

‘Making space’ in Cairo: Expatriate movements and spatial practices

What does it mean to be an ‘expatriate’; what sort of migration does the term describe; and which migrants can and want to inhabit it? Despite the inconsistencies and controversial nature of the category ‘expatriate’, its use is extensive (Fechter 2007). Whether embraced or rejected, ‘expatriate’ remains vital to many migrants’ self-identifications as well as wider discourses on migration and performs important work in narrating what sort of migrant one is or wants to be. Especially given the continuing politicisation of international migration and its centrality in processes of globalisation, the term’s social and political functions and effects demand attention. This paper examines what it means to be an ‘expatriate’ in contemporary Cairo through the lens of movements and space-making. As such, it contributes to a growing literature on ‘expatriate’ migration and engages scholarship thinking space and movement in relational and socio-historical terms, as embedded in wider power relations and co-constitutive with the formation of ‘social kinds’. The paper finds that rather than denoting an easily definable and distinguishable group of migrants, ‘expatriate’ in Cairo emerged as a contingent, unstable and ambiguous category of practice that privileged migrants related to in complex ways, both rejecting and embracing it. As such, ‘expatriate’ stands in a productive relationship with movement and socio-spatial processes; movement and space underlie and express how ‘expatriate’ as a social category is inhabited but also challenged by privileged migrants, as they negotiate their ‘being in place’ in Egypt, their relationship to ‘home’, to each other and to other migrants. If migrants in contemporary Cairo use the label ‘expatriate’ to narrate a particular arrangement of (im)mobilities, socio-spatial relationships and imaginations, these are crucially linked to ‘migratory’ privileges rooted in wider hierarchies of citizenship, class, and ‘race’. In other words, as subjectivity and practice, the ‘expat’ implied participation in a set of movements, spatial practices, relations and imaginations that relied on migrants’ relatively privileged positions within systems of social difference. Categories of social differentiation moreover intersected to create gradations of privilege, reflected in differentiated ‘expatriate’ mobilities and spatial experiences.

The paper will first introduce literature on expatriates and privileged migration, before discussing scholarship on relational space and the politics of movement. A

third section contextualises current ‘expatriate’ migration to Cairo, before the remainder of the paper explores three instances of ‘being an expatriate’ in Cairo. It first discusses how being an ‘expatriate’ depends on and narrates privileged access to international migration and transnationalism; second, investigates how in everyday negotiations of public space ‘expatriate’ privileges of class and citizenship are gendered and racialised; and third, examines how a segregated and exclusive ‘expatriate bubble’ is materially and discursively created and guarded, but also challenged and transgressed.

Expatriates and privileged migration

A growing literature documents how everyday ‘expatriate’ lives and identities are made and embodied through the participation in and negotiation of material, social and imaginative geographies (Knowles 2005; Walsh, 2006ab, Kothari 2006; Fechter 2007; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Farrer 2010; Coles and Walsh 2010; Cranston 2016; Kunz 2016). Much of this work further employs postcolonial approaches to understand expatriate migrations’ relationship to and parallels with European colonial migrations and settler societies. As Lester (2010, p.6) argues, “expatriates reproducing the daily routines of colonial life” is “also a matter of their persistent reproduction of colonial imaginaries within refurbished colonial spaces”. Accordingly, in previously colonised contexts, expatriate transnational lives and identities are regularly grounded in historical notions of racial and cultural superiority and defined by processes of bordering against the ‘local’ other (Armbruster 2010; Fechter 2005, 2007, 2010; Leonard 2008, 2010ab; Walsh 2012). Similarly, whiteness has been found central to expatriate social and work settings, reproducing exclusionary socio-spatial formations and inherited privileges (Fechter 2005; Knowles 2005; Leonard 2008, 2010ab; Conway and Leonard 2014). And while for expatriates, as for other migrants, nationality generally gains in importance upon migration, it often works alongside or matters less than a collective Imperial identification as ‘Westerners’ (Legget 2010; Korpela 2010).

Studying expatriates faces a set of pitfalls and challenges. As argued by previous literature, the category’s employment is often biased, employed to narrate classed white migrations (Leonard 2010; Fechter and Walsh 2010); Moreover, ‘expatriate’ is marked by a constitutive polyvalence, inconsistency and ambiguity. It has been

mobilised to describe groups historically ranging from exiles (Green 2009) and Americans -often bohemians - in Europe (Green 2014; Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014), to highly skilled, often corporate migrants (Beaverstock 2011; van Bochove and Engbersen 2013), and Northern European retirees at the Spanish coast (Gustafson 2001). Moreover, especially in Gulf states 'expatriate' further denotes labour migrants primarily from Asia and they need not be highly-skilled, let alone privileged (Parween 2013; Gulf News 2017). Exploring 'expatriate' as spatialised migrant subjectivity and practice thus requires avoiding reproducing – rather than analysing - the category's contentious assumptions and connotations or glossing over its conceptual 'mobility'. For such reasons, other scholarship has explicitly rejected 'expatriate' as 'analytical category' (cf. Brubaker 2012). Croucher (2010, p.23) states that "if 'expatriate,' as commonly used today, essentially implies immigrants of privilege, it seems preferable to simply call them that". She concurs with O'Reilly (2000, p.143) who argues that "a refusal to consider the British expatriates in Spain as immigrants endows them with power, prestige and privilege"; this not only reproduces problematic imaginations of 'migration', it detracts from analysing the particular intersections of privilege, but also challenges these particular migrants face.

