the financial burden created by the political change of the UK leaving the EU:

> *"And what [the employer] did, is they offered critical support [in information sessions, loans]. And it all was emphasized, that you are valued, you are all valued, and they would do their best [with Brexit]."* (#41, German)

This administrative and financial support provided by some employers was generally well received by their European employees. However, other informants reported that their

[1] The EU Settlement Scheme allows EU, EEA, and Swiss citizens to apply for settled status to continue living and working in the UK after it officially leaves the EU as a member state.

employers expressed more concern about their company's prospects, with many putting recruitment of European employees on hold until the future legal situation for recruiting Europeans became clearer. While most of our informants were not directly affected by such restrictions, some of their friends were, and news of such recruitment pauses/restrictions was transmitted through the social networks of many informants.

A few employers saw the political change as a threat to their core business model, leading them to rethink aspects of their business. *"My employer had to re-strategize and think about 'Where will we get the money from now on?'"* (#22, German). The significance of the change created new opportunities for some businesses, but also held uncertainty for their employees. The employers of some of our informants took the opportunity to restructure their British subsidiaries and move some of their staff to other locations in Europe:

> *"Suddenly it was, 'We need to check everything. We need to get everything back in order.'...Suddenly we were put on the side. And there was a risk that we would either need our visas to be sponsored, or potentially we would be asked to move somewhere else...A lot of the business decisions were made, like to move certain activities to Ireland, rather than keeping them in London. Interestingly, a lot of the people that were asked to move to Ireland were people that supported multiple countries, so therefore were not British, because they were Europeans from other European countries and spoke multiple languages. And therefore, they were the ones who were asked to leave*." (#26, Swiss)

Although the majority of the employers in our study did not respond on an organizational level, those that did react and offer support were seen as helpful, particularly by the Local Cosmopolitans and Reconciled Migrants. However, if such support was viewed as unprofessional, many informants interpreted it as a waste of their time, or as a sign of employer's lack of competence or appreciation for their employees. On a personal level, however, some managers and colleagues offered emotional support to our informants, which often made them feel like valued colleagues and members of the British society. Some informants had a positive recollection of receiving emotional support from colleagues and managers after the referendum, with one recalling: *"My British manager literally made the*

EU flag her screen saver on the day that Brexit was voted for---so that was nice" (#35, Hungarian). Showing such empathy and emotional support are simple measures managers can take to offer an individual response to SIEs during political changes. Such emotional support was highly regarded by most of our informants from all four groups.

Overall, our informants viewed employer responses as limited, disorganized, or entirely absent. EU SIEs reacted positively to those managers and colleagues who expressed empathy for their situation, especially the Local Cosmopolitans, Departing Europeans, and Reconciled Migrants. Other employers took advantage of the political change to move staff to other locations in the EU—even in cases where these SIEs had expressed an interest in staying in the UK. Most employers appear to have been caught off guard by the referendum result, and had little time to develop measured and tailored approaches to dealing with their EU employees.

DISCUSSION

By shedding light on the impact that anti-immigration political initiatives can have on SIEs, our study contributes to a much-needed contextualization of SIEs' experiences (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004) in situations where the environment for immigrants has become less hospitable. While SIEs facing such circumstances are clearly influenced by mobility considerations (Doherty, 2013), we found that integrating 'host' country identification with mobility allows for richer insight into the way they interpret and react to such initiatives. While many SIEs are assumed to be influenced by identification with their 'home' country (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), our informants revealed that this factor was far less important than host country identification. Many SIEs in our study had integrated into and begun to identify with the UK. These SIEs interpreted the referendum result as a threat not just to their mobility but also to part of the way they saw themselves, leading many

to subsequently express a desire to distance themselves from the UK. Their sense of perceived mobility at this point simply impacted the form in which this desire could be manifested. In other words, identity threats and perceived mobility interacted in ways that have not been explored in other research, yet importantly these factors gave rise to different outcomes in terms of identity work and reaction patterns related to migration. These interrelated factors were particularly salient in a context where SIEs encounter anti-immigration political movements in their host countries.

While scholars have studied the impact of changes to identification when ethnic identities come under threat (Ethier & Deaux, 1994), we note that the host country identification described by many informants was grounded in a civic, as opposed to ethnic, form of national identity (Kunovich, 2009). In this regard, identification with the UK might be viewed as a form of 'invisible' social identity (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005), one that is less immediately apparent to colleagues or managers but nonetheless makes SIEs vulnerable to identity threats and thus potentially impacted strongly by anti-immigration political initiatives. Unlike ethnic identities which are more impervious to change, it may be that civic national identities are more fragile and make an individual more amenable to identity reinterpretation or even exit (Petriglieri, 2011).

In interpreting SIE reaction patterns, we found the most vociferous responses were evident in the two groups who identified strongly with the UK and thus interpreted the Brexit referendum result as an identity threat (Departing Europeans and Local Cosmopolitans). Both groups sought to reprioritize their social identities and engaged in other forms of identity restructuring work (Petriglieri, 2011), in contrast to responses favoring strengthened identification with a social group in the face of threats found in other studies (Ellemers et al., 2002; Branscombe et al., 1999). We further note that the specific form of this identity work depended on their perceived mobility. The highly mobile 'Departing Europeans' largely

shifted the focus of their identification from the UK to the supranational EU level—a collective identity that to some extent embeds mobility (see Marcu, 2015). On the one hand, these informants had a relatively convenient alternative identity resource available on which to draw, as they were already 'Europeans' and this supranational identity may have offered a lower cost means of exiting an identity (Petriglieri, 2011). However, this move is also somewhat surprising given that lower order social identities tend to have higher salience levels (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001), and moving to a higher level of identity 'abstraction' in this manner may also be expected to lead to more distal and ambiguous identification. Follow-up studies might usefully examine whether the European identity adopted by the Departing Europeans was a transitional stop on a journey to another strengthened national identification, or if their EU identification remained more firmly entrenched over time. Our empirical results thus extend earlier theoretical work on identity threats while raising new questions about how they are handled in contexts of international mobility as experienced by SIEs.

