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## Assembling Geographies of Diplomacy under Neoliberalism

### Abstract

There is an enormous gap in our understanding of the state's role in the construction of international markets. Specifically, diplomacy's position in the contemporary entanglement of state and markets has been overlooked. Increasingly, diplomacy's on-going adaptation to support neoliberalism has led to diplomats operating in a 'twilight world' between diplomacy and business. Using assemblage thinking we investigate the codings, capacities and tendencies emerging in the social spaces of diplomatic possibility in this 'twilight world'. Drawing upon comprehensive empirical materials on the UK-India diplomatic relationship, we show how the material and expressive components of the UK Foreign Office (FCO) assemblage are being deployed to champion state goals in global markets. We illustrate the ways in which diplomacy struggles in the name of the state's international competitiveness. In particular, we argue that these social "spaces of possibility" are structured by both diplomatic and business calculations that have the capacity to create new and unpredictable courses that render both an uncertainty and fuzziness to the agential interactions between assemblages.

Key words: Diplomacy, Assemblage, India, Business, Neoliberalism, Markets

### **1. Introduction**

Political leaders from across the globe now routinely articulate the evolving relationship between diplomacy and neoliberalism. Yet there is an enormous gap in our understanding of the state's role in the construction of international markets. The recalibration of geopolitical forms, mentalities and practices by market logics and opportunities (see earlier discussions by Luttwak 1990; Cowen and Smith 2009, and more recently by Birch and Siemiatycki 2016) is bedevilled by lack of detail, despite calls spanning over more than a decade for this to be addressed (see Larner 2003; Weller and O'Neill

2014). Geoeconomic calculation is centrally embedded in state agency, as neoliberalism's goals to liberate business and corporate power provokes an extensive de/re-construction of institutions in the name, or image of markets (Tickell and Peck 2003). Paramount in this is the diversity and variety of processes, outcomes and agents at work in the mobilisation of state power to extend markets and, by consequence, business and corporate interests (Harvey 2005; Springer 2015). Thus, market calculus is as Cowen and Smith (2009, 43) comment "ineluctably central to political geography at multiple scales today". As part of the apparatus of the state, diplomacy's evolving position within the "geoeconomic and geopolitical dynamics...of the processual, unfolding and action-oriented nature" of neoliberalism (Springer 2015, 7) remains overlooked. This is despite much recent interest in diplomacy as both process and practice (Jones and Clark 2015; McConnell *et al* 2012), and a recognition that under neoliberalism a "fusing of the geopolitical and geoeconomic" is taking place (Moisio and Paasi 2013, 260).

The emerging geographies of diplomacy under neoliberalism present abundant opportunities in research terms. Importantly, what Harvey (2005, 2) describes as an "emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political economic practices and thinking since the 1970s" has not left diplomacy unscathed. The promotion of freer trade and free movement of international capital has undoubtedly intensified in political terms since the 1990s, leading Coolsaet (2004, 61) to contend that with national economies becoming more interdependent, in the "precarious and highly competitive international environment, firms turn to their governments for support". Promoting commercial objectives through diplomacy has become therefore a foreign policy priority of many governments especially those with sufficient resources to devote to this. For example, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, speaking to an assembly of business leaders in Washington in 2011 declared "U.S. embassies have been instructed to stand up for American business interests abroad... the appointment of 1,000 economic officers assigned to US embassies will help U.S. companies compete and win" (CNN 2011) Elsewhere, there is growing evidence of what Kopp (2004, 3) describes as

“Commercial diplomacy involving business and government overseas in cooperative efforts to achieve commercial objectives that advance national interests” be it in the northern (see Okano-Heimanns 2012), or southern hemispheres (see Rana and Chatterjee 2011). For example, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop at an address to the Sydney Institute in 2014 emphasised the government’s priority to use its international diplomatic assets to advance the country’s growth, and in the UK, the Foreign Office (FCO) has put prosperity as a key objective of its diplomatic efforts. Lamentably despite this growing role for commercial diplomacy “its operation in political practices as well as its fundamental geopolitical underpinnings is virtually absent in geopolitical literature” (Moisio and Paasi 2013, 265).

Indisputably, diplomacy is becoming more complex in both content and conduct, and increasingly shaped and blurred by trisectoral interactions between governments, business and NGOs that affect diplomatic outcomes (Kurbalija and Katrandjiev 2006; McConnell 2016). Within the mutability of this multistakeholder context, diplomats then are no longer just ‘plumbers’ of international relations but also ‘neoliberal salespeople’ actively enabling, protecting and propagating markets, entrepreneurialism and competitiveness through geopolitical and geoeconomic knowledge production and its circulation. Despite its historic deep rootedness in diplomatic practice, commercial awareness and business promotion has now become one of “diplomacy’s possible futures” (Henrikson 2006, 3) and central to processes of reform of diplomatic services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Riordan 2007). The changing relations between diplomacy, state practice and business /corporate interests represents a critical area of investigation, to date ignored by geographers and its research significance and complexity only now being highlighted by others (see Kesteleyn et al. 2014; Sondergaard 2014).

This paper fills a yawning gap in geography by taking as its unique focus the neoliberalisation of diplomacy, highlighting its “practices and procedures as they unfold in everyday contexts” (Springer 2015, 7). This epitomises the entanglement of state and markets in a perpetual process of becoming

(Birch and Siemiatycki 2016). The paper's contribution is threefold: to deploy assemblage thinking to modern diplomacy; explore through this what we term "spaces of possibility" between business and diplomacy in neoliberalism; and to exemplify neoliberal diplomacy through a specific focus on British-Indian relations.

Specifically, the ways in which diplomacy fits with neoliberalism is ripe for conceptually grounded empirical analyses, as Sending *et al* (2015, 1) confirm "everybody seems to agree that diplomacy is changing...yet few people can specify exactly how or where it is heading". The neoliberalisation of diplomacy may be significant in the nature and direction of this change. For example, it could be argued that the state's reach is being fundamentally altered as neoliberalism reconfigures diplomatic discourses and practices. Moreover, the economic imperatives that seem to propel much foreign policy could affect the ways in which diplomats act in the name of the state and thus represent it at-a-distance. The fusing of economic and political logics under market-like rule brings about a more heterogeneous cast of actors involved in diplomacy, and stimulates the state's enrolment of non-state actors to support diplomatic agendas. The production of new spaces and fronts for diplomacy under neoliberalism not only actively blurs the state-market distinction, but also juxtaposes more traditional, representational forms of diplomacy with new commercially-oriented practices.