Croucher (2009, 2010, 2012) has mobilised the category 'privileged migration' to conceptually frame the U.S. American immigrants in Mexico she writes about (cf. Amit 2007; Benson 2013; Conway and Leonard 2014). Importantly, 'privilege' does not assume migrations are purely guided by personal lifestyle considerations or take place outside structural determinates; neither does 'privilege' have to connote 'global elite' status. 'Privileged migration' denotes a contextual and relative, relational and intersectional position within migratory systems (Black and Stone 2005; Pease 2010). It includes migrants who are able to transport or translate privileges across contexts or even increase or gain them through migration. Yet, while employing the concept of 'privileged migration' and displacing 'expatriate' as analytical category, I argue that it remains useful to examine what work 'expatriate' does as 'category of practice' (Kunz 2016). This is fruitful to not only recognise, but to examine the power (at) play between different terminology and to understand how specific intersecting forms of privilege shape migrant lives. This paper thus explores the spatial dimensions of being an 'expatriate', conceptualising the 'expatriate' as a provisional and contextual identity category. In other words, not as a category that 'does the explaining', for

instance by describing an easily demarcated migrant type or group, but as a contested label and identity that itself requires investigation and explaining.

‘Spatialising’ subjects: Space, movement and power

The notion that space is socially produced informs a wide range of geographical literature and Doreen Massey’s (1994, 2005, 2009, 2012) work on relational space and power is key to such debates. Massey argues against conceptualizing space as pre-social, closed ‘containers’ in which other processes happen and instead approaches space in relational terms. Like identities, places or spaces at all scales are precarious achievements constituted through relations and interactions between multiple entities from individuals to institutions. This also renders space the sphere of multiplicity, or ‘radical heterogeneity’, in which distinct trajectories can coexist. Moreover, it implies that space is always under construction, continuously being made; never finished, places and spaces are ‘temporary constellations’ constituted by a heterogeneous set of “raw materials” such as physical features and the built environment, individuals and social groups, political coalitions, businesses and economic structures (Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011, p.59).

What unites relational approaches is their “emphasis on the ethical and political implications” of space (Harcourt et al. 2013, p.171). Given its co-constitutive relationship with social processes, space or ‘space-making’ is inherently political, and Massey’s work links spaces and places to “the power-geometries they both enact and exist within” (2005, p.168). The notion of power geometries aims to capture “that not only is space utterly imbued with and a product of relations of power, but power itself has a geography” (Massey 2009, p.18). Massey further calls for grounded analyses of the geography of even ‘global’ formations of power like neoliberal capitalism, and individuals uneven location within and relationship to them; after all, even ‘global space’ is only the sum of relations, embodiments and practices that cut across the globe “and those things are utterly everyday and grounded” (Massey 2004, p.8-9). Space here can be thought of as a verb or an action, ‘to space’, and place impacts on us “not through some visceral belonging [...] but through the practising of place” (Massey 2005, p.54). As space becomes a doing, doing and being also become spatial. In other words, whereas every space embeds and reflects social relations, social relations and identities always have spatial dimensions. Subjectivities can thus be

examined through their spatiality or ‘spacing’, their constitutive socio-spatial relations, practices, imaginations, assumptions, struggles and exclusions. The task becomes to inquire into “the geography of relations through which any particular identity is established and maintained”; and to ask how the wider ‘power-geometries’ of for instance international migration relate to specific identities such as the ‘expatriate’ and its spatial impulses in particular moments and settings (Massey 2006, p.92-93).

When Massey (2004, p.8) argues that “capitalism too is carried into places by bodies”, ‘carrying’ crucially implies *moving* bodies. The recognition of the social importance of movement and its inherently political nature unites “critical mobilities research” (Sheller 2011). Cresswell (2006, 2010) highlights that all aspects of mobility - physical movement, representations of movement, and movement’s ‘experienced and embodied practice’ - are both a product and productive of social relations. As such, “mobility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power. Mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship” (Skeggs 2004, cited in Sheller, 2011, p.3). Further, space, movement and power stand in a co-constitutive relationship as political systems can be conceptualised as ‘regimes of movement’ “organized around both the desire and ability to determine who is permitted to enter what sort of spaces” (Kotef 2015, p.1). Spatial arrangements regulating human movement, like systems of confinement and the circulation of bodies, are central to the emergence of ‘social kinds’, as already argued by Foucault (1979). It is partly through the creation of differentiated (im)mobilities that space is organised and subjectivities produced:

“through the production of patterns of movement (statelessness, deportability, enclosures, confinement), different categories of subjectivity are produced. [...] Regimes of movement are integral to the formation of different modes of being” (Kotef 2015, p.15).

Indeed, as relational conceptualisations of privilege and oppression suggest, the inhibition of some people’s movement implies the facilitation of others’ mobility. Such processes link to wider structures of social difference as “ultimately, the configuration – but also the production – of movement cannot be understood separately from schemas of race, gender, ethnicity, or class” (ibid., p.138). This implies not only that ordering movement is a technology of producing social difference; but moreover that spaces and their co-constitutive regimes of

differentiated movement become racialised, gendered, and classed. As a particular ‘interpretation’ of movement, international migration stands in a productive relationship with space and social categorisation, most obviously the nation-state and citizenship. Different migrations are at least partly created by highly asymmetrical regimes of movement (and thwarted movement), and depend on the production of social categories to sort and legitimise these regimes. Accordingly, this paper examines the ‘expatriate’ as a social category and collective identity constituted through movement; it analyses how the expatriate as a “schema of identity [is] formed in tandem with schemas of mobility” (ibid., p.138). Moreover, it examines the ‘expatriate’ as a social category entangled with the production of spaces and particular spatial imaginations, asking how ‘expatriates’ as a group “materialize themselves” as real by “realizing themselves in space” (Walters 2002, p. 267).

