

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**In Limbo between Cultures: a qualitative study of American and
German diplomats' everyday life and confrontations with foreign
cultures**

By

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1. Introduction

A significant development in our modern world is the collapse of space and time, which is leading to an increase in interconnectedness and diversity within the process of globalization (Koehn and Rosenau 2002; Mau, Mewes and Zimmermann 2008; Petzold 2017; Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt 2017; Vertovec 2009). While this new development brings about a novel frequency of interactions between individuals from different cultures, there is a group of individuals who partake in a long-established profession, concerning the mediation of differences that are present in cross-cultural interactions. The profession referred to here, and the object of analysis in this study, is that of the diplomat (Constantinou 2006; DerDerian 1987; Neumann 2012; Sharp 2004).

As the reason for the presence of diplomats is the goal of achieving mediation between estranged parties (Der Derian 1987), diplomats are often a present element in discussions concerning the theoretical notions of strangers and cosmopolitans (Borcan 2009; Niedner-Kalthoff 2005; Sharp 2009). While the connection between diplomats and the idea of strangers and cosmopolitans is crucial, in order to be able to recognize the obstacles and advantages present in a diplomat's life, Sharp (2009) points out that diplomats differ from strangers in the following unique way: For diplomats, the space between cultures, societies and organizations is a permanent resting place (2009: 102).

Considering diplomats to be caught in a permanent space between different cultures, the question asked in this paper is: How do diplomats create a stable life in limbo between cultures¹? This question aims to understand the practices and entities involved, which create structural

¹ The phrase "life in limbo between cultures" will be repeatedly used in the present paper. It is meant to descriptively depict the permanent resting place between cultures, which Sharp (2009) refers to.

conditions² that allow the diplomat to function in the permanent space between different cultures. The present study discusses this question by focusing on the everyday aspects of a diplomat's life based on the reasoning that (1) diplomats cannot fully dismiss their diplomatic role even in the private sphere and the believe that (2) the understanding of everyday aspect of a life in between cultures allows the present research to extent to and include other persons caught in similar phenomena, which are likely increasing in occurrence as globalization pushes the process of interconnection between individuals of different cultures (Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt 2017).

The empirical basis of this discussion is the analysis of 11 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with German and American diplomats, which will be analyzed using the Grounded Theory, as presented by Glaser and Strauss (1994). The interviews allow for the discussion of the most dominantly present components of the diplomat's everyday life in a permanent space between cultures. In order to understand these structural components of the life in limbo between cultures, this paper gives a thematic overview of the current research standing on the subject of diplomats, in respect to the cultural uniqueness they are faced with, the limits of this study, as well as an insight into the methodological approach, upon which this paper's discussion relies. Following the literature review, the presentation of the methodology, and the limits of this study, the discussion analyze the nature of the space in between cultures by discovering how exactly the diplomat is situated in this space. This will allow the discussion to advance to the analysis of different structural components, which allow diplomats to function in their life in limbo between different cultures. These components include: (1) knowledge of different languages and cultures,

² Structural conditions, as discussed in this paper, are components of the diplomat's everyday life, which help the diplomat to find stability. These conditions structure the permanent resting space between cultures.

(2) access to community and (3) presence of life maxims³. In the case of this study, structural components belong to the structural condition, which diplomats require in order to function in the everyday aspects of their life in limbo.

2. Research Approach

2.1 Current Research Standing

While the total number of sociological and anthropological studies concerning the subject of diplomacy, specifically the idea of diplomats in confrontation with foreign cultures, is sparse, as most studies stem from the fields of international relations and history (Niedner-Kalthoff 2005), there are a handful of significant studies that demonstrate sociological insights and a qualitative data analysis approach regarding the subject of diplomats and their experienced confrontation with other cultures.

A number of research pieces demonstrate a persisting interest in the intersection of identity and a cosmopolitan and/or transnational lifestyle. Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt (2017) present the patterned formation of a cosmopolitan identity, characterized by a stance of openness and transcending traditional national and cultural identities. Thereby, these identities relate to a definition of ‘non-nationals’, as Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt’s (2017) study of the expatriate community in Amsterdam concludes. Concerning the discussion of expatriates’ cultural identity formation, Mao and Shen (2015) uncover the nature of the impact of expatriates’ social networks on identity. Salazar (2021) continues this thought via a discussion of the relation between “[...] place, collective identity and socio-cultural processes of identification [...]” in greater depth (2021: 165). A similar intersection between the notions of identity and locality, in regards to meaningfulness, is discussed by Ridgway and Kirk (2020) in an analysis of 68 semi-structured

³ Maxims will be further defined and discussed in section 6 of the present paper. For now it will suffice to understand maxims as subjective principles for action (McCarthy 2006, Berger and Luckmann 1966).

interviews with globally mobile workers. Ridgeway and Kirk's (2020) study demonstrates that the active support by employers provided to the employees, through practices targeting the development of identity narratives for their expats, is necessary in order to allow the workers to create a sense of meaningfulness in their lives.

The aspect of mobility, especially in light of the cosmopolitan narrative is an important topic of discussion. Mobility, and its effects on the individual, is discussed in detail by Salazar (2015). Salazar (2015) analyzes local tourist guides and culinary tourism in order to identify the impact of mobility, specifically tourism, on the individual's display of cosmopolitan characteristics. The connection between mobility and cosmopolitanism is further questioned in the study by Mau, Mewes and Zimmermann (2008), which presents the result that individuals' border-crossing experiences and transnational social relations positively correlate to their cosmopolitan attitudes.

These studies, constructed around the interplay of identity, mobility, and cosmopolitan attitude, in other words, openness towards foreign cultures and people in the life of expatriates, support what Borcan (2009) suggests in her theoretically based analysis of diplomats as strangers and cosmopolitans. Borcan (2009) further contributes the identification of particular dangers that a diplomat may face. The diplomat is, due to their frequent relocation, potentially confronted with an identity crisis, as: "He does not know any longer where he belongs. He has become a world citizen, at home everywhere and nowhere" (2009: 39). Furthermore, the diplomat is prone to experience a crisis of culture shock, should they be unable to manage this described disorientation within a new culture (2009: 37).

In addition to Borcan's (2009) portrayal of the diplomat as a stranger in general, Sharp (2009) identifies the diplomat as a professional stranger in specific. However, rather than to rely

on existing understandings of strangers and cosmopolitans, as provided by Schutz (1944), Simmel (1950) and Hannerz (1996), Sharp (2009) points out the uniqueness which characterizes and differentiates the diplomat from these traditional discussions. The space between cultures, which is only temporary for strangers and cosmopolitans, is a permanent resting place for the diplomat (2009: 102). Sharp descriptively illuminates this idea: “[...] when diplomats are sent, the boat is pushed out, they leave, but they do not fully arrive in the place where they are to be received” (2009: 101). The notion of the diplomat being “[...] at home everywhere and nowhere” (2009: 39), which Borcan (2009) suggests, Sharp (2009) further develops by specifying the state of “being at home” to take place in a permanent resting place between cultures (2009: 101).

While these two studies are based in sociological theory and the study of international relations, Niedner-Kalthoff (2005) supplies an empirical ethnographic study of diplomats as cosmopolitans and strangers that aids as a basis for the research of the present paper. Niedner-Kalthoff’s research results in the discovery of different attitudes diplomats may portray towards the foreign culture: *Nichteinlassen*⁴, *prgamatisches Integrieren*⁵ and *holistische Ergriffenheit*⁶ (2005: 55). Through her research, Niedner-Kalthoff (2005) is able to lay out what characterizes each of these attitudes, which range from the desire to remain as distant as possible from the host country’s culture to an attempted immersion into the foreign culture respectively. Niedner-Kalthoff (2005) associates specific practices with each of these attitudes. The attitude *prgamatisches Integrieren* is the one that most diplomats display and with which the largest number of practices are associated. By taking on the aforementioned attitude, diplomats attempt to achieve a certain degree of understanding of the foreign culture which allows them to

⁴ Un-involvement

⁵ Pragmatic integration

⁶ Holistic emotional involvement

successfully participate in the everyday life and feel comfortable within the foreign culture (2005: 58). The attitude of *pragmatisches Integrieren* includes a variety of strategies with which the diplomat hopes to successfully participate in the foreign country and culture (2005: 59).

2.2 Research Question

Current research on the subject of expatriates and diplomats demonstrate that diplomats are likely prone to enter a venue of crisis concerning identity and a sense of meaningfulness (Borcan 2009; Ridgeway and Kirk 2020). At the same time, current research presents diplomats, due to their high mobility and the experiences that occur due to this mobility, to likely develop a stance of openness towards foreign cultures (Borcan 2009; Niedner-Kalthoff 2005). Consequently, diplomats qualify to be classified as cosmopolitans. However, in comparison to the traditional stranger, diplomats find themselves in a resting place between different cultures that is permanent (Sharp 2009). Additionally, Niedner-Kalthoff's (2005) discovery of the presence of strategies related to a diplomat's attitude of openness is a crucial basis for the discussion embarked upon in this paper, as her findings give a first insight into how diplomats structure their everyday life.

This paper aims to move beyond the notion of strategies of cultural acculturation⁷ and aims to add onto current research by understanding how diplomats can successfully function in a permanent resting place between cultures (Sharp 2009) by taking a look at the structural conditions that the diplomat requires in this unique space. The danger of crisis and the permanence of the inhabitation of the space between cultures must be considered as unique aspects of the everyday life of diplomats, which require specific structural conditions, in order to

⁷ Cultural acculturation is meant to refer to Niedner-Kalthoff's (2005) strategies that diplomats use specifically to organize their interactions with the foreign culture. This study attempts to move beyond this topic of discussion by identifying the space between cultures as permanent, thereby, identifying practices that remain constant no matter in which culture the diplomat is currently in and for how long.

provide the diplomat the opportunity to function properly in this permanent space between cultures.