This "political-economic twilight world" (Peck 2013, 133) where "markets and institutions are... found in (various states of) contradictory coexistence" (Peck 2016, forthcoming) represents the interface between diplomatic and business assemblages, in effect new "spaces of possibility" comprising new codings, emerging capacities, and latent possibilities discursively framed by political elites and transacted by diplomats. They are therefore social spaces of diplomatic possibility where the unexpected is immanent and desired outcomes are rendered more or less likely through the presence or absence of critical points (for example, accepted ethical standards of diplomatic practice; personal reputational legitimacy). These "spaces of possibility" are therefore more than spaces of concrete interaction (cf. Bachmann 2016). They are liminal, emergent and comprise

various capacities, some actualised and others virtual. Their evolving nature as 'in-between' spaces renders them unpredictable and fragile, producing at any given moment stability or instability, since they are open to the potentialities that exist at particular times in the political-economic twilight world between diplomatic and business practices. In this twilight, business and diplomatic intensities and desires reach out to each other offering latent possibilities and alternatives. These spaces are thus dynamic and often spontaneous, in which encounters open up and close down.

In our view, what is missing is a thorough empirical examination of these in-between diplomacy-business "spaces of possibility" from the perspective of diplomats. We consider assemblage thinking offers analytical purchase to such work for a number of reasons. First is that the approach exposes the dynamics of micro-scale activities and events that affect neoliberalism, that is, how macro-level diplomatic agendas are contingent upon the interactions occurring in "spaces of possibility" at relatively micro-levels. These dynamics emerge from the everyday practices and lived experience of diplomacy in mutable sites and the heterogeneity of diplomatic components and their material and expressive roles. Assemblage approaches to the neoliberalisation of diplomacy therefore place emphasis upon the multiple, uneven and unique mutations "that arise as articulation with existing political economic contexts and geo-institutional configurations occurs" (Springer 2015, 10). Secondly, assemblage thinking enables a focus upon the processual, unfolding relations between specific diplomatic sites, highlighting the ways in which diplomatic components interact with other assemblages, and the unpredictability of these interactions. These affect the broad objectives of diplomacy and, in particular, pinpoint the constant struggle of diplomats to stabilise and control relations in an ordered way. Specifically, an assemblage approach discloses the difficulties of directing and managing diplomatic agendas in "spaces of possibility" where layers of the diplomatic past imbue the diplomatic present.

We contend that these spaces can articulate diplomatic objectives as an expression of desire/wish, that simultaneously stabilise and destabilise (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) as they unfold, revealing the unexpected, the potential and the surplus in socio-material terms.

Our focus is upon British diplomatic efforts to increase British business investment in India and attract Indian companies to Britain, an objective regarded as central to the British government's strategy of building a relationship that is "stronger, wider, and deeper - generating more jobs, more growth and more security" for both countries (FCO, 2015b). Britain is not the only country focussing on India for commercial opportunity; there has been a major drive by European and other states to penetrate what is the world's second largest market with an economy currently registering around 6% growth, and an Indian middle class set to treble in numbers over the next fifteen years, with significant impacts on disposable income levels (Ahmed *et al.* 2010). Indian domestic demand is expected to grow at a compound rate of 9.2% per year up to 2030, thus creating commercial opportunities for many sectors (Bhagat *et al.* 2016). Commercial opportunity is, of course, also intrinsic to broader geo-strategic goals for both Indian global aspirations (Sikri 2009) and south Asia strategy of many governments including Britain's (Ogden 2014). For the UK, the relationship is based upon promoting itself as India's 'natural' economic, political and cultural gateway into Europe; a shared history that is woven into contemporary British diplomatic imaginaries. While the UK is the second largest investor in India (bilateral trade is worth £5 billion per annum and the UK attracts 60 per cent of all Indian investment into Europe), British diplomacy is challenged with not only trying to source opportunities in India for British business but also retaining Indian investment in the UK which is significant for a number of economic sectors in particular localities. Consequently, the postcolonial British-India relationship is therefore diplomatically complex, not asymmetrical and, politically, not to be taken for granted.

The paper is organised into four sections. First, we assemble a potential geography of commercial diplomacy, identifying its drivers and emergent dimensions as well as the interfaces between

business and diplomacy in assemblage thinking. Precisely, we consider the British Foreign Office (FCO) and its diplomatic organisation in India as an assemblage, and examine its interaction with neoliberalism through the commercial dictates of the British Government led by David Cameron from May 2010 to July 2016. We tentatively explore the idea of “spaces of possibility” by examining how British commercial engagement with India is coded in the political construction of ‘India as market’ by the FCO and plays out in the doing, performance and events of the assemblage (McFarlane 2009). The capacity of diplomats to enable, protect and promote commercial activities is then considered in terms of history, materiality and performance. Finally, we turn to the tendencies in the diplomacy-business relationship and consider some of the challenges facing diplomats in the “spaces of possibility”. In this we highlight how “spaces of possibility” are structured by trust, ethics and evaluation of competencies that serve as critical points in the (dis)continuities between diplomacy and business, so affecting the assemblage’s emergence.

## **2. Assembling Geographies of Commercial Diplomacy**

Assemblage theory has begun to attract considerable interest from human geographers (Anderson and McFarlane 2011; McFarlane 2009; Muller 2015). However, apart from some notable exceptions (Dittmer 2014, 2016) its application to diplomacy is still limited. A diplomatic assemblage is a collection of parts that has the property of a whole arising from the constant interactions between the parts. These parts can comprise material (e.g. Embassy building, desks, phones, technical equipment) and expressive components (e.g. people, hierarchies, regulations, texts, meetings, policies, and codes), giving rise to ‘systems of correspondence’ (DeLanda 2006) that involve linguistic and non-linguistic signals (Jones and Clark 2015). The interactions between these parts lead to the exercise of capacities. The diplomatic assemblage is always in a state of flux as it is continuously subjected to outside influences, that is, relations of exteriority. Thus, the mixture of material and expressive roles varies with the exercise of capacities. The diplomatic assemblage is produced over time and embeds its past in its current composition. The diplomatic assemblage is



*coded* through the accepted 'doings and sayings' of diplomatic practice. The assemblage exercises *capacities* to affect and be affected, though their effectiveness is contingent upon the ways in which components tend to interact, that is their *tendencies*. The interaction of these components with themselves and with other assemblages and their constituent parts gives rise to diplomatic "spaces of possibility"; twilight worlds between diplomacy and other assemblages such as business, defence, human rights or security.

