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Locating Privilege in Transnational Mobilities: The Case of Diplomatic Communities

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Abstract

Despite being considered valuable actors of state practice based abroad, diplomats are rarely perceived to be affected by mobility. This paper seeks to (re)centre mobility in the study of diplomacy and locate privilege in transnational mobilities by approaching diplomatic communities through the lens of privileged migration. Based on interviews conducted in December 2019 with various diplomats and their family members in Tokyo, Japan, it explores the boundaries that define diplomats as a migrant community. It argues that despite the assumption that privileged migrants' lives are unbounded, the transnational identities and lives of diplomats are in fact defined by the creation of boundaries — or boundary-making — the individual, collective and institutional process of locating oneself in the external world. These boundaries operate along the lines of education, work, race, gender, class, nationality, culture, status and politics. In addition, structures, spaces and practices are explored as boundaries and, simultaneously, as the sites where boundary-making takes place. By examining the practices of diplomatic boundary-making, this paper reinserts diplomats in the migration studies literature.

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Introduction

'Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?' asked Koutonin in 2015. In the wake of the so-called 'migration crisis', as debates erupted over the uses of the terms 'refugees' and 'migrants', this question unveiled the deeply racialised politics of the categorisation of migration. In the privileged migration literature, diplomats have been analysed as part of this wider group of 'expats' — short for 'expatriates' — encompassing a diversity of migrant profiles. Privileged migrants refer to individuals who are relatively wealthy, mostly white, and who migrate to increase their quality of life (Leonard, 2010). Not limited to 'expatriates', they include, among other categories, retirement migrants (O'Reilly, 2000; Olivier, 2007) and 'lifestyle migrants' (Amit, 2011; Benson, 2013; Spalding, 2013).

Although 'expatriate' is a term that originates in the human resource management lexicon to describe a transnational professional taking part in an intra-company transfer, it has recently been adopted to refer to a broader category of people on the move (Kunz, 2016). 'Expatriate' is usually, in fact, problematically reserved for white Westerners, in contrast with 'the rest' who are labelled 'economic migrants' (Fechter and Walsh, 2010). The literature on privileged migration questions the ways in which terms associated with privileged mobility — such as 'expatriate' — legitimises the division of migrants into disputable categories (Croucher, 2012).

In this way, scholars of privileged migration have noted the danger of studying privileged migrants because such analysis reproduces the problematic concept and category of the 'expatriate' (Fechter, 2007; Leonard 2010). In an effort to avoid normalising the term, Kunz (2016) suggests using it as a category of practice instead of a category of analysis. This means acknowledging that the concept is used in everyday practices, but at the same time not legitimising it as a scholarly category. To accentuate this point, I use 'expatriate' in inverted commas throughout this paper to draw attention to the fact that the term is loaded with racist and classist baggage. Moreover, because the migration experiences of privileged migrants are influenced by the high position they occupy in global socio-economic hierarchies (Kunz, 2016), I refer to other migrants as non-privileged migrants to highlight their contrasting experiences as people on the move.

Despite scholars such as Favell (2003) challenging the idea that privileged migrants live unbounded lives, the notions of fluidity and 'global flows' are dominant in the transnationalism literature on privileged migration, and support the idea that boundaries are absent in transnational globalised spaces (Fechter, 2007). Building on Fechter (2007) who maintains that the everyday lives of privileged migrants are marked by boundaries, I ask in this paper: what are the boundaries that define diplomats as a migrant community?

My focus is on the formation of these boundaries — that I call boundary-making — defined as an individual, collective and institutional process of locating oneself in the external world. I argue that this process is central to diplomats' identity-making and marking as people on the move, and operates on the grounds of education, work, race, gender, class, nationality, culture, status, and politics. In addition, I examine diplomatic spaces, structures, and practices as boundaries and, at the same time, as the sites where boundary-making processes take place.

Based on interviews that I conducted in December 2019 with a number of different diplomatic communities in Tokyo, Japan, I examine the mobile identities and transnational lives of diplomats as a specific category of privileged migrants, and as migrant communities. I begin by introducing the aims of my research. I then provide a literature review, followed by my methodology. In my empirical analyses divided in two sections, I explore the interrelated boundaries that characterise diplomatic communities. First, I examine how diplomats engage in boundary-making when distinguishing their mobility and identity from that of other migrants', on the grounds of education, class, race, status, work, and politics. Second, I focus on the ways in which boundary-making is historically embedded in the diplomatic institution and operates along gendered, cultural, and national lines, as manifested in diplomatic structures, spaces and practices.

While there is a growing literature on the transnational lives of privileged migrants examining 'expatriates' as communities of inquiry (see for e.g. Walsh, 2007; Leonard, 2010; Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2014), empirical research in this area continues to be scarce (Fechter, 2007). Moreover, although diplomacy has long been studied in the field of international relations as state practice (Constantinou and Sharp, 2016), the mobility of diplomats themselves has rarely been the focus of such field of inquiry. More recently, however, there has been an increase in critical approaches insisting on the need to understand diplomacy as an everyday practice (see Neumann, 2010; Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010; Dittmer and McConnell, 2015), with post-colonial scholars studying diplomatic structures, practices and actors through a historical lens (see for e.g. Opondo, 2016). I try to fill this void by centring the specific perspectives of diplomats, since they form a distinct category within the wider group of 'expatriates'. My research is thus exploratory and aims to lay the groundwork for potential future studies on the topic by collecting primary data and analysing it. My goal, similarly to that of privileged migration scholars, is to bring attention to the 'super diversity' of migrants that exist in the world today (Vertovec, 2007). By exploring the transnational lives of diplomatic communities in Tokyo, Japan, I aim to make the case for including diplomats as a community of enquiry in migration studies.

