

WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY: THEIR PRIVATE TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Women in Diplomacy: Their Private Transnational Practices

The paper concerns women in diplomacy observed through the anthropological perspective of migrants' transnational practices. It focuses on the transnational practices of women in diplomacy that include efforts to establish and maintain the everyday normality of their own choices in their temporary place of living. Shifting attention from less privileged to multiply privileged transnational migrants enables potential insights into the similarities of their practices of negotiating normality by the means of objects and ways of communication in different places of everyday life.

KEY WORDS: diplomacy, transnational migration, women, practices, objects

IZVLEČEK

Ženske v diplomaciji in njihove zasebne transnacionalne prakse

Članek obravnava ženske v diplomaciji s stališča antropološke perspektive migrantskih transnacionalnih praks. V središče postavlja transnacionalne prakse žensk v diplomaciji, ki si prizadevajo ustanoviti in ohraniti vsakodnevno normalnost po njihovi izbiri v krajih njihovega začasnega bivanja. Članek s preusmeritvijo pozornosti z neprivelegiranih na različne privilegirane transnacionalne migrante omogoča različne vpoglede v podobnosti med praksami, s katerimi migranti izpogajajo normalnost skozi predmete in načine komuniciranja v različnih krajih vsakodnevnega življenja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: diplomacija, transnacionalna migracija, ženske, prakse, predmeti

INTRODUCTION - DIPLOMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES

A diplomat's lifestyle implies frequent movement across national borders, and it thus incorporates continuous practices of transnational journey of people as well as material objects. Therefore, diplomatic migration provides an excellent foundation for a grounded theory about the creation of transnational spaces. In this paper the term transnationalism is employed from the perspective of transnational social spaces that "constitute sets of

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social and symbolic relations beyond and across national states and supranational institutions” (Faist 2004: 23).² In the context of the transnational practices of diplomats, *to be a migrant* could be conceptualized as part of their job. However, they migrate in a specific way and in specific conditions. Diplomats are usually considered as privileged transnational migrants. They have guaranteed jobs in their country of placement and they are entering a relatively safe environment about which they are well informed. In addition to their legally privileged diplomatic status, diplomats are better paid when they are abroad than when at home. Therefore, diplomacy is considered a profession with a high economic and social status. Because of their profession, diplomats represent a very particular group in the context of transnational migrants.³

The very precise period of staying abroad is one of the most important conditions in an anthropological perspective of migrants’ transnational practices, so I focused on the specific implications of time-limited diplomatic postings that influence and considerably define the transnational practices of my research participants: “We all know that we are coming back; we don’t want to stay there, work there.”⁴ It is also important to mention why I have chosen to interview women for my research. Many anthropological studies have observed women’s roles in various kinds of migration (e.g. Brettell 2003; Burrell 2008; Kurotani 2007). However, it is important to mention that women’s experiences were not the focus of ‘classical migration theories’ and that women were not conceptualised as active agents in the migration process, but mostly as accompanying spouses. Such portrayal of women has mainly been overcome in the past two or three decades.⁵

This paper focuses on the experiences of women in diplomacy by observing them as active agents in the migration process and the creation of transnational spaces.⁶ In this regard, the situation for women in diplomacy is very specific. According to Croatian law, the spouse of a diplomat is not allowed to work in the country of temporary placement. Therefore, he or she has to leave their job and put their career on hold.⁷

² Some referential articles on this subject can be found in the publication *Transnational Spaces: Disciplinary perspectives* - conference proceedings from the international workshop held at the School of International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Malmo University in June 2003.

³ I employ a transnational perspective that frames migration as a “process which encompasses both sending and receiving countries, and which involves continuing mobility and often the development and maintenance of emotional and other bonds with both countries”(Gustafson 2004: 73).

⁴ Each of my research participants emphasised time-limited diplomatic migration as a significant determinant, in the sense that it was important that they knew in advance that this was only temporary and that they would return to Croatia in four years: “...I knew that I was going to Finland for 4 years, and that I am coming back in 4 years”, “Then, on the other hand I know I am somewhere doing something for a few years and after that I am going home.”

⁵ Cf. Mirjana Morokvašić Muller, Eleonore Kofman, Floya Anthias, Giovanna Campani, etc.

⁶ Regarding this, the intention was not to base my views on gender theory or distinctively on women’s studies, but rather to try to overcome numerous migration studies that are mainly “male oriented” and to offer one possible ethnographic description of transnational mobility experiences from the women’s point of view.

⁷ It is important to mention that there is no empirical data being collected about the percentage of women in Croatian diplomacy (both as diplomats and accompanying spouses).

Basing my research on anthropological perspectives of migrants' transnational practices (e.g. Amit 2007; Brettell 2003; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Povrzanović Frykman 2003; Robertson 1994) my interest was primarily directed towards those transnational practices of women in diplomacy that include efforts to establish and maintain the everyday normality of their own choices in their temporary place of living. This can be partly achieved through the material objects that they bring to the country to which they are assigned. The efforts of *homemaking away from home* in the example of the five diplomats who participated in this study could be conceptualized as their personal creation of transnational spaces. Given that my aim is to better understand these women's creation of transnational spaces in the private and public spheres, I have investigated similarities between the practices of female diplomats and those women who accompany their husbands, of single women in diplomacy as well as those who also organize transnational lives for their children.

METHODOLOGY – THE EXPERIENCES OF FIVE WOMEN

My research is primarily ethnographic, which means “recording the life of a particular group and thus entails participation and observation in their milieu, community, or social world” (Charmaz 2006: 21). I have interviewed five women on several occasions during May and June 2008. Four of the interviewees are friends of my best friend, and one of them is also my close friend. I interviewed each of them individually, some of them in their homes in Zagreb and some in their offices. My research participants are all highly educated Croatian women in their forties. Each of them had a different situation concerning family, accommodation, career, interests and personal worldview. Given that each diplomat who participated in this research has specific life circumstances, we can compare the collected data to emphasize the similarities and differences of their experiences.