The renaissance of commercial diplomacy (Potter 2004) has led to it becoming a significant part of the armoury of state powers in enabling, protecting and propagating the rationalities of neoliberalism, seeking to influence and orientate the economic choices of those who "dominate economic relations and so adding its own—specifically symbolic—force to those power relations" (Bourdieu 1998, 95). Thus producing and reproducing "spaces of possibility" for neoliberalism through the capacities of a diplomatic assemblage are integral to the "extension of markets and logics of competitiveness" (Peck and Tickell 2002, 381). Commercial diplomacy champions the robust, proactive production of the 'out-there' of market capture and the 'in-here' of the diplomatic means for organising this capture. Neoliberalism licenses an aggressive posture for commercial diplomacy, turbulently placing the economic over the political and submitting the latter to a form of geopolitical catch-up.

Precisely, commercial diplomacy is defined as "government service to the business community [and the state], which aims at the development of socially beneficial international business ventures" (Naray, 2010b, 8). It is "the work of diplomatic missions in support of the home country's business and finance sectors" and includes the promotion of "inward and outward investment, as well as trade" (Ozdem, 2009, 8). As an assemblage, commercial diplomacy includes "all aspects of business support and promotion (trade, investment, tourism, science, and technology, protection of intellectual property)" (Naray, 2010b, 8), using "diplomatic channels and processes" (Lee and Hudson 2004, 51).

Diplomats are actively fronting marketisation, driving it forward by easing access to business information, bolstering the transnational credibility of domestic businesses in foreign markets, matchmaking businesses across scales, sites and territories, and mediating commercial conflicts in often fraught foreign contexts. Business opportunity, commercial advantage, and market possibilities are thus central to the geographical and geopolitical knowledges produced and traded in diplomatic assemblages.

From this perspective, “spaces of possibility” are the interfaces between diplomatic and business assemblages—the actualised or virtual, for example, the diplomatic garden party, the visit to a business by a serving diplomat, the trade exhibition, the business tendering process using the internet and so on. The diplomatic assemblage is coded to enable, protect and propagate explicit geoeconomic formulations and instructions that are transacted through a range of formal and informal diplomatic practices. These codings can shape “spaces of possibility”, opening up particular lines of engagement and becoming between diplomacy and business. Thus, the political construction of markets is supported by a range of material and expressive components in the diplomatic assemblage that have capacities to affect, for example, state-sponsored trade fairs using Embassy facilities, hosting of business delegations, and supporting business interests through a range of policy briefings, diplomatic speaking points, and face-to-face meetings with host government representatives.

Crucially, these capacities give rise to a number of tendencies. First is that the assemblage becomes characterised by an increasingly heterogeneous cast of diplomatic actors (for example, career diplomats, trade and investment officials and commercial counsellors), affecting its nature and function. Diplomatic practices are recomposed to more frequent interfacing with business interests and their representatives. This creates a fluidity in the assemblage in which the breadth, depth and intensity of interaction is altered. This gives rise to contingencies with new parameters, thresholds and critical values. Diplomatic practices thus become prone to state and corporate scrutiny and

evaluation as diplomatic competence to promote neoliberal agendas is spotlighted. Consequently “spaces of possibility” are suffused with state narratives promoting and advancing business opportunity in order to prompt diplomatic and business components to ‘team up’ in “pursuing business deals while at the same time serving public economic interests” (Ruel *et al* 2012,13). These narratives thus serve as the parameters for diplomatic behaviours.

### *Methodologies*

Assembling geographies of commercial diplomacy presents a number of methodological challenges. For example, Dittmer (2014, 12) contends that a generic difficulty in studying an assemblage is “making sense of the myriad interactions that produce it, especially given the differences in scale and temporality that characterize the various components and interactions”. Certainly, the study of diplomatic assemblages presents no less a challenge. Arguably, the research hurdles may be higher. For, as Lee and Hudson (2004, 360) suggest, “much of the diplomatic studies literature is unable to perceive, let alone analyse, the commercial elements of diplomacy” and Ruel *et al* (2012) also confirm the difficulty facing researchers in investigating the diplomatic codings that span macro- and micro-contexts, as well as identifying the precise practices of commercial diplomacy, and specific nature of interactions between diplomats and businesses. The researcher is also confronted by “how to observe diplomatic practice, judge its significance and read its effects” (Jones and Clark 2015, 4). Thus, investigating the codings of the FCO diplomatic assemblage, its capacities and tendencies and acknowledging its historical trajectory necessitates methods that enable interactions to be traced. What is specifically needed is a focus on diplomats who can speak with authority on the capacities of the assemblage, explain its material and expressive workings. This requires intensive and repeated interviewing with a range of diplomatic staff in both home and host countries that are charged with policy delivery and its diplomatic assessment, as well as those senior diplomats responsible for driving commercial diplomatic agendas in local “spaces of possibility”. These spaces are replete with expectations, opportunities and frustrations that have the capacity to affect profoundly the lived

experience of diplomats. The investigation of these experiences is therefore critical to a fuller understanding of diplomatic assemblages. Moreover, diplomatic assemblages are constantly in process; assemblage components, like diplomats, come and go, and “are constantly interacting with one another in ways that produce new capabilities” (Dittmer 2014, 388). Thus, gaining access to British diplomats who had served full terms (4-5 years) in their postings was important since this provided a longitudinal basis to explore assemblage dynamics.

Consequently, our entry point to investigate “spaces of possibility” is diplomatic assemblages, though we acknowledge that the study of business assemblages could provide an alternative, though no less challenging, research route. Our methodology draws upon interviews (all under Chatham House rules in which information disclosed can be reported by those present, but the source of that information may not be explicitly or implicitly identified) with India desk officers and departmental heads within the British Foreign Office (FCO) to explore the working structure and organisation of the FCO diplomatic assemblage; interviews with senior Indian diplomats in several European capitals to probe Indian perspectives on the assemblage; and interviews with returning senior British diplomats who served in India between 2010-2015, who had responsibility for managing the day-to-day operation of the British High Commission in New Delhi, and in charge of British commercial policy there, as well as overseeing the management of all the British Deputy High Commissions across the country. Additionally, on-site interviews were conducted with senior diplomats at the British High Commission in New Delhi in December 2016. In total 26 interviews have been conducted with British and Indian diplomats. These detailed interview materials were supported by diplomatic historical records of the British-India relationship, specifically, the operation of the British High Commission in New Delhi (British Diplomatic Oral History Programme 2013) and Foreign Office (FCO) and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) published documentation. Also, analysis was undertaken of significant political speeches on the British-India relationship made by senior politicians from both countries over the period 2010-2015.

