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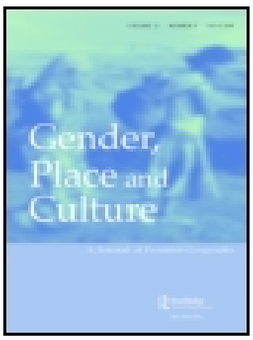

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'She's a real expat': be(com)ing a woman expatriate in Luxembourg through everyday performances of heteronormativity

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an ethnographical account of everyday practices of how expatriate women in the Global North adjust and negotiate their gender position to become part of a transnational elite. Drawing on feminist scholarship, it makes the case for a comprehensive understanding of the production of expatriate wives' gendered subjectivities in relation to the neoliberal doxa of success associated with transnational mobility. Through an intersectional analysis that places the body as the main scale of analysis, this paper sheds light on the role of hegemonic sexual norms in the context of family migration in Luxembourg. The results reveal the spatial dimension of heteronormativity in the shaping of expatriate subjectivities. They also give insights into how these women access the world of global privileges while supporting the social reproduction of their expatriate family and contributing to the reconfiguration and reproduction of exclusionary power relations. In so doing, this paper argues for the use of heteronormativity as a useful – although underused – analytical framework to understand further the power dynamics that shape transnational experiences, spaces and subjectivities in the context of neoliberal globalisation.

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Introduction

> Fabien had already been looking to go abroad for a long time. He had proposals to go to London and Milan. Milan and London seemed to be no problem to me because I had a job where I worked a lot in Milan, London, Barcelona. .. And then, one day, he came back and said, 'Luxembourg, CFO'. I said nothing. I really did not say anything .. I was preparing something in the kitchen and so I pretended to be busy, but he was there, standing at the kitchen door, so after five real long minutes

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> I said [breathlessness, lots of emotion in her voice]: 'Listen, I'm proud of you.' But it took a long time, and it was hard to tell him, because [emotion again], during those five minutes, I made my calculations: 'What is there in Luxembourg? There is nothing […] I said to myself: 'Oh […] what am I going to do in that country!' And honestly, for a week, every night I came home, every night I cried, I did not show it to Fabien of course, but every night I cried in my bed [laugh of emotion]. I really did not want to leave […]. Yeah, it's a really selfish decision. For me, it's a really selfish decision. (Interview with Sabine, in French – author's translation)

This ethnographic vignette illustrates how Sabine, a French female expatriate, happened to become what many studies on mobile professionals have long called a trailing wife. After arriving in Luxembourg, Sabine first turned her energy towards settling the family and organising their new lives: furnishing the house, managing all the domestic work and developing a network of social relations for her and her husband. She met other expatriate women, mostly through community activities such as cooking workshops or play-groups for mums with toddlers, as she was at that time. Then, once she had successfully set up their household and their first child had started school, she took a job – aimed at the lower qualified and not in her branch of expertise – to stay financially independent from her partner, who continued to give her a monthly allowance to run the home. She continued to take care of all the domestic activities, including those relating to parental duties, since her partner often travelled abroad or was absent on weekdays. Sabine does not complain about such a burden. She is much more nuanced when asked to comment on her new life abroad. She explains how she has chosen to make sacrifices for the sake of the family because of her husband's more lucrative and socially distinctive career, and because of the dream they both share of embracing a more cosmopolitan lifestyle highlights how she became the backbone of the family through her valuable dedication. Sabine highlights how she adjusts her daily practices to those she associates with her position as an expat's wife. To that aim, she commits herself fully to the success of this new transnational family as well as to her husband's career success. This allows her to identify as 'a real expat' – an expression voiced by many of the women I met and that seems to grant them access to a sort of power which I scrutinise in this paper.

The vignette above expresses a tension on which I will build throughout this paper. Sabine's account of her own experience seems at first sight to echo mainstream representations of the trailing wife, in which women's agency succumbs to gender subordination in the patriarchal system. However, Sabine recognises her own power in the family's upward social mobility in this context of transnational migration that allows her to be positioned as part of an elite class herself. The elite position of expatriate women is questionable, however, since they remain oppressed by patriarchal structures of power.

This paper aims to make the case for a comprehensive understanding of the production of expatriate wives' gendered subjectivities in relation to the neoliberal doxa of success of the new world order associated with transnational mobility (Borja, Courty, and Ramadier 2013; Oswin 2020). It draws upon grounded empirical research to analyse how female expatriates adjust and negotiate their gender position to support their becoming as a (contested) transnational elite through their everyday practices (Conradson and Latham 2005). Shedding light on the role of hegemonic sexual norms in the context of family migration, the results reveal how expatriate subjectivities are produced and maintained through reiterated corporeal and discursive performances of heteronormativity. By heteronormativity, I refer to the 'privilege, power and normative status invested in heterosexuality' (Cohen 1997, 445). However, heteronormativity is much more than gender and sexuality privileges only, since it intersects with class and race privileges (Oswin 2008) in the context of global capitalism.

This paper provides two main contributions to the literature. Firstly, and following Kofman's (2000) exposure of women's invisibility in qualified migration studies, it complements existing ethnographic research that has unsettled the still-prevalent stereotype of the passive trailing wife. Most of this work has highlighted the role of whiteness and Western privilege in the making of expatriate subjectivities (see literature discussion in the next section) in the case of Euro-American women sojourning in so-called Southern, often former colonial countries (following Kofman and Bastia's [2020] suggestion, I will equate the so-called Global South to non-Western contexts and conversely the so-called Global North to Western ones, while calling for further attention to the unequal power relations these terms carry with them). I propose here to consider the role of neoliberal imaginaries of globalisation in the making of expatriate heteronormative subjectivities to offer milestones for understanding privileged migration in the context of the highly-skilled in Northern countries. As such, this research contributes to reveal the fluidity of power relations along with entanglements of forms of privileges with gender vulnerabilities. Secondly, using an intersectional approach which has been identified as missing in skilled migration research (Bailey and Mulder 2017), this paper focuses on sexuality in relation to privileged transnational mobility beyond queer tourism. Drawing on critical geographies of sexualities (Browne 2006; Oswin 2008), it contributes to destabilise the assumption of everyday spaces as naturally heterosexual by highlighting how heteronormativity is produced through specific sets of performances. This paper makes the case for the use of heteronormativity as a useful – although underused – analytical framework to understand further the power dynamics that shape transnational experiences, spaces and subjectivities in the context of neoliberal globalisation.