In-depth interviewing has been a useful data-gathering method because it involves eliciting each participant's interpretation of her experiences (see Charmaz 2006). I asked the interviewees to describe and reflect upon their experiences in ways that seldom occur in everyday life. Each of the five research participants said that prior to these interviews they had not thought about their diplomatic migration experience in this way. Since my interest was primarily focused on their efforts to establish and maintain everyday normality by means of the material objects that they bring with them, I started with an open-ended question: what kind of things were in the diplomatic truck that moved your belongings to your new location?⁸ My aim was to indirectly invite detailed discussion about *homemaking away from home* and to encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge. All of my interviewees have been abroad in the last ten years. The first one, Sanja,⁹ ac-

⁸ The moving of diplomats' personal belongings is regularly performed by diplomatic trucks and carries the denomination of *diplomatic pouch* – sealed transport that is not subject to being opened or searched, i.e. customs inspection, at border crossings.

⁹ The names of my research participants (as well as the names of their family members) have been

accompanied her husband who works as a diplomat. She and their two children, according to established practice, also had diplomatic status. Up to the present they have been on two diplomatic tours of duty, both in countries of former Yugoslavia. The second, Marina, went alone as a diplomat to Italy. Before she went on her diplomatic tour of duty, she had been living and working (for a family) in Switzerland for a few years, so she had previous migration experience. The third one, Nadija, also went alone to work at the embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia. Before her diplomatic migration she had lived in England for almost two years. Today she is married and has a son. Danijela's situation was unusual. She was sent as a diplomat and her husband and son accompanied her. They went to Slovakia and this was her first tour of duty. During her tour of duty her husband helped at the embassy, but now he is unemployed. My fifth informant, Lana, who has two sons, had been on two tours of duty with her family. The first location was in Austria, where she accompanied her husband, and the second in Finland, where she worked at the embassy on contract, as an external associate.¹⁰

From the point of view of the spouse that follows the diplomat, issues related with leaving his/her job and sacrificing their own careers is one of the key elements of diplomatic migration. However, this problem does not occur only in the case of diplomatic families. As Fechter observes, the wives of managers and directors of large industrial enterprises who are posted abroad also do not work. During their stay abroad they usually join some of the various ladies' clubs, which engage in various charity activities or organize women's gatherings for coffee or tea, so-called "coffee mornings".¹¹ A key issue in these cases is that the activities of women's clubs do not meet the needs and wishes of all of these women. Some of them consider such gatherings to be artificial, and seek fulfilment in other activities, which generally have a connection with their own professions (see Fechter 2007: 44–49). Such examples provide fertile ground for further research and review of theories that deal with gender-power relations in the family and in the field of work theory. Another topic that emerged as very significant during conversations with my informants concerns financial motives, which implies the question of whether diplomacy is a form of economic migration. Based on the testimony of the five diplomats who participated in this study, it is legitimate to retain a certain amount of reserve when it comes to the glamorous life of diplomats. My interest however does not focus on gender relations, or on the financial motives of diplomatic migration. To examine these, further field research would be necessary. The number of informants should be increased, while the in-depth interviewing and even participant observation should aim to answer the analytic questions

changed in order to protect data and privacy.

¹⁰ Despite the fact that the law states that the spouses of diplomats cannot work, in some states it is possible to work on a so-called *temporary work contract*, but only at the embassy. In this case he/she is not a permanent employee of the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹¹ The experience of my interviewee Sanja also confirmed this. One of her best friends during her stay in Ljubljana was a Frenchwoman whose husband worked in the Slovenian subsidiary to a large French company. They have remained close friends, and now regularly visit each other in Paris and Zagreb.

that have emerged and to fill conceptual gaps as Cathy Charmaz suggested: “Qualitative researchers have one great advantage over our quantitative colleagues. We can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure an entirely new puzzle – while we gather data.” (Charmaz 2006: 14)

It is important to mention here that this study is not based only on interviews with five diplomats, but also on my long-standing participation in the diplomatic milieu in various ways. In order to protect the privacy of all those who directly or indirectly made contributions to this study, I have avoided a more detailed explanation of my acquaintances and position in the diplomatic circle. It is only important to emphasize that for several years I had the opportunity to participate and observe the personal creation of transnational spaces of women in diplomacy. Regarding epistemological insight on this issue I find it important to mention that my position as both a semi-insider and a woman definitely had an influence on the research process. In this regard, the most significant aspect was that I had easy access to the field i.e. found my interviewees, and had a possibility to obtain personal or confidential (professional) information due to my semi-membership in this specific milieu.¹²

This participation provided me some advance knowledge of the research subjects and therefore I can use my own experience as ethnographic material¹³ (cf. Marcus 1995). However, keeping in mind that ethnographers are expected to be reflexive in their work I have tried to avoid subjective assumptions based on my previous experience and focus on the real stories and the experiences of my five respondents.

Because “grounded theory ethnography gives priority to the studied phenomenon or process – rather than to the description of setting” (Charmaz 2006: 22), by applying the instructions of Charmaz (2006), who described the process of qualitative analysis and constructing grounded theory, I have tried to study what is *happening in the setting* in order to build a conceptual framework of the actions and practices of my research participants.

THE PROCESS OF LEAVING AND SETTLING

The first problem connected to the process of leaving on diplomatic tours of duty concerns the country to which one is assigned. It is not always the case that a diplomat will be assigned to their first choice of country. The process of leaving begins with an application in a mostly internal competition, which publicises vacancies in certain countries. Those who apply choose three destinations to which they are willing to go. However, it often happens that they get assigned to the country that was only their “third option” (or they didn’t even want it, but they had to write something). If they are not satisfied they

¹² In order to avoid confusion I want to mention that I personally have never had a legal diplomatic status or diplomatic passport.

¹³ As was already mentioned, I am friendly with and family related to several diplomatic families. I have regularly mingled with them in Croatia, and I had an opportunity to visit some of them in their homes abroad.

are not forced to go, but the practice is still such that if they have previously been on a tour of duty in a country of their own choice, they are now obliged to accept a posting at some less attractive (to them) destination. As Danijela said, “I applied for Slovakia too but it wasn’t my first preference, it wasn’t the destination I wanted the most, not at all.”