Cairo: locating migrant narratives

Scholarship on expatriate migration has paid little attention to north African contexts, including contemporary Egypt and Cairo¹. This is despite the historical and current importance of immigration to Cairo. Home to over seventeen million people, Cairo is a “knot of contradictions”, where ostentatious wealth coexists with extreme poverty; yet, at least pre-revolution it was considered one of the world’s safest cities of its size (Sims 2010). Cairo has from its inception been a cosmopolitan city and home to many immigrants (Golia 2004); indeed, until the 1950s Egypt was a country of immigration rather than emigration (Sell 1988; Zohry 2006). As discussed, the category ‘expatriate’ has often been linked to the migrations of Euro-Americans. Also in Cairo, this emerged as a prominent connotation, yet ‘expatriate’ was a label also embraced by migrants from other parts of the world, while rejected by some Euro-Americans. Historically, Europeans have been a key group of privileged immigrants in Egypt. Already during Ottoman rule many foreigners, including 90.000 Europeans, lived in Cairo (Biancani 2016). And, as Abu-Lughod (1971, p. 145) outlines, since the Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire, Europeans in Egypt benefited from a “favoured and protected status [...that] aided them in their accumulation of economic and social power”; these concessions were only abrogated in 1937. From 1882, British colonialism and imperial influence further transformed Cairo through unprecedented concentrations of foreign capital and European immigration. While some Europeans,

¹ Although see Karkabi’s (2011, 2013) work on ‘lifestyle migrants’ in Southern Sinai.

especially women, lived in precarious conditions, most lived privileged lives vis-à-vis locals and other migrants (Biancani 2016). Given such histories of institutionalised privilege and imperial power, a substantial if declining share of Cairo's professional and business elite were still "non-native" by the 1950s (Sims 2010, p.45).

After the revolution of 1952 and especially in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez Crisis, Cairo saw a "sizeable exodus of foreigners", especially Europeans (Abu-Lughod 1971, p. 186). Yet, while Egypt experienced large-scale emigration from the 1950s on, Cairo remained home to a considerable and diverse group of foreigners, more or less interwoven into the city's social and cultural fabric. Between 1992 and 2003 Egypt witnessed another immigration phase, marked by Egyptian return migration and large migration inflows from neighbouring African countries experiencing conflict and political instability (Zohry 2006; Fargues and Fandrich 2012). In fact, Egypt is considered a major immigration country and Cairo hosts some of the largest urban refugee communities in the world, the majority being from Palestine, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia (Golia 2004; Zohry 2006). Further, as indicated by the numbers of issued work permits, most 'labour migrants', or employed foreign residents, now come from other Arab countries, followed by Europe, North America and Asia (Zohry 2006). Yet, as emerged from the research, a hard to estimate number of Europeans and North Americans live and work in Egypt on tourist visas; therefore, official figures of Europeans and North Americans employed in Egypt are likely underestimations.

In an effort to dispense with the ethnic group as unit of analysis and to explore how being an 'expatriate' is negotiated by a diverse set of migrants, I approached the field from the unit of analysis of the international 'expat community' (Glick-Schiller et al. 2006; Pries 2005). This means I worked with and through 'expat clubs' as well as personal contacts that self-identified as 'expats'². Most research took place in Maadi, but interviews also brought me to Zamalek, Mohandessin and Garden City, all relatively wealthy neighbourhoods of Cairo. Research included in-depth interviews and a focus-group discussion with a total of 16 respondents, as well as participant observation and informal conversations. Interviews were framed as being about 'expat life' in Cairo and it was on this basis that initial interviewees introduced me to other

² Organisations and individuals have been anonymised.

respondents, mainly colleagues or fellow club members. Besides them self-identifying – more or less, as it emerged – as ‘expatriates’, respondents were diverse with regards to professional and educational background, nationality³, and length of residence in Cairo⁴. Participant observation and further informal conversations took place in public and semi-public spaces, both professional and social settings and often places that respondents took me to, including clubs, cafés, and shops run or frequented by participants. As I conducted this research in summer 2012, the mood among ‘expats’ was marked as much by Cairo’s notorious traffic and the sweltering summer heat as by Ramadan and the relatively recent revolution of 2011 – all topics that frequently came up in interviews. Many non-Egyptians had left at the onset of the revolution, but others stayed and many had returned subsequently. While the political situation certainly caused some insecurity and unease among foreigners, as much as Egyptians, most respondents felt reasonably comfortable; and although everyday safety was perceived as having worsened, most still felt safe in Cairo. It needs to be recognised that this paper only accounts for the views, experience and practices of a small group of relatively privileged migrants. It thereby risks reducing the Cairo of Egyptians and other, often less privileged migrants to a silent, penetrable and shape-able canvas for ‘expats’ to paint their stories and interpretations upon. Yet, with this limitation in mind, the paper hopes to offer valuable insights into migrant narratives and subjectivities and the larger dynamics these are embedded in and shaped by.

The power-geometries of migration: ‘bouncing around the world’

Central to respondents’ narrations of ‘expat life’ was the casual embrace and performance of ‘global mobility’ – powerfully structured by usually unacknowledged privileges conferred by their passports. Personal geographies spanned a seemingly accessible globe as respondents like Mike, who held Australian and British citizenship, recounted moving here or “spending x number of years there”. Migration was narrated as a haphazard, almost accidental decision: “originally, as an expat, it was for wanting experience and getting away from the tax man. Now it’s become a life I end up staying in” (Mike). Chris and Ann were American citizens and practising Christians with an interest in the Arab world, who wanted to dedicate their lives to

³ Respondents were citizens of the USA, Australia, the UK, Germany, France, Mexico and the Philippines. Some held multiple citizenships.