The paper starts with a short discussion of the literature on the highly skilled that will lead me to present my epistemological and theoretical framework. I will then contextualise the case study and present the methodology. Finally, the main findings will highlight how expatriate women in Luxembourg act as agents in the production of localised transnational spaces (Andrucki and Dickinson 2015; Yeoh and Willis 2005) through the reiteration of heteronormative performances that support neoliberal ideologies of success.

Studying the highly skilled: premises, biases and perspectives

Highly skilled workers who relocate abroad for professional reasons on the unequivocal premises of a temporary stay have been variously described as mobile professionals, transnational elites, expatriates, highly skilled or privileged migrants – all those terms sharing an emphasis on the ease of movement and its embeddedness with the global city paradigm (for discussion of these terms, see, e.g. Duplan 2022; Farrer 2018; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Kunz 2016). As illustrated by the early work of Beaverstock (2002) on British business expatriates in Singapore, these managerial and professional employees are mostly male Westerners. Depicted as being unattached to localities, they are emblematic figures of neoliberal globalisation whose cosmopolitanism allows them 'the capacity to be mobile and free-floating' (Mitchell 2016, 125) in an unbounded world (Ley 2004; Mitchell 1997; Walsh 2006). Moreover, scholars have pointed at how glorifying discourses of mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006), along withthe global mobility industry (Cranston 2014), contribute to making mobility and globalisation normative imaginaries of success. Although 'transnational elites may be evidence of processes at a global scale, […] this "global" is constructed and understood by operations of particular individuals in local spaces' (Willis, Yeoh, and Fakhri 2002, 506), whose subjectivities are key to a better understanding of globalisation processes. Drawing on a grounded transnationalism perspective (Brickell and Datta 2011), scholars orient their attention towards a fine analysis of the everyday. Placing the body as a locus of power relations (Dunn 2010), they reveal the consequent reconfiguration of subjectivities along lines of gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, class, or even body size (Favell 2008; Fechter 2005, 2007; Leonard 2010; Lloyd 2019; Meier 2015; Scott 2006; Walsh 2006; Yeoh and Willis 2005) throughout the transnational experience. Transnational elites and other mobile professionals are hence deeply embodied subjects whose migrant experiences contribute to the shaping of spaces they cross, share and inhabit.

Alongside a relative ease of mobility in the globalised world, expatriation results in gendered sets of experiences. First, due to the sexual division of labour, corporate expatriation opportunities remain highly gendered (Brandén,

Bygren, and Gähler 2018; Collet and Dauber 2010; Hardill 1998). Moreover, the consequences of family migration appear to be contingent upon parental status and therefore much more pejorative for mothers than non-mothers in the case of married women (Boyle et al. 2003; Cooke 2001) in studies that have shown how 'the trailing wife phenomenon is closely tied with parental status' (Cooke 2001, 428). Mothers remain hence subject to the patriarchal system, which infers that they are dependent on their male spouse's career path and reduced to 'trailing spouses' (Kofman 2004; Walsh 2006). Denying any form of agency, this term echoes 'a particular kind of femininity, in which the spouse withdraws from the labour market and is re-domesticated, [assuming] that multinational executives have dependent wives who run their home, bring up the children and organise their social lives in the new place of residence' (Kofman and Raghuram 2005, 151).

Contesting the methodological individualism that preludes to much of this work (Kofman 2000), feminist scholars have worked 'to reinstate women as active negotiators in the process of skilled international migration' (Yeoh and Khoo 1998, 162). In her ground-breaking work on expatriates in Jakarta, Fechter (2007) argues that women experiment expatriation in an accentuated way because of their anchor in the everyday realities that contrasts with the uniformity of multinational work environments of their male counterparts. By tracing historic continuities from the colonial period and its inheritance in terms of representations and power relations with the contemporary times of corporate family expatriation, she maps the path between the diplomatic colonial wife and what she terms, following Callan, the 'incorporated wife' (Fechter 2007, Fechter 2010). By taking charge of the reproductive sphere for the wealth of her husband's professional career and for the sake of the family, the expatriate wife plays a crucial role in the reproduction of global capitalism (Fechter and Walsh 2010). One of the achievements of this scholarship is hence to give a better understanding of the intimate logics of expatriate wives, showing how they actively develop coping strategies to deal with their situation (Duplan 2014; Fechter 2007; Leonard 2010; Yeoh and Khoo 1998).

The racialised dimension of these experiences should also be central to this scholarship. Drawing on a postcolonial framework that helps uncover the workings of race in post-imperial times and spaces highlights the whiteness of the bodies which are at ease in circulating from the Global North to the Global South and their encounters in 'contact zones' with non-white bodies (Fechter 2005; Leonard 2010; Meier 2015). Coming back to Fechter (2005, 2007), she draws attention to the way accompanying spouses in Jakarta make sense of their experience through their whiteness, using it as resource to keep a distance from local people who are considered as culturally deficient compared to Western norms. In a similar vein, Leonard (2010) argues for the racial structuration of expatriate communities that intend to

express their racial and cultural superiority by gathering in community clubs. Walsh (2010) shows how migrants negotiate their distinctive status according to their whiteness along with their Western identity. This research usefully sheds light on how Western expatriates produce their privilege by extending imaginaries inherited from colonial times to the global contemporary era (Fechter and Walsh 2010). While the colonial settler expressed the power of the empire, the expatriate defines him/herself as a category distinct from the ordinary migrant, self-identifying as a 'good migrant', where goodness is imbued with whiteness (Cranston 2017). Whereas scholarship has mostly focused on European or American women expatriated in Southern countries, Lundström (2014) has studied Swedish expatriate women in the United States from an intersectional perspective, and Leinonen (2012) has focused on American expatriates (both male and female) living in Finland. However, since the core focus of both studies remains on the distinctive status entitled through whiteness in relation to other types of migrants, one can hence question how highly skilled Euro-American migrant women in the Global North produce specific spatialities and how they give sense to their expatriate status beyond white privilege.