Thereby, this paper moves beyond the analysis of the recognized cosmopolitan attitude of openness towards foreign cultures. Instead, the present discussion is focused on understanding how a functional everyday life can be constructed in limbo between cultures. In other words, what structural conditions are necessary for the diplomat to be able to maintain stability in an environment of constant movement, which is determined by a profession that requires an individual to move from one culture and country to another every two or three years, while also emphasizing the maintenance of a mandatory connection of considerable strength between the diplomat and the home culture and country.

2.3 Limits of the Present Study

The limits to this study are shortly touched upon here in order to clarify gaps, opportunities for further research and aspects that may certainly be present in the lives of diplomats, but are purposely not discussed within the scope of this paper. First of all, this paper observes diplomats in their everyday life. Thereby, the focus is not on the work they are performing but rather on how they cope with the mobile lifestyle that they lead because of their work. Security concerns are one of the main reasons which prevent the interviewed diplomats from going into detail concerning insights that touched on aspects of their work.

Secondly, the present discussion is not an analysis of individuals being confronted with the role of the diplomat; neither does this discussion take place within a scope that has room for a network analysis. In this paper there do appear opportunities for both approaches to provide further valuable insights. This has been recognized, however, the limited resources for this research do not provide the opportunity to further explore these thoughts. Still, a mention of

these is made in order to contribute opportunities for possible future research on the topic of diplomats living between cultures.

Finally, the structural components of the diplomat's everyday life in limbo between cultures, which are mentioned in this paper, are by no means an exhaustive account of all the components that may be present in a diplomat's life. The three components discussed here are merely the most dominantly observed aspects of the structural condition that seems to contribute to the diplomats' stability in the life in limbo between cultures. Keeping these limits in mind, the next section will present the methodological approach of the underlying research for this study.

2.4 Methodology

In order to contribute further knowledge towards the conditions required for functioning in a permanent space in between cultures, this paper explores aspects of a diplomat's everyday life, with the aim of identifying structural components. To contribute a meaningful discussion on this topic, 11 one-hour long, semi-structured interviews with six American and five German diplomats were conducted, transcribed and analyzed. A balanced amount of female and male diplomats were interviewed. The American interviewees are all considered Foreign Service Officers overseas and have all spent a significant amount of time abroad; therefore, they are all advanced in their careers. Of the German diplomats, the interviewees are more diverse regarding the positions they work in, as well as the time they have already been active in the Foreign Service. The interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom. The transcriptions and analysis were performed using the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA.

The questions asked during these interviews were aimed at achieving a resulting insight into aspects of the everyday life of the diplomat. Therefore, the diplomats were asked about their family life, health care, the organization and process of moving from one country to the next,

activities done in their free time, as well as the rather mundane aspects of life, such as grocery shopping. Using a theoretically inductive approach of analysis via the Grounded Theory, as presented by Glaser and Strauss (1994), the data underwent an initial cycle of open coding, followed by the process of focused coding (Saldana 2013) to create categories from which theoretical conclusions could be drawn⁸.

The results of this analysis demonstrate that diplomats live in a space between cultures in their everyday life. While Sharp (2009) analyzes the space in between cultures in respect to the diplomat's work-related practices, this study provides an insight into the pervasive influences of living in limbo between cultures on the stability of the everyday life. In other words, while Sharp focuses on the responsibilities of diplomats viewed through the lens of international relations, the present discussion aims to understand how the profession of being a diplomat influences the everyday life of individuals practicing this profession. This study demonstrates that certain structural components create conditions that facilitate the diplomat's ability to function in their everyday life within a permanent space between cultures. These components are: (1) knowledge of languages and cultures, (2) access to community and (3) presence of life maxims. The components presented here have been chosen based on their dominant presence in the research data and are discussed in the following sections.

3. Diplomats in a Permanent Space between Cultures

3.1 Diplomats: A Relevant Definition for the Present Study

The first argument of this paper is that diplomats, while at one moment or another may be classified as strangers and cosmopolitans, are unique because they permanently reside in a space between cultures (Sharp 2009). Prior to discussing diplomats in this unique position in more

⁸ Focused coding, as presented by Saldana (2013), pays attention to the most frequent codes in the data. This helps to develop the "most salient categories" (2013: 213).

detail, this sub-section will provide a general insight into the understanding of the phenomenon of diplomacy and diplomats.

Firstly, it must be noted that the field of political science contributes central definitions to the discussion of diplomacy, which aid in the understanding of this paper's discussion. Der Derian (1987) describes diplomacy "[...] as a mediation between estranged individuals, groups or entities [...]" (1987: 93). By acknowledging difference, which cause a state of alienation between individuals, this definition establishes the opportunity to remove diplomacy from the field of international relations, where diplomacy is associated with the relationship maintained between sovereign states (Berridge and James 2001; Satow 1932).

Der Derian's (1987) definition moves the subject of diplomacy into a space where difference and estrangement are central aspects to be considered in an exploration on diplomats. Therefore, Der Derian's (1987) argument supplies significant reason to examine diplomats in a discussion aimed at further understanding the permanent space diplomats inhabit between different cultures. This is supported by Sharp's (2004) conclusion regarding Der Derian's (1987) definition, as it points to the fact that diplomats live in a space of difference, in which they attempt to make "[...] the strange seem more familiar [...]" or make "[...] the familiar seem more strange [...]" (2004: 371). Diplomats are thereby actively confronted with the presence of and the objective to overcome difference.

Constantinou (2006) uses Der Derian's concept of estrangement to expand the discussion to an area of nonprofessional, experiential diplomacy of everyday life. Constantinou (2006) coins the term homo-diplomacy. In addition to describing the everyday aspect of diplomacy, this term includes the concept of diplomacy as an idea which does not only attend to the estrangement of the Other but also considers the estrangement of the Self (2006: 352). Cornago (2019) builds

upon the idea of the estrangement of the Self in his discussion of diplomatic knowledge as heterology. By considering diplomatic knowledge as heterology, diplomatic knowledge does not only include objective knowledge about a country, people or profession, but also the subjective knowledge that is gathered as the individual reflects upon the Self via the reoccurring confrontation with the Other (2019: 7). Understanding diplomats as mediators between estranged Others, as well as their own estranged Self, in a space of difference allows the present discussion to advance by taking a look at the diplomat as a stranger and cosmopolitan in order to be able to identify how exactly this space of difference or, in other words, life in limbo between cultures takes shape.

3.2 Culture: A Definition and Overview of the Concept

In order to proceed with a discussion of the diplomat's permanent state of resting in a space between cultures, an adequate understanding of the notion of culture is necessary. Therefore, two different approaches concerning the discussion of culture are presented here. Parsons (1972) reviews culture in a comparison and analysis of society's cultural and social systems. Parsons commences his discussion with the fact that society is based on solidarity (1972: 254). Crucial to society is the cultural system and the social system. The cultural system, which is of primary interest in the present discussion, is concerned with patterns of culture, in other words, the meanings of cultural symbols systems (1972: 255). Central to the cultural system of meanings is, for example, "[...] language which is a medium of expression and communication very specifically at symbolic levels expressed in the language, for example, both in beliefs and sentiments and in various modes of overt action" (1972: 254). Parsons further enters a detailed discussion of the moral-evaluative aspect of the cultural system, which is

concerned with the expectations that the cultural system orients towards its individuals regarding the procedure of social interaction (1972: 256).

While Parsons (1972) presents culture in a reflection of the moral-evaluative aspect of the cultural system of society, which places certain expectations on individuals in social interactions within a cultural system of meaning, Swidler (1986) explores culture's influence on action. Thereby, Swidler (1986) appears in agreement with Parsons' (1972) central notion; culture heavily influences the individual's actions, which determine the procedure of social interaction. However, contrary to the traditional notion of culture, which Parsons (1972) presents, as an element of guidance in social action via the means of expectations and values towards which actions are oriented, Swidler argues culture to be a "[...] repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action' (1986: 273).

The analysis of these two different approaches concerning the concept of culture allows for the general understanding that culture encompasses elements which portray a deciding factor of the shape in which social action in one culture or another occurs, either by deciding values and expectations or by providing a repertoire of skills, habits and styles. While the discussion of both sides can take the shape of an exciting exchange of ideas, this paper does not provide the scope for such a discussion to take place. A general understanding of culture is achieved, which allows for the continuation of the exploration of the diplomat's presence in a permanent space between cultures via the consideration of the notion of the cosmopolitan and the stranger.

3.3 Diplomats as Cosmopolitans

The discussion of cosmopolitanism takes place in a number of different areas. The present discussion on cosmopolitanism must be differentiated from the notion of cosmopolitanism as a socio-cultural condition, a philosophy/worldview or as a political project

(Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Instead, the consideration of diplomats as cosmopolitans belongs to the overarching theme of cosmopolitanism, as presented by Salazar (2021), as “[...] an attitudinal or dispositional orientation [...]” and “[...] a mode of practice or competence” (2021: 168). In order to create an in-depth understanding of cosmopolitanism as an attitudinal orientation and a mode of competence, an analysis of the notion of the cosmopolitan, as presented by Hannerz (1996) is valuable at this point.

A discussion of two different characteristics allows for the notion of the cosmopolitan to take shape: cosmopolitanism as a mindset and as a competence (Hannerz 1996). First off, Hannerz (1996) declares cosmopolitanism to be a mindset, which displays a “[...] willingness to engage with the Other” (1996: 103). Furthermore, Salazar (2015) describes this mindset as an “[...] openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity” (2015: 51). Therefore, the cosmopolitan mindset is defined by an open attitude towards others of different cultures.