Although diplomatic relocation is voluntary migration, certain involuntary aspects appear, such as the possibility of compelled living in a country you did not want. This is not something that is impossible to avoid. Coercion or “punishment” is not a practice in diplomacy, but as in any other profession there are certain compromises that are required in certain circumstances, or certain aspects of the job that are expected to be accepted. After accepting the job the second stage is to find a place to live. Before they find an apartment they usually live in a hotel for a month. When asking the participants in this study to describe some negative experiences, they all mentioned the period of searching for an apartment. To quote Danijela:

When we arrived in Slovakia, my idea was to find an apartment as soon as possible. You have the right to be in a hotel while finding accommodation. This shouldn’t of course take a long time, they have rules about that, but it wasn’t in my interest to stay too long in the hotel because I would have to be alone there. On the other hand, a person can’t function from a hotel room, I mean, until you settle in and find yourself an apartment you can’t function, so we tried, I was looking to find an apartment as soon as possible.

While describing the moving as being stressful during the time they lived in improvised, unsettled conditions, they all stress the fact of their settlement becoming “normal” as soon as they obtained stable accommodations.

But it was very hard to find a place, to rent it, specifically in that period, it was the year 2000. I couldn’t find one. The rule is that you can stay in the hotel for a month. Normally, nobody threw you out of the hotel, I would just have to write a request and they would approve me a longer stay at the hotel, but that unsuccessful and long search was like, “how am I going to”. [...] Then [when she found an apartment; L.K.] follow those lovely things; I’m in an apartment, now I have to give a soul to this place, so I can feel good in it. I took some photos of my entire family and some friends. Those were the photos of some special moments. They were on one wall. Then, I had a picture of Zagreb’s stone gates, the cathedral, which I both got, so all of those things ended up somewhere on the walls. I also brought my table-cloths.

The need and possibility of organizing a home on their own shows the need for a *material realm* in which they could act freely and furnish it according to their own needs and taste.

Since the same was the case for all of my interviewees, as in stories of some other migrants (see Povrzanović Frykman 2008), this example shows that certain material conditions are necessary for *making* a home. In the analysis proposed here, ‘home’ is

considered as an empirical, experiential category. It is a place “which acquires meanings through practice; and as such, it forms part of the everyday process of creation of the self” (Petridou 2001: 88). I employ the term *homemaking* as practice and a combination of processes through which its inhabitants acquire a sense of history and identity. In the context of this research the home is a place/space of lived experience where objects, practices and identifications, the material and the symbolic come together (see Povrzanović Frykman 2008).

THINGS THAT ARE ALIVE

The process by which “the material culture of the home is used to examine realizations of the self by focusing on the self-creation of the subject through interaction with the object” (Petridou 2001: 88), is called the process of *objectification* (Miller 1987). In contemporary societies, which are characterized by a high level of mobility (see Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006), “the process of self-creation of the subject through interaction with objects associated with home does not need to be geographically bounded” (Petridou 2001: 88). It is rather about a dynamic process in which every day practices make the home meaningful to those who inhabit it. In most cases people do not move with all their belongings. In response to the desire to select what matters, they face of the difficulty of separating themselves from an object that may be considered in a way as a part of oneself (see Marcoux 2001). Responding to my question as to the belongings they took with them to the places abroad that were to become their homes for the next four years, my interviewees all talked about knick-knacks and personal belongings that have some special meaning or emotional importance in their intimate, private or family life.

Yes, that is a part of family history which you like to carry with you, for example these photos of the family, for children, so they can, when they arrive at a new school or kindergarten, show them to their peers, they can show them their grandma, relatives, cousins, friends ... [...] you take some things you like very much, some picture or a poster, I had some boats that always reminded me of Split, and we always carried books. There were some books that we carried everywhere we went.

We have brought absolutely an entire household, from Zagreb to Vienna, from Vienna to Zagreb, from Zagreb to Finland. So, all of our books, coffee cups, bedclothes, but furniture we didn't take since as tenants we did not even have any. The embassy [in Finland; L.K.] had functional furniture that of course remained the property of the Embassy, so we did not bring it back. But all the memories, we took all, from the children's drawings, everything.

All my interviewees mentioned the same or similar personal belongings, but Lana explicitly stressed that she and her family transferred “absolutely their entire household” to Finland. The reason for this was that they were living as tenants (before their tour of duty). However, within the framework of these five cases, Lana's specific experience

confirms the importance of grounded theory, i.e. conclusions grounded in the collected data – which always appear as a specific cases (see Charmaz 2006).

Travelling between Croatia and a new home also involved carrying new things to and fro. These were mostly things that they bought during their visits to Croatia, or gifts they brought for their friends and families. During these peregrinations, the regular contents of their suitcases included items that cannot be purchased in either location or country. It was most often specific types of food, then books and music that reminded them of their homeland.

My husband and I are southerners so we prefer olive oil, fish and so on, cooked food, and they simply ... their food just did not suit us, so we would bring everything that we could, every year. Olive oil, some bacon, Čokolino for the kids, Vegeta. We always had Croatian wines. We always brought our music.

Nadija, who was in Jakarta, says:

Yes, and I think I took some photos, I even didn't take them by myself, when someone would come for a visit, they would always bring me a little thing, a photo or something, in fact I built so to say a collection of "Croatian things" out of it.

Visiting friends also brought the same objects, e.g. photographs of some mutual friends or family. That was a way to maintain the connection with those who were left behind. Creating "Croatian things" in Nadija's example can be defined as the creation of personal transnational spaces between Indonesia and Croatia. In this process of creation of transnational space, it was not only her, but also her friends who visited her and brought her those objects. Objects travel from country to country, but also from hand to hand. They enable the process of self-creation through the migrants' involvement in personal relations and social networks achieved or maintained through objects. In the same way the personal creation of transnational space was expanding in "the other direction", towards Croatia. When travelling to Croatia, Nadija would always bring her friends and family a part of her life in Jakarta: "Yes, absolutely always, every time (when she went home L.K.) I would put a present in my bag, and always something specific, something Indonesian." By transporting personal belongings of symbolic value in the places that were their real homes for those four years, or bringing them as gifts to their friends at home, they – through these objects – maintained a sense of continuity of their own personal life, a sense of personal history and identity.