Race and gender have been fruitfully put at the centre of the power relations that structure expatriates' lives. Sexuality, as part of a matrix including sex and gender (Butler 1990), has not benefitted however from the same attention in migration research so far. Some scholars have investigated LGBTIQ transnational mobilities, mostly tourist mobilities and asylum migration, in relation to the discriminatory and exclusionary power of heteronormativity in everyday spaces of migration. Heterosexuality remains meanwhile overlooked, 'as a taken-for-granted framework for the organisation and experience of familial, marital or romantic relations in migration' (Walsh, Shen, and Willis 2008, 575). Few studies have focused on migrant performances of heterosexualities beyond couple relations and marriage (Walsh 2007; Walsh, Shen, and Willis 2008), echoing queer scholars' call to correct this heteronormative research bias (Duplan 2016; Luibhéid 2004; Manalansan 2006). More must therefore be done to better understand 'how heterosexuality as a normative category […] is socially constituted and negotiated at the everyday level' (Huang and Yeoh 2008, 1) in the lives of the highly skilled.

This paper makes the case for highlighting the workings of heteronormativity in everyday practices of expatriation as a means of producing distinctive transnational/global subjectivities for migrant women expatriated in the Global North. As a hegemonic expression of gender and sexuality, heteronormativity implies a relation with familial norms and respectable domesticity. It is also crucial to underline how this assemblage lies at the juncture of multiple axes of power, such as class and race (Cohen 1997; Haritaworn 2015; Hubbard 2000, 2008; Oswin 2008, 2014). Drawing on Butler (1990, 1993), I embrace gender as performative, which means that gender is acted

upon and oriented by the repetition of a hegemonic set of norms through ritualised performances. Performance is therefore meant as an embodied expression of sociocultural standards, which varies depending on the spatial contexts in which it happens. The lens of performativity allows hence the body to become a space of practice where gender is inscribed within the regime of compulsory heterosexuality. This meaning draws the body to the core of my analysis, as 'the closest in' (Jonhston and Longhurst 2010), the surface of inscription of social norms (Butler 1993), and the locus of creation of transnational expatriate spaces and subjectivities through contextual performances (Conradson and McKay 2007; Silvey 2004). Such an approach helps to understand the workings of situated hegemonic or marginalised expressions of gender.

In relation to sexuality, hegemonic expressions of gender are privileged, for instance respectable femininity, in which respectability is coded in terms of class or race, among others. To that purpose, in this paper I use intersectionality as an analytical framework for addressing the intertwining of axes of social power in everyday lives and experiences (Hancock 2016). While intersectional theory is deeply rooted in Black feminist thought (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Davis 1983), such an approach remains useful to account for the diversity of lived experiences of oppression and the way power is constantly (re)produced and maintained in everyday lives. My research question can hence be framed as follows: How do expatriate women negotiate their everyday gender subordination to support their becoming as a global elite? In so doing, I argue that an intersectional perspective on the highly skilled, attentive to the workings of intertwined power relations through the lens of heteronormativity and the way it relates to neoliberal ideology of globalisation, leads us to a better understanding of individual and collective experiences of transnational migration and the (re)making of privileges as well as inequalities.

Investigating expatriate women's lives in Luxembourg

This paper draws upon ethnographic research carried out in the City of Luxembourg, the capital of the eponymous Grand Duchy, from 2012 to 2014. With less than 120,000 inhabitants, Luxembourg's population is composed of 70% of foreign residents and is home to more than 167 nationalities (de Luxembourg 2017) – much like New York or London. This multicultural character is considered to be part of the *Multikulti* Luxembourgish identity. Luxembourg's population includes a very high ratio of skilled workers, labelled as 'golden immigration' (Fehlen 2009). Mostly from other European countries (87% of foreign residents hold an EU passport (Ville de Luxembourg 2017) and working in multinational corporations and European institutions, the immigrants are locally labelled as expatriates.

In this research, I define expatriates as highly skilled migrants who have decided to move to Luxembourg for a mid-length period of time (a minimum of a couple of years) due to a job or career decision by one of the members of the household. I excluded young professionals coming for internships to Luxembourg since their stays are usually shorter, and job-seekers from neighbouring areas because they would be more likely identified as cross-border migrants than expatriates. I also decided not to include European civil servants because most of them benefit from tenure positions and are therefore geographically stable. The selected sample therefore broadly follows Fechter's (2007, 128) definition of family expatriates as '"traditional" corporate expatriates where the husband as bread winner has a middle management or senior position and for whom the expatriation constitutes a crucial step in his career advancement'. This also matches the realities of expatriation in Luxembourg according to the country's specialisation in background services for global firms and other business milieu in line with the country and capital's ongoing globalising features (Decoville 2008; Schulz 2008; Sohn 2012), which structure follows the aforementioned sexual division of labour. However, while expatriation relies on the geographical professional mobility of one member of the family only, it nevertheless affects all the members who 'follow' the career path of the former: 'concretely, the work of one member of the family – when displaced thousands of miles over multiple years – transforms the life of all other members of the family' (Hindman 2013, 9).

Alongside immersive participant observation and informal interactions, I conducted multiple in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 female expatriates that focused on how they go about their daily lives according to their gender position. Interviews, conducted in French or English, were all recorded and partially transcribed. Most of them took place at interviewees' home, the others in cafes in the city centre or in commercial malls. Although the research informants have diverse migratory pathways and statuses, they themselves use the term expatriate, underlining through it a sense of belonging.