In the next section, we scrutinise the coding of the diplomatic assemblage for structuring and organising British commercial engagement with India. This coding is intended to steer diplomacy's role in supporting neoliberal agendas through championing of state goals in global markets.

### 3. Codings for Diplomatic Assemblage: British Commercial Diplomacy in India

Codings are the product of material and expressive processes which consolidate and rigidify the identity of an assemblage. Diplomatically, they are doings and sayings that facilitate the political construction of markets, effectively formalising the discourse of commercial policy within the assemblage and contouring the “spaces of possibility” for commercial activity. Simultaneously, they ‘glue’ the assemblage together, shaping behaviours and expectations and influencing and directing its functional capacities. Diplomatic assemblages are also the product of historical processes; mixtures of material and expressive components that exercise capacities at different historical moments. The diplomatic assemblage therefore has a past that affects its composition, emergence and interactions in the present.

Thus, British colonial rule in India is routinely depicted as the systematic plundering of a nation, with the Empire leaving the country economically destitute when independence was finally granted in 1947 (Corbridge *et al* 2013; Nayar 2012). The practice of contemporary diplomacy in such hybrid postcolonial contexts is fraught with challenges. Envisioning Indian relations through the lens of the past has to be avoided as former British Prime Minister, John Major, accompanied by a score of British industrialists, fittingly commented in 1993 whilst on a state visit to Mumbai to promote commercial links: *“We have to banish the ghosts of an Empire that nobody mourns, reject both nostalgia and resentment, and build instead a modern partnership”*; a goal that would be contingent upon bottom–up processes of assemblage production where the tasks were huge. As a former British High Commissioner to India in the 1990s, confirmed *“When I arrived ... the relationship still had a lot of ‘Raj’ about it, and nostalgia and resentment is about as bad a basis for a bilateral relationship as one can imagine”* (British Diplomatic Oral History Programme 2013). His description

of the challenges of British diplomacy in India refers starkly to *“residual anti-colonial sentiment”*, accompanied by an *“almost infinite capacity to blame Britain for all the ills of India”*. Moreover, *“On the British side, notions about India that were formed in other times had not been adequately updated”* (Former British High Commissioner to India, Oral History Programme 2013). Crucially, efforts to ‘glue’ the diplomatic assemblage require an historical sensitivity, an informed understanding of India’s political, cultural and geographical complexities, and thorough diplomatic assessments made of the barriers to Britain’s potential role there. Thus, enhancing geographical and geopolitical understanding of India as place, context and space is seen as central to the British diplomatic assemblage. Consequently, the geographical exploration of place is central to the processes of consolidating and rigidifying *“the identity of the assemblage”* (Dittmer 2014, 388). In sum, it bonds the material and the expressive in the diplomatic consciousness.

Hence, with diplomatic assemblages constantly in process, strenuous efforts are expended to stabilise and order their operation through codings that reveal *“conscious thought and political decision-making”* (Dittmer 2014, 388). For example, the negative experience of British diplomacy in India in the 1990s is drawn upon to enhance the current capacities of the material and expressive components of the assemblage. Here, the significance of geographical knowledge as a coding to legitimise the diplomatic assemblage is important. For example, the former British Foreign Secretary, William Hague in a speech in London in 2012, commented: *“to have successful relations with India we have to have the deepest possible understanding of its culture... its rich traditions and its complex geography... We must constantly update our assumptions as those factors change over time”* (FCO 2012). This provides a coding for the current identity of the diplomatic assemblage, and one that steers diplomatic approaches, practices and activities. So, recent India-based diplomats readily explain in interview how *“It’s all too easy to get sucked in to the servicing of the ‘London machine’ [rather] than investing time and effort in understanding the country which is a core part of what we offer whether to ministers or businesses- our customers”* (Interview with British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 23rd 2016). How these codings then translate into the exercise of capacities is

summed up well by a current diplomat: *“we are not acting as a sort of travel guide to India...but, rather, how to advise on how the locals will react to a proposal or this is how to get an objective delivered”* (Interview with British Diplomat specialising in trade and Investment at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016).

Codings require perpetual reinforcement to sustain their dominant meanings. This is done through Government visits to India, public statements on the significance of the Indian relationship and its commercial possibilities, committing government resources and securing business endorsement. However, codings are fragile accomplishments, often undermined by all manner of interactions occurring both within and between assemblages. For example, from the early 1990s to 2010 British trade with India was disappointingly low (House of Commons 2008). The contested interplay of Indian democratic politics, coalition governments and various pressure groups led to frequent delays and policy reversals; a situation that plagued British diplomatic efforts to increase commercial links. Doing business in India is faced with political and regulatory risks. While many barriers to foreign investment have been removed since the 1990s, there still remain formidable challenges for foreign investors. Frequent political elections in the states and power struggles present uncertainty to business investment. Notwithstanding this, more concerted efforts to ramp up British economic engagement with India were launched by the British government in 2011 in a diplomatic offensive known as ‘Network Shift’- a new coding (funded from within FCO budgets despite broader government spending cuts) to glue the material and expressive components of the diplomatic assemblage based on a fusion of geopolitical and geoeconomic arguments. This new coding was articulated by Foreign Secretary William Hague, speaking in Cardiff in March of that year: *“It is foolish to imagine that we can be strong in foreign affairs... unless our economy is strong or that there is something wrong with backing British businesses... Our foreign policy has to support the British economy”*. This coding serves to consolidate the assemblage and spur capacities around *“policy creativity, in depth knowledge of [India]..., on geographic and linguistic expertise and the enhancement of traditional diplomatic skills in a manner suitable for the modern world”* (FCO 2015a).

In India, diplomats were left in no doubt of the assemblage's operational goals, summed up candidly by a senior British diplomat as follows: *"We all remember diplomats who didn't want to get their hands dirty with trade...it was now all made clear to us...the role of diplomacy is to open the road to the merchant...we can't drive the car but we can mend potholes in the road"* (Interview with British Diplomat specialising in trade and investment at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016).

The Network Shift coding coincided with changes in the Indian political landscape. The general election held in India in Spring 2014 led to the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian peoples' party) coming to power and Narendra Modi (previously Chief Minister of Gujarat) becoming the fifteenth Prime Minister of India, with a party majority in the *Lok Sabha* (the lower house of the Indian parliament) – a first for any party since 1984 (Sridharan 2014). On taking office, the Modi government prioritised a progressive economic liberalisation agenda that had been started in the early 1990s, fuelling substantial foreign interest in Indian economic development (Kumar 2005, Price 2015). Within two months of Modi taking office (and on the heels of visits to India by French, Russian and Chinese Foreign Ministers) British Foreign Secretary Hague, accompanied by British Chancellor, George Osborne, were on an official visit to Mumbai (7 July 2014) publicly congratulating Modi's government on its *"mandate for change and reform that has transformative potential ... for the relationship between our two countries"*. This was to be achieved by increasing diplomatic frontline staff in India by 30 officers, the opening of up to eight new trade offices around the country as part of a strategy to widen British focus beyond Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and Bangalore, and establishing new Deputy High Commissions in some of India's other fast growing cities.