Moreover, I justify the merit of looking at privileged communities following Nader's (1972: 289) suggestion for anthropologists to 'study up' — meaning analysing 'the colonisers rather than the colonised'. 'Studying up' is useful and essential because understanding the nature and impacts of global social inequality requires examining all members of society, including the upper social strata (Croucher, 2012). Furthermore, focusing on privileged migration is a pertinent way to bring attention to power relations and inequalities that characterise global migration flows (Kunz, 2016). Examining privileged migrants thus has important theoretical implications, since theories of migration studies have disproportionately been based on the experience of non-privileged migrants (Fechter, 2007). Fechter (2007: 19) describes her ethnography of 'expatriates' as a form of 'transnationalism from above' and I locate my study of diplomats in the same line of thought.

According to Kunz (2016), there are currently three areas of 'expatriate' research that need further inspection. First, the ways in which 'others' (locals and non-privileged migrants) perceive and relate to the 'expatriate' to shed a light on the relational aspect of identity. Second, the historical context where the research takes place, the inclusion of voices of non-white 'expatriates', as well as non-Anglophone spaces that 'expatriates' inhabit. Third, the link between privileged migration and other forms of mobility. Accounting for all three gaps is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I aim to contribute to the literature by focusing on the second and third areas of research. More specifically, I explore the context where this research takes place by investigating Japan's relationship with diplomacy, colonisation, and the conception of whiteness. Moreover, by including accounts of French and Spanish speaking migrants, and the voices of migrants of colour, I aim to broaden the study of privileged migration beyond the exploration of Anglophone spaces and the voices of white migrants. I address the third gap by relying on concepts from the transnationalism literature to look at diplomats, despite transnationalism originally being developed for the study of diasporas.

Literature review

Boundaries and identity-making

The notion of fluidity is dominant in the transnationalism literature. Regarding privileged migrants, there is often an assumption that their lives are marked by unboundedness (Fechter, 2007). Despite the increasingly globalised nature of movement, however, borders and boundaries continue to be obstacles that characterise the experiences of non-privileged migrants (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Kearney 2004; Cunningham, 2004). Privileged migrants, on the other hand, have been depicted as a very mobile 'transnational capitalist class' (Sklair, 2001) or as a 'transnational elite' occupying the highest level of

influence in global capitalism (Friedman, 1999). Adding to this idea of 'global lives' is the presumption of their cosmopolitanism (Hannerz, 1996). These assumptions have been questioned, however, notably by Smith and Guarnizo (1998) and Willis et al. (2002), and challenged by Favell (2003) who demonstrated the bounded nature of European privileged migration.

Fechter (2007) argues that the notion of boundaries is central to the lives of 'expatriates'. In her ethnography, she looks at the ways in which 'expatriates' in Indonesia build their identities by distinguishing themselves from other groups of people, including 'non-expatriate' white foreigners and Indonesian nationals. These boundaries are constructed along the lines of race, gender, nationality, body, space, and social lives (Fechter, 2007). Long before Fetcher, Cohen (1977) conceptualised the ecological and institutional structures through which 'expatriates' form communities. The practice of boundary-making is based on the distinction between marking the 'inside' of a community and the 'outside' of it. Similarly, Kurotani (2005) explains the ways in which Japanese 'expatriate' households in the United States make a clear separation between the inside of their house and the outside world. Yet, in contrast to other migrant communities, 'expatriate' groups are not the targets of criticism for their wilful and collective segregation (Cohen, 1977; Fechter, 2007).

Leonard (2010) adds another important dimension to the discussion of privileged migration by focusing on the influence of the work and organisational context on the formation of migrants' lives and identities — an area often disregarded in the literature. In my study, this means looking at how diplomatic identities are produced by the institution of diplomacy itself. Following Leonard (2010), I acknowledge, however, that the work context is not the only one producing these identities, and the distinction between work and private life can in fact be blurry. Considering the organisational context also supposes understanding the particularities of the diplomatic structure, which is deeply gendered. I examine this by looking at both female diplomats and male diplomats' wives, often called 'incorporated wives'. The following section will further anchor privileged mobilities — and more specifically diplomatic mobilities — within colonial history, and focus on its racial underpinnings.

Historical perspective: colonialism and the legacy of whiteness

Scholars of privileged migration have advocated the importance of understanding privileged migration within the wider frame of colonialism, by locating privileged mobility within a historical context of power and domination (Leonard, 2010; Benson, 2013; Kunz 2016). This means focusing on the ways privilege in migration is constituted and experienced by virtue of contemporary and historical political and socio-economic inequalities. Within the growing literature on Western migrants moving to 'developing'

countries, some scholars have focused specifically on their movement towards former colonies (see for e,g, Findlay et al., 1996; Knowles, 2005; Armbruster, 2010; Beaverstock, 2011). The experiences of these migrants stand in sharp contrast to migrants from formerly colonised countries travelling to the former metropole. Often, the focus is on colonial continuities, whether that means power imbalances between former colonisers and the formerly colonised or the legacy of racial hierarchies more generally.

An important debate in the literature concerns whether 'expatriates' act as nationals of a particular country or part of a broader category of 'Western' (Fechter and Walsh, 2010). According to Fechter and Walsh (2010), Western 'expatriates' have a shared heritage of viewing the 'other' with a sense of superiority, which goes beyond specific colonial histories. In her study of 'expatriates' in Indonesia, Fechter (2007) focuses on 'expatriates' beyond national boundaries and explores the idea of whiteness, demonstrating its normative power through the accounts of 'expatriates' who struggle to recognise that whiteness is not the norm. This idea is particularly powerful when she compares their experiences of being 'othered' to their 'othering' of racialised migrants in their countries of origin (Fechter, 2007). White 'expatriates'' lack of self-reflection shows how relations of domination are maintained through the naturalisation of the idea of whiteness, regardless of its location (ibid.). For Fechter (2007) and Leonard (2010), looking at how 'expatriates' experience their whiteness in predominantly non-white spaces is useful in order to understand how whiteness is produced and performed.