The identity work engaged in by the far less mobile "Local Cosmopolitans" was considerably more complicated, as their continued presence in the UK made exiting this national identity much more difficult. These informants shifted the focus of their identification 'down' to a sub-national level nested within it (e.g., defining themselves as "Londoners"), which was perceived as carrying less anti-immigration stigma. Lacking the option to physically leave the UK adopted by Departing Europeans, Local Cosmopolitans may have suffered the highest levels of cognitive dissonance due to their decision to remain in the country despite interpreting the Brexit referendum as an identity threat. This resulted in a more original form of identity work, involving a narrowing of scope to international cities or regions thought to be inhabited by like-minded internationals while at the same time dis-identifying with the UK. This interpretive exercise to imagine and make salient a novel

collective identity to replace an existing national identification is particularly noteworthy, as it goes further than simply changing or reinterpreting one's identification to one or more existing collective identities (Caza et al., 2018). Furthermore, by surrounding themselves with like-minded SIEs, these informants sought to maintain the idea that their city or region remained an internationally minded welcoming place, and collectively reinforced the creation of this new identity. Nonetheless, we observe that identity work in this group was accompanied by what many informants self-consciously described as "childish" or "silly" coping mechanisms in their private spheres, such as systematically supporting England's soccer opponent or not inviting children of Brexit voters to their children's' birthday parties, to compensate their feelings of hurt and rejection. We might speculate that psychological reactance may be driving some of these responses (Brehm, 1966). While reactance theory implies that perceived restrictions to freedom (such as one's mobility) may trigger a desire to 'fight back', our findings indicate that not all low mobility SIEs reacted in this way—instead it only occurred amongst those SIE types who perceived identity threat. Although it has been suggested that reactance can contribute to identity formation (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), we note in our study that identification may not be the result but also a precursor of reactance. The relationship between identity and reactance may thus be more complex than indicated by the literature, and we suggest future research may explore this potential connection in greater detail.

Our study further helps explain why those who identified least with their host country, the UK, chose to stay. By taking the identity dimension into account, we can understand why some SIEs did not feel impacted by the vote. With their initial weak level of identification with the host country, Global Citizens and Reconciled Migrants were largely immune to interpreting the anti-immigration sentiment as a personal rejection directed against them. By not interpreting the referendum result in identity terms, these SIEs reacted less emotionally to

it, and adopted a reaction pattern largely dictated by their perceived mobility. Those who were highly mobile—the Global Citizens—knew they could continue to move seamlessly between countries and continents and felt no pressure to make changes to how they saw themselves or how they lived in a cosmopolitan bubble. They rejected to apply for a British passport and tried to avoid Brexit news and discussions. These SIEs bore the closest resemblance to the often-portrayed "global cosmopolitans" or "citizens of nowhere" frequently targeted by populist voters. Those with fewer mobility options, the Reconciled Migrants, took pragmatic actions to secure their legal status and accepted their long-term status as migrants to the UK, while retaining links and a possible desire to retire to their home countries.

Overall, our findings therefore offer a more differentiated look at SIEs than previous studies (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty, 2013). While some had extremely high levels of perceived mobility, akin to employer-designated expatriates (Zhang et al., 2018), others perceived their mobility possibilities as extremely limited and did not envisage moving for the foreseeable future, similar to typical migrants (Al-Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). We also noted that while levels of host country identification varied significantly across this group, many SIEs report high levels of UK identification pre-Brexit—at far higher levels than what might be expected amongst expatriates or even skilled migrants (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). This variation indicates that SIEs should not be regarded monolithically. Considering the combination of host country/UK identification and mobility considerations allows us to make sense of why and how SIEs' reactions to anti-immigration movements differ, and to tailor practical recommendations how employers should deal with these different sub-groups (see below). This interplay also allows us to make sense of puzzling observations, such as why so many SIEs (i.e., Departing Europeans) who identified strongly with the UK and were legally entitled to a British passport firmly rejected getting British

citizenship after the vote. It also helps explain why others who were most appalled by the vote obtained British citizenship after the referendum (i.e., Local Cosmopolitans), as they chose to remain in the UK.

Our study also highlights the need to better understand how organizations might more effectively manage SIEs impacted by anti-immigration political events. While previous research has mostly focused on company features and activities to support SIE integration and retention (e.g., Doherty, 2013; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020), our findings underline the need for employers to consider the impact of higher-order, national factors on individual meaning making that shape SIEs identification with their host country. In that respect, our findings have important implications for international talent management and follow calls for further study in this field (Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2018). For the purposes of SIE retention and management, host country identification should be considered a relevant dimension affecting SIEs' decisions to stay or leave. While the perceived mobility of their staff has always been at least implicitly a concern for organizations trying to accommodate their need to retain talent, dealing with questions of identity and identification may appear more daunting. Beyond helping employees to deal with any additional administrative hurdles they may be facing, employers should try to understand how strongly their SIEs might identify with their host country and how they make sense of political developments impacting immigration. Some SIEs may feel more alienated and personally targeted by such changes, while others less so. For SIEs, their decision to return to their home country or a move to a third country might be influenced by identity-oriented questions combined with a realistic assessment of alternative mobility options.

Meuer, Tröster, and Angstmann (2019) found that workplace embeddedness was a critical influence on the repatriation intentions of German SIEs working in Switzerland. Although our findings indicate that such embeddedness may not be able to override the

impact of an identity threat, it may be possible for employers to target their actions more effectively based on our typology. The administrative support and empathy for their EU employees offered by some employers of the SIEs in our study was generally appreciated by all. However, our typology might assist employers develop more robust approaches to dealing with SIE employees facing such situations, acknowledging that changing regulatory constraints may limit some of these organizational responses. We now turn to discuss how this might happen.