This reconfigured diplomatic assemblage based on new codings to enable, protect and promote British commercial agendas demanded, as several diplomats confirm in interview, subscription to the view that *"British diplomats had to make a contribution to jobs and growth in the UK"*, and that the assemblage would have to be plugged in *"to different requirements"* (Interviews with British diplomats in New Delhi, December 8th and 10th 2016). The urgency and desire to achieve



commercial objectives by “targeting new spaces and fronts for marketisation” (Peck 2013, 150) was thus instilled across the relational sites of the diplomatic assemblage from the Foreign Office’s desk officers to British diplomats serving in India. This desire is summed up by an FCO official as follows: *“Everyone’s clear at the top of government [points out of the window to No 10 Downing Street] that the priority is jobs and growth and we in this building [FCO], are clear that our job is to contribute to that by getting out to India and getting businesses investing”* (Interview with FCO official on the India Desk, February 11th 2015). Across the multiple sites of the diplomatic assemblage this ‘desire to produce’ the commercial agenda was according to a senior British diplomat: *“made very clear to us irrespective of what bits of work you were doing [in the assemblage]”* (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 25th 2016). Moreover, the material components of the diplomatic assemblage such as Embassies and their grounds, and ambassadorial residences and their gardens were also viewed as intrinsic to securing commercial agendas. The potential use of these material surpluses (Muller and Schurr 2016) to enable, protect and propagate British commercial policy in India is aptly explained by a senior diplomat in interview: *“At one point [David] Cameron went as far as saying ‘If you’ve got a very large diplomatic residence and you are not using it for trade purposes then you shouldn’t have one’”* (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 25th 2016).

The British diplomatic assemblage is thus coded around commercial objectives with a heterogeneous set of material and expressive components and with many possibilities for interaction between these components, and with others from other assemblages. Considered from this perspective, the British diplomatic assemblage and its components can exercise different capacities in new “spaces of possibility” where commercial agendas are sought. Critically, it is the particular difficulties faced in the exercise of those capacities that seem to us to be most important, since these will influence the degree to which commercial agendas can be advanced diplomatically. Here, then, we consider the challenges of exercising diplomatic capacities in India to secure commercial objectives and the behavioural and personal affects upon diplomats arising from this.

#### 4. Capacities to Enable-Protect-Promote Commercial Policy

According to DeLanda (2006) it is always possible to detach a component from one particular set of relations and insert it ('plug') instead in a different set of relations, with different components.

Plugging components of the diplomatic assemblage into commercial activities is crucial not only to how the British government attempts to extend its scope and reach geoeconomically and geopolitically, but also how diplomatic practices are central to understanding the success (or otherwise) of market oriented transformative governance. How a diplomatic assemblage can be ordered and its components [re]directed to exercise capacities is not without significant difficulty given the unpredictability, fluidity and instability of assemblages. Structurally, the FCO reorganised the diplomatic assemblage in order to maximise the potential for capacities. It did this by dividing its work between 'security' policy and 'prosperity' activities. Within India responsibility for coordinating what is described as the "Whitehall effort" lies with the High Commission based in the Chanakyapuri district of New Delhi, a diplomatic enclave established by the Indian government in the 1950s and home to various embassies, high commissions and ambassadorial residences. The British High Commission comprises thirteen departments including defence, trade, international development, consular and visa divisions and occupies a site of 24 acres with 1100 staff. Additionally, the Lutyens-designed whitewashed residence, which has been occupied by British High Commissioners since 1946 is surrounded by 3.6 acres of gardens capable of hosting receptions for up to 2,000 guests. By 2015 the British diplomatic presence in India was larger than any of its other operations globally, and greater in size than any other country represented there. This reterritorialization of the diplomatic assemblage to achieve commercial goals is explained in interview comments from two returning diplomats: *"We went through a lot of change both in terms of how the Indian operation worked...we made it much more a 'national machine' so a lot of change in management, a lot of challenges and I suppose a lot of developing contacts...Each day would contain a mixture of meetings, emails, telephone calls or whatever, broadly around these three areas of work"* (Interview with British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 23rd 2016). However, the instability of the assemblage and

perpetual efforts to order it are summarised by a senior diplomatic source: *“It was a combination of challenging the existing operation [assemblage] to work better and some fire-fighting, and when things go wrong trying to correct that, a follow-up communications meeting about this and how we could improve and transform the operation”* (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 25th 2016).

Effectively, exercising capacities to achieve commercial goals means looking for outcomes rooted in the material and expressive components of the diplomatic assemblage and shaping their interaction with other assemblages. Operationally, this translates into India-based British diplomats determining that: *“What companies by and large want from diplomats is information, introduction and influence”* and therefore *“our sole purpose is to get out to bits of India, to use the Heineken advert, which we weren’t reaching and to do things like making local contacts, talent spotting, looking for commercial opportunities...The essential purpose is to promote the British government trade and investment offer”* (Interview with British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 23rd 2016). In assemblage terms, there is a continuous search for the production of what Dittmer (2014, 392) describes as the “desired outcome” from the exercise of capacities. For example, the material use of the High Commission buildings, residence and gardens to support commercial diplomatic efforts has now become a regular occurrence and is illustrative of the ‘neoliberal salesmanship’ now expected of diplomats charged with promoting, driving and coordinating business agendas as part of state agendas. The exercise of capacities is varied and uneven diplomatically, reflecting who did what, where and how, and crucially for whom. Moreover, it exposes the deep penetration of marketisation and commercial opportunity into socially embedded diplomatic practices. This is captured in comments by a former British diplomat:

*“In New Delhi in the course of getting out to innumerable cocktail parties...you were mixing with business people. You would be feeding into the morning meetings or into the commercial department things you had picked up and, sometimes, they were things of specific importance. I remember once,*

*at one outdoor cocktail party, somebody coming to seek me out and saying that Mr Goenka or Mr Birla wanted to see me. I went over and was asked to recommend a British firm that could be asked to tender for building a new port south of Bombay, which is now the Jawaharlal Nehru Port. I happened to know the P&O chap rather well, and I knew that it had built some ports recently in Australia. I recommended it, told the P&O chap, who came rushing back from Singapore, and eventually it got the contract” (Oral History Project 2013).*