Secondly, cosmopolitanism is the competence of being able to function in another culture, which is achieved by “[...] listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting” (1996: 103). Thereby, access to another culture is a prerequisite for the development of such a competence, as argued by Gunesch (2006). According to Hannerz (1996), this creates the possibility for “[...] maneuvering more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings” (1996: 103). This competence can be exercised in two different ways: (1) the cosmopolitan can pick and choose those elements of the foreign culture that suits them in order to develop their own unique perspective, or (2) the cosmopolitan can surrender and accept all aspects of the foreign culture as a package deal (1996: 103). However, the cosmopolitan is always in control and can exit the foreign culture at any time (1996: 104). Petzold (2017) suggests that precisely the awareness that

the cosmopolitan maintains of their ability to exit the foreign culture at any time, in combination with the cosmopolitan's skill to handle the culture specific system of meaning, lends the cosmopolitan superiority over the foreign culture (2017: 170). Gunesch (2006) argues that the cosmopolitan competence can be regarded as knowledge, while the engagement with the foreign culture, motivated by the open mindset, is a cosmopolitan attitude (2006: 214). Therefore, the cosmopolitan competence is ability as well as knowledge, which allow the cosmopolitan to maneuver a foreign culture effectively.

In regards to the diplomat as a cosmopolitan, prior research demonstrates that the diplomat is a "flexible cosmopolitan" (Niedner-Kalthoff 2005). As a flexible cosmopolitan, the diplomat does not display Hannerz' (1996) cosmopolitan characteristics to the extent that a cosmopolitan, in the traditional sense, would. The main deviance that diplomats as flexible cosmopolitans display, in comparison to the traditional understanding of cosmopolitans, is that they cannot choose between the two different methods of exercising cosmopolitan competence (Borcan 2009). Borcan (2009) suggests that diplomats cannot choose between taking particularly convenient elements of the other culture and surrendering to all aspects of the foreign culture. Instead, the diplomat must find a balance between these two options. This balance must allow the diplomat to accept all elements of the foreign culture, while preventing them from a full immersion, in order to maintain loyalty to the home culture and country (2009: 33).

This claim is supported by Niedner-Kalthoff's (2005) research, which presents diplomats to be extremely cautious of a full immersion in the foreign culture (2005: 21). The understanding of diplomats as flexible cosmopolitans demonstrates that diplomats are greatly interested in the foreign culture, due to the mindset of the cosmopolitan that is characterized by a stance of openness towards other cultures. However, diplomats cannot stay distant from the foreign culture

by only picking certain parts of it, which appeal to them. In other words, diplomats are open and accepting of all aspects of the foreign culture but not attached to, nor identifying with any aspect in particular. At the same time, diplomats cannot surrender fully to the other culture. A full immersion is thereby not possible. The notion of the diplomat as a flexible cosmopolitan provides a first insight into how the diplomat is in limbo between cultures: on the one hand they must be interested and accepting of all parts of the foreign culture, on the other hand they must remain distant and committed to the home culture.

3.4 Diplomats as Strangers

Closely related to the discussion of cosmopolitans is the notion of the stranger (Ossewaarde 2007). The central aspect of the discussion of diplomats as strangers is the understanding of the objective attitude that is associated with the concept of the stranger. The theoretical basis to analyze diplomats as strangers are the notions put forth by Simmel (1950) and Schutz (1944).

Simmel (1950) understands the stranger to be “[...] the person who comes today and stays tomorrow” (1950: 1). Therefore, the stranger aims to achieve acceptance within the group, however, it is without a doubt that they do not belong to the group. The stranger thus unites nearness and remoteness, which results in the stranger’s objective attitude. The objectivity allows the stranger to be granted special access to the group. This access is rooted in the stranger’s objective knowledge and un-involvement. Furthermore, the stranger’s objectivity is the root cause for the stranger’s feeling of freedom from the regular perception and patterns of action practiced by the local group (Simmel 1950).

Schutz (1944) similarly identifies an objective attitude to be associated with the stranger, which goes hand-in-hand with the stranger’s doubtful loyalty (1944: 506). Schutz’ stranger’s

objectivity is founded in the desire to acquire full knowledge of the elements that belong to the in-group's cultural patterns, in order to be able to adapt to the self-explanatory patterns of behavior of the in-group. Additionally, the stranger's objectivity results from experiencing the limits of the concept of "thinking as usual", which directly correlates to the "relative natural conception of the world", which in-group members share⁹. Therefore, the stranger's ability to remain objective is based on the action of not taking the in-group's member's natural conception of the world for granted. The stranger's doubtful loyalty then results in the fact that the stranger does not seem to accept the in-group's entire cultural patterns, which is due to the stranger being a "[...] cultural hybrid on the verge of two different patterns of group life, not knowing to which of them he belongs" (1944: 507). Ossewaarde's (2007) comparison of Simmel's and Schutz' stranger displays that while Simmel's stranger is invited into the group, Schutz' stranger struggles to achieve acceptance. Furthermore, Simmel's stranger's objectivity is appreciated by locals, whereas Schutz' stranger's objective attitude is frowned upon (2007: 3).

Borcan (2009) and Niedner-Kalthoff (2005) identify the diplomat's ability to remain objective. Niedner-Kalthoff points out that the diplomat takes on the role of a "designated stranger": the diplomat does not spontaneously appear; they have a position to fill (2005: 19). Furthermore, the objectivity of the stranger is perceived as a positive attribute of the diplomat. The objectivity of the diplomat and the freedom from the cultural patterns of the in-groups is a central aspect of the diplomatic profession (2005: 20). Concerning Schutz' understanding of the stranger, the diplomat appears to gather objective knowledge about the group from the outside; however, the diplomat also actively utilizes this knowledge to organize their everyday life in a

⁹ Thinking as usual refers to a system of knowledge, which members of the in-group rely on and take for granted. This knowledge is incoherent, inconsistent, as well as only partially clear. Nonetheless, it provides a standardized scheme of cultural pattern, which results in trustworthy recipes with which the social world can be interpreted (1944: 501).

manner which allows for successful social action (2005: 20). Therefore, diplomats display attributes of Schutz' and Simmel's stranger.

What is unique to the diplomat is that they continuously re-enter a new foreign group and have to undergo these experiences repeatedly. Borcan (2009) further contributes to this analysis by recognizing that the diplomat's inability to fully surrender to the foreign culture, due to the required and maintained loyalty towards the home culture. This results in the diplomat's characterization as a stranger who does not seek full immersion and retains the ability to escape the foreign culture at any time. This further reinforces the diplomat's ability to remain objective.

The analysis of the diplomat as a stranger concludes in the finding that the diplomat's objectivity is generally regarded positively, as in the case of Simmel's stranger. However, the diplomat displays attributes of Schutz' stranger because they are confronted with everyday social situations in which they attempt to understand and adapt to the thinking as usual and its resulting patterns of behavior within the local group.

This discussion of the phenomenon of the stranger further allows the development of the understanding of the diplomat's life in between cultures. However, the central difference between the diplomat and the stranger lies in the fact that the diplomat cannot and does not seek full inclusion in the local group. In other words, the diplomat resides permanently in the space between cultures, while the stranger aims to leave this space. A further difference is that the diplomat is faced with a new local cultural group every few years. These deciding differences between the diplomat and the stranger illuminate the diplomat's position of permanence in the space between cultures. Thereby, the discussion of the diplomat as a stranger not only allows for a contribution to the understanding of the diplomat's life in limbo between cultures, but also demonstrates what the notion of a permanent inhabitation of this space between cultures entails.

Having established a theoretical comprehension of the life of diplomats in a permanent space between cultures, this discussion will now build upon the acquired understanding via a discussion of the empirical data collected in the interviews with American and German diplomats.

3.5 American and German Diplomats: Tours, Posts and Roles

The present study of German and American diplomats allows for an in-depth discussion of the influences of the diplomatic profession on the diplomat's everyday life. American diplomats are classified as Foreign Service Officers and can choose one of five different career tracks: consular officers, economic officers, management officers, political officers, and public diplomacy officers (U.S. Department of State). The interviewed diplomats are diverse in regards to the different career tracks they represent.

German diplomats are similarly divided into different career tracks: Hoeherer Dienst¹⁰, Gehobener Dienst¹¹ and Mittlerer Dienst¹² (Auswaertiges Amt). The different career tracks differ in the work that they require the diplomat to do as well as the prerequisites that the applicant needs to present in order to be eligible for a certain career track. Furthermore, the different career tracks differentiate concerning the time that can be spent abroad. Diplomats of the Hoeherer Dienst are required to serve more home tours, whereas diplomats active in the Mittlerer Dienst, for example, can stay abroad for a longer time period. The interviewed German diplomats of this study can also be understood as a diverse group of interviewees, particularly when taking their diverse career paths into consideration.

The interviews conducted with German and American diplomats display that a common characteristic is the frequent movement from one country to another. Being located in a foreign

¹⁰ Highest Grade Service

¹¹ Higher Grade Service

¹² Medium Grade Service

country is referred to as being “on post” or “on tour”. Being on post usually lasts between two to five years. A central difference between German and American diplomats is the total time that can be spent abroad without having to return to the home country. American diplomat interviewees have all spent ten or more years abroad without being required to do a home tour in Washington D.C. between posts abroad. In contrast, German diplomats are obligated to do a home tour every one or two tours abroad. Nevertheless, American diplomats regularly take part in the experience of “home leave”. Home leave is an obligatory six week stay in the United States between tours in order to give the diplomat the opportunity to reconnect with the U.S. The interview excerpt below provides an insight into the practice of home leave:

“[...] it’s not for the family members; it’s for the direct higher employee. The reason they insist on home leave in between tours is because they don’t want their direct higher employees to become estranged from the United States. They want them to come back to the United States and become refamiliarized with America.”¹³

This demonstrates that while American diplomats have the freedom to stay abroad for a large amount of time, there is significant effort made by the Foreign Service to ensure that the diplomat stays in touch with their home country.