Insert Figure 3 here

Practical implications and future research

Most employers of SIEs have limited ability to influence the course of macro-political events driven by anti-immigration sentiments, although our findings may indicate directions for developing more effective retention plans (see Figure 3 for examples of such a targeted approach). Employers should begin by exploring the degree to which their SIEs identify with their host country (indicators might include length of stay in host country, whether they have a partner from a host country, the nature of their social circle), as well as how they perceive their mobility options (desire to move back to the home country, international experience, children, mortgage). Retaining SIEs with high host country identification and high mobility, the Departing Europeans in our study, may experience a strong desire to leave the country. These employees might consider options of companywide transfers abroad. While this may only be realistic for employers with other overseas operations, it could offer a viable means of keeping talent from exiting the organization. More challenging to manage may be the less mobile but highly identified equivalents of Local Cosmopolitans, who in spite of their

mobility constraints would be likely to consider leaving in the medium or longer term. These SIEs should be reassured that the workplace recognizes their contributions and will continue to employ and embrace international talent to reinforce their belief that they can continue to live in the cosmopolitan environment they value. Reinforcing an organizational sense of belonging may help to counteract the impact of feeling of backlash against foreigners in the wider macro environment.

For Global Citizens and Reconciled Migrants who experience minimal (if any) identity threat, practical considerations such as reducing administrative barriers to their continued stay might be an important way of ensuring their continued commitment. This might include assistance in terms of legal support to deal with paperwork, or help with additional fees, would signal an important commitment from the employer's side. It is also likely that Global Citizens would be attentive to any messages and signals demonstrating that workforce diversity continues to be valued by their employer. Reconciled Migrants represent the least risky group for employers, as they plan to stay in the host country and do not suffer from identity threat. Employers may try to leverage their contributions, such as their adaptive capacity (Brimm, 2018), cultural brokerage skills (Levy, et al., 2019), and knowledge sharing (Harzing, Pudelko, & Reiche, 2016), to ensure that the workplace remains attractive to them.

Although beyond the focus of our study, we note that from a public policy standpoint the groups most likely to stay were the ones who had made little effort to integrate or identify with the UK, i.e., those with few other options retained a strong home country identity and never intended to "become British" (i.e., Reconciled Migrants) and "citizens of nowhere" who easily move between countries (i.e., Global Citizens). These were the individuals targeted by many pro-Brexit voters and the Brexit campaign yet they were the least impacted by the Brexit vote from an identity perspective. Among those who previously identified strongly with the UK and had attempted to integrate, outright departure and other reactance-

driven behaviors were very high, and their decision to stay (and begrudge the local population) or leave was made entirely for mobility reasons. Our findings may therefore also hold some relevance to policy makers.

Future research may explore possibilities if and how organizations might compensate for macro level anti-immigration sentiment perceived as unfavorable by SIEs. Merely recognizing that some employees are less mobile may prove insufficient to convince these SIEs to stay in the medium and longer term. This raises another direction for future research. We have seen that host country identification and mobility perception should not be considered "fixed", as personal and professional changes such as new job opportunities abroad or in the current host country, marriage or divorce, children or sick family members, might also trigger changes in one's perception of mobility or identification. We recommend longitudinal studies to improve our understanding how identity and perceived mobility considerations play out over time, particularly during and following significant anti-immigration events.

Future research might further examine the interplay between identity work and perceived mobility with larger samples and different populations outside of Europe who face challenges comparable to Brexit. For example, SIE immigration has become more contentious in the United States (US) and other European jurisdictions in recent years, and scholars may explore the extent to which SIEs in these jurisdictions are similarly impacted by identity and mobility considerations. Scholars might also explore any underlying factors that might help explain *why* some SIEs come to identify with their host country, as well as why they interpret anti-immigration political events as more of an identity threat than others.

Conclusion

This study examines how EU SIEs living in the UK coped with anti-immigration sentiments surrounding the Brexit referendum. It builds a typology drawing on perceived mobility considerations combined with host country identification to shed light on SIE reaction patterns to this macro-political event. Its findings provide a new lens for understanding SIEs in general and in the context of anti-immigration initiatives. We offer future research directions that may refine current theories on migration and identity work. Our proposed typology also offers practical implications for how HRM managers might develop targeted retention strategies for the four different identified groups of SIEs, and how they can adapt their retention strategies when significant political changes take place.

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TABLE 1:
Summary Profile of Interviewees and their Employers

Informant	*Gender*	*National Identity(s)*	*Profession*	*Employer Operations*	*Employer's Reaction to Brexit*
#1	Female	Italian	Consultant	International	Email communication, administrative support
#2	Female	Romanian, British	Academic	Mixed	Email communication, administrative support
#3	Male	French, British	Consultant	International	N/A
#4	Male	Belgian	Public Relations	International	Email communication, administrative support
#5	Female	French	Academic	International	Information session, email communication, administrative support
#6	Female	German	Banker	International	Email communication, administrative support
#7	Female	French, American	Academic	International	Email communication, administrative support
#8	Male	French	Banker	International	Email communication, administrative support
#9	Female	French, British	HR Manager	International	Information session, email communication, administrative support
#10	Male	German	Coach	International	N/A
#11	Male	Spanish, British, French	Consultant	International	None
#12	Female	German, British	Academic	International	Information session, email communication, administrative support
#13	Male	Dutch, Indian	Consultant	International	Administrative support
#14	Male	Swedish, Venezuelan	Entrepreneur	International	None
#15	Male	Dutch, Indian	Graphic Designer	Mixed	None
#16	Female	Portuguese	Health Professional	Mixed	None
#17	Female	Spanish	Economist	Mixed	None
#18	Female	Italian	Economist	Mixed	None
#19	Female	German	Consultant	International	None
#20	Male	Belgian, British	Consultant	International	Administrative support
#21	Female	Italian	Academic	Mixed	None
#22	Female	German	Economist	International	Email communication to apply for settlement
#23	Female	Austrian, Turkmen	Manager	Mixed	None
#24	Male	Danish	Economist	Mixed	None