Using the different components of the diplomatic assemblage to support commercial objectives extends from the High Commission in New Delhi organising trade promotions and other commercial events on its extensive grounds, its visa department proposing new arrangements for same day visas for Indian business people to travel to Britain, and its trade department arranging on-site visits by senior British politicians accompanied by business leaders to promote commercial agendas. The complexity and intensity of these capacities to propagate commercial opportunity requires substantial diplomatic time and effort, as a recent British Diplomat to New Delhi explains:

*“We prided ourselves on getting the visits right...a good example [is that] after Modi got elected in 2014 we had seven cabinet ministers arriving within six weeks, two of them – Hague and Osborne – came simultaneously. Then we had a quite a number of ‘Great’ events, such as trade promotion events, held in the Residence where we would have to consider all things like security, invitations and how the event would run, choreographing it and so on. We spent an awful lot of time on ‘pre-planning’ these” (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 25th 2016).*

However, the exercise of capacities critically depends upon their reception. Thus, High Commission staff carry out a crucial role in supporting British commercial interests by gathering market intelligence, advocating on behalf of British businesses, and facilitating commercial contacts in India. Nurturing business engagement requires diplomatic efforts to ensure the Indian regulatory environment is conducive to British investment that is, risks are minimised, bureaucracy and red tape kept to a minimum, and corporate legal environments safe and reliable. The effectiveness of

British commercial diplomacy significantly depends upon the Indian business regime and its cultural practices as well as the efficiency of the business environment. Here, diplomatic components are used to plug in to political channels, allowing British diplomats to act as lobbyists for economic reforms that serve business interests, as explained by a senior diplomat in interview: *“we enable British business to get into India by trying to remove market access barriers- we got the Indians to lift the investment cap on insurance, and, specifically, to enable Lloyds to operate in the market, so that then enabled businesses to follow through”* (Interview with British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 23rd 2016).

Also, promoting, enabling and propagating commercial objectives require that the diplomatic assemblage is open to outside influences that provide opportunity for garnering commercial information. Diplomatically, capacities to achieve this are addressed in a number of ways. First, and supporting the assemblage coding set out above regarding expertise and local geographic knowledge, the High Commission has introduced an induction training programme for new diplomats in which they are encouraged to spend time travelling around India visiting Indian families and businesses. As one diplomat explained: *“I spent a couple of weeks with JCB travelling around and visiting their customers and getting some sense of the business challenges...this served our commercial diplomatic agenda of developing local expertise for local operations with local contexts”*. (Interview with British Diplomat with trade and investment responsibilities at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016). Secondly, a round of diplomatic appointments to support a targeted British commercial drive across India with the specific goal to identify growth markets, build local business connections and garner local commercial intelligence has also been undertaken. This has led to many of these diplomatic appointees having strong business, trade or financial backgrounds. For example, the new Deputy High Commissioner in Ahmedabad has a UKTI background, in Kolkata an economics and MBA background, and in Mumbai an economics background with financial services experience. These appointments are designed to give coherence to the diplomatic assemblage and its commercial objectives.

Efforts to maximise capacities within a diplomatic assemblage have, though, profound implications for individual diplomats in their “cognitive and affective interactions” (Dittmer 2014, 395). Focus upon this subjectivity permits insights to be gleaned into how diplomatic interactions (in efforts to maximise capacities) affect diplomats’ experience of place, their ability to act within it, and their effectiveness in doing so. So, exercising capacities in the diplomatic assemblage is affected by the lived experiences of British diplomats in India who routinely speak in interview of the trials of *“living in the diplomatic bubble”* and the efforts made by them to shape and settle diplomatic life there by *“engendering a transformation in the Embassy compound as a community”* (Interviews with British Diplomats at the UK High Commission in New Delhi, 8th and 10th December 2016). Without exception, they speak of the limits imposed upon their personal effectiveness to exercise capacities by the bureaucratic nature of Indian political and economic life characterised by *“a ‘just in time’ delivery element in what is a ‘white knuckle ride of doing anything”* (Interview with British Diplomat with trade and investment responsibilities at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016). For British diplomats, trying to achieve British commercial objectives in India is wearisome; many are ill-prepared for their bureaucratic encounters (see Gupta 2012). As a senior diplomat explained: *“When I was told I was going to New Delhi I hadn’t realised the level of Indian bureaucracy and how stifling it could be... a view that ‘all will be alright in the end, and if it’s not alright, it’s not the end’... This made working there very frustrating. To speak honestly, when I left India after four years I was quite relieved not to have to deal with that anymore”*. British diplomatic complaints to their Indian counterparts about bureaucracy were frequently met as this well-placed diplomatic source explained by *“This is what you left us with”*, that is, the residual anti-British sentiment that successive British governments since the 1990s had hoped to expunge (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 25th 2016).

The exercise of capacities within a diplomatic assemblage is strongly related to the emotions, mood, and personalities of diplomats. Their interventions within the assemblage are triggered by their past experiences and emergent sensibilities. These affect therefore their assessments of particular

situations and opportunities to deliver the 'Whitehall effort' in India. Harnessing capacities in a diplomatic assemblage is thus shaped by individual reactions to the present moment; practical calculations with specific affects in the context of assemblage unpredictability. A senior diplomat volunteers a good example of this:

*"In terms of my day, because I was responsible for the corporate side of it, including the 24 acres compound in New Delhi and most of the 1100 staff, my day was completely different to what was in my diary- you could guarantee it. My most bizarre day was having a meeting in the morning to deal with a stray cat problem on the compound and in the afternoon being part of the EU3 + team lobbying the Indian Foreign Service about the Iranian nuclear issue. You never knew with the number of people we had, the size of the [assemblage] network, the diplomatic property- this was India and the unexpected often happened"* (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 25th 2016).

This characteristic unpredictability presents diplomats with many challenges as they seek to achieve commercial objectives across multiple sites of the assemblage. For example, efforts to link same day visa for Indians with British commercial goals not only connects two components of the diplomatic assemblage (visa and trade departments of the High Commission), but also brings them into unpredictable relations with other components of other assemblages (Indian Ministry of External Affairs). The exercise of assemblage capacities, in this case for British commercial policy, can be constrained by individual behaviours and reactions that serve to limit, undermine and thwart. These micro-level influences are illustrated by a senior British diplomat in interview: *"I learnt in New Delhi that if you struck up a good relationship with someone in the Indian Ministry you could actually do a lot- they could be incredibly helpful. However, if you had someone, and it didn't result necessarily from something you had done- I had someone who's niece had been turned down for a visa- that ruined the relationship for the next two years- you had to be very careful of that... when it worked it*

*worked incredibly well- when it didn't...well..."* (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, October 20th 2016).