OBJECTS OF EVERYDAY USE

The second group of objects that the women I interviewed brought along with them could be termed *objects of everyday use*. It is very interesting that, without any sugges-

tion on my part, their responses were practically identical: “But we have always taken our cutlery, plates, everything that has to do with the dining table and sleeping, it has always been our bedclothes.”

Those were the things for everyday use, I mean, for instance a funny example, we took our plates, our bedclothes, everything, not because I would have to buy all that and make additional costs but because it is mine, I have just transferred part of my life, we transferred our pictures from the walls so we could make the apartment our own, our books, our library, we have transferred all of that, because we live there.

At first glance it seems a bit odd that they bothered to carry quite practical things, objects of no sentimental value. However, the last example perfectly illustrates why Croatian diplomats bring along their own bedclothes and tableware to the places abroad that are to become their homes for the next four years. By bringing those objects of everyday use “they establish the continuity of the very material core of the intimacy of a home; those are domestic objects that are in direct touch with our bodies” (Povrzanović Frykman 2008). Bringing their own books, pictures or Croatian music is also a regular example of creating and maintaining domestic space. Which objects that the migrants consider crucial for keeping their own private everyday normality in different locations of attachment is obviously a matter of personal choice. There are considerable differences between the choices and practices of my informants, however, it is crucial to stress that they all wanted to *bring their places with them*, also when returning to Croatia – not only as mental references, but also in the form of objects. “The intention is to ensure the homely feeling naturalized in the country of immigration, also in a place that is emotionally or ideologically defined as ‘(real) home’” (Povrzanović Frykman 2008: 7).

THE TASTE OF HOME

In describing basic experiential elements of everyday life, the women I interviewed all addressed the importance of food.

A person realizes then how important nutrition really is in everyday family life. In the beginning you search for food and groceries that you are used to, and it makes you happy when you find a Kraš store, or some candy that you know.

Friends and family were also always bringing them the same food products when they would visit. They knew how much they yearned for anything of “Croatian taste”: “Yes, yes always. They would always bring us these same things, everybody knew that when visiting a package of Cedevita always comes in handy.” Their friends were providing them with tastes they were used to, the smells from their “normal” everyday lives in Croatia. In this context the “known food served for the purpose of providing the sense

of stability and continuity” (Petridou 2001: 102). On the other hand they were also sending new tastes to their family and friends in Croatia, so the trucks or cars carrying the diplomatic pouch were loaded not only with official letters and documents, but one could also normally find foreign chocolates and wines in them: “I would always send Finnish chocolate. That was necessary.”

The indispensability of food in studying homemaking lies in the fact that the food is perceived through a combination of senses, and it can, therefore, evoke the experience of home. Referring to the packages of food sent abroad, Petridou referring to Sutton (2001) argues that “food sent from home constitutes a symbolic process of restoring the fragmented world of the displaced through reconstructing the sensory totality of the world of home” (Petridou 2001: 89). Sanja stated: “The French were very glad that LeClerc was opened (in Slovenia L.K.), since that is their national supermarket and they made their purchases exclusively there, exclusively.”

Food from home evokes a large network of association between values and practices (cooking, cleanliness, family). In a new environment where the migrants find themselves deprived of the familiar homeland structures, bringing the known food, the known taste is closely tied up with the construction of the self and to the process of *homemaking away from home*. Food brought from the homeland, prepared and served in a new home abroad becomes an active object of transnational practices.

USE OF TRADITION IN HOMEMAKING

All these examples confirm that objects generate cultural meanings, evoke feelings, but also – or in the first place – animate practices (cf. Woodward 2001). In lived experience, the meaning and consequences of object-use are inseparable. This practice-oriented ethnography grounded in everyday experience focuses on “not what material culture *means*, but of what it *does* to people with active roles in the maintenance of transnational spaces” (Povrzanović Frykman 2008: 15). One of the practices that the women who participated in this study used to create their transnational spaces and keep them active is related to preserving traditional customs. My research participants told me a lot about Easter or Christmas celebrations.

Totally the same as in Zagreb, with decorations from Zagreb. Decorations are something, which is a pure symbol of Christmas, we would always take these decorations with us, and the Nativity scene, Bethlehem.

Usually somebody from Croatia came, mom or sister, or we went to Croatia. They came to us more often. Then, we used to make our traditional breakfast, the most traditional Croatian Easter breakfast; we would always meet at somebody’s place, all together. We would usually invite some people from the embassy, because there were people who were alone, their families weren’t there with them.

The fact that they brought their Christmas decorations from home and that they paid special attention to preserving traditional customs indicates that traditional practices and traditional objects also served to keep the customary normality in the place of their temporary residence. To have a homely Christmas in a foreign location has a meaning of maintaining the continuity and identity of their family and home, by positioning them within the traditional framework. They all mentioned (more or less directly) that this was not about the preservation of tradition in the terms of representing the affiliation with the Croatian people, but to maintain the everyday normality of their family lives. The fact that the interviewees who have a family talked a lot about Christmas, while on the other hand Nadija didn't even mention it before I asked her, confirms the hypothesis that the practice of maintaining traditional customs in the practices of migrants should be interpreted primarily as a practice of maintaining the stability of their own (family) life, their own daily lives,¹⁴ and not as confirmation of national belonging.

For example, that is what has been very important for us, as we plant young wheat for Christmas, and Slovaks don't have that custom, I couldn't find it anywhere to buy, and it was horrible for me, because what kind of Christmas would it be without wheat? Luckily, some friends from the Croatian minority had it, and they gave me some so I could have a traditional Christmas. After that, we at the embassy always had wheat for Christmas, just like at home ...