#25	Female	Portuguese	Manager	Mixed	Relocation of some employees None
#26	Female	Swiss, Italian	Consultant	Mixed	None
#27	Female	German	Researcher	Mixed	None
#28	Female	Irish	Health Professional	Local	Administrative support and statement that they will provide visas
#29	Male	Czech	Software Tester	Local	None
#30	Male	German	Program Director	Local	None
#31	Male	German, British	Marketing Executive	International	Seminars, extensive administrative support from HR and legal department
#32	Female	Bulgarian	Fashion Designer	Mixed	None
#33	Male	Hungarian, Chinese	Architect	International	None, relocation of employees
#34	Male	Austrian, Bulgarian	Banker	International	None
#35	Female	Hungarian	PR Manager	Local	None
#36	Male	Hungarian	Medical Professional	Mixed	None
#37	Female	German, Czech, British	Lecturer	Local	Information sessions
#38	Male	British, Polish	Security Contractor	Local	None
#39	Female	Czech	Architect	Mixed	None
#40	Female	Austrian	Researcher	Mixed	None
#41	Male	German	Academic	Local	Emails informing about the process, information sessions, and providing loans for British citizenship application

FIGURE 1: Typology of EU SIEs in the UK at the time of the Brexit referendum

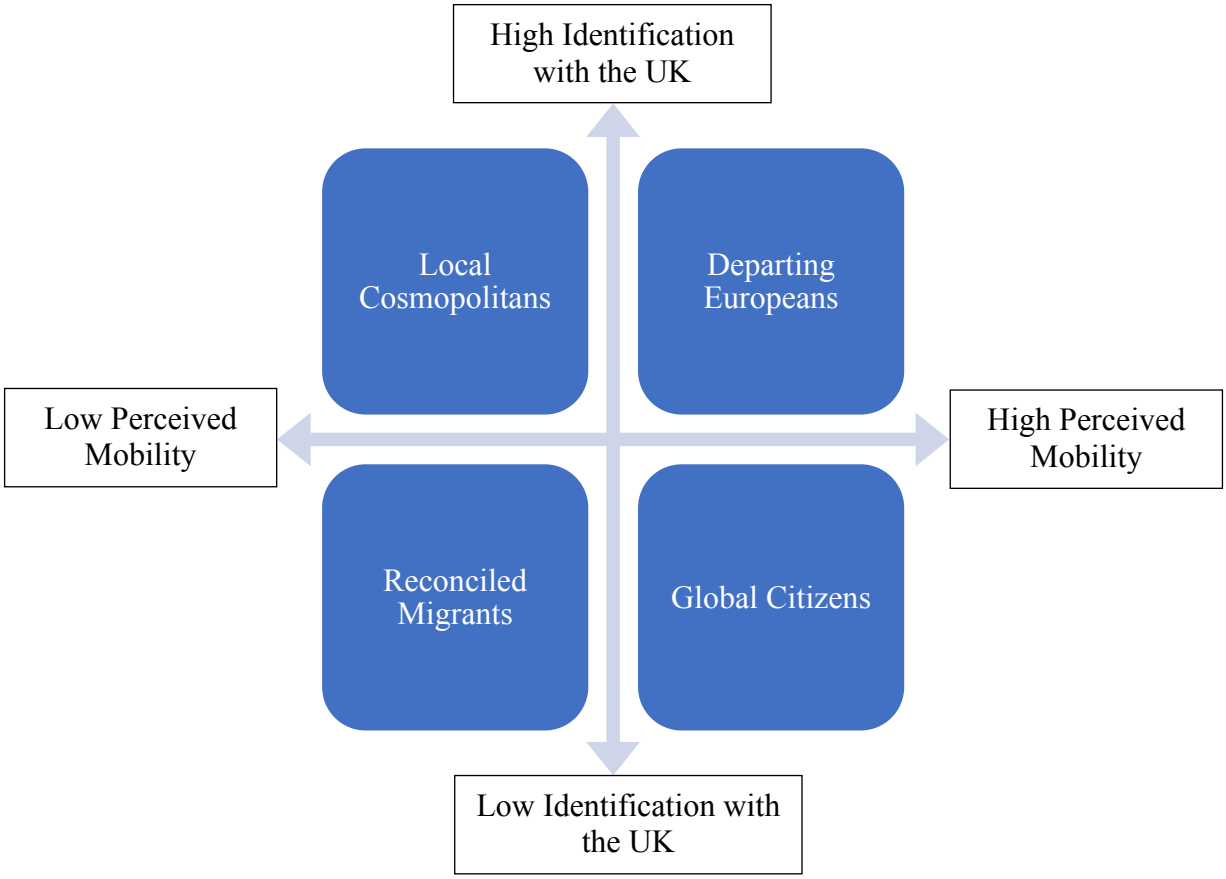


FIGURE 2: Coping patterns of EU SIEs at the time of the Brexit referendum

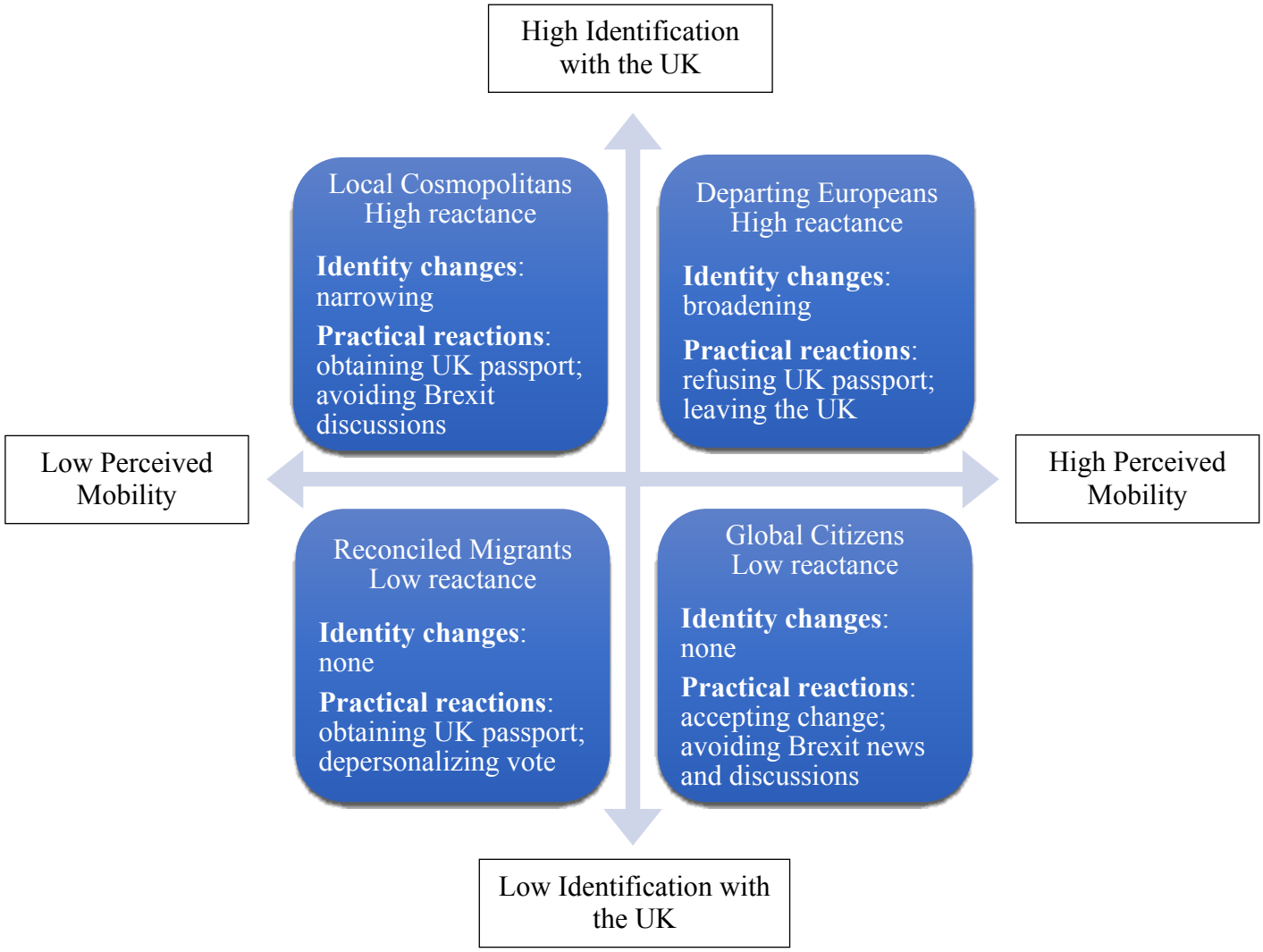
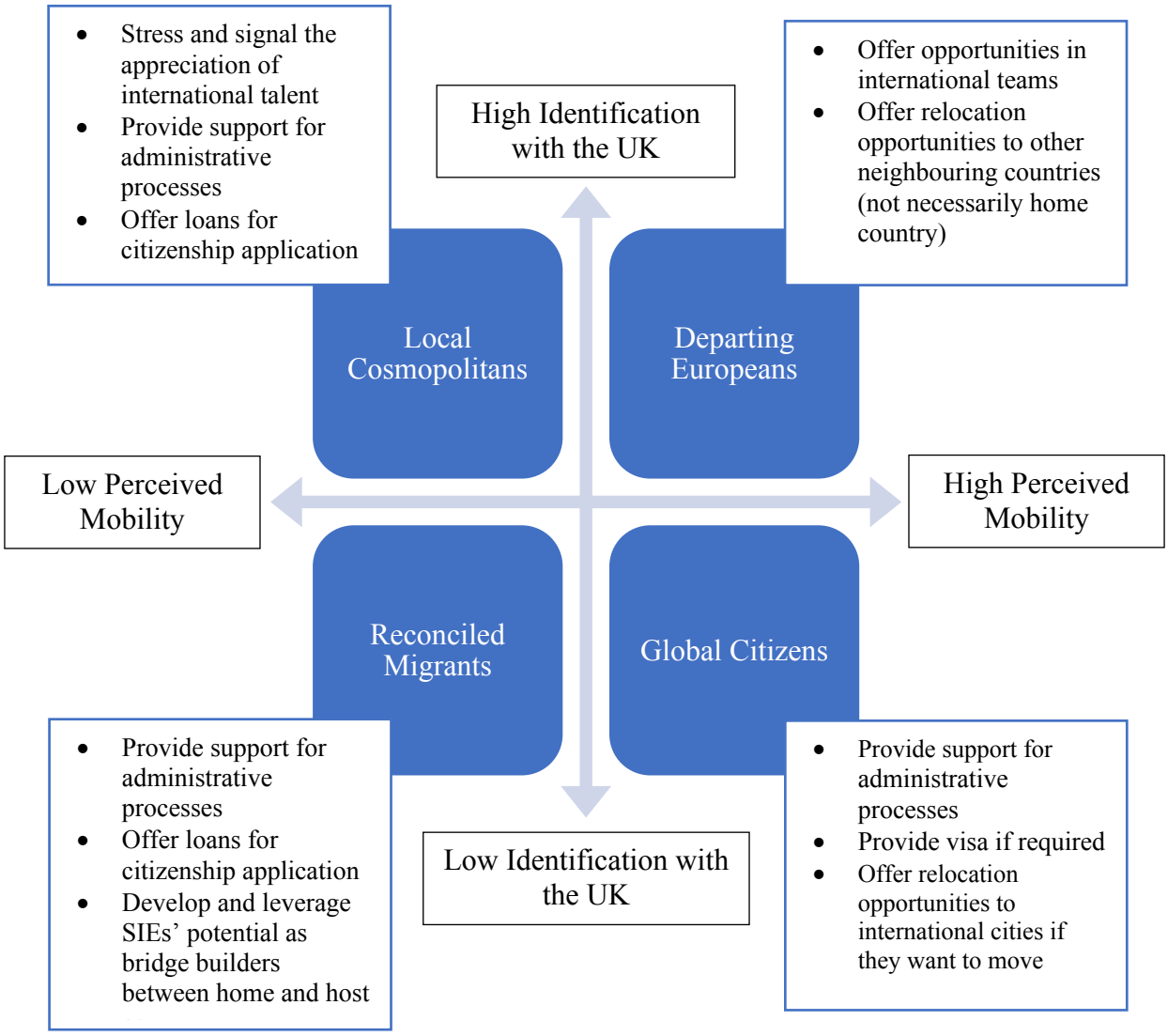


FIGURE 3: Targeted HRM responses to anti-immigration sentiment for each SIE profile



Response Letter to the Editor (Dr. Yuka Fujimoto) and Reviewers
AMD-2020-0972 Revision 2

Dear Dr. Fujimoto,

Thank you for your decision letter and comments. Your collective feedback has had considerable impact on refining our paper. We would like to begin by briefly summarizing the major changes we have made to the paper, and then respond individually to your and each of the reviewers' questions and concerns.