Individual diplomats operate at the frontline in delivering state commercial objectives- offering increasingly technical and specialized business-assistance functions (Rana 2004), and often required to engage in partner search, investment promotion and business advocacy (Kostecki and Naray 2007). Consequently, their individual capacities and interventions render them centrally placed in the assemblage's efforts to extend markets and promote logics of competitiveness: the mainstays of neoliberalism. However, in the exercise of capacities to achieve commercial objectives diplomats are now obliged to juxtapose more traditional, representational forms of diplomacy with new commercially oriented practices. In this way, the emergent nature of diplomatic assemblages to support commercial goals necessitates, as one diplomat argues, *"Finding ways to operate... connections and personal contacts... snippets, introductions and so on but that's only part of the package... You've got to be able to work a room, make these personal introductions but also understand how to use other types and forms of intervention"* (Interview with British Diplomat with trade and investment responsibilities at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016). Thus, personal interventions are crucial to the exercise of capacities, and, as such, position diplomats in the 'twilight world', that is, the "spaces of possibility" between diplomatic and business assemblages. Next we turn to an examination of these spaces, and explore the diplomatic assemblage's success in supporting British commercial policy towards India.

##### **5. "Spaces of possibility" between Diplomacy and Business**

"Spaces of possibility" meld business and diplomatic intensities and desires to 'reach out' to each other, recognising the latent possibilities and alternatives that exist through 'becoming'. They are spaces for lines of flight and their [dis]enablement. In this twilight, tensions may result over the forms, processes and effects of this coming together; an instability that may open up or close down possibilities. Moreover, diplomacy-business encounters are subject to state and corporate scrutiny,



as diplomatic competence to promote neoliberal agendas is heightened. Over time, “spaces of possibility” between diplomacy and business are pervaded by codes of trust, ethical behaviours and evaluation of competencies. There are critical points in this twilight world, in effect, social thresholds marking the [un]acceptable, the [un] sanctioned, and the [ill] licit.

Thus British diplomats working to secure commercial policy objectives in India speak in interview of the *“tension between diplomatic practices and business practices...the sorts of challenges in business are different to those in politics. So in politics one deals with ambiguity, uncertainty and desirable objectives and one has to find a way through these in a way that business doesn’t...diplomacy is trying to reconcile various shades of grey [cf ‘twilight zone’] whereas business isn’t”* ((Interview with British Diplomat with trade and investment responsibilities at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016).

These ‘shades of grey’ are played out in “spaces of possibility”, making them dynamic and unstable and, simultaneously highlighting diplomatic agency and its constraints in trying to achieve ‘lines of flight’. Clearly, the unpredictability of diplomatic capacities in these spaces needs to be referenced to “the properties of other interacting entities” (DeLanda, 2006: 11) be it business operation, corporate demands and heterogeneous political-institutional structures. Diplomats, through their daily interactions in these spaces, are sensitized to how specific capacities play out in relation to, or with, the properties and capacities of other entities, though the contingency of these is often not fully appreciated outside this context. Diplomats in interview thus speak of the pressure placed on them by Ministers to deliver government objectives: *“Whitehall likes process, planning, clarity and that could be hard to deliver in a context where a lot of these qualities weren’t necessarily strengths in that community. That ‘give’ if you like between the expectations of London (which was justified) and what was practicable and doable in India, where the tradition of ‘getting things’ right on the night’ was challenging”* (Interview with British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 23rd 2016).

The resources and capacities of diplomatic agency in “spaces of possibility” thus affect the assemblage’s component parts and its whole. Importantly, diplomats articulate the provisional, unfolding and uncertain nature of these spaces and contrast this with the causality thinking that

tends to characterize political spheres. Hence, the contingency of interaction is foregrounded by interview comments from a senior British diplomat: *"I don't wish to be critical of No 10 but there was a feeling that David Cameron had invested quite a lot of time in India but where were the big contracts? They were making a correlation between time invested and success that they expected and it doesn't work like that...Expectation management was therefore always quite difficult"* (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, October 20th 2016). Rather more bluntly, this was summed up by another diplomat as *"Number 10 had its expectations...the diplomatic network in India didn't quite deliver the level, so there's a problem with our capability...seems to forget the Indians"* (Interview with British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016).

Diplomatic agency in this twilight world is also affected by the uncertainty facing diplomats in setting boundaries for business support, in particular determining and respecting ethical limits of lobbying for business, and the legal-ethical consequences, as representatives of the state, in promoting business interests in translocal spaces. Such questions are brought into sharp focus in interview comments from a British diplomat as follows : *"Rolls Royce [is] a British company- but if they win an order to supply engines, what if that order is to build engines for Singapore, even if that order is to build engines in Singapore[?]"* (Interview with British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 23rd 2016). "Spaces of possibility" are therefore structured by both diplomatic and business calculations that have the capacity to create new and unpredictable directions, rendering an uncertainty to the iterative patterns between assemblages.

Critical points also arise from the effectiveness of commercial diplomacy to meet business demands. Indeed business expectations may be routinely higher than the capacities of diplomats to fulfil them. Diplomats work under various political and bureaucratic conditions which may not correspond to the exigencies of business. Respondents were often candid in their own assessments of their capacities to address business needs, as a senior diplomat explained in interview: *"Business often thinks we are*

*better than we think we are...are we as good as we could be? No. But do businesses appreciate what we do for them? Yes. People who expected...we have the diplomatic presence, we have shown intent, we have visited so as is natural the Indians will give us the contracts, ignore the fact that sometimes it's hardball negotiation"* (Interview with British Diplomat with trade and investment responsibilities at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016).

The tension between stability and fluidity within "spaces of possibility" is therefore contingent on both the content and quality of diplomatic provision of information to support business decision making. Crucial, here, is the ability of diplomats to tap in to local business communities and environments by exercising capacities that build confidence and trust with business representatives. Diplomacy's contribution is largely created by furnishing access to information that is both new and not publicly available. In this way, there is mutual advantage for diplomats and business leaders in terms of informational exchange, though challenges for diplomats in terms of how knowledge should be shared between various business interests. The social threshold between diplomatic and business engagement is revealed in the following way by a senior commercial diplomat in interview : *"a British company had tendered for a contract with an Indian para-state organisation and heard nothing more, and it picked up on the rumour mill that one of its competitors was essentially trying to grab the business, so I went in to the organisation and deliberately asked a naïve question which was 'This process is taking a long time, I wonder why?'* and nothing more than that, and that caused sufficient embarrassed shuffling to get across the message, and in the end the original company won the contract" (Interview with British Diplomat with trade and investment responsibilities at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016).