⁴ Respondents had lived in Cairo between 1 year and 34 years.

further cross-cultural and religious understanding. Together with their two young daughters they had lived for some years in other Arab countries, before deciding to move to Egypt. Asked if they planned to stay in Egypt, Chris answered “yeah I hope so. It’s home now, the girls are in school and we want them to have stability in their childhood and not *bounce around the world* like we have done so far”. Like here, being an expatriate was frequently mobilised to allude to a seemingly spontaneous and effortless movement across the globe driven by personalities and lifestyle choices rather than necessity. Mike, Chris and Ann’s experience was not unusual in that respondents often felt they had a wide choice of countries to live in. Frequently, their mobility across international borders was narrated as easy and ‘routine’, undisturbed by considerations of immigration regulation and while often bound up with career considerations, not necessarily dependent on profession or skills. The term ‘expatriate’ was thus mobilised to narrate and make sense of relatively privileged forms of migration (Croucher 2012). That they were privileged does not imply that these migrations were without challenges, emotionally or otherwise, but that access to the resource migration is unevenly distributed globally; ‘privilege’ always describes a *relational* location (Pease 2010). Accordingly, Weiss (2005) argues that social positions in a global context are increasingly dependent on spatial autonomy across national borders. If mobility as a social resource “gets distributed unevenly and in interconnected ways” and as such plays an important role in the “differentiation of society” (Cresswell 2006, p.220), this is more so the case for *international* mobility. Crucially, most ‘expatriates’ I encountered or their close family members held citizenship in the global North, and “for passport holders from OECD countries the world appears in easy reach, with relatively few restrictions imposed” (Neumayer 2006, p.81). Carens (2013, p.226) likens contemporary “citizenship in Western democracies” to “feudal class privilege—an inherited status that greatly enhances one’s life chances”, advantages that are entrenched “by legally restricting mobility”.

Privilege also marked respondents seemingly unimpeded entry to and settlement in Egypt. Amin explained that “you can’t really settle here permanently, it’s very difficult to get residency. If you are not from a Western country, it’s almost impossible and if you are from a Western country, there is ways, for example renew a 3-month tourist visa continuously”. Indeed, given a patriarchal and ethnicity-based conception of nationhood, permanent migrants in Egypt are not eligible for

citizenship regardless of length of residence or resources (Singerman 2009). Yet, as Amin and others recounted, the right passport could ‘negotiate’ Egyptian visa and immigration regulations. Technically, ignoring the tourist visa’s employment restrictions constituted a breach of immigration status, a “semi-compliance” rendering migrants “deportable” (Anderson and Ruhs 2010, p.177; Ruhs and Anderson 2009). Thus, at least some ‘expatriates’ fit the category of the irregular migrant. Accordingly, Tom reflected

“there are a lot of people who have lived here for decades and have maybe had some jobs under the table, not official jobs or not paid taxes in Egypt or to their countries, they would come and go using endless supply of tourist visas. Which tracks with the same kind of argument that goes around in the States that these jobs are being stolen by illegal immigrants. So here the illegal immigrant might be the American or Brit”.

The Egyptian state seemed unable or unwilling to intervene in such practises; despite occasional announcements of ‘cracking down’ on them (Parietti 2011), they remained largely unobstructed at the time of research. Yet, Egyptian public discourse was growing more negative toward ‘illegal’ foreigners, however, the perceived problem were the “‘sea’ of illegal African migrants ‘flooding’ Egyptian society and ‘robbing’ its youth of employment” (newspaper cited in Singerman 2009, p.461). And when Golia (2004, p.224, my highlights) cites estimates that “there are a quarter of a million ‘illegal immigrants’ *from a variety of African and Arab countries* in Cairo”, this further suggests the invisibility of Western ‘illegal’ immigrants in statistics and public debates. It also highlights the “social construction” of the ‘illegal immigrant’; as borders are implemented differently and selectively, ‘(il)legality’, both its narrative construction and its enforcement are inherently entwined with wider realities of uneven global power (Engbersen and van der Leun 2001).

Despite an often professedly distant emotional relationship to ‘home’, respondents were engaged in continuous transnational practises and imaginations linking them to countries of citizenship. However, their transnationalism differed from other migrants’ ‘dense social networks’, ‘long-distance nationalism’ or ‘homeland politics’ (Basch et al. 1994; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Levitt 2001). While ties to family and close friends existed, transnationalism also took more pragmatic and instrumental forms (cf. Fechter 2007). Work lives were often transnationally organized and oriented as respondents worked for North American or European companies, which

implied wages in line with Euro-American rather than Egyptian standards. Other livelihoods mobilised access to transnational networks to import 'rare' goods such as German pork sausages or U.S. American car parts for four wheel drives otherwise unavailable in Egypt. Kirsten, in turn, drew on the symbolic capital of being a 'German licensed' health practitioner, in catering to better-off Egyptians and 'expatriates'. Moreover, especially Europeans talked about 'returning home' for medical treatment or to give birth and respondents or their children returned to Europe or the U.S. for internationally valued higher education. Kirsten's two children, born in Egypt, were just in the process of applying for German citizenship in order to attend university there. As Kirsten recalls laughingly: "and then they [her children] realised 'oh wait a second, actually this [German citizenship] could be really useful'... and well, we don't have any shame using it". Respondents were able to successfully negotiate transnational lives partly predicated on inequalities between countries of citizenship in the global North and a country of residence in the global South. Indeed as they skilfully navigated global power geometries they benefited, unlike most South-North migrants, from on-going citizenship in countries of origin that tended to possess greater economic and political power than Egypt. As Croucher (2012, p.4) points out, migrants' privilege "derives not only from their individual economic and social status [...], but also from their membership in countries of origin that tend to possess greater economic, political, and cultural power in the international system".

In the context of highly unequal access to international migration, the largely unimpeded movement across international borders afforded by citizenship in the global North was thus a key 'privilege' enabling 'expatriate' lives. It deserves highlighting that privileged migrants' spatial autonomy arguably gives them an advantage only as long as other actors are confined to their respective regions or nation-states (cf. Kotef 2015). This indeed is a task actively pursued by respondents' countries of citizenship, which have strict entry regulations and arguably aggressive immigration apparatuses - also affecting Egyptian nationals. As in the case of Egypt, the power geographies of access to migration often too neatly map on those of past European Empires, and Castles (2007, p. 360) argues that "the hierarchisation of the right to migrate can be seen as a new form of transnational racism" (cf. Boatca 2011). This underscores the need for analyses that recognise the nuanced interconnections of different and differentiated mobilities, connections that reflect and sometimes reinforce power (Massey 1994; Boatca 2011; Kotef 2015).