All of the interview respondents were parents, aged between 28 and 45 years old, living in heterosexual families with children under 18. Four were newcomers (less than one year in Luxembourg) and six were about to return to their home countries. Only two came to Luxembourg for their own job, reinforcing the aforementioned global sexual division of labour. Eight were benefiting from expatriation packages and four more worked under local contracts with side benefits; others were self-initiated expatriates. While following their spouses, 11 out of 19 started working again, mostly part-time or freelance. Six were third-country nationals (respectively from: the US, New Zealand, India, Russia, Brazil and Japan); others were EU citizens (from France, Italy, Spain and the UK, which conflates with the nationalities most often represented in Luxembourg).

I used a snowball technique to recruit research participants, who were initially contacted through neighbourhood, school, and expatriates' clubs such as the British Ladies Club and the American Women's Club, or other social relationships. Because of my own situation as an educated French woman living in Luxembourg with my male partner and our family, the research respondents identified me throughout the fieldwork as an expatriate myself. This position obviously facilitated my integration in various social opportunities as well, as it influenced the course – and often the ease – of the interviews because of an implicit shared situation. Research respondents in this context identified me as a peer. This assigned me to various positions that also evolved according to my own knowledge of expatriation throughout the research: from newcomer who needs coaching to expert elder, from confidant to party mate. However, the data analysis does not rely on autoethnography and is solely based on the narratives of the research participants. I have elsewhere discussed further what a reflexive approach brings to the understanding of the opportunities and possible pitfalls opened up by such a context as well as the implications for research ethics (Duplan 2017).

In this paper, I present a tentative categorisation of these women's everyday representations and practices of transnational mobility through the lens of their gender position. Three different kinds of settings are scrutinised: everyday geographies of children and the home, heteroconjugal geographies, and women-only gatherings. These peculiar spaces are given meaning in the form of model roles that expatriate women adopt or negotiate: as homemaker, good wife or enfranchised woman. All three role models are strongly heteronormative. While nuances do exist in individual accounts of lived experiences of these expatriate women, the results presented here focus on similarities among research informants in an attempt to grasp power relations at stake in everyday geographies.

Care geographies of devoted mothers as homemakers

In accordance with their gender role, women endorse care responsibilities within the household, which are reinforced by moving abroad. Care relates to the practices that help keeping our world liveable (Fischer and Tronto 1991), interweaving different scales, from our bodies to the ones of those we care about, to home or community. A such, care is a set of deeply embodied practices that contribute to the production of liveable everyday places. I focus more specifically in this section on care practices for children in relation to their education and on home making practices for all members of the expatriate family. This help uncover how women learn through the body a set of heteronormative performances that allow them to position themselves and their family within the expatriate milieu.

Once in Luxembourg, the wife becomes the spouse mostly in charge of homemaking: the practical, affective and emotional spheres for the whole

family. For research participants who have moved with their family for their own professional career, this responsibility most often appears as a burden since it is only partially shared with their male spouse. Contrariwise, those who have quit their job to follow their husband embrace such an involvement as a way of compensating for their lack of professional activity. This also allows them to play an active role – beyond the reductionist one of the trailing spouse – in the achievement of the family mobility project, as well as in the achievement of what they frame as a cosmopolitan future. Highly marked by the gendered structure of expatriation as international professional mobility, this position influences the production of new subjectivities in movement while affecting social relations and spaces.

Highly committed to their children's education, these women act as extremely dedicated mothers in managing their children's school and after-school activities as well as their social relations. In this context of temporary mobility, children most often attend international schools, where the curriculum creates a continuity in children's education across moves. International schools are usually private and expensive, often partially supported by employers. Putting forward sets of values such as openness to the world and tolerance, they contribute to fulfilling one of the wishes of the mobility project by matching the supposedly innate cosmopolitanism of the transnational elite. This is what Svetlana, a Russian mother of two, explains:

> It's a good opportunity for us to learn about the world. It's a good opportunity for the kids to get a good education. I think the important thing for kids is to start foreign languages. … It's a good base knowledge and I think the most important thing for the kids is that they now understand that there are lots of different countries and cultures – not showing them on the map and they will never know what is it going over there, or visiting a country as a tourist – they know from the inside: they have friends from different parts of the world, they have different languages, I think it's important to feel this big world.

For mobile families, sending their children to international schools represents an opportunity to socialise them as members of the transnational elite. Beyond a gendered mothering role, mothers' involvement in their children's integration reveals a socially distinct strategy (Mulholland and Ryan 2015). As Wagner (1998) has shown in her analysis of what she calls the 'new elites of globalisation' in the French context, schooling strategies are part of a global project of international lifestyle training, giving children international cultural and social capital in a highly competitive academic environment. This version of cosmopolitanism fits well with the values of transnational corporations and the depoliticisation of culture (Khan 2014, 33), while allowing for the recognition of a new kind of distinction (Igarashi and Saito 2014): An elite status that becomes an unquestioned privilege, inscribed upon the bodies as a form of corporeal knowledge (Khan 2014).

In this context, female expatriates, especially those who follow their spouses, develop an intensive mothering role (Nugaka 2012) that involves socialisation and education to give their children the required transnational skills to take part in the elite milieu. Through contact with these institutions and actors committed to forming a transnational elite, women learn through an embodied experience in situated contexts how to perform their role as expatriate mothers. This performance answers the injunction of neoliberal corporate capitalism while allowing those who conform to this position to receive side benefits of cosmopolitan privileges within the transnational family.