In comparison, German diplomats, especially the ones working in the Hoeherer Dienst, are required to serve a home tour after one or two tours abroad. Therefore, these diplomats spend half of their diplomatic career abroad and the other half of their diplomatic career in Berlin, Germany (Auswaertiges Amt). This ensures that diplomats do not get too detached from their home country and culture. The emphasis placed on German diplomats to remain closely connected to their home culture is further demonstrated in an interview with a German diplomat who had lived abroad for ten years prior to joining the German Foreign Service:

¹³ Kate, interview with author, May 2021.

“In the oral exam, there were worries that I had remained too long in one place [...]. Therefore, they wanted to test me first, which is why they gave me a temporary contract for two years.”¹⁴

A different German diplomat recalled the insight shared by a colleague who had dual citizenship. According to the diplomat’s recollection, this colleague had been asked during the exam, with which citizenship they identified themselves more¹⁵. This demonstrates that Germany, as well as the US place importance on diplomats to remain familiar with their home country. However, a central difference is the fact that American diplomats can spend a longer time abroad than German diplomats. Therefore, the strategies for achieving the diplomat’s maintained connection to their home country and culture vary.

A further common theme between German and American diplomats is the awareness that they cannot dismiss their role as a diplomat in their private, everyday life. A German diplomat shares that even as a private person, they must remain conscious of how they act, as other people can and likely will take notice of their behavior:

“[...] I am not only a private person abroad; I also represent in my private life. If I want to or not, I am always representing Germany a little bit. That is connected with my responsibilities [and] title [...]. People will watch that you behave accordingly.”¹⁶

Similarly, an American diplomat gives an insight into the responsibility to represent the US abroad and the effect this has on them as an individual. It must be noted that this diplomat has the citizenship of another country in addition to their American citizenship, as they were born and raised in that respective country.

¹⁴ Tyler, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

¹⁵ Lucas, interview with author, May 2021.

¹⁶ Tyler, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

“It’s our job to show American culture, to spread it around and to make people enthusiastic about it. And explain it mostly. [...] I learned how to be an American by being in the American Embassy.”¹⁷

In this case, the diplomat even notices how they have been able to privately identify to a greater degree with the American culture, by being responsible for its representation. Another American diplomat recalls how representing the US in their private everyday life, influences the ability to make friends abroad.

“[...] as a diplomat, you are always representing the United States [...]. Very often, sadly, in many, many places there is always an undercurrent of visa. Someone is trying to be your friend because they want your help in getting them a visa. That’s always an undercurrent; you can’t get away from it.”¹⁸

This diplomat shares that they have had difficulties making friends with locals because there is always the chance that some individuals want to befriend the diplomat in order to take advantage of the benefits such a friendship may bring, such as assistance with acquiring a visa to the US, as described in the interview. This understanding contributes to the diplomat’s awareness of their role as a diplomat in everyday life.

The presented insights provide an overview of the major elements that influence a diplomat’s everyday life: frequent movement between countries, attachment to the home country and the pervasiveness of the diplomatic profession in various aspects of the diplomat’s everyday life. Specifically, what is demonstrated is that while diplomats rotate every 2-5 years, the American, as well as the German Foreign Service, undertakes efforts in order to ensure that their employees do not get too estranged from their home country and culture through a thorough

¹⁷ Diana, interview with author, May 2021.

¹⁸ Lisa, interview with author, May 2021.

hiring process and the practices of home tours and home leave. Furthermore, what is recognizable is that diplomats cannot dismiss their professional role even in their private life. It is crucial to keep this in mind, as this paper advances with a discussion of everyday aspects of diplomats' lives.

3.6 Diplomats in Limbo between Cultures

The theoretical as well as empirical analysis in this section provides a greater insight into what Sharp (2009) describes to occur “[...] when diplomats are sent, the boat is pushed out, they leave, but they do not fully arrive in the place where they are to be received” (2009: 101). On the one hand, diplomats, as flexible cosmopolitans, are interested in the foreign culture and demonstrate the competence to remain distant from it, while also being able to accept it. On the other hand, diplomats, as strangers, display a positively perceived attitude of objectivity, while also trying to gather enough knowledge about the local culture to adapt to the existing patterns of behaviors. These characteristics of cosmopolitans and strangers are helpful in order to understand the notion of diplomats being in a space between cultures. Diplomats have to show interest as well as adapt to the local culture to a certain extent, while also being required to remain objective and prevent a full immersion in the foreign culture.

The presented data displays that diplomats are confronted with multiple foreign cultures throughout their career; however, their profession does not allow for them to get immersed into the foreign culture, as there is effort, actively undertaken, such as the phenomenon of home leave, to ensure that diplomats remain committed to their home country and hinder the unwelcomed phenomenon of “going native”¹⁹. This highlights the aspect of Sharp’s (2009) boat

¹⁹ Going native is a phenomenon commonly associated with ethnographers who lose their perspectives as researchers and get immersed in their field site. However, Hannerz (1996) utilizes this term to describe the cosmopolitan’s surrender to the foreign culture and Niedner-Kalthoff (2005) then applies this notion to describe the process of diplomats assimilating to the host culture of their post.

metaphor in which the diplomat never truly arrives in the host country and culture. This carries over into their everyday life, since diplomats cannot dismiss their professional role as diplomats, as the previously presented data demonstrates. This further supports Niedner-Kalthoff's (2005) argument that diplomats take on the role of the "designated stranger" (2005: 19).

The discussion in this section allows the notion that Sharp (2009) presents in his discussion on the permanent space between cultures, which diplomats are confronted with, to be further explored (2009: 104). While this section achieves a theoretical understanding of the permanent space between cultures and demonstrates the existence and dimension of this phenomenon, by highlighting the patterns of rotation and the pervasion of the role of the diplomat into the everyday life of diplomats, this discussion does not expand beyond proving the existence of the phenomenon of a life in limbo, which diplomats experience. Therefore, the next sections of this paper will aim to understand how diplomats can function effectively when they are confronted not only with the traditional challenges of cosmopolitans and strangers, but also with the aspect of permanence, which characterizes the inhabitation of the space between cultures. The following sections will embark on this exploration by illuminating dominant structural patterns present in the diplomat's everyday life in limbo between cultures. The structural components discussed in this paper are: (1) knowledge of language and culture, (2) access to community and (3) presence of life maxims.

4. Language: Achieving a Strong Basis for a Successful Life in Limbo

4.1 Language as a Key Competence of Mobile Workers

The ability to speak multiple languages, specifically the language of the home country and that of the foreign country in which the diplomat is located, is a key aspect of the diplomat's life. Gunesch (2006) directly relates the multilingual ability of an individual to their

cosmopolitan attitude (2006: 217). This link is established on the grounds of a study in which multilingual persons are analyzed via semi-structured interviews to conclude that there are three ideal types of cosmopolitans, which directly correlate to the individual's language abilities. The greatest multilingual skills relate to individuals typified as "Interactive Cosmopolitans", who have gained a new dimension of "[...] individual intercultural competence and communication" (2006: 221). Gunesh thereby links language to the notion of cosmopolitan competence, which he describes as "knowledge" (2006: 214).

Koehn and Rosenau (2002) discuss the knowledge of the language of the foreign culture as one key skill that belongs to the broader category of behavioral transnational competence. While the aforementioned study mainly discusses transnational migrants interacting in an international space with similar counterparts, Niedner-Kalthoff (2005) also considers the aspect of language, in other words, communicative competence, in regards to the importance of being able to navigate life in a foreign country as a diplomat. Language in the life of diplomats is a central medium to achieve communicative and cognitive communication and competence (2005: 60). Language, which mainly receives attention as a transnational or cosmopolitan competence, is analyzed in this section as a basic structural condition in the diplomat's life in limbo between cultures.

4.2 American and German Diplomats: Language

The German and the American Foreign Service support diplomats in learning local languages, by providing language trainings and language classes, oftentimes prior to, as well as during their stays abroad. In these language trainings, diplomats do not only learn linguistic skills; knowledge about the culture that practices this language is also provided²⁰. As knowledge about the language and knowledge about the culture are closely intertwined, this section will

²⁰ Sophie, interview with author, June 2021.

consider the knowledge of the language to also always cross into the knowledge of the culture and vice-versa.

Diplomats approach knowledge of the foreign language and culture with two different goals in mind. Specifically, the knowledge of language and culture is important for the diplomat in order to (1) be able to achieve successful communication with locals and (2) signal openness and interest towards locals by learning their language. The ability to communicate in order to achieve successful interactions is extremely important and perhaps the most obvious reason for learning a language. Learning the foreign language is important, since such interactions make diplomats feel secure and comfortable in the foreign country:

“It makes all the difference when you can communicate, even on a basic level, with the people around you. I noticed that it makes me feel more comfortable and secure, and of course it’s very practical [...]”²¹

In addition to feeling secure and comfortable, diplomats also feel more effective when they are able to communicate successfully in the local language:

“[...] you discover as you go along, if you do enough tours, particularly back-to-back tours that your language skills get much, much better. Then the work becomes more interesting and more rewarding because you’re more effective.”²²

These insights demonstrate that the ability to have successful communications and interactions in the foreign culture is very rewarding to the diplomat. However, to learn the foreign language of the locals is also beneficial in a different way: it allows the diplomat to demonstrate interest in the local culture. The benefit of the demonstrated interest in the culture, which is tied to learning

²¹ Diana, interview with author, May 2021.

²² Henry, interview with author, May 2021.

the local language, is further presented in multiple interviews throughout this study. One diplomat discussed the difficulties of learning Azerbaijani:

“I don’t know yet how perfectly I will be able to speak Azerbaijani within the next three years. I don’t think I will be fluent but I do hope that the people will at least recognize that I am putting in effort and that I am opening myself and my home. I am not just the distant diplomat but I am also the present individual.”²³

Here, the intense relationship between learning the language and demonstrating openness and interest towards another country’s people is emphasized by this diplomat’s insights and actions. While this diplomat learns the knowledge of the foreign language in hope of its positive effects, such as the access to the local people and their culture, another diplomat shares how these effects, specifically the locals’ recognition of diplomats’ efforts, may take shape:

“I can say, according to my experiences in [...], where I spent a lot of time understanding their history, their actors and where I also openly approached the people [...]. They understand at some point that I know their history and their culture, and that was reflected. That was reflected with the results that, for example, the [...] granted me relatively free access to their territory.”²⁴

This demonstrates that learning the language and culture of the locals of a foreign country is not only important for effective communication, but also for building a relationship, which is only possible if the locals accept the diplomat. In order for locals to greet the diplomat with a stance of openness, it is necessary for the diplomat to open themselves first, by demonstrating interest in the local group, as well as willingness to put in effort to understand and learn about the locals, which is done by obtaining objective knowledge about their language, history, and culture.