In leaving the place that for them contained their historical foundations and arriving in another place where they are foreigners, they evoke a sense of stability of home through using familiar objects. However, sometimes the performances of traditional customs abroad were limited due to the lack of necessary items. Such situations could generate frustration because of the disruption of continuity in the practice of family life. However, by establishing new social connections in the foreign country they were able to purchase items previously not available to them. This shows how identities are actually created in the practices that subjects perform. The *personal creation of transnational spaces* in my research participants' experience was significantly marked by the material objects which they were transmitting, bringing and using in the place of their temporary residence. Through these practices the process of *homemaking away from home* was actualised, and the temporary location became a fully functioning home aboard.

When we were leaving, we said: we shall live here for four years, it is temporary, but I can't live a temporary life. I can't just wait for four years to pass and simply throw those years away, because it's temporary? No, we live here, it is beautiful, and we want to make most of it. We didn't leave because we were punished; we left because we wanted to.

¹⁴ It is important to stress that this article discusses the *private* transnational practices of five respondents, which means their personal everyday activities and everydayness in their family lives and homes.

When it comes to maintaining tradition, the discrepancies in my interviewees' statements poses the question of whether tradition *per se* is important to certain people? The thesis of this paper is that the maintenance of private everyday normality is important to everyone. Some of the interviews fully support this, while some, like Nadija's case, are divergent.¹⁵ It could be possible to interpret this divergence due to Nadija's age (she was the youngest), or the fact that she didn't have children. Again, it is possible that this was the case simply because of her personal worldview and life circumstances. However, for a more detailed analysis of the reasons for the differences in my interviewees' statements, an extension of the pattern and theory established in a larger number of collected data would be necessary (see Charmaz 2006).

On the basis of this research, we can conclude that when it comes to maintaining traditional customs and the use of traditional symbolic objects (such as Christmas decorations),¹⁶ it is primarily about the creation of personal or family practices. Therefore, in the process of homemaking abroad, the "household" customs and people's personal preferences are essential – all in order to maintain a specific (personal) everyday normality.

MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS OR MAKING NEW ONES

Maintaining connections with family and friends in the homeland is a crucial sphere in the debate about transnational spaces. My informants told me that one of the motives for accepting their diplomatic postings was the geographic closeness of their future location: "It is a lot easier when you are closer, I mean, a friend or a family member can visit, it is a lot easier and faster." Despite the emphasised advantage that the new location should preferably be close to Croatia (that is, in Europe), it turned out that during their tour of duty they actually travelled to Croatia quite rarely. Their intention was based primarily on a personal feeling that if they wanted or needed to they would be able to go home easily and relatively quickly.¹⁷ It was about the possibility of unproblematic access that counted, although it was not often realized.

It is very important for me to know, in my mind, that I can take a flight every Friday and return home for a weekend, although while I was in Rome I rarely returned home, maybe twice a year.

¹⁵ As a contribution to the discussion above I present a part of Nadija's interview: When asked about her Christmas holidays in Indonesia, she answered: "That didn't interest me at all, I spent one Christmas in Bali, one New Year I was in Australia. Here [in Jakarta; L.K.] everybody just cried White Christmas [in the embassy; L.K.]. To me it does not mean anything. I'm not the traditional type, I mostly miss the people."

¹⁶ That was the same as with the food which my interviewees brought from Croatia.

¹⁷ The proximity of the homeland where their parents, family or friends live may also have practical value, for example, if the parents are old and they need to be cared for (see Povrzanović Frykman 2008).

They travelled to Croatia mostly once or twice a year, during vacations. Consequently, the desire for a location in Europe refers to the maintenance of *easy access* to their homes in Croatia. Although they rarely visited Croatia, they would all regularly, a few times a year, invite and entertain their friends and family at their new locations: “They would often pay me a visit. That was the advantage of being rather close.”

However, regardless of the fact that some would frequently, while others rarely see their friends and family, intense communication was kept through telephone and e-mail, several times a week, even every day through text messages (see Povrzanović Frykman 2008). Lana called “home and particular friends regularly, other friends occasionally through e-mail”, as well as my other interviewees who all regularly contacted their families and close friends in Croatia: “We heard from each other at least twice a week.” Considering the nature of their work, they received the latest daily information from Croatia, which was not only official. They read the Croatian papers that arrived daily at the embassy, and they watched Croatian television. The children of those who had Croatian satellite TV enjoyed watching Croatian cartoons.

One particular example supporting the process of self-creation through interaction with objects concerns the letters that Nadija sent to her family and close friends. Nadija’s letters perfectly illustrate the importance, nature and the role of material objects in the *creation of personal transnational spaces*: “But I wrote a lot. Real, material letters, I corresponded with my sister, mother, father and my best friends, I had four people I was in touch with regularly.”

Making new friends at the location of the diplomatic posting is also very important with regard to constructing and maintaining a transnational space, especially given the fact that all of my informants even after their return to Croatia continue to contact and to communicate with the people whom they met abroad. They have kept their transnational friendships alive until today (i.e. the time of the interviews).

We even made some friendships. One of them [friends L.K.] calls me, sends me e-mails from Israel. She and her husband even came to stay permanently in Slovenia but she couldn’t find a job for over three years. Now she wants to come to Croatia so she called me and asked me if I could help her find a job.

Making new social connections abroad was also extremely important in creating a sense of stability in the place of their temporary location. After they formed their circle of friends, they established normality through community-based contacts and inclusion in social networks: “When I finally managed to get company, when I finally acquired friendships, everything became absolutely fantastic.” They all made their circle of friends not only among other diplomats, people from the embassy or Croatian clubs, but they also socialized with other foreigners, as well as natives.¹⁸ Children who attended international

¹⁸ Despite the fact that one of my interviewees even said that it was suggested to her that she should be aware of whom she hung out with, since she is diplomat, it was the case with all my interviewees that they created their circle of friends according to personal preference and inclination. Social, economic

schools mingled with children from all over the world. My interviewees and their spouses socialized with the parents of their children's peers as well. They remained in contact even after they returned to Croatia.