Most expatriate women interviewed also assume responsibility for household chores, furnishing and maintenance. Complying with the traditional sexual division of labour, they take charge of making the home comfortable for every member of the family. Considering the size of transnational moves, women perform invisible but time-consuming tasks which require managerial skills. While most of the research informants' husbands have 'Europe-wide jobs', which take them away from Luxembourg most of the week, women have to manage the 'back office' of the home: activities that prevent them from engaging in professional activity that would demand other responsibilities of them. This is what Leonor, a Spanish mother of two, whose husband is often absent for longer periods because of faraway assignments, said:

> I don't know how I can go back to work. Even if I hire a nanny, if the nanny is sick, you cannot call your husband who is in India or South Africa. My husband travels for long periods of time, ten or fifteen days, because it's less expensive for the company if he stays longer instead of going twice. […] It's all on my shoulders.

Additionally, most families hire help for cleaning, entailing that they delegate part of their gendered oppression to others, typically women from socially and economically less advantaged and often racialised backgrounds. Analysed by feminist scholars to highlight how hierarchies are reproduced and maintained through the organisation of reproductive labour (Glenn 1992), racialisation of reproductive labour also takes part in the production of white upper middle-class standards. From a study of Swedish expatriate women in the United States, Lundström (2010, 2014) argues that female expatriates produce themselves as Westerners through the organisation of domestic labour that is delegated to low-class female workers, often from different racial backgrounds than their own. In the case of female expatriates in Luxembourg, hiring a house cleaner helps them to demonstrate their ability to manage their home by performing a bourgeois gendered role (Glenn 1992), which is implicitly upheld by white and Western standards. In this way, they perform specific forms of what they imagine to be a female expatriate. Sihem, a British expatriate of Lebanese background and a stay-at-home mother of five, justifies the undeclared employment of an eastern European maid whom she pays under the minimum wage. She explains that

it is easy to negotiate with 'those people', 'who are in any case happy […] coming from where they come from', to have the opportunity to make more money than what they would be ever able to earn in their own country. This abusive relation deserves specific attention. Beyond its exploitative dimension, which has been largely analysed by migration scholars researching domestic workers (see, e.g. Schwiter, Strauss, and England 2018; Silvey 2004), her performance of othering and racialising poor migrant women contributes to her own whitening, giving her access to a privileged status within the hierarchies of transnational migration. By acting this way, Sihem's performance includes ways in which she expresses and maintains power and authority towards less privileged women. Here, gender oppression is compensated through social class privileges, while gender is disciplined through a social class lens of the bourgeoisie.

In adapting to the loss of their own professional activity and financial independence, the women interviewed take on the gendered roles of devoted mothers and homemakers. By performing this role, they implicitly comply with care expectations, which are also highly gendered. As a social presence, care practices presuppose daily emotional work and control that relies on 'relating positively to others, for example listening, supporting, and encouraging them, in order to help them to feel better' (Arieli 2007, 21). In her study of expatriate mothers in Beijing, Arieli emphasised how they perform a 'task of being content', although negating their own selves. She emphasises how this emotional work is an important part of why expatriate women overinvest in children's education and care practices. She argues that the emotional work they dedicate to each family member plays a key role in the successful integration of the whole family in the context of expatriation.

The embodiment of such a gendered role thereby participates in the global reproduction of care practices and the global economico-affective relations that underpin gender structures (Vershuur 2013). Female expatriates give care in exchange for the economic and material security afforded them by their husband's professional position, in a context that amplifies the gendered division of labour. In so doing, they contribute to the reiteration of sexual gendered roles, division of labour and renewal of heterosexuality as integral to a normative version of gender (Bondi 1992).

The heteroconjugal geographies of the good wife

Beyond care practices, the behind-the-scene gender role performed by many expatriate women is directly linked to their position as married woman. I examine here what this entails and how it is negotiated by these women according to place and context. I look at how women take on relational responsibilities and engage with varying degrees of ease and desire in

heteronormative behaviours. This will help to understand how this affects and transforms their sense of self and subjectivity.

Women are in charge of the social life of the family, especially in creating new relations and social bonds 'from scratch', to quote an expression used several times by the research informants. They initiate and manage the whole family's social connections and social agenda, which can be a large responsibility due to the complexity of settling new routines while maintaining transnational connections. This is what Stéphanie, a French expatriate who quit her position as a marketing manager in a big company for the transnational sake of the family, explains:

> You take care of the kids, you do the shopping, you manage the dinner invitations in relation to your husband's schedule, it is also you who organises holidays, and on weekends, you're the one who proposes activities. Well, you are like the super PA [personal assistant] of the family! (Interview in French – author's translation)

Stéphanie's choice to call upon corporate terminology by comparing her role to that of a personal assistant highlights the demanding involvement and the organisational skills required by such a role along with its usually invisible dimension. The social setup of the family looks indeed much like the management of a family company if drawing on a neoliberal frame of thought. The use of English corporate terminology in an interview conducted in French also shows the associations between the expatriation experience, neoliberal ideology (Massey 2005) and the 'new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007) at different scales, including the household and the individual. However, instead of seeing this responsibility as part of their gendered role, the women interviewed argued for their greater availability to be eligible for this responsibility – even the women leading the mobility project. What is at stake here is the success of the expatriation sojourn in which these women are both contributors and beneficiaries. Jane, a British woman, explains her involvement in family integration, underlining her husband's lack of time outside his job: 'All the friends we have are the friends I have made, for my husband (laughs)'.