Movement and public space: intersections of class, gender and racialisation

The previous section illustrates the ‘expatriate’ as a subjectivity rooted in privileged access to international movement and transnational lives. The next two sections will outline how the spatialities and (im)mobilities, (social) boundaries and their transgressions, that made everyday ‘expatriate’ lives were classed, racialised and gendered in complex and intersecting ways. In line with findings by other literature, respondents experienced improved living standards as a result of moving to Egypt and ‘expatriate’ emerged as an inherently classed notion (Fechter 2007; Hindman 2009; Walsh 2010; Lundström 2014). As Maria put it: “being an expat here, you are being pampered a lot”. Yet, not all migrants in Cairo identified as ‘expatriates’ were skilled or high earners by the standards of their countries of origin. Even formerly working-class and ‘unskilled’ respondents like Harald, who ran a small business catering to the ‘expat community’, had a comfortable life including domestic staff and a driver. As Karkabi (2013, p.58) observes for South Sinai, many European working-class or middle-class migrants became “part of the financial elite”, holding “a strong bargaining position in claiming privileged rights”. Tom commented on dynamics of shifting privilege, observing that among expats there are some “who are not considered privileged where they are from nor would they consider themselves as such but just merely by having a bit of money in their bank account and a passport from some other country, they come here and they are instantly privileged”. Their class position shaped which parts of the city ‘expatriates’ lived in and were discursively associated with. In the past, wealthy foreigners would reside in Cairo’s “European Sector”, today’s downtown (Sims 2010). From the 1990s onward, however, most upscale establishments and offices and many affluent Egyptians and foreigners relocated to today’s more prestigious quarters, including Mohandiseen, Heliopolis, Maadi, and Zamalek (ibid., p.56). It was these neighbourhoods that spatially framed respondents narratives about their ‘expat lives’, and it was in Maadi - “such an expat place” as Tom described it to me - that most of my respondents lived. Maadi was conceived by Britain’s colonial architects as an “exclusive residential enclave” and was then a rural suburb (Abu-Lughod 1971, p.201). While now embraced by the city’s vast sprawls, Maadi has retained some suburban flare and its association with foreign elites, hosting embassies and international schools, as well as clubs, shops, restaurants and cafés catering to better-off foreigners and Egyptians

(Singerman and Amar 2006). Class positions and social status also shaped respondents' movement across the city and most 'expatriates' did not have to rely on public transport in navigating the vast metropolis that is Cairo. If they did not have their own car or driver, they habitually used taxis.

Contrary to many other migrants, respondents' gained not only in material comfort, but also in social status from their migration. Yet, expatriates' elevated social status derived "not only from their individual economic and social status" (Croucher 2012, p.4), but was partly rooted in their association with the 'West'. The 'expatriate' was discursively associated with the 'West' and while international in composition the 'expatriate community' was numerically dominated by North Americans and Europeans. As Mike told me, the expat club he chaired was "fairly diverse" with members of 72 nationalities, but "Brits are the biggest group, followed by the Americans, followed by the Canadians". Amin explained that "there are a lot of non-western foreigners. I guess they tend to be a bit more separated from the *Western expat community*". 'Western' foreignness seemed to infer privileged treatment vis-à-vis Egyptians, also in navigating Cairo. Respondents recounted that they had gotten away with misdemeanours such as traffic violations and when Mike and his friends rode home in a taxi long after the curfew during the revolution, they were waved through by police officers. Generally respondents felt that being foreign resulted in extra respect and preferential treatment also by local authorities: "you just have a bonus as a foreigner. If it's me and an Egyptian, they will believe me, and no matter how much I am lying, they would believe me" (Kirsten). As de Koning (2006, p.225ff) argues, in Cairo 'Western' things – be it a "café latte", or "American diplomas" – often carry social status and speaking a European language, especially English, is a clear class distinguisher (cf. Ghannam 2006).

Yet, citizenship is not visibly inscribed on bodies and especially in navigating public spaces whiteness frequently emerged as the assumed embodiment of being an 'expatriate' (cf. Knowles 2005; Fechter 2005; Walsh 2010; Leonard 2008, 2010ab). When discussing 'expat life' post-revolution, Mike described that "on a scale from 0 to 10 we have gone from 0.5 to 1 in security problems. So it doubled but is still fairly low". The main change, he describes, is that the "Muslim brotherhood, or the Salafistas feel like [...] they can pick on blonde, blue-eyed foreigners, you know". Mike's focus on blonde hair and blue eyes not only narrates those inhabiting 'expat

life' as white, but also highlights white respondents' reluctance to name or discuss their whiteness directly. The "you know" with which his description trailed off is just a throwaway remark, but in this context it is one that does some work in creating a shared identity around whiteness. It drew me into a relational 'community of whiteness', that assumedly shares a common sense and proves bonding by being potentially threatened. Kirsten, when talking about Ethiopian and Sudanese migrants in Cairo, asked "but I think those then aren't counted as expats, are they?" In fact, Maadi is one of the main Sudanese districts in metropolitan Cairo (Jacobsen, Ayoub and Johnson 2014), yet these substantial Sudanese communities were not referenced in respondents' imaginations of Maadi as an "expat place". Similarly, Mike's club's predominantly Sudanese staff was absent from accounts of the 'expat community' provided by Mike (and other club members I spoke to). Respondents were more likely to position Sudanese as refugees, as Mike explained "they [Sudanese youth] have only known refugee status". Yet as Jacobsen et al (2014, p.146) explain, while notoriously difficult to estimate, potentially "less than half of the Sudanese in Egypt are refugees and asylum seekers". In any case, the "separation" between migrants that Amin noted often played out at the level of social categories, social life and imagination rather than in physical space. While pointing to the category 'expatriate's association with 'Western' whiteness, Karen also related her own conceptual insecurities about it. Ultimately, both might be linked. Being white was never an 'enunciated' criterion for being an expatriate; the association, and indeed conflation of the two happened exactly in the space of the category's conceptual ambiguity. This meant that while whiteness, status and privilege remained tethered in the 'expatriate', the shared identity and community created under the label was ostensibly 'colour-blind'. And indeed not all those that self-identified as expats were white or could transport their whiteness to Cairo.