The most important overall changes to the paper include a crystallization of the "discoveries" of our study. Combining identification with the host country and perceived mobility offers greater understanding of SIEs facing anti-immigration movements in their host country. These insights can inform employers to address SIEs needs and to improve global talent management. We thereby highlight the contributions we make to the impact of anti-immigration sentiment (and policies/political macro changes) on SIEs, to our understanding of what motivates SIEs as well as what are the implications and recommendations for talent management.

You will also see that we have enriched and reworked the findings section as well as the figures for a better crystallization and visualization of the contributions. The methods section has been revised to take into account reviewer comments to provide more detail on the sample selection and data analysis.

We will now respond to each of the reviewers' comments individually.

Responses to Reviewer 1

Response: First, we would like to thank you for your encouragement. Your comments and suggestions were very clear and valuable, and they have helped us to sharpen our paper in multiple ways. Below we will reproduce each of your comments and then offer our response. First, we state your original comments and then our reply.

1. What is your 'discovery' in this paper? In my view, 'discovery' refers to a new idea that can stimulate further research within and beyond the context of SIEs. Consequently, it goes beyond an empirical contribution or the introduction a new typology. In the current version, I see excellent empirical contributions and the introduction of a very useful taxonomy that helps us understand the UK context.

Thank you for pushing us to crystallize our discoveries. We completely agree that our discovery goes beyond the typology that we presented. Our work analyzes how one growing category of migrants, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), reacted to a changed political macro environment involving strengthened anti-immigration sentiment. This phenomenon affects a considerable and growing part of the population who choose to live outside their home country. Our study provides insights into what shapes the reactions of SIEs facing anti-immigration backlash, as well as to the different and sometimes surprising ways they cope with it.

While mobility considerations have prominently featured in research on SIEs' motivations to leave their home country or to "move on" to another destination, the insight that

identification with their *host* country is a key dimension to help understand their reactions to immigration backlash is new. It is the interplay between mobility and host country identification that helps us understand the sometimes puzzling or seemingly contradictory reactions to Brexit we observed. Furthermore, our study provides a rare empirical examination of how SIEs respond to identity threats, finding that mobility considerations influence decisions to engage in identity protection vs. identity restructuring.

Our findings thereby provide insights into the management of SIEs and international talent. They demonstrate that although SIEs are a distinctive group of migrants, different from expatriates or work migrants, there is variance within this group in terms of their mobility and their identification with the host country. We highlight the different needs of each of the four SIE subgroups, and hence offer insights into actions employers might take to retain SIEs in the face of anti-immigration sentiment. This includes a recognition that employers should consider the SIEs' identity and degree of identification with the host country in order to make the best choices about how to manage and accommodate them.

As our reply indicates, our insights relate to SIEs facing anti-immigration backlash. While our empirical data comes from the UK Brexit context, in this revision of our paper we now highlight why we think that our findings may be relevant well beyond the UK context and hence also of interest to broader, non-European audiences.

2. The concept of 'identity work' is central in this paper (included also as a key word), but it is not properly reviewed or explained. The author(s), after presenting this body of literature properly, should consider addressing their theoretical contributions and 'discovery' in relation to identity work.

Thank you very much for pointing out this flaw. In the new version, we have added/edited a sub-section on "identity work" (see page 7) to explain the concept, previous insights on identity work and how they relate to migrants and SIEs.

We now also discuss in detail in the Discussion section (see page 35) how identity work is central to understanding the reactions to Brexit that we observed among the four groups. We explain how a strong identification with the UK triggered "identity work" for two groups. The Departing Europeans, formally known as the EU Patriots (we changed the label of this group to better capture the central element of 'departing' and better align with the other three labels), engage in identity work that widens the scope of their identity to embrace a supra-national identity by identifying with the EU. The Local Cosmopolitans engage in identity work that narrows their identity to a local level, a cosmopolitan city or a region.

The new version also features a more elaborate discussion of how the Local Cosmopolitans deal with the tension triggered by a high identity threat combined with low mobility. We describe the various behaviors that Local Cosmopolitans undertake to deal with this tension, including their identity work (pages 35-36).

We further elaborate on how identity threats leading to identity work help us understand why some SIEs (the Reconciled Migrants and the Global Citizens) are less impacted and feel less threatened by the Brexit vote (page 37). Finally, our revised Discussion section underlines that the previous level of identification with the UK is the crucial factor to make sense of some otherwise puzzling reactions from SIEs, for example, that those who identified most with the UK are the most likely to leave, while those with a low level of identification stay.

3. The new typology makes sense and it is useful. However, it is not fully explained how this new typology contributes to which body of literature, and as a result, your theoretical contributions are not crystal clear.

As mentioned under point 1, we have attempted to better crystallize our contributions and focus primarily on the literature on SIEs and international talent management. Our typology helps explain the variance we find among SIEs in terms of their reactions to the Brexit vote. Beyond the immediate Brexit context, we believe that these findings have implications for SIEs and their employers in other contexts as they react to and are impacted by anti-immigration political movements. In addition, our empirical study of internationally mobile workers also makes a modest contribution to the literature on identity threat responses.

Again, we would like to thank you for your comments, thoughts and advice how to improve the paper. We hope that you will like the updated version.