Expatriation carries with it a specific set of implicitly Western, white, and upper-class values that newcomers arriving in such settings seem to unquestioningly embrace. Women embark on a personal transformation, aiming to take part in this transnational milieu without being aware of the gendered norms that uphold it. While internal divisions may occur in terms of social class among expatriates (see, e.g. Fechter 2007), they display a normative version of gender and sexual roles through the figure of an idealised, respectable bourgeois wife. The heterosexual couple is staged as a major element for socialisation (Davoine et al. 2013), which takes place among expatriates only, assuming transnational mobility as a common factor and condition for this cosmopolitan *entre-soi*. The couple is produced according to defined

roles that call to mind Goffman's (1997) 'arrangement between the sexes'. Gender structures private dinner parties, from dress codes to attitudes, places to sit and conversations, as explained by Sylvie, a French expatriate:

> At dinner parties, it's mostly husbands talking about their job. Then, we, as women, talk about holidays, children, […] We talk about holidays, projects we have, we talk a lot about school, school, children, because it's what usually connects all of us, children are often in the same class, so that school is a big topic of conversation! [Laughs.] (Interview in French – author's translation)

This social ritualisation, underlined by the research informants themselves, leads to the standardisation of gendered behaviours according to a sexual division of roles, which enhances the social and cultural reproduction of the household. It reiterates heteronormativity as a condition for successful integration within this expatriate social sphere as well as a social marker within hierarchies of global capitalism. Ritualisation relies on a set of norms which are no more than an imitation of a model (Butler 1990). Performing these gender norms gives these expatriates the opportunity to access the transnational community they imagine (Anderson 1983) and wish to embrace while being defined as part of the transnational elite. This heteronormative social ritualisation also extends to professional occasions, where women play the role of the spouse as a follower whose femininity has to comply with specific standards in terms of embodiment – in dress, posture and behaviour – as well as how they position themselves, interact and converse. Being an accompanying spouse precludes any form of individuality during these events, relegating women in such opportunities to their exclusive function of 'wife of'. My research respondents stressed the professional aspect of their contribution to their male partner's career. As noted in my fieldwork notes from a gala cocktail, Julia, a British expatriate, said amusingly of her friend Alice (whose husband was one of the organisers and who was chatting with a male guest): 'Can't you see? She's working! [She laughs.] Look at her! She's at work now!' This formal role is also like how Leonor describes her professional social role in her previous expatriation experience in Bangkok:

> You always have to be formal because it is also work. For me, this was a new part of my profile. So you are the wife, you have to be careful, to be polite, just … you have to be good, smart, clever, but nothing which is your private life. It's nice, but you have just to be here.

These professional events prolong the expression of a hetero-patriarchal bourgeois model as well as traditional women's roles in the cultural and social reproduction of the family. Papanek (in Arieli 2007) refers to a 'two-person single career' to emphasise women's dedication through physical, emotional and relational care practices required by these occasions. These women seem to devote themselves totally to a gender role that promotes upward social mobility for them and their family. However, not all women

are comfortable in this role, and many of them expressed that they 'felt out-of-place having to drink and engage in "ladylike" behaviour in order to meet people' (Willis, Yeoh, and Fakhri 2002, 559), as in the case of Malika, a French woman, who is packing for the family's return to Paris:

> For business dinners, well, I have to get dressed, wear makeup and a smart dress […] I was very often invited to business dinners with my husband. It is really not my thing, this environment … Having to act as spouse of, really, it… […]. I do not feel comfortable at such events, when you have to behave, … when it is for a job, and we have to perform with our husband […] 'Please meet my spouse', … 'it is a professional invitation from Mister X'… Anyway, I am not very talkative, when I do not know people well, I… I don't know… I envy people like this, I do really, it's so convenient, but I really can't do that so … it is so far from my world, so people are nice, but … [sigh]. (Interview in French – author's translation)

Malika explained that she does not feel comfortable with the expected social standards of such events. She explained that she is not used to attending these occasions and expressed her affective and bodily difficulties in performing the expected role of the accompanying spouse. Her experience challenges assumed natural gendered abilities. It discloses the role of affects and the body in the learning and display of social norms. Malika's words underline how women are engaged in a process of personal transformation during the transnational mobility experiences that affect their bodies and subjectivities. Malika gives up improving her performance and prefers to remain as she is, from her words, demonstrating her agency in negotiating what she points out as the gender requirements of expatriation. This flexible embodiment of heteronormativity highlights how one can play strategically with such social norms. Malika voiced that she has consciously chosen not to embody the accompanying spouse role model, which can denote a form of contestation of heteronormativity. Despite falling into a gendered role, expatriate women can therefore demonstrate their agency by choosing to which extent they contextually endorse heteronormative standards. This prevents from considering spaces and places as naturally heterosexual and underlines who is entitled to frame them and under which conditions.

Spaces of enfranchised women: a continuum of spaces beyond gender constraints?

I have discussed how these women are strongly re-assigned to their gendered position as mother and wife in the context of expatriation, which proves to be an amplifier of gender norms. These expatriate women also develop a personal social life through diverse relationships and friendships. We see in this section the crucial role of specific places and social gathering in the development of women's' networks, which gendered dimension

oscillates between reiteration of gendered assignment and a potential emancipation.

Expatriate clubs, such as the British Ladies' Club (BLC) or the American Women's Club (AWC), play a crucial role in the socialisation and integration process of accompanying spouses and their families arriving in a stranger land. They organise a range of events and activities that help establish social relations and ground newcomers in existing networks. Jane, a mother of two from London, focused on the role the BLC played for her while arriving in Luxembourg:

> We came to look twice, you know […] And, I bumped into – this is my connection with the British Ladies' Club – I was sitting in the pirate ship park [an outdoor playground], and I heard people speaking English, you know. That was a whole herd of English mothers with their children, and so I did go talk to these ladies and that was Amy, you know Amy, don't you? And I just happened to sit next to her in the pirate ship park when we were there for the weekend, visiting, deciding whether we were going to move! We weren't sure, you know. I wasn't sure about it, and she said: 'Well, if you move, here is my number', and she wrote me her number! She was part of the board of the BLC, so she said: 'It's a very good organisation for you to join if you don't know anybody in Luxembourg'. So, she suggested, 'look at it at home, and if you move, go and join the club!'