²³ Tyler, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

²⁴ Daniel, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

The importance associated with the knowledge of language by diplomats is clearly visible when diplomats discuss the language skills of their children. One diplomat discusses raising their children to be trilingual, as they are fluent in German and their spouse is fluent in English and French. In addition to the diversity of the languages spoken between the parents, the parent's role as a diplomat further provides the opportunity for the children to have lived in the United States and the possibility for the children to be enrolled in a French school at their new post. The diplomat consciously speaks multiple languages at home and has chosen to send their children to a French school to maximize their children's access to multiple languages, as they believe it is a valuable enrichment in their children's lives:

“We are trying to do three languages [...] It just really makes sense: I speak German, my [spouse] speaks French. We are currently in an English-speaking country. This summer we are moving to a French speaking country. That is really great for the children. They can really only profit from this.”²⁵

Similarly, another diplomat emphasizes the importance their family places on their children learning Mandarin. For example, they and their spouse employed a Taiwanese nanny, in order to further develop their children's Mandarin skills. When asked why they employed a Taiwanese nanny, the diplomat elaborated:

“[...] when we had been in mainland China prior to that [being in Taiwan], we had a Chinese nanny. So, our son at the time, he was an infant to a toddler, was already learning to speak mandarin and we wanted to continue that in Taiwan.”²⁶

The practice of employing nannies who speak the language and are familiar with the culture of the country a diplomat is posted in occurs in another interview with an American diplomat who

²⁵ Maia, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

²⁶ Henry, interview with author, May 2021.

presents similar reasoning. This makes apparent that diplomats value languages highly and want to create opportune conditions for their children to engage with foreign languages to ideally master these.

4.3 Language as a Key Structural Component of the Life in Limbo

The diplomat greatly values and relies on knowing and learning a foreign language and the culture, with which it is associated, in order to achieve two things: (1) to be able to participate in successful communication and (2) to signal to the local people that the diplomat is open towards and interested in the foreign culture. The importance to learn languages, in order to navigate spaces between cultures, is emphasized by diplomats when they discuss that they desire their children to acquire proficiency in multiple languages.

The previous discussion of culture in this paper uses Parsons' (1972) argument to demonstrate the connection between culture and language. Parsons argues that language is a central aspect of the cultural system of meaning (1972: 254). This supports the recognized importance of diplomats learning the language and culture of the foreign country in order to create a stable everyday life between cultures. In order to examine the role of language in an individual's everyday life, the theoretical arguments made by Schutz and Luckmann (2003) are valuable as they provide a further approach towards understanding how language facilitates living with the reoccurring confrontation with different cultures.

Schutz and Luckmann (2003) argue that language directly correlates to the relative natural conception of the world. The central structure of language demonstrates the central structure of meaning of the correlating natural conception of the world (2003: 336). In consideration of the previous discussion of the diplomat as a stranger, as presented by Schutz (1944), the discovered language practices of diplomats may be analyzed in the following way.

The recognition of the connection between language and the natural conception of the world allows the analysis of language as an element of the in-group's thinking as usual, (since the in-groups thinking as usual directly correlates to the natural conception of the world). As argued by Schutz (1944), the stranger's failure to utilize and commit to the in-group's thinking as usual results in the stranger's objectivity. Keeping in mind that while the central difference between diplomats and strangers is the diplomat's absence of the desire to integrate to the in-group (Borcan 2009; Niedner-Kalthoff 2005), learning a certain degree of the thinking as usual of the in-group is nevertheless welcomed and required in order for the diplomat to be able to function in their everyday life, as well as to achieve successful mediation between the culturally different entities.

The recognition that language is part of the thinking as usual of the in-group provides a new approach of understanding the effectiveness that diplomats may achieve in their communication by speaking the foreign culture's language, which extends beyond the currently recognized benefits, which Gunesch (2006) presents as "[...] highly open and interactive two-way cultural access and engagement" (2006: 220). According to Schutz (1944), learning the foreign culture's language allows the stranger, in this scenario the diplomat, to understand the self-explanatory patterns of the foreign culture to a certain extent.

This understanding allows for a further comprehension of the second aim that diplomats keep in mind, when learning a foreign language: to signal to the local people that the diplomat is interested in, open towards and respectful of the foreign culture. By learning, or attempting to learn, the foreign culture's language, in other words, aspects of the in-groups thinking as usual, the diplomat, as a stranger, is lessening the degree to which they are regarded to display doubtful loyalty towards the locals' cultural patterns. While the diplomat, as a designated stranger

(Niedner-Kalthoff 2005), is not greeted with the same amount of doubtful loyal that a regular stranger, who seeks full immersion, would be, the diplomat nevertheless has the opportunity to demonstrate acceptance of the foreign cultural patterns by showing interest in learning the in-groups thinking as usual.

This demonstrates that by gathering knowledge of the local culture's thinking as usual, specifically by learning their language and cultural patterns; the diplomat is able to create a strong basis for a successful life in limbo. Learning the foreign culture's language allows the diplomat to be an effective communicator, while also achieving an acceptance of the diplomat within the foreign culture by overcoming the in-groups attitude of doubtful loyalty towards the stranger. This creates an important structural condition for the diplomat that prevents a state of crisis²⁷ when they are permanently residing in a space between cultures.

5. Community: A Critical Structural Component of the Life in Limbo

5.1 An Overview of the Aspect of Community in the Lives of Mobile Workers

While the topic of diplomatic culture, a culture unique to the diplomatic corps, regardless of the individual diplomat's heritage, is discussed in previous literature (Bolewski 2008; Sharp 2004), the notion of the role of community receives comparatively little attention in the discussion of diplomats, when considering the centrality this phenomenon takes on in the everyday lives of diplomats. While not discussing of communities that are specific to diplomats, Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt (2017) examine the cosmopolitan characteristics of expatriate communities, specifically those of an expatriate community in Amsterdam. The results of this study show that members of the expatriate community define themselves as non-nationals and draw hard boundaries between their "cosmopolitan us" and the local (mono)culture. Salazar (2021) adds to this discussion by considering the notion of belonging. Specifically, belonging is

²⁷ Borcan (2009) discusses a crisis of culture shock to result from the diplomat's state of disorientation (2009: 37).

discussed to exist apart from locality; meaning that belonging is no longer considered to be territorial (2021: 168). While these two studies present an insight into the relevance of the discussion of community concerning transnational migrants, the aspect of community within a diplomat's life remains rather unclear.

5.2 American and German Diplomats: Community

The aspect of community, while actively discussed by American and German diplomats, is presented in two different ways. American diplomats tend to emphasize the importance of the diplomatic community to a much greater extent than the interviewed German diplomats. However, the diplomatic community is not the only community that is discussed. Many diplomats, German as well as American, tend to have reusable strategies for finding their own community within and/or outside the diplomatic, expat and/or international “bubble”.²⁸

While some diplomats demonstrate a desire to remain more distant from the diplomatic bubble than others, there is no question of the fact that the diplomatic bubble is exceptionally strong. A German diplomat shares that most of their friends are also active in the Foreign Service:

“I am not staying in touch with many friends, most of the people I stay in touch with, really close friends, all work for the Department of State.”²⁹

Another diplomat provides an insight into the reason behind the observed fact that many diplomats tend to stay more in touch with other diplomats than individuals that would be considered locals:

²⁸ The term “bubble” is repeatedly used throughout the interviews by the interviewees themselves. It is here taken over to describe the diplomatic, international or expat community that exists apart from whatever local communities may exist in the country where the diplomat is located.

²⁹ Maia, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

“At one point, everyone looks at me and thinks: ‘What is going on with them?’ because I just talk way too much about the international bubble. Because, if you say: ‘My buddy is Italian, with him I do this and my other friend from Russia, with him I do this.’, then everyone says: ‘What is he even doing over there?’”³⁰

This demonstrates that one causal factor for staying more connected to other diplomats is the fact that individuals, who do not partake in experiences similar to the ones described by this diplomat, may respond to the diplomat’s experience with confusion and disbelief. Additionally, the reoccurring theme of “unique camaraderie” is often mentioned, when interviewing recently retired diplomats and asking them what exactly they miss most about the diplomatic lifestyle. The theme of “unique camaraderie” is often further elaborated on in the following way:

“What I do miss is the unique camaraderie, because only someone who’s done this for a living can understand. There is a tight camaraderie of officers who know what people go through and the hardships involved, you know, not seeing families and missing birthdays [...]”³¹

This diplomat not only demonstrates that they miss the strong bonds with other diplomats; they also provide an insight into further reasons which explain the existence and strength of these bonds. In addition to being greeted with confusion when sharing certain experiences, diplomats may also find that understanding the hardships of one another’s life is a fundamental aspect that functions as a strong basis for deep connections.

While these insights are presented by American and German diplomats, the interview data collected demonstrates that American diplomats, more often than German diplomats, retain strong positive feelings oriented towards the connection they maintain with the diplomatic

³⁰ Daniel, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

³¹ Sophie, interview with author, May 2021.

bubble. There are two main reasons present in the collected data which have the potential to explain why the diplomatic community is more dominant in the lives of American diplomats than German diplomats.