Race is an important analytical frame for distinguishing diplomats from the larger category of 'expatriates' because as a group, they are not defined by whiteness. The study of diplomats as privileged migrants thus has the potential to complicate the narrative around race in the study of 'expatriates' and deserves further inspection. Arguably, the notion of whiteness remains pertinent because of the European nature of modern diplomacy, diplomacy being a field characterised by colonial violence and Eurocentrism (Opondo, 2010; Neumann, 2012). For example, Japan, as well as all 'new' states, became accepted as members of the international community only when they adapted their legal codes to that of the West (Howland, 2012). Prior to that, European states considered that they had no territorial sovereignty (ibid.), providing a justification for colonisation.

Although whiteness does not confer automatic privilege — since it does not operate independently of class and gender considerations (Kunz, 2016) — it is a crucial aspect of the ways in which migrants are portrayed and understood in contemporary Japan. As Owens (2014) explains, migrants are to be understood in the context of Japanese imperial history which resulted in Japanese people developing an 'inferiority complex' in relation to Americans — conflated with the West, and in turn, with whiteness —

and a mixture of discomfort and superiority in relation to Asian migrants or other migrants of colour. While white migrants in Japan are generally well received and even 'pampered' as 'honoured guests' (Lie, 2001: 172), Asian and African migrants tend to face discrimination (Befu, 2001). For that reason, although diplomats are not defined by whiteness, whiteness has some currency in diplomatic circles. In fact, this was recently exposed in the accounts of black American diplomats experiencing racism both in their postings abroad and within the Foreign Service (Gramer, 2020). It is worth noting that the nationalist political construction of Japan as a racially homogeneous country means that white migrants are also excluded from the Japanese society despite the privileged treatment they receive (Owens, 2014).

Japan is a complicated case study because the country was never formally colonised and was itself a coloniser. However, the first establishment of diplomatic missions in Japan followed military pressure from the United States in 1854 (Beasley, 1972). Subsequently, the so-called 'great powers'[i] seized foreign extra-territorial privileges from Japan between 1858 and 1899 (Ker, 1928). In practice, extra-territoriality means exemption from local jurisdiction, which is made possible via the acquisition of territorial sovereignty (Howland, 2012). European colonial powers wanted to secure these privileges because Japan could not be colonised (ibid.). Still, they considered Japan an 'uncivilised' country because its religious and legal institutions were different from theirs, and extra-territoriality was proposed as the best way to 'protect' Western nationals (ibid.). This has led some scholars to argue that Japan had a semi-colonised status during its history (see for e.g. Lehmann, 1982; Murphy, 2002; Ruxton, 2013). In addition, the US military occupied Okinawa Islands after the Second World War between 1945-72, and has, up to this date, preserved military bases there despite Okinawans' strong opposition (Pajon, 2010). Without going into the specificities of Japan's coloniser and semi-colonised status, what is certain is that Japan has inherited a colonial imaginary from Western states, particularly in the way it continues to place white migrants at the top of its racial hierarchy (Owens, 2014).

Methodology

My research is qualitative, based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews I conducted with 17 respondents in Tokyo, Japan, during the Michaelmas 2019 term break. Although my research is not meant to be representative, I tried to reach out to diplomatic communities from different nationalities, races and genders with an aim for diversity in my respondent pool. In Japan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) divides the countries of the world into seven regions: Asia, Pacific, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Middle East and Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.). I aimed to have at least one respondent from each of these regions, and was successful in doing so, except for the Pacific.

	Asia	North America	Latin America and Caribbean	Europe	Middle-East	Africa	Pacific	Total
Diplomats	2	3	1	5	2	0	0	13
Family	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	4
Total	**2**	**3**	**1**	**7**	**2**	**2**	**0**	**17**

Table 1: Regional distribution of interviewees

In terms of gender distribution, because diplomacy is traditionally a male-dominated field, it was important for me to try and integrate as many female voices as possible. Within the four diplomatic family members interviewed, three were wives of male diplomats, and one was the daughter of a male diplomat.

	Men	Women	Total
Diplomats	7	6	13
Family	0	4	4
Total	**7**	**10**	**17**

Table 2: Gender distribution of interviewees

Seeking to counter the Anglophone domination of the literature, I reached out to a diverse body of respondents. The criterion for selection was that they were French, English or Spanish speakers because these are the languages I am fluent in. I must note, however, that the fact that I ultimately translated everything into English presents its own challenges since translation is a form of '(re)-narration' (Leurs, 2015: 95). When my interviewees were willing to put me in contact with fellow diplomats, I made use of snowball sampling, and this happened twice in Japan. Out of all the respondents, only two people out of 70 — who were not linked to my personal network — responded positively to my interview request. The rest of the interviewees were all presented to me by personal connections.

The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the availability of the respondent. We met at a mutually agreed location, which was mostly at the embassy where the diplomat was working, or at their residence in the case of diplomatic family members. Although my research has no overt political implications, I anonymised all interviewees. To maintain this anonymity, I sometimes refer to the same person differently. This is specifically the case for ambassadors and their wives, since revealing the name of their country reveals their identity. Depending on the context, when the country is more important, they will be referred to as diplomat or diplomatic wife of X country, and when the status is more meaningful, their diplomatic rank will be revealed alongside their region, following MOFA's categorisation.