Reviewer 2

Let us start by thanking you for your constructive criticism and detailed comments. Your comments and suggestions pushed us to think harder how to better crystalize our discoveries and contributions. They also helped us to zoom in and elaborate more on interesting findings and to summarize and visualize them. We also added more detail on the methods including our epistemological positioning. Thank you for helping us make (what we think are) considerable improvements. We sincerely hope that you will like the result. Below we will reproduce each of your comments and then offer our response. First, we state your original comments and then our reply.

Based on my previous comment in this area, I appreciate the added context in terms of the identity literature and feel that this had added clarity and depth to the lead up to the findings. I do feel, however, that the writing stopped short of incorporating these insights into the findings and discussion with appropriate depth/clarity. The authors contend that, "This analysis also explains what may seem paradoxical at first sight: EU citizens who, prior to the referendum, felt a greater sense of identification with Britain appeared to feel most alienated and rejected by the vote, and thus showed much stronger identity reactions than those SIEs with little identification with the UK." (pg. 27). For an identity scholar, the fact that stronger identification with a target would result in a greater sense of identity threat when one's future with that target is disrupted is straightforward and unsurprising—since the meaning, value, or enactment of that identity is being threatened. I think the more interesting surprise lies in how those with low mobility options actually narrow the focus of their identification, in order to stay in the UK.

Thank you for this observation. We agree that the link between the conceptual sections on identity and identity work and the findings and the following discussion was not sufficiently strong. In the current version, we now discuss in detail in the Discussion section (starting page 34) how identity work is central to understanding the reactions to Brexit that we observed among the four groups. We explain how a strong identification with the UK triggered "identity work" for two groups, the Departing Europeans, formally known as the EU Patriots (we changed the label of this group to better capture the central element of 'departing' and better align with the other three labels) and the Local Cosmopolitans. For the former, their identity work consists of widening the scope of their identity to embrace a supra-national identity by identifying with the EU. For the latter, their identity work consists of narrowing their identity to a local level, a cosmopolitan city or a region.

We agree with you that the Local Cosmopolitans (low mobility, high previous UK identification) are a particularly interesting group as they encounter the most tensions. The new version now features a more elaborate Discussion of how the Local Cosmopolitans deal with the tension created by a high identity threat combined with low mobility, as well as the various behaviors in which they engaged to deal with this tension, including identity work (pages 35-36).

We thank you for pointing out that our articulation of the 'paradox' between being highly identified with the UK and having a strong identity-level reaction to Brexit. Our formulation of this idea was somewhat murky. We now clarify that what we found surprising/paradoxical was that those who previously identified most with the UK, now showed the greatest desire to leave (often followed by concrete departure plans for the Departing Europeans or references to leaving as wishful thinking for the Local Cosmopolitans). One might have suspected that those who already identified strongly with the UK before the vote would either be "immune" to the anti-immigration stance voiced by Brexit due to a strong sense of belonging to their host country, or that they might at least have been more willing to stick with a country to which they had committed. These suspicions find some backing in the literature on identity threats (Branscombe et al., 1999; Ellemers et al., 2002; Petriglieri, 2011), which identifies a range of possible responses including identity restructuring (what we observed), but also various forms of "identity protection" responses. For example, rather than restructuring their identities, highly identified group members may respond to threats by *increasing* their identification with the group (Ellemers et al. 2002). People have a tendency to emphasize group cohesiveness when the value of the group is threatened (Branscombe et al., 1999), and those who are committed to the group may display even stronger group affiliation facing threats (Ellemers et al., 2002). Indeed, individuals facing 'acceptance' social identity threats, possibly characterizing responses to the referendum result, often attempt to adopt favourable and prototypical behaviors toward the in-group (Branscombe et al, 1999). We did not observe this with the Departing Europeans or Local Cosmopolitans.

Our study also shows that because not all SIEs identified with the UK pre-Brexit (i.e., Reconciled Migrants and Global Citizens), many did not experience significant identity threats and thus did not engage in the threat responses described above (page 37).

3. AMD is interested in research that is grounded in strong and persuasive evidence and that employs state-of-the art methods appropriate for the research questions asked. Please comment on whether this manuscript accomplishes these methodological and analytical goals.

- ***The authors have improved their description of the sample selection procedure. Mention is now made of finding new respondents on the basis of emerging insights on pg. 8 ("Consistent with principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), emergent theoretical ideas informed our sampling criteria in an iterative fashion.)***

We have expanded our description of how we sampled our informants, as well as detailing benefits and disadvantages associated with this sampling strategy (see page 10-11).

- ***The description of the data analysis remains somewhat meagre and might be improved by a more careful alignment with a particular research paradigm/epistemology. For instance, on page 10 the authors cite Charmaz, 2006 in describing the use of constant comparison in their second phase of data analysis. Charmaz espouses a constructivist approach to grounded theorising (as compared to Glasserian or Straussian), where constant comparison is an ongoing guiding principle of analysis rather than a discrete***

step in one's analytical procedures. The current writing does not take an immediately clear stance in terms of the underlying epistemology/research paradigm guiding the grounded theory methodology.

Thank you for this observation. Indeed, our methodological approach was more aligned with the constructivist paradigm as articulated by Charmaz than the more step-by-step set of practices outlined by Strauss and Corbin. We now provide further detail and examples of our iterative approach to data collection and analysis, including constant comparison, and removed language suggesting that we followed pre-determined 'phases' (pages 12-14).

- ***Issues with the quality of the writing have been improved, but several remain. E.g.,— on Page 8 – This led us to expand our sampling criteria to include EU citizens at different career stages (e.g., early, mid, and late career), different personal circumstances (e.g., whether they lived in partnership with a British or non- British partner, had family in or outside the UK, or owned property or other investments in the UK), the industry of their employment, and where they lived in the UK (we sought informants in London, larger cities such as Edinburgh, and regional areas).***

Thank you for this comment. We have changed the presentation of the sampling criteria making it easier to read and hopefully more comprehensible. We have also sought to fix any passages where our language may have been unclear.

- ***Page 28 – "While applying for citizenship of a country with which they were disidentifying may seem paradoxical, it makes perfectly sense from the perspective of a Local Cosmopolitan."***

We carefully reread the paper for language and edited it to attempt to further clarify our in the revised version. The above phrase that you quote has been deleted.