One reason is the lesser freedom that American diplomats have when finding housing in their new country than German diplomats. American diplomats usually live in assigned housing, thus American diplomats often live in a close proximity to other American diplomats, while German diplomats can generally, unless they are located in a dangerous area, find their own housing. Another reason, which leads to American diplomats to be more involved in their diplomatic community, is the importance of the sponsorship system within the American diplomatic lifestyle. When an American diplomat arrives at a new post, another American diplomat, who has already lived at this post for a year or more, volunteers to sponsor them. The activity of sponsorship involves anything from picking the diplomat and their family up from the airport, stacking their fridge with food, organizing a welcome party, to taking them to a local waterpark³². Not only do the interviewed American diplomats reflect fondly upon the experience of being sponsored, it is also emphasized that volunteering to sponsor someone else is equally important:

“You’re always supposed to give back. That means, when you first come to the country, someone is going to sponsor you. Sponsoring means take you around. It means saying: ‘Here, look! This is where we shop. [...] I’m going to drive you to the consulate.’ Just basic things. You’re supposed to sponsor as well. [...] I enjoy being a sponsor. [...] You should give your time to some newcomer because you were taken care of at one point too.”³³

³² Taken from the Interview data of multiple American diplomat interviewees.

³³ Alex, interview with author, May 2021.

This excerpt from an interview with an American diplomat provides an insight into the practice and experience of sponsorship, as well as the reasoning behind the attributed importance associated with the sponsorship system.

While German and American diplomats differ in the importance that they attribute to the diplomatic community, all diplomats share numerous similar strategies of finding and/or establishing a community, inside and/or outside the diplomatic “bubble”, within their everyday lives. The main strategy, or pattern of action, of finding a community, which diplomats employ when arriving and trying to establish footing in a new location, is getting to know people based on common interests, such as religion, music, volunteering, sports or reading. This strategy is either utilized to get to know locals or other diplomats. The following are diplomats discussing how they find groups of people with similar interests:

“[...] I like to read, so I almost always join a book club or volunteer for whatever group because that’s how you start meeting like-minded people [...]”³⁴

While this diplomat reaches out to other people through an interest in volunteering and reading, another diplomat builds a network through their interest in running:

“[...] I became a runner in the Foreign Service. I realized it’s a nice way to meet people and you can do it anywhere. You know, I can’t do a team sport because I am always moving around but I can be a runner.”³⁵

The interest in running is consciously being chosen by the diplomat. They are aware that certain interests, especially sports that require a team, are not an effective strategy for building a community, as they require a commitment, which is not compatible with a mobile lifestyle. The diplomat cannot provide the commitment that is required for a team sport; therefore, they have

³⁴ Kate, interview with author, May 2021.

³⁵ Diana, interview with author, May 2021.

consciously decided to pursue an interest that can be enjoyed in any locality. Another diplomat shares the experience of joining a church, once they and their family had arrived at their new post:

“We immediately sought out a local American Church. We just looked what we could find in our neighborhood and then we drove there one Sunday to get an impression and thought: ‘Wow, these are really kind people; this is where we are going to go.’ And now we have stayed with this church for three years.”³⁶

Another way this diplomat chose to connect with individuals who share a common interest is by joining a band and connecting with others through a common interest in music:

“[...] I play piano, so I just made music with a band.”³⁷

These insights demonstrate that diplomats put in the effort to actively connect with people through common interests. Diplomats may even create new interests, such as running, in order to facilitate a connection with people. These interests are non-locality specific in order to allow the diplomat to be able to use the same interest as a basis for connecting with others in whatever country they may be sent to next. However, it must also be noted that these interests can be utilized to connect with other expats and diplomats or they can be used to get to know locals.

A common factor that decides to what extent these strategies are utilized by American and German diplomats to get to know locals or other diplomats is the foreign culture in which the diplomat is located. If the foreign culture offers the opportunities, based on safety, similarity to the home culture or the diplomat’s previous confrontation with the culture, diplomats generally take advantage of these strategies to get to know locals. In high-risk areas, for example,

³⁶ Tyler, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

³⁷ Tyler, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

getting to know locals is difficult. In such areas, the diplomat usually lives in a compound with other diplomats, which already limits their chances of getting in touch with locals. One diplomat gives an insight into a recent exchange with a colleague who is currently located in South Sudan:

“I was just, for instance, corresponding with a colleague who's in South Sudan. Their ability to leave the compound is limited. They all eat together, even, because it's a real hardship there [...]. They can only go out to selected places in armored vehicles, because of the security factor.”³⁸

A German diplomat, who has employed multiple of the above-mentioned strategies to find footing in local communities while located in the U.S., shares their thoughts regarding their upcoming post in a non-Western country:

“I don't expect to be able to immerse ourselves to the same extent. We still want to, we consciously decided against living in a gated community [...]. We also want to try over there to go into the direction of living with the ‘normal people’”.³⁹

Therefore, even though this German diplomat has more freedom than most of their American counterparts regarding the housing situation, the higher cultural barriers, presented in the manner of the extent of the diplomat's knowledge of the language, for instance, already minimizes their chances of getting involved in local communities to the same extent this was possible when they were located in the United States. Finally, the factor of the previous involvement with the foreign culture heavily influences the diplomat's search for footing within a local community. For example, a German diplomat found it very pleasant to have a strong community rooted in the country where their parent is originally from, while being located in the respective country.⁴⁰ An American diplomat shares a similar experience in regards to their involvement in local

³⁸ Sophie, interview with author, June 2021.

³⁹ Daniel, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

⁴⁰ Tyler, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

communities, when they were located in the country where they had spent a significant amount of their childhood and early adulthood.⁴¹

This analysis demonstrates the following aspects concerning the presence and importance of community in the lives of diplomats. Firstly, the diplomatic community appears to be much more present in the lives of American diplomats than German diplomats. This is due to factors such as the freedom or lack thereof to choose housing and valued practices of the diplomatic corps, as the sponsorship system for instance. Secondly, all diplomats actively maintain strategies, which they can utilize in almost any location and culture to quickly find footing in new communities within the local culture or the diplomatic bubble. Thirdly, the country of the post heavily influences the freedoms which diplomats have to get involved with the local culture. Barriers usually involve the aspect of safety for the diplomat, their knowledge of the language and culture and the question of their previous involvement with the local culture.

5.3 Community as a Structural Component of the Diplomat's Life in Limbo

The presented data demonstrates that diplomats, who permanently reside in a space between cultures, (1) always have access to a strong diplomatic community regardless of the locality they reside in and (2) have developed excellent skills in quickly finding footing in various communities. While the data demonstrates that the diplomatic community is more dominant in the life of American diplomats, German diplomats also have reliable access to a diplomatic community and can access this community should they desire to take advantage of this opportunity. In either case, the diplomatic community offers support as well as acceptance to the diplomat by creating a space of belonging.

Cohen (1985) presents a reasonable understanding of what the notion of community entails. Community implies “[...] simultaneously both similarity and difference” (1985: 12).

⁴¹ Alex, interview with author, May 2021.

This suggestion builds upon the consideration of members of a group, understood as a community, who have things in common with one another, which consequently distinguish them from other individuals that do not belong to their group. The diplomatic community seems to function much like the cosmopolitan collective presented by Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt (2017). It is argued that the cosmopolitan collective is “[...] not less cultural and collective than national, ethnic or ethno-religious identities” (2017: 3).

The notion that community is strongly intertwined with culture is further supported by Cohen (1985). Cohen (1985) relates community to culture through a discussion of symbols. As previously examined in this paper’s section on culture, culture refers to a system of symbolic meanings (Parsons 1972). Cohen supports this approach: “[...] when we speak of people acquiring culture, or learning to be social, we mean that they acquire the symbols which will equip them to be social” (1985: 16). While culture, via the means of symbols, gives individuals the opportunity to make sense of the world, community allows members of its group to believe they are making the same sense of the world via symbols. Community members attach a similar meaning to certain symbols; this creates a common understanding of the world, which differs from the understanding retained by people outside their community (1985: 16).

Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt (2017) further illuminate that the “[...] collective here does not refer to an abstract notion of humanity as a whole or a global culture, but particular situated modes of belonging contingent on shared social spaces, circumstances and a set of collectively held understandings [...]” (2017: 3). Thereby, shared social space, circumstances, and collectively held understandings are the basis for the creation of a mode of belonging that is essential for the expat community in Amsterdam, which is being analyzed in Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt’s (2017) study.

In this sense, the diplomatic community is a group of people who share common aspects central to the diplomatic lifestyle. This includes moving from one country to the next, working in the Foreign Service and being separated from other German or Americans, as well as from the local population, by exactly this mode of living unique to diplomats. Furthermore, diplomats share a system of symbolic meanings. They not only share the American or German cultural symbols or the symbols supplied by the local culture, they also attach the same meaning to these symbols. This argument therefore suggests that diplomats create a common understanding of the world.

The mode of belonging to the diplomatic community is then achieved through a shared social space, such as embassies or diplomatic housing compounds, circumstances, such as moving from one country to the next, and collectively held understandings, such as the sponsorship system. The aspect of the collectively held understandings of diplomats, which is rooted in the common association of meanings in regards to symbols, is an extensive topic. To explore this in detail would extend beyond the scope of this paper. However, the most dominantly portrayed aspect of the diplomatic community, which demonstrates a great source of meaning and importance for diplomats, is the practice of sponsorship. Sponsorship is regarded as a mode of giving back to the community. Its importance is furthermore derived from the understanding that every diplomat has experienced what it is like to arrive somewhere new and has had a sponsor to help them get settled, thereby, they know how much the arriving diplomat values this practice. The practice of sponsorship is a culmination of the aspect of common meaning associated with symbols, as well as a central source of similarity, which allows for the formation of a community in the first place.

This understanding correlates with the insights presented in the interviews: diplomats are connected via strong and unique bonds with other individuals active in the Foreign Service. These most likely result out of the central similarity diplomats share, which is the diplomatic lifestyle. This is the causal factor for the diplomats' numerous shared experiences, which out-group individuals have a hard time to relate to⁴². This similarity is unique and carries a great importance in the diplomats' lives, which leads to the fact that the members of the diplomatic community differentiate themselves from out-group individuals. Thus, the diplomatic community is very strong.