By putting forward existing practices of solidarity, Jane emphasises how the BLC has influenced her integration as well as her mindset. This is also what Lucie, a French expatriate, stresses when describing the support she received from other women who she did not even know personally: 'There is lot of support here and it seems to be something that mums are trying to enhance' (Interview in French – author's translation). The building of solidarity networks, besides breaking up the loneliness of arriving in an unknown land, is also part of the aim of mothers' networks that are set up through international schools. Women meet after school drop-off or pickup, with or without kids, as well as through activity groups organised by volunteers. These semi-structured gatherings help to get to know each other better and to create one's own personal network, as Jane explains:

> I could not believe it when I arrived, after having been at [name of her children's school] for a week, I think I had been invited to coffees at two big houses, there was a class coffee morning, you know, all these emails were flying in, and it was all from the school. And I met a lot of people, not necessarily people who are my friends now, but I met a lot of people and then you start what I call the fitting process. So you decide, you know, which sort of people you feel you have something in common with, more than just the fact of being here […] I could not believe it, how quickly I met friends here, it was unbelievable.

After meeting each other through social networks, women often meet at home in small groups, inviting one another for casual meetings or special activities. Breakfasts are organised for keeping in touch, as well as activities

such as cooking or sewing workshops, for example. Women's use of the domestic space for sharing such activities reveals how they stick to the gender identity they are assigned to while using it to shape 'women's only' places far from the 'male gaze'. These spaces arise as paradoxical spaces (Rose 1993) where women gather together in the place and role they are supposed to endorse while sharing intimate gendered experiences, concerns and doubts. Many conversations revolve around the absence of husbands, the consequent load of responsibilities endorsed along with the feeling of loneliness, as well as the children's wellbeing. Rather than being made as intimate confidences, these discussions are most often framed with humour or derision, avoiding being exposed as possibly not being able to deal with such trivial situations. The sharing of these personal narratives thus makes it possible to establish the premises of what could be labelled as a gender consciousness: the personal difficulties being related to the shared situation of being an expatriate woman. The gendered dimension of this emotional sharing practice then comes to shape the one of such places as spaces of emancipation where mutual support and solidarity arise as key values of an inclusion. However, other topics also structure the conversation, such as information on the local context, administrative tips or address books. While this contributes to providing support and solidarity, this also highlights hierarchy between new and long-standing/experienced expatriates.

Gender does not play out straightforwardly as mutual support. Its role moreover changes drastically once outside the home when meeting in public places, such as cafes, bars or restaurants. Because of its historical association with maleness, consumption and power (McDowell 1999), public space is embraced as a space of emancipation for women assigned to the domestic sphere. Here again, the organisation of luncheons or dinners can be semi-institutionalised through the organisation of expatriate clubs or volunteer subgroups of international schools, or they can be more spontaneous and based on personal affinities. Unlike job-related events that require performances of heteronormative femininity where women act as accompanying spouses, these opportunities to go out, because they involve women only, could be expected to be more relaxed in terms of gender norms. However, according to what I carefully observed during fieldwork when women meet other women outside of the home, they embody heteronormative femininity that allows them to express their belonging to a privileged elite: They dress carefully, favouring trendy brands and accessories, fine leather goods and jewellery for those who can afford them, as well as sophisticated makeup. They perform ladylike behaviours while displaying their access to a high level of consumption of goods and services. This testifies to a whole set of disciplinary practices women apply in their everyday: From fitness or yoga to aesthetic, dietetic, medical routines or ornamental practices, women rule

their body through a careful agenda inspired by corporate methods of neoliberal capitalism.

Rather than serving only as places of solidarity and mutual help, women-only gatherings in public spaces look much more like spaces of assertiveness to be accepted as expatriate. I observed in such occasions that women tend to present themselves more affirmatively, aiming to best perform the eliteness associated to expatriation, thus underlining the deep injunction to embody situated gendered and sexualised norms. As such, they contribute to the reinforcement of internal hierarchies among women who use social, cultural and economic capital to gain access to such spaces. Also highlighted are the differences between those who have learnt from previous experiences of expatriation how to act in such settings, on the one hand, and new or less socially equipped expatriates, on the other hand.

Taking part in the public space also acts as a claim for visibility and recognition of autonomy. This is particularly visible at the girls' night out, which may appear at first glance to be a real space of transgression in terms of daily gendered assignments, by combining male-associated practices such as smoking, staying out late and getting drunk. When it comes to respectability, however, these practices remain normative. When meeting out, women go to fancy places. They wear glamourous clothes, appearing sexually attractive without displaying any signs of sexual availability, remaining modest while performing having great fun. Women going out perform what Skeggs (1997) has coined 'respectable femininity', which requires them to comply with specific sexual and social norms – and, we might add, racialised norms, as venues also bear the renewal of racialised norms. Performing respectability creates the opportunity to flirt with the limits of what would be tolerated for a woman to keep her white and bourgeois moral dignity when enjoying public venues, especially at night, while minimising the possibility of sexual violence and maintaining a form of individual autonomy (Lieber 2010).

This claim for recognition lies also at the heart of girls' weekends, far removed from the assignment to gender roles such as the dedicated mother or the bourgeois wife. Eva, a British respondent, told me what she had planned for the weekend:

> Yeah, I'm going to London for the weekend! It's a girls' weekend. I'll go with some friends and you know, we will meet Sanja there, know her? She left last year for Berlin. She will join too! I really need fresh air [funny face].

Once personal social preferences and close networks are set, some of these women organise breakaways between women, in cities such as London, Paris or Barcelona that they describe as 'sexy' – reputed for their trendy venues and active nightlife. This helps them to emphasise how independent they are from the patriarchal structure that assigns them to the domestic sphere, as well as from their breadwinner husbands. They also evidence their

cultural and economic capital by using these city trips as a distinctive practice. Finally, they take the opportunity to keep in touch with expatriates from previous stays or who have already left Luxembourg.