- ***I found it difficult to follow the findings at some points and wondered whether the authors had considered labelling the groups in terms of their underlying low/high factors. I also remain unclear about how the combinations of factors are at play for each group, as opposed to the single factors. That is, identification with the UK relates to perceived identity threat, while mobility relates to relocation plans.***

In the new version, we expanded how identity and mobility play out for each group in the findings section. In our descriptions of the four types, we now focus first on identity, then on mobility, and finally on interactions between the two concepts. We then discuss response patterns, starting at the perceptual level e.g., the perceived threat of the Brexit vote for UK identification, and influences of mobility on identity, and subsequently on behavioral response patterns e.g., applying for a host country passport or cheering for any non-UK football opponent. To further improve clarity, we start each type description with a short reminder of how each type is situated in terms of UK identification and mobility levels (in brackets).

- ***The section on organizational responses feels very descriptive at the moment and lacks a unifying structure/categorization method. For instance, some pieces are about what organisations do, while others are about what individuals do. E.g. —***

We restructured this section to look at: 1) the reaction of employers towards EU employees at the organizational and team levels, and 2) the way some employers personally reacted in their organizational contexts. We connected these findings with our typology.

The discussion section then critically assesses these organizational responses. While suggesting more focused approaches for employers, we also highlight that in circumstances of great environmental uncertainty, employers' room for maneuver may be limited.

- ***Page 25 – While most of our interviewees already worked in international teams and/or companies, two others worked in more localized contexts and sought to move to more international organizations to decrease their discomfort with their pro-Brexit colleagues, and to feel more included at their workplace***

We removed this individual response part on page 25 and edited it into the response patterns of the respective groups.

Claims regarding contributions in the discussion section seem largely unsubstantiated. E.g.,—

- ***Page 26 – Our study sheds light on the impact anti-globalization initiatives such as Brexit can have on SIEs and provides guidance for how organizations may usefully tailor their interventions in the interest of talent retention.***

As part of our work to crystallize our contributions, we have rewritten substantive sections of the discussion section, including the former pages 26, 29 and 30 that you quote here. As we explain above, we now clearly position the impact of anti-immigration sentiment on SIEs in the center of our contribution. The gained understanding of the four reaction types and the underlying dimensions (degree of mobility and identification with the host country) thereby enhances our understanding of what motivates SIEs facing such political macro changes as well as providing implications and recommendations for SIE talent management.

- ***Page 26 – Their reaction to a perceived identity threat was intrinsically linked to their degree of perceived mobility, and this sense of mobility informed the way they interpreted and dealt with the identity threat. Our findings illustrate that deciding to leave one's current host country is influenced by a change of hierarchy between different intra-personal identities (Bataille & Vough, 2020).***

As part of this re-write we also changed this statement. First, we dropped the claim that there is a hierarchy between the dimensions. The current version states that there is an interplay between mobility and host country identification, but we cannot make any claims concerning the primacy of one dimension over the other. We have also dropped the somewhat extraneous reference about different intra-personal identities.

- ***Page 29 – As predicted by Petriglieri (2011), we found that the strength of an identity threat has an impact on the level of reaction observed, with stronger perceived identity threats more likely to lead to identity restructuring reactions. As illustrated by the EU patriots and the Local Cosmopolitans, we can also see that identity subtraction or replacement are common reactions in case of a strong threat coinciding with the provision of an alternative identity.***

We retained the Petriglieri (2011) reference found in the first sentence as this relates to a conclusion we drew from in the findings section. However, we no longer refer to "identity subtraction" or "identity replacement" in this draft.

- ***Page 29 – Furthermore, identity threats may trigger questions of mobility, while at the same time mobility options can shape identity work and lead to different reaction patterns, some of which can be agentic and involve migration decisions.***

As explained above, we now elaborate more on the interplay between mobility and host country identification (see pages 35-36). In the last part of the paper when we discuss future research directions, we suggest longitudinal process studies might further examine the patterns of the interplay between mobility and identification over time. We encourage such

an approach to improve our understanding of the temporal unfolding of mobility and identification concerns, possibly capturing more detail on the emotions accompanying these processes. This work is however well beyond the scope of this study.

- ***Page 29 – We find that the constellation of individually perceived drivers of mobility (including both options and restrictions), together with an individual's perception of identity threat, impacts the way SIEs react to the significant macro-political change represented by the Brexit vote.***

We have reformulated this in our rewritten draft to refer to the interplay between identification and mobility.

- ***Page 30 – our findings also illustrate how one dimension can take priority over the other among the four groups, leading to different reactions and coping patterns.***

As explained above, we now focus on the interplay between these two dimensions, yet with the current study design, we cannot make a definitive statement about any order or prioritization between them.

6. Please provide any other comments here.

- ***There is still a lot going on in this paper, although it has certainly come forward in terms of clarity and focus. I would keep zeroing in on:***
- ***Pre-Brexit National Identification with Host Nation***
- ***Mobility***

Thank you. We hope that our work to clarify our contributions in this new version has contributed to enhancing the paper's focus.

- ***I wondered about some new avenues to explore, including the strong retaliation theme that comes through in several of the quotes. Perhaps reviewing the literature on psychological reactance, revenge, or envy might add some new dimensions to explore***

Thank you for this suggestion. We have indeed looked at the notion of reactance and found it to be an intriguing potential motivator for some of the reactions observed, particularly with the Local Cosmopolitans. We now include a short section on this topic in our Discussion section.

In line with the process of grounded theorizing, I would encourage the authors to continue refining their findings as they re-engage with the literature. The evolution from the last version to this version of the paper had very little change in terms of updating the findings, and I would expect to see a more substantive revision in subsequent versions, for instance, through additional quotes/evidence to support theoretical connections between the categories, through new types of data visualizations, etc.

In this version of the paper, we include 63 quotations from informants, as well as two new tables to better illustrate our data and findings.

Thank you for your very constructive and helpful comments as we have redrafted this paper.