The other finding that this data presents is that diplomats have a well-practiced set of strategies, which they utilize to quickly find their own community once they are sent on tour in a new location. The strategies recognized in the data from the interviews are being analyzed here as actions. In this sense, the findings must be regarded to be similar to the goal-oriented actions proposed by Schutz and Luckmann (2003), the strategies of actions discussed by Swidler (1986), and instrumental action, as presented by Weber (1978). Thereby, these actions are taken after or while considering the end-goal that is meant to be achieved. Important for the present analysis is the recognition that diplomats have acquired routinized action strategies, which they perform skillfully with the motive of connecting to other individuals within the international environment and/or within the local culture.

Conclusively, diplomats demonstrate repeatedly that they have access to a strong diplomatic community, which they are part of, should they desire to be. The diplomatic community acquires its strength through shared social spaces, circumstances and collectively held understandings. Furthermore, diplomats maintain routinized strategies that they employ in order to achieve footing in a new community, whether within or outside the diplomatic bubble.

⁴² Daniel and Maia, interviews with author, May 2021.

This discussion supplies a detailed insight into the community component, which contributes to the stability within diplomats' everyday lives in limbo between cultures.

6. Maxims: Principles that Guide the Life in Limbo

6.1 Insights on the Notion of Maxims

Niedner-Kalthoff (2005) discovers that diplomats maintain strategies that are aimed at being able to get acculturated to the host culture, which she summarized as a "Diplomatisches Handbuch fuer gelungenes Einleben in eine Gastkultur"⁴³ (2005: 59). This handbook includes strategies that can be formulated as "a diplomat should...", "a diplomat can never...", etc. While this style of strategies demonstrates that diplomats are very conscious of patterns of actions, which are useful for getting accustomed to the foreign culture, these strategies appear to be most similar to what has been previously described as "cosmopolitan competence". However, relevant observations included in this section of the paper will be introduced as "maxims", as they describe the individual diplomat's attitude towards the ability to fully function in a space between cultures, rather than strategies that allow the diplomat to get to know a foreign culture.

Maxims in this sense are most similar to the notion that Kant associates with the term. McCarthy (2006) presents two approaches towards the understanding of Kant's maxims. On the one hand maxims can be reflected upon as principles expressing the reason upon which actions are based, on the other hand maxims can be viewed as "[...] mere practical advice for living" (2006: 65). In either case, maxims are subjective principles which influence how individuals act in everyday life. In sociology, the notion of maxims is primarily present in connection with the discussion of the knowledge of every-day life, guided by Berger and Luckmann (1966). This basic understanding of maxims allows for the later analysis of the following insights presented by diplomats throughout the interviews.

⁴³ Diplomatic Handbook for Successful Arrival in the Host Culture

6.2 American and German Diplomats: Maxims

Niedner-Kalthoff (2006) discusses diplomats as highly-skilled migrants, who are sent to a place to work using special skills and knowledge and who are taking part in transient migration, meaning they are relocated to a new country every couple of years (2006: 85). In addition, diplomats are aware of this regular movement, since they consciously choose their profession and the lifestyle it entails. The fact that this prior awareness of the mobility demands diplomats are faced with, facilitates a positive attitude maintained by the diplomat towards their lifestyle must be recognized. However, diplomats do not only maintain a positive attitude towards moving, they further consciously create maxims for themselves and their families with which they identify. Diplomats often use these maxims to make decisions and help navigate multiple aspects of their lives.

Throughout the interviews there was one reoccurring maxim: maintaining low expectations towards the new country and culture throughout relocations. Multiple diplomats present this maxim which is consciously chosen in order to be able to appreciate the new place they are scheduled to arrive in. These maxims are usually developed over time and based on previous experiences, which the diplomat reflects on in order to be able to adjust their attitude⁴⁴. Two diplomats present an insight into the specifics of how the maxim of maintaining low expectations is developed and used. The following diplomat discusses their first tour abroad and the influence this experience had on the attitude towards later tours:

⁴⁴ While there is no adequate room within the scope of this paper for an elaborate discussion of the aspect of diplomatic knowledge as a heterology (Cornago 2019), the notion that diplomats reflect on past events in order to be able to create these maxims, could possibly be a potential aspect to discuss in relation to the diplomats estrangement of the Self.

“[...] everything is better than Niger, so we can look back and think ‘Oh well it's better than [that]’.”⁴⁵

The same diplomat further discusses this maxim in a later part of the interview:

“[...] we arrive in every country with bare minimum expectations, so no matter what, we're positively surprised. That's generally my goal: to love wherever we live and I feel, if you don't have any unrealistic expectations, you are a lot better off and you're probably going to be positively surprised.”⁴⁶

A different diplomat discusses a similar approach that is oriented towards the goal of being able to positively approach a new country and culture. After experiencing the local country's culture on a previous tour, which did not live up to the diplomat's expectation, the diplomat shifted their approach concerning the attitude presented when arriving in a new culture:

“[...] I learned to, in a way, keep my expectations lower. [...] I kept my expectations a lot lower when I went to [...] and I think that has been my model ever since.”⁴⁷

Therefore, one maxim that diplomats commonly hold is entering a new culture with no expectations, positive or negative ones, as possible, in order to create a positive experience and realize the culture and country in a way that is true to its actual nature. This maxim is often created via a prior, usually rather negative, experience.

While this is a commonly shared maxim, almost all interviewed diplomats present a maxim they identify with and which they feel is important in order to navigate the mobile lifestyle they maintain. The following are different maxims that diplomats maintain. For instance, one diplomat emphasized a life motto, which is used to create a feeling of being at home in the foreign location:

⁴⁵ Kate, interview with author, May 2021.

⁴⁶ Kate, interview with author, May 2021.

⁴⁷ Diana, interview with author, May 2021.

“We don’t always want to look back onto our home, or our old home. Instead, we have created our life motto: home is where we are.”⁴⁸

Here, the diplomat refers to the maxim as a “life motto”, which implies that the attitude of “Home is where we are” is attempted to be maintained throughout moving from one country and culture and location to the next. Another example of a life maxim that a different diplomat connects with is to accept things as they are and to find a positive angle concerning any aspect of life within the foreign culture that the diplomat may face:

“Those who say: ‘Look, this is what it is.’ They are going to be the most successful and they are going to be the healthiest in a mental and physical kind of way. [...] you happen to be in Nepal. Guess what, you are not getting the American stuff here. [...] so, you adapt and there’s two ways of looking at that. Every now and then you’re going to say: ‘I wish I had a ...’, [...] I say: ‘I do miss having a good taco or a burrito.’ At the same time, those countries do not load up their foods with all these additives that are very, very bad for your health, the way the U.S. does. So, think of it that way.”⁴⁹

This diplomat presents their maxim as: “This is what it is”. They connect mental and physical benefits with being able to maintain such an attitude. The diplomat demonstrates how this attitude can be displayed via an example of the aspect of food. In specific, they discuss how the everyday aspect of food can be regarded from two different perspectives. One perspective, presented by this diplomat, is focused on the negative aspect that the foreign culture’s food is not the same as the food from the diplomat’s home culture. In comparison, the second perspective, which is oriented towards accepting circumstances as they are, aims to find a positive angle from

⁴⁸ Tyler, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

⁴⁹ Alex, interview with author, May 2021.

which the foreign culture's food can be discussed. The second perspective aligns with the maxim "This is what it is."⁵⁰

A further demonstration of the notion of maxims is a maxim that is presented by another diplomat, which is also oriented towards distancing oneself from the "thinking-as-usual"⁵¹ in order to gain a better understanding of the culture and people they were interacting with. The following excerpt demonstrates the notion that in order to gain a better understanding of people of a foreign culture, it is necessary to take off one's own cultural lens, through which events are examined. In specific, this diplomat reflects on the question of why refugees want to migrate to Germany:

"Those are all young people, they all want a job. They want to work, study and have a family.' And then I always say: 'I am sure you are looking at all of this through the wrong lens. How do you get the idea that they want all of that? Did they ever say that?' 'But that's obvious.' 'No, that's not obvious.' [...] That means, when someone is talking about cultures, one has to look through the lens of the other person and ask 'How do you see Germany?'

One time, I talked to a Somali because I am interested to also interact with these people. He was sitting on a wall [...] in a refugee camp. I sat next to him and said: 'The weather is nice today. The sun is out, like always during summer. Why don't you go over there by the street, where the workers who want to get employed for a day are standing?' He said:

⁵⁰ It is interesting to note the objective attitude of stranger that this maxim demonstrates. The diplomat refrains from subjectively "liking" or "disliking" an aspect of the foreign culture. Instead, the diplomat objectively identifies benefits, which enable a positive approach towards things by taking them as they are.

⁵¹ Thinking as usual refers here to the attitude of the diplomat where they are caught up in their old culture's beliefs. This term is chosen to use the opportunity here to reconnect this discussion to the previous notion discussed by Schutz (1944). In the previous example, the diplomat's thinking as usual, which they distance themselves from, is the attitude that their culture's food is the best. In the case explained in this paragraph, the thinking as usual from which the diplomat distances themselves is their old culture's "lens", through which topics in society are only discussed from a certain perspective.