While whiteness remains a transnational resource, its functioning can shift and differ by context (Knowles 2005; Leonard 2008, 2010a; Andrucki 2010; Walsh 2010, Leinonen 2012; Lundström 2014; Andrucki and Max 2013). The centrality of whiteness, but also its ambiguous effects emerged clearly when non-white respondents recounted their movement in public space. Respondents had cars or used taxis to navigate the sprawling metropolis of Cairo. Yet, locally some walked and while respondents generally positioned Maadi as an 'expat place', its public spaces and especially streets implied an encounter with 'Egypt'. Amin's experience is

instructive. Being Indian American he often ‘passed’ as Egyptian, which he welcomed in his general attempts to break out of the “expat bubble”. As he explained, passing allowed him ‘free’ movement in public spaces, unnoticed and uninhibited by certain forms of attention such as the frequently shouted “Welcome to Egypt” and without the increased self-consciousness of being visibly foreign. Even more so, “looking Egyptian” became important for Amin inasmuch as it made it easier to engage in activities which he considered differentiated him from “most expats [who] tend not to be plugged into actual Cairo” and “live in a bubble” (Amin). For instance, it allowed easier access to political demonstrations or “non-Western concerts” which he frequently attended. Yet, Amin’s ‘passing’ as Egyptian was notably just that, an always partial, temporary blending that, if implicitly, relied on the assumption that his passport would allow him to navigate uncomfortable situations and ultimately to return to the U.S. for higher education: “I have to go back for graduate school eventually” (Amin).

Notably, Amin narrated his experience of ‘passing’ quite differently than Julia. Julia was Mexican and passing as an Egyptian *woman* meant she struggled to rely on spatial privileges attached to whiteness and felt inhibited in her mobility. When I spoke to Julia and a group of her female friends and colleagues at an expat club where they worked, she explained that she had recently received negative attention when walking in Maadi. Unlike sexual harassment, this involved comments from both men and women assumedly about her clothing being inappropriate during Ramadan. As Julia recounted:

“...I was comfortable in Ramadan last year, and it was my first time in Egypt. And now I feel uncomfortable walking in the street because everybody is looking at me like, ‘you’re not covered’ or something, especially when I’m trying to get a taxi... and even women, one girl was telling me something in Arabic, I didn’t understand but my friend told me ‘oh she is just saying bad things because you’re not covered’...I think people think I...

Others: ...that you’re Egyptian!

Julia: ..yeah that is my problem

Others: you could pass...

Julia: yes that is my problem, they think ‘oh you’re just like us’, ...so now sometimes I’m just with the boys [her sons] walking with them and speaking in Spanish, SPANISH”!

Being mistaken as Egyptian significantly affected Julia’s comfort and perceived safety in moving through the city. In their negotiation of public spaces, foreign women became subject to Egypt’s dominant patriarchal gender regime, where even the relatively unrestricted movement of liberal middle and upper class women takes place within tight frameworks set by class and morality, also ‘policed’ through widespread gender-based street harassment (de Koning 2006; El Feki et al. 2017). Yet, Julia and her colleagues assumed that foreign women – by virtue of being foreign – had and could expect more leeway than Egyptian women in their public movements, for instance not covering their hair. Crucially, this was not just any ‘foreignness’, but one associated with status and embodied as white that expected to inhabit public space largely on its own terms (Ahmed 2007). Temporarily losing the privileges that came with being identifiable as a ‘Western’ woman led Julia to consciously perform her ‘foreignness’ by speaking Spanish - notably a European language - “loud and clearly”.

As Massey (1994 p. 148) notes, accounts of spatial processes need “differentiating socially” and accordingly, analyses of ‘privilege’ in migration need to be cautious with broad generalizations. Everyday (im)mobility was shaped in complex ways by how respondents’ bodies were gendered and positioned on scales of whiteness (cf. Walsh 2010). Privileges of citizenship and class associated with ‘expatriate’ status were easier to claim for some than for others, partly depending on the ability to transport and translate valuable immaterial resources like whiteness (Lundström 2014). As Ahmed (2007, p.150) argues, whiteness “orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space [and...] what it is that bodies ‘can do’”. Yet, this played out differently for men and women in a context where women face tight control through discourses of morality as much as everyday practices of street harassment. This section thus not only suggests the frequent, if usually implicit racialisation of the ‘expatriate’ as white and ‘Western’ – it also speaks to the ambiguous experiences of non-white expatriates negotiating the privileges their class, nationality and, in some cases, gender confer. Access to privileged movements

hinged on how one's body was racialised and gendered in complex, intersecting and sometimes counter-intuitive ways.

The 'expat bubble': boundaries and transgressions

Mike, when I asked him whether he self-identified as an expat, answered with an emphatic "Oh yes - removed from your own country. Not a resident, eh, not a eh citizen of this country". Mike's slip of tongue speaks to what respondents associated with being an expat, namely not living in Egypt as much as in the 'imagined space' of the "expat bubble" (Amin). The concept of a 'bubble' evokes imaginations of enclosure and separation and denoted a sense of groupness dependent on spatial as much as social segregation from Egyptians. Whether talking about their own lives or critiquing others, 'being an expat' as a negotiation of being in place in Egypt was narrated around limited social interactions with Egyptians and limited engagement with 'real Egypt' (cf. Fechter 2007; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Croucher 2012). For instance, Maadi hosted what Tom described as a "network of expat clubs", reflecting the important yet controversial role of 'clubs' for contemporary expatriate as much as colonial socialities (Leonard 2008, 2010b; Coles and Walsh 2010; Beaverstock 2011). While Tom was member of an exclusive, embassy-affiliated club, he described, with some amusement, another well-known 'expat club' just down the road: "if I were back in New York, it would sort of just be a rough bar, you know, like there was the feeling like a fight could break out there". Spatial markers of class distinction do not translate neatly across contexts, and what was a privileged expatriate space in Cairo resembled far from upper-class establishments in New York City. Mike, who was chairman of the 'rough' club explained laughingly: "it's designed basically to give a place of refuge from life in Cairo. A nice way of putting it, it's an oasis. [SK: What is a not-so-nice way of putting it?] To get away from the bloody Egyptians!". Accordingly, the club's membership was not open to Egyptians. Similarly, Maria explained to me that the club she managed capped Egyptian membership at 12 percent, given its aim to "serve the expat community". Facilitating social contact with Egyptians clearly did not fall within the remit of "serving the expat community"; instead, clubs were imagined and managed as spaces 'away' from Egypt.