"Spaces of possibility", then, are characterised by ethics and responsibilities that structure diplomatic capacities. Within these spaces, new orientations can emerge that have the potential to affect the durability, stability and capacity of the assemblage. For example, the question arises of why diplomatic missions should provide commercial assistance rather than having these services

provided by private consultants, intermediaries or self-help business organizations (Kostecki and Naray 2007). “Spaces of possibility” thus furnish a novel perspective on the potentials of diplomacy. For example, British diplomats in India confirm a tendency to be *“increasingly smart about which businesses need help and the nature of this diplomatic assistance”* (Interview with British diplomat at the FCO, February 23rd 2016). This is explained by a British diplomat through the use of the following example: *“SMEs certainly need help entering the market- they need information, introductions to the right customers and so, but should this be provided by a network organisation like Chambers of Commerce [rather than diplomats] ...whereas a big company like Vodafone that might be trying to sort out its retrospective taxation issue ...well, nobody else can deploy the sort of influence that the British Government can do”* (Interview with British Diplomat with trade and investment responsibilities at the FCO, London, February 24th 2016).

“Spaces of possibility” not only have critical points determined by questions of ethics and responsibility but also of blame, and this can affect the stability of assemblages. This blame may be expressed in terms of the limited understanding of business needs by diplomats, lack of diplomatic entrepreneurship to find solutions to particular challenges, or abuse of diplomatic knowledges (Kostecki and Naray 2007). Component parts of the diplomatic assemblage have attempted to deflect these criticisms by highlighting the everyday challenges of working in the twilight space of diplomacy-business. Thus, British diplomats, somewhat defensively, speak in interview of the complications of conducting commercial diplomacy in India *“one of the few places where being a bureaucrat is seen as honorific rather than a term of abuse”* and a *“bureaucracy that doesn’t do deliverables, but ‘process’* (Interview with senior British Diplomat at the FCO, London, February 25th 2016). Diplomatic capacities are therefore fundamentally unpredictable.

## **6. Conclusions and Future Research Directions**

This paper has examined diplomacy’s role in supporting neoliberal agendas through their promotion, protection and propagation. This mobilisation entangles state and markets and produces a varied

and variegated process of geographical transformation. Taking British efforts to improve commercial relations with India, we have shown how the material and expressive components of diplomacy are being deployed to champion state goals in global markets. Using the analytical categories of codings, capacities and tendencies associated with assemblage theory, we have demonstrated how marketisation and the search for commercial opportunity are now central diplomatic goals.

Diplomacy has thus been obliged to adapt and reorganise itself to support actively the extension of markets and logics of competitiveness. To this end, the doings and sayings of diplomats have been transformed to support the state's commercial objectives, which in turn have served to facilitate the amplification of business interests. Additionally, these transformations in diplomatic assemblages have created fuzziness between diplomacy's traditional representational role and its new advocacy of market-rule.

The India case also illustrates the ways in which diplomacy struggles in the name of the state's international competitiveness; the mundane and practical quest to promote and respond to business opportunity, exploit commercial advantage, and secure market advantage using all of the assemblage's material and expressive components. We have focussed upon the specifics and details of this process and shown how this mobilisation of state power produces unruliness. The functioning, authority and legitimation of diplomacy is challenged in efforts to link transnational business with place-bound politico-bureaucratic dynamics. Understanding place in all its geographical complexity is thus fundamental to the exercise of diplomatic capacities to secure state goals, as many diplomats who have worked in India confirm.

Assemblage theory offers a distinct way of conceptualizing the relations between entities and their constituent elements. Specifically, as we have demonstrated, it lays emphasis on the emergent, that is, the ability of the diplomatic assemblage to exercise capacities to promote commercial agendas in the face of unrelenting political pressure for market oriented transformative governance. These capacities involve both expressive and material components that are plugged in to new "spaces of

possibility” in India. Thus, the exercise of such capacities gives rise to a range of personal encounters in these spaces which affect diplomats’ experience of place and, crucially, their ability to act within it. The exercise of capacities in the diplomatic assemblage, as we have seen, has strong personal impacts upon those diplomats charged with commercial policy delivery. Given the assemblage is both the provisional holding together of a group of components across differences and a continuous process of change, we have exposed how the practicalities of neoliberal promotion in India and the tribulations for diplomats are substantial.

Critically, “spaces of possibility” for commercial diplomacy are contingent and correspond to an ongoing process of (de)composing and sustaining interactions between diplomatic and business assemblages. We have depicted this interaction by focussing on the uncertainty of diplomatic agency in India. In particular, we have argued that these “spaces of possibility” are structured by both diplomatic and business calculations that have the capacity to create new and unpredictable courses that render both an uncertainty and fuzziness to the agential interactions between assemblages. Importantly, this has the potential to affect the durability, stability and capacity of diplomatic assemblages.

The application of assemblage theory to the study of diplomacy offers in our view further promising research avenues to unpack the transnational and local processes associated with neoliberalism and its multi-locale rationalities. In particular, it offers the scope to examine and connect ‘in- here’ diplomatic organisation, settings and agendas with ‘out-there’ diplomatic practices, governance arrangements and business environments. In this way, applying assemblage theory to diplomacy addresses what Peck (2013, 143) suggests are the jointly constituted ‘in-heres’ and ‘out theres’ that are “animated by certain centres of calculation and sites of conjectural power”. Commercial diplomacy has spatiality- it has consequences for cities, regions and states, local economies, and workforces. It is transformative, affecting governing logics, relations and practices across sites and territories yet, simultaneously, displaying an instability and contingent nature. It is fuelled by

geopolitical and geoeconomic knowledges produced and circulated in and across assemblage formations. It is therefore deeply contextual, dependent upon local rules, regulatory environments, and business practices set within broader intra and inter-state politically scaled dynamics. Moreover, commercial diplomacy is a lived experience highly dependent upon and fashioned by the enthusiasm, performances and competencies of individuals charged with promoting transnational business cooperation and growth through organised diplomatic means in what Peck (2013, 146) describes as “grounded, local and lived settings”. Surprisingly, scholarly attention to the role of diplomacy in promoting neoliberalism is still in its infancy, despite job creation, tax revenue increase and economic integration now underpinning state agendas. Geographers have much to contribute to this evolving field. This paper launches this process.

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