



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

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines what it means to be an ‘expatriate’ in Cairo through the lens of movement and space-making. Inquiring into a set of migrant (im)mobilities, spatial practices, relations, and imaginations, it argues that as a ‘spatialised’ identity category ‘expatriate’ narrates and enacts migratory privileges linked to wider hierarchies of social difference. It contributes to a growing literature examining the social and political dimensions of ‘expatriate’ migration and further engages scholarship thinking space and movement in relational and socio-historical terms. Rather than denoting an easily distinguishable group of migrants, ‘expatriate’ emerged as a contingent and ambiguous category of practice. As such, ‘expatriate’ stands in a productive relationship with privileged movement and socio-spatial processes. Like other migrants, respondents skillfully navigated the global differences in wealth, power 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. Migrants’ personal geographies were further shaped by how bodies were racialised and gendered in entangled, intersecting and sometimes counter-intuitive ways. This diversity and complexity of ‘expatriate’ geographies highlights the necessity of intersectional and situated analyses of privilege.

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 practises, 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.

1. Expatriates and privileged migration

A growing literature documents how everyday ‘expatriate’ lives and identities are made and embodied through the participation in and

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negotiation of material, social and imaginative geographies (Knowles, 2005; Walsh, 2006, 2012; 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 (2012, 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, 2010a,b; 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, 2010a,b; 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' (Leggett, 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, 2010a, 2010b; 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, 2016). 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.

2. 'Spatialising' subjects: space, movement and power

The notion that space is socially produced informs a wide range of geographical literature and 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 et al., 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 practises that cut across the globe "and those things are utterly everyday and grounded" (Massey, 2004, pp. 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, practises, 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 organized and

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