Spatial arrangements like clubs were thus linked to social distancing and these socio-spatial boundaries were reproduced discursively. It was against often Orientalist

imaginings of 'Egyptians' that the 'expat' came into being with an unlikely homogeneity. As Nadja stated: "I have my group of Italian, group of English, group of French, we go as groups, but the beauty of Egypt is that it is easy to be together, as an Expat group, which in Europe or other countries it would be more difficult". The 'expat group' here achieved a provisional and spatially contingent presence and unity by being constructed simultaneously within and against 'Egypt' as a constitutive other. Orientalist discourses, racially imbued and gendered, were "powerful tools" in these constructions (Sheppard 2002, p.231). Nadja, for instance, evoked well-rehearsed notions of the vulnerability of white femininity when 'warning' me about "an increasing number" of young European women mistreated by Egyptian men. She described a "recent incident" of a young Swiss woman who married an Egyptian and moved with him to Egypt, where he mistreated her, forced her to wear the headscarf and forbid all contact with her family: "As I told you they are really sympathetic. An Egyptian is like a chameleon, okay, he can go to Japan and behave like the Japanese, he can go to Germany and behave like the Germans, ok, no problem. The problem is that until they are outside Germany, they are wonderful" (Nadja). The Egyptian man as a generalised figure here poses an inherent threat to young 'Western' women; and by extension to the 'West' as such.

Frequently, Egyptians were cast as essentially lazy, lacking ability and unreliable, characteristics positioned as underlying Egypt's 'lack of development' and suggesting a directionality of assimilation that reproduced colonial power relationships. As Said (1997) argues, Orientalism underlies contemporary depictions of 'Arab' cultures and people as backward, irrational, and untrustworthy. Accordingly, Chris noted: "They say of Egyptians you have to stay right on top of them, or else they are not going to work". A similar theme marked Harald and Lisa's discussion of domestic staff. As Lisa explained, "everyone says, better take one of the Filipinas, they clean and are hardworking. The others don't really feel like working". Harald added, "well, the Egyptians ... there are many among them, where you'll be missing 100 pounds, you'll be missing a camera.... Mine was passed on by a good friend and then you'll also take an Egyptian one. Well, mine is a bit slow, but I don't care. She can clean the whole day if she likes, she'll get the same money" Later, Harald argued that:

"I don't understand how they do business at all with this mentality. I mean it's slowly changing now with the younger generation, I mean they have also been educated in these [foreign] schools and have enjoyed a different upbringing,

they already have a bit of a different mentality. So it's changing, but it will take another two, three generations”.

Echoing colonial civilizing missions as much as developmental narratives, Harald suggests that Western education and cultural influence will slowly help Egyptians ‘develop’ (cf. Armbruster 2010; Walsh 2012). As Sheppard (2002, p.322) noted, Orientalist discourses “continue to play an important normative role in development-as-modernization discourses”. Such rehearsed Orientalist imaginations not only did work to reproduce the enduring status of European education and culture, they also justified ‘expatriate’s lack of ‘integration’. Indeed, the ‘assimilation’ of Egyptians into ‘Western’ cultural-educational contexts was considered as a motor of progress, even in Egypt itself. This contrasts markedly with assimilationist discourses in Europe or North America, where migrants are expected to socio-culturally assimilate into the host society (Glick-Schiller et al. 2006).

Yet, such discourses and the ‘expat bubble’ were contested and challenged among migrants themselves as some tried not to move within the ‘pre-inscribed’ expatriate circuits and geographies. Kirsten and Amin lived in Mohandessin and downtown Cairo, neighbourhoods which they narratively located as ‘outside’ the Maadi ‘expat bubble’. Signifying their distance to the migratory model ‘expatriate’, they narrated alternative geographies of Cairo, referring to the recent protests, African neighbourhoods and Nubian music scenes. Ann and Chris lived in Maadi, yet made a conscious choice to distance themselves from the ‘expat scene’ by inserting themselves in spaces like the Coptic church or the Egyptian language school, which they suggested physically and thereby socially removed them from other foreigners. Asked whether they would use the term ‘expatriate’ to describe themselves, Chris hesitated: “not so much I guess, foreigner more often. I mean we will say the Arabic word for foreigner when we describe ourselves to Egyptians”. Unlike other migrants, Ann and Chris imagined an audience to their self-positioning that included Egyptians, which reflected their social interactions and friendships with Egyptian colleagues and neighbors. Yet, Chris had drawn on the term expat just shortly before, explaining “we have not been involved a lot - we had [our daughter] playing soccer, which was mostly expats. And you know we are all expats in the building and we know a school that’s mostly expats, although we don’t send our kids there”. Like others’, his relationship to the migratory model ‘expatriate’ was ambiguous; and notably,, respondents felt they were largely able to *choose* whether and to which extent to

participate in what they saw as Egyptian society and life. As Jessica and Maria agreed, socio-cultural integration into Egyptian society “*is up to the person*” and , for instance, those who spoke Arabic did so largely out of personal interest rather than perceived necessity. Raj (2003) argues that’s middle-class migrants hold enough social and cultural capital to assimilate selectively. Studying Arabic, not joining expat clubs, trying to socialise with Egyptians, or living in neighbourhoods perceived as less popular with ‘expats’ were preferences of nevertheless privileged migrants. And often these choices were then explicitly engaged, as markers of identity, to situate themselves outside and against what it meant to be an ‘expatriate’.