My respondent pool thus has a selection bias since interviewees were not randomly selected. It was not possible for me to have a completely randomised selection of respondents due to limits on my time and resources. I chose a convenience sample, meaning that the interviewees were chosen based on practical considerations. I am aware of the methodological limitations of snowball and convenience sampling, and for this reason, I am not making any conclusive claims about my findings. Moreover, one thing that is especially true for diplomats is that they might be reluctant to share their true views or might promote particular views based on the nature of their work (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). This is something I felt most strongly when conducting interviews with ambassadors, who would at times turn my questions around to promote their countries of origin. Because diplomats are constantly representing their countries, it is difficult to distinguish between when they are speaking as their 'personal' selves, thus expressing their real thoughts and feelings, and when they are speaking as professionals, thus expressing the official foreign and domestic policy stances of their governments. Moreover, one American diplomat expressed security concerns and admitted filtering his thoughts to protect himself.

The diplomats: characteristics of a privileged migrant community

Although a sub-category of 'expatriates', diplomats have specific characteristics that set them apart as their own group. In this section, I explore how diplomats engage in boundary-making when considering their mobility and identity as migrants, along the lines of education, class, race, status, work, and politics. First, I examine the ways in which diplomats understand their mobile identities. Second, I analyse how privilege is manifested in their lives. Third, I focus on the bounded imaginary of 'living in a bubble', which found echo in many diplomats' accounts. Finally, I investigate the way their social relations are affected by political considerations.

Migrant? 'Expatriate'? Or something else?

According to Clark (1973), diplomats have traditionally come from wealthy and aristocratic backgrounds. Although this is less the case today, previous studies have shown that diplomats tend to have similar academic backgrounds, characterised by higher education in fields such as law, political science, international relations, area studies and economics (Gottheil, 1973). This holds true for the diplomats I interviewed in Tokyo, three-quarters of them having an educational background in these fields. Despite the heterogeneity of their educational and professional experiences, the diplomats had many commonalities in social backgrounds. In fact, a diplomatic profile transpired from the interviews, and could be characterised by university education, often up to postgraduate level, and an attraction towards the 'international', influenced by experiences of studying or working abroad. One Turkish diplomat actually

expressed boundaries between diplomats and other types of migrants based on education. When comparing the situation of Turkish workers in Japan with hers, she highlighted the like-mindedness of diplomats and 'expatriates' due to their higher education level, which eventually positioned them higher in the social hierarchy.

The interviewees also created boundaries with other migrants on the grounds of work. Over two-thirds of the interviewees did not consider themselves to be migrants because the reason for their presence in the host country was work, and their stay was for a fixed and short amount of time. They used alternative terms to describe themselves, such as 'guest', 'government representative', 'sent personnel' and 'foreigner'. For these interviewees, the term 'migrant' was attributed a lot of different —mostly negative — meanings. Three diplomats, French, Cambodian and Finnish, said that they had never thought of themselves as migrants before I suggested the term to them. The French diplomat, after discussion and reflection, acknowledged that she was in fact a migrant. This is not surprising, as privileged migrants tend to conflate migrants with refugees or with 'low-skilled' labour, and because the term is perceived as negative more generally (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2014). In addition, the interviewees perceived their situation moving for a job with a certain lack of agency. In this sense, they likened their mobility to that of 'expatriates', who are also 'sent' by their corporations or organisations. Some admitted preferring the term 'expatriate' because they associated it with a more positive meaning.

Among the five interviewees who identified as migrants, all were women who did not attribute a negative meaning to the term. Most of them understood 'migrant' as a broad category referring to those who move and are not located in their home country. One French diplomat disliked the term precisely because it was too broad: 'we are all migrants since it means to move', she said. For a Togolese diplomat's daughter, the motivation for leaving one's home country does not matter, whether it is for work or not. She said that there is no difference between a diplomat and a refugee, and that thinking otherwise is arrogant. This was an interesting comment in that the diplomatic status had no influence on the way she understood her mobility, and she did not create boundaries between diplomats and refugees. Yet, diplomats and refugees have very different motivations and positionings abroad. Whilst the Japanese government facilitates the mobility of diplomats and their family, their acceptance rate of refugees is strikingly low (Tanaka, 2019).

Privileged status

Although some diplomats were reluctant to acknowledge their position as privileged, most of them recognised that their diplomatic status made administrative and practical tasks easier to navigate. Two female diplomats, American and Finnish, compared their current situation as diplomats to when they were

students abroad. The American diplomat said that she considered herself a migrant back then but not right now precisely for that reason. 'So many things you don't have to do as a diplomat', she said, 'everything is easy'. Similarly, one European ambassador's wife — although identifying as a migrant 'in a way' — felt bad to put herself in that category because of her privileged status. This is reminiscent of the fact that in the popular imaginary, a migrant cannot be privileged. This idea was reinforced when she compared her business class travel to that of 'Africans that cross the Mediterranean' because 'if I think about the suffering and the threatening conditions of the migrants today, it's incomparable'. Although this person did not connote the term migrant as negative, she understood most migrants as being 'illegal' and not having a job, revealing a subconscious boundary-making based on considerations of status and race. Her ideas are part of the 'myths of migration' (De Haas, 2017), common assumptions around contemporary migration that are not supported by evidence. Rather, they are the product of a political agenda that frames migration as 'a problem that must be solved' (ibid.).

Three female diplomatic family members also mentioned the importance of status in Japan and the ways in which they are treated differently by virtue of their diplomatic status. One Togolese diplomat's wife, for example, mentioned how people treat her with more respect when they know that she is affiliated with the embassy. She contrasted that with experiences of racism that she had encountered in her daily life in Japan — such as an instance in which a man left his seat in the train because she sat next to him. Similarly, one European ambassador's wife mentioned that her experience of being a migrant is very different from other Europeans because of the importance attributed to status, especially in Japan. Furthermore, she mentioned the ways in which status creates boundaries even within diplomatic missions as the treatment one receives depends on one's husband's ranking: the higher the ranking the better the treatment. This shows how experiences of privilege can also differ depending on the position one occupies in the diplomatic mission hierarchy. One French diplomat echoed this idea of differential treatment within the embassy based on diplomatic hierarchy.