These gatherings in different contexts and at different scales all involve moving away from the private, the domestic and the local while favouring the public and the global, jumping from the micro to the transnational. This distancing of spatial gendered norms is enabled by conforming to the norms of consumption of the expatriate social milieu. These various spaces are therefore framed as a continuum marked by a tension between gender emancipation and social class expectations. Although not all women choose such a lifestyle, it remains often presented as an achievement within the expatriate milieu. Embodying an emancipated female subject links them to imaginaries/ideologies of globalisation. Going away to appealing global cities allows them to perform as hypermobile individuals flying from one city to another, having fun in fancy venues, shopping in expensive malls, embodying the perfect subject of neoliberal globalisation in its female version. As such, the body is a key element of the social construction of expatriate identities, a surface of inscription where social norms and standards regarding gender expressions, size, weight, attitude, decoration and dressing are inscribed (McDowell 1995). My observations attest that women work hard for their body to bolster the production of their expatriate subjectivity. By doing so, they are seeking to pass for 'real expats' while learning to be(come) ones, convincingly embodying heteronormative white transnational upper class norms that come to shape their expatriate subjectivities in the making.

Be(com)ing a woman expatriate

By exploring the transformation of female expatriates' subjectivities in Luxembourg through the study of their embodied practices of space in a globalising city, this paper has questioned the ambiguous position of the trailing wife in relation with the production of elite subjectivities in the context of Global North expatriation. Through an examination of the everyday spaces that structure their way of living, I have shown how women comply with the gender norms imposed on them by the context of family expatriation through their learning and display of specific performances. Expatriate women play with these heteronormative standards to find their own path to emancipation, framed by neoliberal values of success. The research highlights therefore the ongoing tension between conformity and, to some extent, enfranchisement in relation to gender, sexuality and social norms. In so doing, it extends the work of other feminist scholars engaged in understanding the intimate logics that frame women's practices and identities in transnational migration (see, e.g. Fechter 2007; Leonard 2010). By focusing on the crucial role of heteronormativity in the making of distinctive privileged subjectivities

for women expatriated in the Global North, it also paves the way for further research on (hetero)sexuality in privileged migration research.

Illustrating how space and social relations play a role in the production of heteronormative transnational subjectivities, I argue therefore in this paper for the need to take (hetero)sexualities seriously in researching highly skilled migrant's subjectivities beyond the role of whiteness and the persistence of colonial imaginaries and along with the way it is framed in the discourses and imaginaries of global capitalism. Placing the body as first scale of analysis, this paper contributes to fleshing out globalisation by putting forward female contributions to the production of transnational spaces. The concept of performance helps to uncover how heteronormative standards, influenced by the neoliberal doxa (Borja, Courty, and Ramadier 2013), circulate and are imagined, projected, embodied and reiterated through everyday practices, as 'mundane, banal and unremarkable activities performed and experienced on a day-to-day-basis' (Ho and Hatfield 2011, 710). An intersectional analysis, attentive to the intersections of gender with sexuality, sheds light on how female expatriates' spatial performances of femininity underpins the reproduction and spread of heteronormativity as a regulatory regime (McDowell 2008), contributing to destabilise normative assumptions about the pre-existing heterosexual dimension of space and places. This led me to complicate the figure of the trailing spouse, oscillating between gender oppression and class dominance – understood as access to and ease of mobility and consumption – from the perspective of a neoliberal critic. Both the figures of the devoted mother and the good wife express this ambiguity. By conforming to both the traditional role of mothering and social norms of expatriation, the performance of these two figures allows these women to position themselves within the expatriate milieu while being identified as part of a transnational elite. This ambiguity is also expressed through the figure of the enfranchised woman, whose distancing from gendered roles and spaces is only possible thanks to the elite status conferred by family expatriation. It is hence because they accept to play the game and perform their role within heteronormative standards that women are guaranteed a kind of emancipation which is based on mobility and consumption and therefore in line with neoliberal politics. This paper hence reveals that women in this research do not contest heteropatriarchy. Rather, they are 'active agents' who take part in a 'patriarchal bargain' (Arieli 2007, 19), deploying forms of agency that make them complicit in hegemonic forms of power. These outcomes help us to better understand how mobility acts as a process of negotiation of social positions in the context of transnational mobility. The role played by the spatial dimension of heteronormativity in the shaping of expatriate subjectivities offers hence new insights in how these women access the world of global privileges for themselves, while supporting the neoliberal agenda of social

reproduction of the expatriate family and contributing to the reconfiguration and reproduction of heteronormative power relations.

Some questions need to be further addressed, however. First, since highly skilled migration in Luxembourg is mostly European, one may indeed ask about the whiteness of such a community. Women coming from third countries, marked by the racialised stigma of their origin, do also perform Western heteronormativity, which lead them to learning to be white. Indeed, 'part of learning to be white is to learn specific places of whites, as well as how to perform within these in ways which produce and maintain power, distance and authority over people in other places' (Leonard 2010). Further research on the whiteness of heteronormativity in the context of privileged migration may also complement the understanding of the making of expatriates' subjectivities. Moreover, while giving insights into the workings of heteronormativity in the context of privileged migration, this research uncovers a preeminent pattern at play in the expatriate milieu. This does not mean, however, that all expatriate women act in the same way, nor that these actions are exclusive to expatriate women. The women in this research were all sharing, to various extents, an imagined community and its values (Anderson 1983; Rothenberg 1995). While not documented here, one must nevertheless keep in mind that other practices and subjectivities can occur in privileged migration. Further research would be fruitful in addressing other strategies involved in the making of transnational subjectivities and their possible contestation of neoliberal globalisation. Finally, and beyond such limits, I argue that the workings of heteronormativity highlighted in this research are spreading to all social spheres and are taking implicitly part of the making of the expatriate milieu as a distinctive one. Unveiling such processes thereby remains useful for understanding the making of privileges in migration, as well as its relations to inequality. Thinking further through privilege, while being attentive to its fluidity and contingency, may also open decompartmentalising categories of migration along a continuum that varies throughout the life course. Further thinking about privilege in migration will help continuing questioning of spatial and social justice.

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