However, there were moments where choice was suspended as the boundaries between expat spaces and everything deemed ‘Egyptian’ were defended. Kirsten had already in Germany and prior to marrying her Egyptian husband, converted to Islam and started wearing the hijab. She recounted that this caused problems when she arrived in Egypt in the 1990s: “they said ‘what, you don’t want to eat this piece of pork now and come here with that headscarf’. I was excluded from German reading circles because of that, officially”. Kirsten felt that ‘bi-nationals’, a term she prefers to ‘expat’ for women married to Egyptian men, were treated like “second class foreigners” in Cairo’s expatriate circles: “at the embassy it’s also like ‘married an Egyptian? Problems? Well, your own fault; Tough luck’”. Kotef (2015, p.114) argues that “space becomes political via the movements it allows and prevents, and the relations that are formed or prevented via these im/mobilities”. The social and cultural boundaries separating the imagined space of the ‘expat bubble’ from ‘Egypt’ appeared explicitly and implicitly guarded. In her marriage to an Egyptian, but maybe even more so in her conversion to Islam, Kirsten had transgressed important boundaries as social spaces, their meanings and rules were negotiated, even fought over on women’s bodies. Highlighting again the intersectional and internally differentiated nature of privilege, the social and spatial boundaries marking ‘expatriate foreignness’ and who was allowed access or transgression, were embedded within wider racial, gendered and religious hierarchies.

Concluding comments

This article has argued that ‘expatriate’ as an identity category narrates a particular arrangement of both ‘local’ and ‘global’ (im)mobilities, spatial relationships and

imaginings, that are linked to ‘migratory’ privileges rooted in hierarchies of citizenship, class, ‘race’ and gender. It premised that rather than taking categories of migration like the ‘expatriate’ as given, their construction, contestation and effects demand situated and context-specific analysis. Increased attention needs to be paid to how different migrant categories, figures and identities are created in and through various social domains; how these processes relate to wider power geometries and inequalities; and how different categories in turn seemingly justify or normalize different and unequal treatment. Such analyses can move beyond over-simplifying celebrations of a new ‘age of mobility’ or generalised depictions of a disempowered ‘migrant’. Space and movement are domains of governing and social differentiation. Migrants’ movements, space-making practises and spatial imaginings are entwined with the production of ‘expatriate’ subjectivity and, crucially, relate to wider power formations. What spaces one imagines, participates in and re-creates, where one goes and where one does not go, can and cannot go, and how one goes there, are all inherently entwined with ‘who one is’.

Like other migrants, respondents skilfully navigated and made use of global differences in opportunities, wealth, and status they were presented with. Yet, unlike many other migrants, they did so from a privileged position within the global power-geometries of international migration. With varying importance and intensity, privileges of citizenship, financial and cultural capital, a positioning as ‘Western’ and a racialization as white shaped respondents’ movements, the relations close and far they could mobilise, spatial practises they engaged in, the places they created for themselves, as well as their geographical imaginings; and these were often identified as and narrated along the terms of being an ‘expatriate’. Possibly not all, and certainly not only, but especially those migrants that come to Cairo from the global North can be considered privileged migrants. More specifically, being an expat in Cairo often narrated a lifestyle predicated on readily available and casually embraced global mobility that moreover allowed transnational lives structured by and dependent on inequalities between global North and South; it implied simultaneously laying claim to the country of citizenship and to ‘Egypt’, which in interdependent ways shaped the everyday ‘place’ migrants inhabited. Yet, to occupy a privileged position in the ‘power-geometries’ of international migration, individuals did not necessarily have to classify as privileged in origin countries (Croucher 2012). Especially citizenship of the global North was a powerful ‘raw material’ constituting

the ‘expat’ in Cairo; it carried symbolic capital and facilitated material benefits, both crucial in negotiating everyday life. It was bound up with assumed and real class status and – imperfectly – projected onto and read of bodies as whiteness. The spatial practises and movements associated with ‘being an expat’ thus often reproduced and guarded a geographically located, classed and racialised foreignness, which in its various forms and embodiments was central to claiming privilege. As such, narrating the expatriate into being also included an orientation to the ‘West’ that in its performance often relied on drawing spatial, social and discursive boundaries, most powerfully against the local ‘Egyptian’. While some drew on Orientalist tropes in doing so, others aimed to overcome these discourses and the segregation traditionally associated with expatriates.

Yet, this research also revealed the diversity and complexity of migrants’ personal geographies spanning Cairo and beyond. This belies any notion of a static, homogeneous and unified ‘expat life’. In navigating Cairo, whiteness became a powerful structuring force, and in many ways resource, to which however not all ‘expats’ could lay equal claim, and the everyday effects of which were inherently gendered. Such findings caution against generalised notions of privilege in migration, which ultimately requires an intersectional and situated analysis. Also, space- and place-making are on-going endeavours, movements can always be re-directed and contested identities such as the ‘expatriate’ are shifting and open for re-negotiation. This is especially the case as the wider conditions, within which they emerged, change. Ultimately, the research suggests that far from being an ontologically secure, easily definable type of migrant, the ‘expatriate’ emerged as a shifting and fluid category that narrated social as much as spatial relationships and signified a particular way of migration and settlement in Cairo. Yet, while the ‘expat’ emerged as an ambiguous and precarious contextual achievement, “relations of dominance may be maintained precisely through the instabilities of meaning. [...] The very slipperiness is one of the resources which produce the effects of power” (Massey 2005, p.175). Privileged migration, exactly in its often ‘unofficial’ and ‘provisional’ nature, frequently enacted and reproduced material global inequalities; and while certainly challenged by some, respondents’ movements, spatial practises and geographical imaginations often translated Orientalist tropes and inherited unequal power relations into seemingly new and ‘modern’ practises, social relations, and discourses.

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