On the contrary, however, some interviewees did not feel privileged because of their diplomatic status, which they associated with some disadvantages. One Brazilian diplomat, for example, explained how she was refused access to two flats she was looking to rent in Tokyo because of 'the misconception that diplomats have immunity and that if they [the property owners] had any problems they wouldn't have any support from the Japanese government'. In this way, she felt less privileged than 'expatriates' whom she assumed do not have this problem. An Italian diplomat's wife had a similar experience while living in New York in the 1990s, where there would be signs saying 'no pets, no diplomats'. According to the Brazilian diplomat, what is conceived as 'privilege' is merely the facilitation of some practicalities. For one French

diplomat, her status as a diplomat compel her to make a conscious effort to respect the rules of host countries because of the pressure to be an exemplary representative of her home country. In this way, similar to the Brazilian diplomat, she drew boundaries between 'expatriates' and diplomats, and expressed feeling more constrained than the former. Others understood their privilege as limited to the prestige of their function only. According to a Canadian and Omani diplomat, there is a certain prestige held during official events but not outside of them. Both of them felt like 'normal' people because the treatment they receive during formal relationships is the only thing setting them apart from other foreign nationals.

'Living in a golden bubble'

Many interviewees resonated with the bounded imagery of living in a bubble, associated with the idea of living secluded from the host country. One Belgian diplomat defined the diplomatic bubble as a 'golden bubble', understood as a social circle and space inhabited by people with a certain social status within the society. He thought that diplomats should 'get out of that bubble' which, for him, meant meeting and engaging with people from all levels of society. Other interviewees echoed the idea that it was important to make the effort to integrate, thus valuing the negotiation and contestation of boundaries with the host population. In fact, three diplomats, French, Mongolian and Armenian, managed to 'get out of the bubble' to a certain extent by virtue of their experience living and studying in Japan previously, as well as proficiency in the Japanese language. Others aimed to negotiate their boundaries with the local population by, for example, mingling with English-speaking Japanese people and/or by making efforts to learn Japanese. This was the case for the Belgian diplomat, an Omani diplomat and an Italian diplomat's wife. Diplomats, however, are traditionally advised against integrating since this can weaken their loyalty to their home country, which explains why they are limited in the time they spend in each posting (Cohen, 1977). This resonated in the account of one French diplomat who explained that although diplomats are posted in a country between two and four years in the French diplomatic service, she exceptionally stayed for five years in her previous posting, which was 'almost too much' because 'when you go over four years you don't want to leave anymore'. This could be one of the reasons why the diplomatic institution organises the spatial clustering of diplomats' and their families.

Two diplomats, American and Canadian, living in their embassy's compound, particularly disliked living in a bubble because of the spatial boundary-making this entails. The American diplomat called it an abnormal 'physical bubble' and resented the lack of privacy and the feeling that she was always working. The majority of diplomats interviewed lived in some sort of embassy compound and those who did not seemingly lived in close proximity to the embassy. Two diplomats, Brazilian and American, expressed no particular issue with living in a bubble. The American diplomat explained that 'everyone lives in a bubble', and that this

bubble, especially in Japan, allowed him to be 'free to be American' and 'live as an American', alluding to the fact that the maintenance of spatial boundaries created an environment in which he does not need to integrate. The American embassy and housing compound is an extreme example of a physical bubble, with its own mailing system, grocery stores, community TV and a direct access to US military bases.

As pointed out by Cohen (1977: 16), what is important in the formation of 'environmental bubbles' is the 'social meaning of their separateness'. This brings to focus the reason behind a community's exclusiveness, for example whether they actively or passively choose to be seclusive, or whether the society is excluding them. The diplomats I interviewed had a particular way of understanding and practicing boundary-making. In the case of 'expatriates', it has been noted that their active seclusion is evidence of their privilege, since they do not get criticised for this type of behaviour in the way other migrant communities do (Cohen, 1977; Fechter 2007). In the case of diplomats, however, we can see an interesting phenomenon in which the active exclusiveness and maintenance of spatial boundaries is not necessarily their will, but imposed and organised by the diplomatic institution as well. This was made clear previously in the accounts of those who disliked living in embassy compounds but did not have a say in the decision. The relationship between the diplomatic structure and the formation of diplomatic bubbles shows the prevalence of boundaries rather than unboundedness in the transnational lives of diplomats, whether these boundaries are created willingly or not.

Diplomatic communities: when the private becomes political

One important distinction that sets diplomats apart from 'expatriates' is the ways in which their social relationships are influenced by the political positions of their home countries. Similar to what Gottheil (1973) found among diplomats in Israel, regional and/or organisational links had an important impact on the way the diplomats I interviewed formed 'friendships' with diplomats from other countries. In this respect, one Canadian diplomat spoke of 'friendly embassies', Brazilian and Finnish diplomats of 'like-minded countries' and one Turkish diplomat expressed discomfort in socialising with countries that Turkey was antagonistic towards. All diplomats said that they had contacts most frequently with diplomats from countries with which they had regional or organisational ties because of shared issues. These commonalities meant that some distinct groups of diplomats formed naturally. In terms of regional blocs, the diplomats mentioned a few: the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Islamic Countries (OIC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Nordic countries, Latin America, and Arab countries.

However, boundary-making does not just operate along regional and organisational lines. Diplomats' positions and ranks within the embassy also had an impact on their social interactions. For example, one

Belgian diplomat mentioned a diplomatic economic group (diplomats working in the economic section of their embassies). Similarly, a diplomat who was deputy head of mission mentioned knowing best the diplomats in the same diplomatic position as her. Ambassadors also tended to have their own sub-group. According to a European ambassador's wife, Japanese people give a lot of value to one's status, which leads them to give differential and preferential treatment to ambassadors. She said that she was 'treated like royalty', which was not the case in her previous postings when her husband was a diplomat. Interestingly, the social groups of diplomatic wives were also based on status consideration and/or regional affiliations. One European ambassador's wife remembered being invited to join elite women's clubs as soon as she arrived in Japan. Both her and another European ambassador's wife were part of several women's groups such as Nadeshiko-kai. Moreover, one Togolese diplomat's wife was part of the African Diplomats' Wives Association (ADIWA).