Yes we hang out a lot [with Slovaks; L.K.], and mostly through Luka, because he practiced judo there with the Slovaks, sometimes his judo club had a barbecue party, a whole day of fun, and we, the kids and everybody would hang out the whole day, so we made some friendships there, some have even visited us in Zagreb.¹⁹

The fact that my informants and their families did not socialize only with diplomats leads to the conclusion that despite of the specificity of their migration and their legal status, they were not a part of an enclave, did not live in some kind of a ghetto, or a hothouse – which are the usual metaphors for the nature of the spaces that higher-class expatriates create. They did not live in a “bubble”, as suggested by Fechter (2007). The bubble metaphor implies a suspended, self-contained world with its own microclimate – out of touch with the reality of the country of residence. That was not the case in the experiences of the transnational lives of my informants.

FAMILY AGREEMENT – “ACCOMPANYING WIVES”

As mentioned in the introduction, I chose to interview female diplomats because of their specific situation in the diplomatic milieu. Because of the legal restrictions, diplomats' spouses are unable to work and thus become “accompanying spouses”. Subsequently, diplomats' lives are more gender-segregated because of labour division restructuring. The spouses who cannot work are often assigned housekeeping tasks, childcare and generally the reproduction of the domestic sphere abroad. This situation primarily invokes the question of gender roles:

This is not just a problem in Croatia; there are many countries with the same situation and because of that there are fewer women than men in diplomacy. Because women give up on their careers more easily.

This gender division is reflected in the creation of women's organizations, such as international ladies clubs.²⁰ In those clubs they organize all kinds of activities and courses: language courses, cooking courses, book clubs, tea afternoons or coffee mornings, excursions etc.

or educational status could not be taken as criteria in the process of creating new social networks and friendships. It can be said that everybody mingled with everybody, even if they had been suggested the opposite.

¹⁹ Luka is Danijela's son.

²⁰ It should be noted that there are no men's clubs of this kind.

In Slovenia there is an organized women's association, not only for diplomats' wives but also for all unemployed women whose husbands work in various firms. This has been done precisely in order to make their lives easier in the new environment.

A lot of women, not just my interviewees, sacrificed their own professional and personal interests when following their husbands. They left their jobs, knowing that it was questionable whether they would be able to resume their careers after the tour of duty. That presented a big problem for them. While explaining their own career setback as a "family arrangement", they struggled with an undeniable sense of loss and frustration. Sawa Kurtoani (2007) cited similar examples describing Japanese women and their experience of transnational migration. Following their husbands to their job assignments in the US they were also not legally permitted to work, so they become housewives, and were faced with similar problems as the examples described in this study (see Kurotani 2007: 21).

It is very hard to adapt to things when you switch from an active life to another, completely different one. I had to put a lot of effort to organize my day. I studied a new language; I tried to meet new people from my [professional; L.K.] field, but with a lot of effort.

While being a diplomat's wife is usually perceived as high-class lifestyle, in the reality of everyday life these women became "accompanying wives". Very often they couldn't adapt to the new environment and their new role. All of my informants stated that for some women this situation was even impossible to maintain. These women were all highly educated, sophisticated and had successful careers, so for them to be an "accompanying wife" was hard to endure.

There were some women who were endlessly bored, they were amazingly capable and educated, but all of that was too difficult for them, they just couldn't last long.

I would argue that this is probably the case because those women did not want to live in some unreal or artificial world, in some improvised Disneyland (see Fetcher 2007). As diplomats' wives they were unable to work and thereby restrained in their self-expression and self-realization. By adopting the 'accompanying' identity they had to accept particular sets of rules regarding social ranking, dress codes and forms of socializing, like those in ladies clubs. However, some of them found themselves in some of the activities of ladies clubs and others found their interests somewhere else (e.g. attending seminars, public lectures or conferences in their own professional field), but some of those women, as described by Sanja, could not find fulfilment in the role of "accompanying wife".

You know, there were a lot of women who just stayed at home, dying from sorrow, grief ... they had no initial determination to join SILA [Slovenian International Ladies Association; L.K.], or they did just give up ... since that was my second tour

of duty I already recognized when someone had such problems, so I tried to help them pull out of that slump.

IMPLICATIONS OF “HIGHER CLASS”

“If class is based on occupation, depending on education and providing financial grounds for a certain standard of living” (Povrzanović Frykman 2008: 2), diplomats can be considered as members of the privileged class.

Undoubtedly [diplomatic migration; LK] has many advantages, as a diplomat you have a secure job, an apartment, you find it, but it was partially paid. You don't have any existential problems; you do not have that [emigrational; L.K.] struggle. If you go abroad to work you are a foreigner, you at least have to prove yourself and you have to fight. As a diplomat you are in a privileged position in many ways. I do not need a work permit; I don't have to wait in line for it. I do not have to extend it every year; I don't have to worry what is going to happen.

It was definitely much easier for me. O.K. Indonesia is pretty specific, but surely you don't have such privileges in Europe as we had in Indonesia, because as soon they noticed a diplomatic passport everything became much simpler. For instance, I could have waited in front of the airplane door when someone came to visit, literally in front of the airplane door.²¹ Small things like that made your life much nicer.

Diplomats have guaranteed jobs and they are entering a relatively safe environment about which they are well informed. They even have a specific legal status (diplomatic immunity) and their going away from home is compensated with a higher salary. However, none of my interviewees regarded themselves as “special” or “elite”.

Of course our migration is a privilege, especially for people on the outside it seems like something untouchable, something far away, exotic, but for us it is just a regular everyday job.

Despite all of the mitigating circumstances of diplomatic migration I would suggest that although diplomats belong to the class of privileged mobile professionals, diplomacy cannot be simply described and defined as a profession reserved for elite *workers* that promises a fast-track career and a high standard of living.²² Simply put, it is not as wonderful as it seems

²¹ For a better understanding of the advantages of privileged diplomatic passports compare Ovar Löfgren's article *The Nationalization of Anxiety* (1999), which describes the problems that “regular” travellers face at border crossings.

²² Karen F. Olwig and Angela Torresan discuss privileged travellers and privileged migration in a similar manner (Cf. Olwig 2007 and Torresan 2007).

That's a stereotype like any other. To everybody who says they would immediately go into diplomacy I say no, you wouldn't, because after few months you experience that pattern ... the ambassador goes to the same parties with the same people over and over again, and after some time it gets pretty boring.