‘Why should I do that?’ I said: ‘To make money.’ He said: ‘I am making money. I get 148 Euros from the [...] government. I send 80 Euros to my mother in Somalia. The average wage in Somali is about 20 dollars. That means I send my mother four times that much. Then my mom says: My son is rich. [...] I still have 70 Euros and can live from that. [...]’⁵²

This segment of the interview demonstrates that this is a maxim the diplomat lives by when confronted with other cultures. The diplomat uses terms such as “always” and presents their maxim as a rule that should be followed repeatedly when interacting with other cultures: “[...] when someone is talking about cultures, one has to look through the lens of the other person [...]”⁵³. The diplomat provides an example of an instance in which they followed this maxim by interacting with a Somali refugee and having a conversation in order to understand the other individual’s perspective.⁵⁴

Maxims, such as having low expectations when entering a new country and culture, not holding on to the previous place that felt like home, in order to create a new at home feeling, accepting things as they are by always trying to find a positive angle from which to approach an aspect of the foreign culture, and trying to understand the cultural perspective of the other person, guide diplomats. These maxims function as rules by which diplomats live in order to be able to cope with residing in a place between two or more different cultures. There are maxims that are shared between diplomats, due to the fact that diplomats share similar experiences; however, they may also be created based on the individual’s values.

⁵² Daniel, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

⁵³ Daniel, interview with author, May 2021. Translated from German.

⁵⁴ This is a further potential opportunity to explore the notion of the estrangement of the Self in the future (Cornago 2019). In this instance the diplomat has turned the estrangement of the own cultural lens into a maxim which guides actions.

6.3 Maxims as Guiding Structural Components for a Life in Limbo

The proposed claim of this section can be summarized as follows: in order to function efficiently in a space between cultures, diplomats design their own maxims, which are primarily based on previously collected experiences. Some observed maxims are similar between multiple diplomats others are unique. Overall, the presence of maxims, as a principle to guide the diplomat's life in limbo, is commonly present. In order to gain a further understanding of these maxims and how they relate to the diplomat's life in limbo, the presented maxims are discussed by using the theoretical propositions provided by Berger and Luckmann (1966).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) focus on the knowledge of the social everyday life of individuals. Central to this discussion is not the theoretical knowledge about the world, but rather the knowledge which resides on the pre-theoretical level. What constitutes this knowledge about the social world is “[...] an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths, and so forth [...]” (1966: 82). Berger and Luckmann further refer to this knowledge as “[...] transmitted recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge that supplies the institutionally appropriate rules of conduct” (1966: 82). In this sense, Berger and Luckmann (1966) discuss maxims as knowledge that is taken for granted in the individual's everyday life and only becomes problematic when it fails to provide a successful recipe for action.

Based on this understanding of maxims, it is plausible to propose that the diplomat's maxims mainly result out of the failure of previously held maxims. The example of diplomats' maxims aimed at keeping low expectations towards the new country and culture, demonstrates that diplomats adhering to this maxim have become conscious and aware of the benefits maxims entail due to prior unsuccessful experiences. This sparks the assumption that the majority of the

maxims present in a diplomat's life most likely result out of the experience that the diplomat's original taken for granted knowledge can result in failure.

As Luckmann and Berger's (1966) work is based in the theoretical propositions presented by Alfred Schutz, it is plausible to place their discussion of knowledge in connection with the thinking as usual that has been previously presented by Schutz (1944). By means of this connection, the following proposition can be made. In the life in limbo, diplomats are not trying to be part of an in-group's thinking as usual, as is presented by the discussion of the stranger by Schutz (1944). Instead, they are aware of the fragility of the natural conception of the world, due to the previous failure of maxims, which are a part of the taken for granted knowledge of the world, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966), or the thinking as usual, according to Schutz (1944). As a result of this awareness, the diplomat develops their new knowledge of the world, in the manner of life maxims, which guide their actions as well as attitude. Thereby, maxims provide a source of stability for diplomats.

7. Conclusion

Through the previous analysis and discussion, this paper has been able to recognize the nature of diplomats permanently residing in a space between cultures. In other words, the components of the structure of the everyday life of diplomats, who "[...] leave, but [...] do not fully arrive in the place where they are to be received" (2009: 101), as described by Sharp (2009), is analyzed in this paper. Through the qualitative analysis of 11 semi structured interviews with German and American diplomats, the nature of the permanent space in between cultures is identified. Furthermore, it is apparent that three main structural components allow diplomats to achieve a stable, well structured, everyday life. Overall, these findings point to the conclusion that in a permanent space between cultures, stability can be maintained through

components, such as the acquisition of knowledge about the foreign culture and country, an access to a strong community, and the ability to create maxims. These components appear to be applicable to all spaces between cultures and are constant variables within the dynamic life of diplomats.

In specific, this paper's discussion demonstrates that in a space between cultures, the situation of the diplomat can be understood via a discussion of the diplomat as a flexible cosmopolitan. Thereby, the diplomat is interested in and accepting of all aspects of the foreign culture, while not allowing themselves to become fully immersed in it. These expectations and restraints keep the diplomat in a permanent space between cultures. During the interviews, this becomes apparent when diplomats discuss the different strategies their home countries employ in order to ensure that the diplomat does not go native. These strategies include elements, such as home leave or a close attention to the diplomat's original feelings of belonging.

The understanding of the diplomat in limbo between cultures is further developed through a discussion of the diplomat as a stranger. In this discussion it becomes apparent that the diplomat can be identified as a designated stranger. While the diplomat displays elements of a traditional stranger, especially in the diplomat's everyday life, the diplomat comes to the foreign culture with a unique status that cannot be dismissed in their private life. Thereby, the struggles of the stranger, such as an attitude of objectivity and a display of doubtful loyalty, as discussed by Schutz (1944), are most present in the diplomat's everyday life.

As a result, two important statements can be made about the life in limbo that diplomats lead: (1) the practices of the Foreign Service, such as home leave and careful examinations prior to entering the service, keep the diplomat attached to their home culture and country by instilling in the characteristics of a flexible cosmopolitan, (2) the diplomat's awareness and recognition of the

extend of their role as a diplomat into their private life, allows the diplomat to be recognized as a designated stranger, whereby the diplomat does not seek full inclusion in the foreign culture and minimized the occurrences of the challenges of a traditional stranger to his/her private everyday life.

Having established important characteristics of the diplomat's life in limbo in a permanent space between cultures, this paper identifies stabilizing components of the diplomat's everyday life that function as necessary structural conditions in their life in order to achieve stability. The most present components identified in the present study include (1) knowledge of the foreign language and culture, (2) access to a strong community and (3) the practice of developing and being oriented towards subjective maxims.

The aspect of gathering objective knowledge about language and culture facilitates interactions for the diplomat. As language is a significant aspect of a culture's system of meaning (Parsons 1972), this allows the diplomat to gain the required access to the local culture, which is necessary to prevent them from going into crisis, due to culture shock, as analyzed by Borcan (2009). Furthermore, the demonstration of learning the other language and learning about the other culture communicates a diplomat's interest in the foreign culture towards locals. This allows the diplomat to minimize the displayed characteristic of doubtful loyalty (Schutz 1944) in their everyday life, as the diplomat demonstrates the attempt to be supportive of the local culture's recipes (Schutz 1944).

Another component that contributes to the structural conditions of a stable life in limbo is the diplomat's access to a strong community. Through shared circumstances and understanding of the world, diplomats are united by a strong bond with other diplomats in the diplomatic

“bubble”. However, diplomats are also very skilled at creating connections to other individuals, within the diplomatic community or outside, mainly by connections rooted in shared interests.

Finally, the presence of maxims in a diplomat’s life in limbo strongly contributes to the structural conditions, which stabilize the diplomat’s permanent presence in a space between cultures. By creating subjective maxims, the diplomat is able to create their own natural conception of the world. This is possible due to the experience diplomats are confronted with when they first leave their home culture and experience characteristics often present in strangers, such as coming to learn that the natural conception of the world is very fragile (Schutz 1944).

The discussed components demonstrate that the diplomat’s knowledge of the foreign language and culture, the access to a strong community and the establishment of, and orientation towards, life maxims, facilitate the diplomat’s permanent residence in a space between cultures. As the analysis of the recognized components demonstrates, it is identifiable that the diplomat makes use of these components to move beyond the struggles of the stranger and cosmopolitan, in order to establish stability in a non-territorial existence in limbo between cultures. This is achieved by recognizing and consciously interacting with the natural conception of the diplomat’s own world as well as the world of the locals, via the knowledge of language and culture and the establishment of subjective maxims, and furthermore by being part of a non-local community.

These are constant variables present in diplomats’ everyday lives that do not depend on the specific cultures the diplomat is interacting with, thereby; these components have the potential to create favorable conditions for a stable everyday life of diplomats. Due to the increasing interconnectedness between individuals of different cultures and the rising levels of mobility, influenced by the forces of globalization, the conclusions reached in this study presents valuable

insights that may be applicable to a significant number of the rapidly increasing amount of mobile individuals in our society.

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Interview Guide:

1. Where are you currently located?

Probes: Previous locations; number of tours; number of times staying in the home country; length of tours

2. How did you come to joining the Foreign Service?

Probes: Application; already active in politics; field of study in school

3. How difficult is it to combine family life and the mobile work life of being a diplomat?

Probes: Family joining travel; partner's work; compromises concerning combining family and life as a diplomat; children's age; children's school

4. What does a typical day look like in the life of your family?

Probes: Your work; partner's work; children's school; a typical day on the weekends; play-dates; neighborhood party's

5. How have you stayed connected with your family/close friends?

Probes: Number and regularity of visits; format of communication

6. How do you spend holidays?

Probes: Christmas; birthdays; national holidays

7. What has your experience been like with the local health system?

Probes: regular check-ins, emergencies, cost, trust

8. What is it like to go grocery shopping in the foreign country?

Probes: grocery shopping, restaurants, local food, food from home

9. What does your social circle look like currently?

Probes: Neighbors; colleagues; children's friends; groups through common interests

10. What does the process look like of finding a new apartment/house to rent?

Probes: Schools for the children; work for the partner, the new city (suburbs or central)

11. When preparing to switch to a new location, how does this preparation take place?

Probes: Connecting with the following/previous diplomat, what is being discussed in these exchanges that you consider useful information for you and your family for adjusting to the new living situation (schools, places to live, etc.)