Another important aspect that is unique to diplomats is the constraints they face in their political expression due to the nature of their job as government representatives. One French diplomat expressed feeling a growing distance from her country due to the progressively authoritarian nature of the state, despite feeling French from a cultural standpoint. 'It is also because we have the so-called duty of confidentiality', she added. The duty of confidentiality prohibits one's public expression of personal viewpoints even when one is not 'working' (République Française, n.d.). From a professional perspective, diplomats are strongly engaged in their countries' political activities, yet these have to be completely detached from their personal opinions. Transnational political engagement and mobilisation are mostly studied in the context of diasporas (see for e.g. Adamson, 2012; Müller Funk, 2016; Koinova, 2013; Shain and Barth, 2003) but the point raised by the French diplomat shows the particular positionality of diplomats due to their representative role. Lucassen and Smit (2015: 35) conceptualised people such as diplomats as organisational migrants 'whose migratory behaviour is primarily determined by the interests of the organisation they have joined'. In such a definition they include the dependents of these migrants and this resonates with diplomatic wives who talked about their activities in the host country as a 'job', as the following section will explore further. This illustrates diplomats and their family members' difficulty of negotiating and contesting political boundaries due to the nature of the diplomatic work.

The diplomatic structure: historical context, gendered dimensions, and transnational spaces

The particularities of diplomats as migrants is based on and reproduced by the diplomatic institution that organises their mobility. This institution is one that creates boundaries between diplomatic communities

and the rest of the society, but also within diplomatic communities themselves. I argue that this institutional boundary-making is to be understood through a historical perspective, and functions on the grounds of gender, nationality, and culture, as manifested in diplomatic practices, spaces and structures. First, I explore the ways in which the diplomatic institution rests on patriarchal boundaries. Second, I look at how the embassy can be understood as diplomats' 'home', and the gendered division of labour that this entails. Third, I describe the historical dimension of diplomatic spaces, focusing on embassies. Fourth, I examine the transnational dimension of diplomatic spaces.

Diplomacy as a patriarchal institution

There exists a gendered dynamic in diplomatic mobilities, as fewer women tend to be posted abroad as diplomats, but also because of the way the diplomatic institution itself was constituted (Aggestam and Towns, 2019). Traditionally, women were excluded from diplomacy because they were considered intellectually inferior, and because of concerns around mobility affecting marriage (Clarke, 1973). According to most of the female diplomats I interviewed, diplomacy used to be a male-dominated field but this is not the case anymore. One French diplomat described her embassy as 'female-dominated', although another French diplomat specified that despite the higher number of women working there, there were still more men in positions of responsibility. For the former, being a woman was a positive asset in her career since she benefitted from a gender quota fixed at 20% for women to be in positions of responsibility in France. For one Brazilian diplomat, the lack of women in diplomacy was not structural but rather personal. She argued that since diplomacy requires frequent movement and because it is difficult to have one's family follow especially if one's husband is not a diplomat, women tend to consciously choose not to become diplomats. One American diplomat however, problematised these accounts, explaining that the issue was structural. She said that diplomacy represents 'a system created for a man with a wife' and that this patriarchal structure makes it more difficult for women to have successful careers in diplomacy, a point echoed by another French diplomat.

The gendered boundaries on which the diplomatic institution rest was revealed in a comparison of the ways in which a female American diplomat and a male Canadian diplomat described and understood the position of their accompanying spouses. For the American diplomat, her husband was 'the one putting his career at risk' and there was therefore a very important emotional strain on her. Despite trying to make compromises to balance this 'inequality' — by, for example, letting her husband choose her postings — she felt very guilty and admitted that she was not sure how long she would be working in diplomacy. In contrast, while acknowledging his work postings as 'challenging' for his wife's professional identity, the Canadian diplomat presented them as an inescapable outcome of a mobile lifestyle in which he had no

direct responsibility. This comparison shows the anguish that female diplomats feel due to the naturalised idea that women should move for their husbands, but not the other way around. When the spouse had a flexible job, however, the diplomats' mobility (both male and female) did not appear to be an issue.

Coles (2008) describes a 'patriarchal structure of diplomacy' in which the labour of accompanying wives, despite being embedded in the very organisation of everyday diplomatic practices, remains unpaid. The term 'incorporated wife' has been used to refer to the accompanying spouses of transnational professionals, including diplomats (Callan and Ardener, 1984; Coles and Fechter, 2008) and still remains particularly relevant for diplomatic wives today. The preservation of patriarchal boundaries in 'expatriate' mobility is to be understood within a historical context and in terms of colonial continuity. Parallels can be drawn between the role played by wives of colonial officers and wives of corporate 'expatriates' with regard to embodying the ideologies of the organisation they represent (Leonard, 2010). One important point to acknowledge, however, is that power is multi-dimensional, and not a top-down process (ibid.). Despite the patriarchal structure of diplomacy, it cannot be taken for granted that incorporated wives feel disempowered. In fact, two female diplomatic family members said they were using the posts to develop professionally despite being barred from working in the host country. One Spanish diplomat's wife, for example, insisted that following her husband was her own decision, one that she did not regret, especially because the knowledge she acquires in Japan could be useful for her in the future. Similarly, one Togolese diplomat's daughter was dedicated to learn the Japanese language because it might help her professionally later on. In fact, she was considering staying in Japan even after her father's posting ends to study there. Both of them regarded being in Japan as an opportunity they wanted to make the most of.