My material poses a question that requires further investigation. As I mentioned earlier, the data that I have collected suggests that diplomatic migration is in many cases driven by economic reasons. Behind all that glamour visible from the outside, the living body of diplomacy does not consist only of the ambassador and the first attaché, but rather of many other officials who are in fact regular people with a traditionally elite vocation.

Yes, I knew, we were in this situation, mortgage and all, we were able to go abroad, therefore I think it is. I think that for the majority of people it is economic migration, at least it is for the people I talk to.

Therefore the further questioning of the importance of class background as the taken for granted explanatory framework of migrants' transnational practices is necessary.

NEW HOME ABROAD

As Mary Douglas (1991) noted, home is a "localizable idea". But it is also a kind of place that acquires meanings through practices and as such it forms part of the everyday process of the creation of the self as well as the family.

Our tendency, to move our lives to Bratislava completely, was perhaps because we didn't want to drag the children, or to make our lives chaotic. Bratislava is close enough for someone to say: ok, my summer wardrobe is here with me, and my winter wardrobe is in Zagreb. Because, in fact, I live in Zagreb, so I will travel on weekends. We didn't want that, we have moved completely, we said: we live here now; therefore we brought all of our stuff with us.

This example describes emplacement in a new environment. During the tour of duty, diplomats' families created a fully functioning home abroad – it wasn't just a space of temporary placement for them. However, they did not end all connections with Zagreb, they did not "eliminate" their Zagreb home, they rather remained in active contact with Zagreb (they contacted and visited friends and family regularly), keeping the transnational lives of their families dynamic. However, through these four years of diplomatic mandate they have organised their home somewhere else, in Bratislava, Rome, Copenhagen ... All five interviewees emphasised the importance of the creation of a fully functioning home abroad.

When returning from holiday, we used to say "let's go home" [to Bratislava; L.K.].

Because, you know, you go for a vacation for a few weeks, it passes in surroundings of family, friends, every time someone gets angry because he feels you didn't share enough time with him. Then you have to do some things you can't do over the phone, there is always some hustling around, so you just wait to return to your peace – let's go home.

In the process of *homemaking away from home*, the interplay of sociality and materiality was crucial – the reciprocity of experiences and memories become embodied and represented by objects that were carried to and fro, participating in the creation of transnational homes. While talking about their return from the diplomatic posting to Croatia, all of my research participants, without being asked, began to talk about items they brought with them back to Zagreb.

I brought a lot of stuff, but nothing useful really. Others brought furniture, sofas, something like that, something valuable. When I hear what other people have brought, it seems like I didn't bring anything, but actually I did: a chair, a carpet, mostly some works of art. After four years you collect so many things you can't really believe it.

We brought a lot of stuff [back to Croatia L.K.]. We bought a lot of souvenirs, their famous Ital porcelain, candle holders, Finns adore candles, the smell of candles ... but most of all I have souvenirs, I have a house full of it, and I brought things for my whole family. We brought smoke-dried salmon, and other food. We brought a lot of books, in Finnish, so he [their seven-year old son; L.K.] can keep up his language.

By bringing books in Finnish, Lana enabled her son to remain transnationality active. Not only by preserving linguistic competence but also by continuing to maintain the familiar atmosphere by through the use of objects which were part of the other environment – from their home abroad. However, those were the objects that her son was used to, things that are undoubtedly objects of his home.

Each of their tours of duty changes them. They experience new things, see different places and make new friendships: "When I returned I felt sad, because in three years I gained some beautiful friendships. It was the hardest to leave the people, not so much the country, but the people." When your job is *to be a perpetual migrant* you have to learn how to leave something or somebody behind, but that does not preclude the manifold possibilities for keeping in touch, transnationally.

I'm preparing for a new posting now, and I'm going to miss it for sure. I'll miss my friends here, definitely, because we have such a good time. At some point I will miss that, just like I miss some things from Rome right now.

CONCLUSION

Keeping the transnational space active is the essence of diplomacy. Because of that, diplomacy migration provides an excellent foundation for a grounded theory regarding the creation of transnational spaces. “International mobile *elites* are often pointed to as the embodiment of the new transnational world” (Favell 2003: 399). However, it is important to emphasize the importance of distinguishing transnationality from the private modes. Based on the transnational practices of women in diplomacy interviewed in this study, I claim that the notion that such professionals as diplomats lead “borderless lives” and that they do not represent “culturally interchangeable citizens of the world” does not apply in the cases examined here. They are privileged but their lives are also, as much as any other migrants, significantly affected by boundaries, especially those determining *homemaking*.

Describing the efforts of five women in diplomacy in the process of *homemaking away from home*, I assumed a notion of home as created and continuously modified through individuals’ practices and through the presence of objects. The objects they brought with them abroad played an important role in the process of their own personal *creation of transnational spaces*. They were important because of personal attachments, practical usefulness, or the ‘everydayness’ of their presence in a person’s life (see Povrzanović Frykman 2008). They ensured a continuity of various practices and places and also of a feeling of “being at home”.

However, as it is pointed out in the article, diplomats’ lives are gender-segregated due to labour division restructuration. Any exploration of objects of material use that are used to construct a home abroad is thus a highly gendered discussion. Moreover, constructing domesticity and a sense of home is very much a “women’s task”, both at the ideological level and at the level of everyday life. Therefore, at the end I find it important to mention that Danijela’s husband, the only man who was the accompanying spouse of a woman diplomat among my interviewees, was also responsible for the “reproduction of the domestic sphere” abroad.

This detail raises the question whether women diplomats assume such responsibility (of *homemaking*) to the same extent as those that are accompanying spouses? Since these are not questions that can be answered in this article, they could be discussed as possible focus points for further field research of gender and power relations in such families.

By bringing newly acquired personal family belongings back to Croatia, the women I interviewed maintained the continuity of their personal and family history and identity, now also incorporating other elements, originating in places where they were on diplomatic duty. Objects, memories, and experiences were added to the personal and family histories, situating people in transnational contexts of personal experiences, and, often, of prolonged contact with people and places in other countries.

In the cases presented here, homes are created in different places on the basis of material elements as well as memories originating in very different places. The fact that the diplomats have to change the location of their homes relatively often opens up an especially interesting field of research of home as a steady point of reference in the search

for meaning, a starting point for the journey of self-creation (see Petridou 2001). In this paper, I have explored the material things involved in that journey. When we focus on the personal level, questioning how women in diplomacy experience migration, we come to the conclusion that to recognize the multifaceted experiences and practices involved in creating transnational spaces the attention should be shifted to the *conditions established by migration* and less on peoples' social status in the country of migration.

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POVZETEK

ŽENSKÉ V DIPLOMACIJI IN NJIHOVE ZASEBNE TRANSNACIONALNE PRAKSE

Lucija Katulić

Diplomati poklicno predstavljajo zelo specifično skupino v kontekstu transnacionalnih migrantov. Življenjski slog diplomatov narekuje pogosto premikanje preko nacionalnih meja in tako vključuje nenehne prakse transnacionalnega potovanja ljudi in predmetov. Diplomatske migracije tako nudijo izvrstno osnovo za temeljno teorijo o ustvarjanju

transnacionalnih prostorov. Članek obravnava ženske v diplomaciji skozi opise njihovih izkušenj z antropološkega vidika transnacionalnih praks migrantov.

Ta študija je v prvi meri etnografska. V raziskavi je bilo udeleženih pet diplomatik, s katerimi so bili večkrat opravljeni intervjuji v maju in juniju leta 2008. Vse osebe so bile Hrvatice, v starosti med tridesetim in štiridesetim letom, z visoko izobrazbo, vendar so bile med njimi razlike glede na družinske, nastanitvene in karijerne razmere, glede zanimanj in osebnih pogledov na svet. Zbrane podatke je glede na te specifične življenjske razmere mogoče med seboj primerjati, pri čemer je poudarek na podobnostih in razlikah v njihovih izkušnjah.

Čprav mnoge antropološke raziskave obravnavajo vlogo žensk v različnih oblikah migracij, so razmere za ženske v diplomaciji zelo specifične. Po hrvaški zakonodaji soprogu ali soprogi diplomata ni dovoljeno delati v državi začasne nastavitve. Zato mora zapustiti službo in začasno prekiniti kariero. Soprogi/e, ki ne morejo delati, pogosto prevzamejo gospodinjska opravila, skrbijo za otroke in na splošno za domače okolje. Posledično so življenja diplomatov bolj spolno segregirana zaradi prerazporeditve delitve dela med spoloma.

Druga neizogibna značilnost diplomacije je v naprej določeno trajanje nastavitve, ki ni stvar pogajanj. Čprav je zelo natančno določen čas bivanja v tujini eden izmed najbolj pomembnih pogojev antropološkega raziskovanja transnacionalnih praks migrantov, je bila ta raziskava prvenstveno usmerjena v preučevanje transnacionalnih praks žensk v diplomaciji. Prakse vključujejo prizadevanja po ustanovitvi in vzdrževanju vsakodnevne normalnosti po njihovi lastni izbiri v kraju njihovega začasnega bivanja. To je bilo deloma doseženo skozi materialne objekte, ki so jih ženske prinesle v državo, kamor so bile poslane.

Predmeti, ki so jih udeleženke raziskave odnesle v tujino, so imeli pomembno vlogo v procesu njihovega osebnega *ustvarjanja transnacionalnih prostorov*. Pomembni so bili zaradi osebnih vezi, praktične uporabnosti, ali »vsakdanjosti«, ki so jo predstavljali v življenju posamezne osebe. S prenašanjem osebne lastnine s simbolno vrednostjo v kraje, ki so bili štiri leta njihovi realni domovi, ali s tem, ko so predmete prinesle kot darilo prijateljem domov, so diplomatke – skozi te objekte – vzdrževale občutek nepretrganosti različnih praks in krajev kot tudi občutek »biti doma«.

Prizadevanja *narediti dom stran od doma* na primeru petih diplomatik, ki so sodelovale v tej raziskavi, je mogoče razumeti kot njihova osebna *ustvarjanja transnacionalnih prostorov*. Namen te raziskave je bil bolje razumeti, kako te ženske *ustvarjajo transnacionalne prostore* v zasebnih in javnih sferah. V tukaj predlagani analizi zasebna sfera vključuje sfero »doma«. V kontekstu te raziskave je dom prostor živete izkušnje – empirična in izkušnjska kategorija, ki pridobiva pomene skozi prakse. Za opis tega procesa avtorica uporablja izraz *ustvarjanje doma* kot kombinacijo praks, skozi katere prebivalci obdržijo občutek zgodovine in identitete. Dejstvo, da se vseh pet informantk in njihove družine niso družili izključno z drugimi diplomati, vodi z vidika javne sfere do zaključka, da kljub specifičnosti njihove migracije in njihovega pravnega statusa diplomati niso del enklave.

Glede na to, da je diplomacija opredeljena kot poklic z visokim ekonomskim in

družbenim statusom, ta raziskava preusmerja pozornost z manj privilegiranih na različno privilegirane transnacionalne migrante. Toda na podlagi transnacionalnih praks žensk, s katerimi so bili opravljeni intervjuji, avtorica članka ugotavlja, da imajo meje znaten vpliv tudi na življenja diplomatov, zlasti na *delanje doma*, in to kljub dejstvu, da gre za privilegirane migrante.

Namen tega članka ni teoretični diskurz, temveč opis procesa osebnega ustvarjanja transnacionalnih prostorov. Znani materialni objekti so diplomatkam in njihovim družinam olajšali nastanitev v novem okolju in istočasno pomagali pri vzdrževanju nepretrganosti njihovih zasebnih in družinskih zgodovin in identitete. V procesu *ustvarjanja doma stran od doma* je imelo ključno vlogo prepletanje družbenosti in materialnosti – vzajemnost izkušenj in spominov je postala utelešena in predstavljena z objekti, ki so jih prenašale sem in tja, in ki so tako sodelovali v ustvarjanju transnacionalnih domov.