The embassy as home: gendered division of labour and home-making

For an Italian diplomat's wife, cooking traditional food was part of a process of boundary-making between 'home' and the outside world. Whatever country she was based in, she would make sure that the inside of the home would be as if they were in Italy, in order to transmit Italian culture to her children. She explained this as a way for her children to 'have a sense of belonging'. This is reminiscent of Kurotani's (2005) depiction of Japanese corporate wives living in the United States who try to create a Japanese home in a foreign country, by maintaining a strict distinction between the inside and the outside. This physical boundary-making has an important gendered dimension, since women are often in charge of 're-creating national or regional cultures abroad' (Fechter, 2007: 33). The creation of a domestic space around cultural boundaries is thus understood to be a woman's work (ibid.). In addition to preparing national or ethnic dishes and displaying cultural objects, migrant groups use spatial clustering as a strategy to form and mark their identities (Kurotani, 2005).

Although Kurotani (2005) focuses on domestic spaces, these identity-making practices are applicable to embassies, which are simultaneously a professional and domestic space. This echoes with Coles' (2008) findings on the ways in which the British diplomatic mission is conceived and operates as a family. Following this logic, the embassy can be understood as the 'house' of diplomats, and diplomatic 'domestic' practices become that of home-making. This is illustrated by the accounts of a Togolese diplomat's wife who said that she cooked and welcomed guests whenever there were embassy events. Diplomatic family members are in theory not supposed to work (although this depends on each country's specific agreements with Japan) and the assumption within diplomatic circles is that the wives of male diplomats will engage in free labour relating to diplomatic activities. The fact that their participation is not officially and contractually understood as work once again confirms the conceptualisation of the embassy as home, with wives in charge of this 'domestic' space. A European ambassador's wife talked about all the events she was organising as her 'job' even though she was not remunerated. In fact, both her and another European ambassadors' wife explained that they were so busy with embassy-related work that, even if they wanted to, they would not have the time to engage in another job. This practice of referring to their free labour as a 'job' is echoed in Kurotani's (2005) description of the way Japanese wives in the US understood their domestic activities.

Moreover, Leonard (2010) highlighted the material dimension within which the negotiation of 'expatriate' identities happens, between the spaces of their work organisations and the ways these relate to broader local and international spaces. In the embassies I visited, what drew my attention most were the efforts put into creating a bounded national imaginary. In the Finnish embassy, for example, there was a sauna photo corner and Moomins stuffed toys. The Mongolian and Cambodian embassies impressed me with their decorations, including traditional rugs, paintings, sculptures as well as photographs representing the countries. In one meeting room of the Mongolian embassy, there was a traditional yurt 'guarded' by two samurai war costumes. Although exhibited differently, there was an attempt by most embassies to broadcast a mixture of the distinctiveness of both home and host countries. The Italian ambassador's residence is a good example of a hybrid Japanese-Italian aesthetics and style, having been designed by an Italian architect in collaboration with a Japanese architect (Embassy of Italy to Japan, n.d.). Thus, although the creation of national and cultural boundaries stood out in embassies, hybrid designs linking host and home countries demonstrated the possibility to negotiate these boundaries.

Diplomatic spaces: historical perspective

The Italian embassy is located in one of the richest areas of Tokyo and stands out by its size and grandiosity. As Clark (1973) noted in the 1970s, embassies are usually located in the most prestigious locations in any

capital and this held true for the embassies I visited in Tokyo. According to Clark (1973), the size of a diplomatic mission could also be indicative of that country's historical significance in the host country, and this was most notably the case for the American mission, which was among the first ones to open an embassy in Tokyo in 1854 (Visit Minato City, 2019). I observed that a diplomatic mission's historical relationship with the host country — such as Japan's and Italy's good relations in particular as allies in the first and Second World War — can also have an impact on the size and quality of the embassy and ambassador's residence, in terms of the building and space itself. Importantly, privileged migration scholars have identified colonial continuities in the space inhabited by 'expatriates' (Leonard, 2010; Fechter and Walsh, 2010; Kunz, 2016). Within formerly colonial cities, 'expatriates' often inhabit the same spaces, buildings and neighbourhoods as colonisers did in the past and 'such active structural renewal provides a material assemblage facilitating the repetition of colonial routines' (Lester, 2012: 6). In that respect, one Belgian diplomat previously based in Burundi said that he lived in an embassy residence there because of the structure maintained from Belgium's colonial legacy in the country.

Diplomatic missions — including diplomatic persons and premises — enjoy privileges of inviolability (Bao, 2014). This means that they are protected from criminal persecution in the host country, as stated in the Vienna Convention (1961). One Turkish diplomat marked boundaries between diplomatic mobilities and other types of mobilities precisely for that reason. 'You are triple protected', she said, under international law, domestic law (Japan, in this case), and Turkish law (in her case). She mentioned the ways in which the Vienna Convention — establishing the foundation for diplomatic privileges and immunities — ensures the protection of diplomats under international law and how she has the backing of the Turkish government 'at all times'. In fact, the Vienna Convention (1961) establishes three groups within the diplomatic staff with different immunity and privileges, revealing the existence of boundaries within the diplomatic institution itself. All the interviewees belonged to the first category of diplomatic agents, which includes diplomats and their family members, and who are granted full immunities as well as tax exemptions. One Belgian diplomat also mentioned how his diplomatic status guaranteed his and his family's security in a previous posting in Burundi when armed conflict erupted.

This particular status enjoyed by diplomatic actors and spaces was reflected in the accounts of three diplomats who challenged the spatial boundaries of their home countries. One Armenian diplomat argued that although he was physically based in Japan, it is as if he were in Armenia since he represents Armenia and interacts with Armenians every day. In addition, one French diplomat said that in the French embassy, she was in a 'bit of France'. Similarly, a Romanian diplomat denied my interview request saying that as a diplomat, 'there is not a mobility issue'. This shows how some diplomats dissociate themselves from the

process of migration, based on the fact that the embassy is considered to be part of their home country's territory. What transpires from these accounts is an assumption that embassies — and by association, diplomats themselves — enjoy an extraterritorial status, which leads them to not consider themselves mobile. Although extra-territorial privileges have existed in Japan in the past, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the idea that embassy premises enjoy extraterritoriality — meaning that they are 'outside the territory of the receiving state' — is a 'legal fiction' (Dicktein, 1973: 48). Still, the concept of extra-territorialisation, although not named as such by the interviewees, is an imaginary that finds resonance in the way some diplomats understand diplomatic spaces and mobility, one that is engrained in colonial history.

Transnational spaces and the process of 'othering'

Diplomatic spaces are transnational spaces, which are not only inhabited by diplomats and their families, but also by other privileged migrants, co-nationals, locals, and non-privileged migrants. They will be referred to as 'others', since, as this section will show, diplomatic communities create and negotiate boundaries with them through boundary-making processes. In two European embassy residences I visited, I was greeted by staff who were migrants of colour. In one of them, the ambassador's wife specified that she has a Filipino team that helps her with house chores such as cooking when she hosts official dinners. In fact, when speaking about the benefits of the diplomatic status, one Brazilian diplomat mentioned that being a diplomat makes it easier to sponsor a housekeeper. Because Japan operates very strict immigration policies and rules, having the ability to legally employ a foreign domestic helper represents a significant privilege for diplomats. Japanese nationals cannot sponsor foreign domestic helpers, and only diplomats and 'expatriates' with a particular visa status can (Twaronite, 2013). As one website stated, 'sponsoring a helper in Japan is not based on need and ability to afford it, but rather on the status' (Best Living Japan, 2020).

Most diplomats I interviewed had very limited interactions with the host population, restricted to locals working at their embassy. According to the interviewees, the existence of boundaries with the local population was an experience that was not specific to Japan but characterised their previous postings too. Japan, however, stood out as particularly difficult for interacting with local people, because most diplomats did not speak Japanese and because Japanese people tend to have very limited English skills. Those who did interact with the host population recognised that they mainly did so with English-speaking elites, revealing the creation of boundaries on the grounds of class and status. These included Japanese parents who send their children to international schools, and artists. Diplomats' relationships with locals were different, however, for a small number of people, as mentioned in the previous section.

Amongst the diplomats I interviewed, I also noticed a process of boundary-making between them and their co-nationals based on status consideration. One Romanian diplomat denied my interview request, for example, arguing that she would not be a good subject for my study suggesting instead to put me in touch with members of the Romanian community comprising workers and students. This is illustrative of the ways in which some diplomats draw conscious or subconscious boundaries between themselves and other migrants from their home countries. On this matter, one Turkish diplomat explained how she felt distinct from fellow Turkish citizens because of her social and diplomatic status. 'We are not like ordinary people in Turkey', she said. She also placed herself outside the Turkish community, arguing that most are migrants whilst she is not. A Cambodian diplomat echoed these thoughts, although he was more cautious in his formulation. He did not explicitly say that he felt alienated from the Cambodian community, but understood his relationship with his co-nationals as one of government service and responsibility. Boundary-making, however, was almost non-existent with 'expatriates'. In fact, three-quarters of the interviewees had children and encountered parents of children in international school, which were mostly 'expatriates' and diplomats. According to three female diplomats, Finnish, French and Brazilian, social circles were formed based on shared problems, difficulties and commonalities. According to them, diplomats and 'expatriates' can bond and understand each other as 'outsiders' and 'foreigners', whether that is due to their diplomatic status or foreigner status, for work-related matters or school-related ones.

Conclusion

Approaching diplomatic communities through the lens of privileged migration, I argued in this paper that the transnational identities and lives of diplomatic communities are defined by boundaries. Examining diplomats as privileged migrants is a way to (re)place mobility at the heart of diplomacy and at the same time, locating privilege in transnational mobilities.

Although diplomats have their place in the privileged migration literature, they are usually studied as part of a wider group of privileged migrants: 'expatriates'. However, by focusing exclusively on diplomats and their families, I brought attention to the particularities of diplomatic communities, which cannot be examined in depth when they are framed as 'expatriates'. I observed that diplomats' identities and lives as people on the move are characterised by boundary-making — defined as an individual, collective and institutional process of locating oneself in the external world. This is based on the creation, maintenance and negotiation of boundaries with other migrant communities, the local population, and within their own communities. These boundaries operate along the lines of education, work, race, gender, class, nationality,

culture, status, and politics. Moreover, they manifest themselves in diplomatic spaces, structures, and practices, which are simultaneously boundaries, and sites where boundary-making occurs.

Adopting a historical perspective on diplomatic mobilities in Tokyo, Japan highlighted the particular ways in which the Japanese society relates to diplomatic actors, colonial history, and the concept of whiteness. Moreover, by exploring diplomatic communities using concepts from the transnationalism literature, I showed both the possibility and the need to locate diplomats in the wider migration literature and study them as a community of enquiry. Eventually, this has the possibility of opening up understandings around what a migrant is, and challenge the raced, classed and gendered basis upon which migrant categories are built and reproduced. This has important theoretical and practical implications, since empirical studies on privileged migrants — diplomats, in particular — are scarce in the migration studies literature; and because the categorisation of migration has real impacts on the lived experiences of people on the move. Although understated, examining the mobile lives of privileged migrants is an important way of shedding light on the global political and socio-economic injustices that characterise the politics of migration.

[i] These refer to Austria-Hungary, Belgium, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States.

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