Globalization friends-

I am sending a chapter from my dissertation on expatriate families in Kathmandu, Nepal. I have removed a significant section on colonialism in South Asia to focus on the system of international expatriate employment. I have tried to fill in some gaps that I’m sure exist after its excision, but others remain. I look forward to hearing your comments.

Heather Hindman

hhindman@uchicago.edu
This article discusses the rise of a particular form of international employment and the creation of a field of expertise focused on perfecting the expatriate employee. The central focus is upon the general system of international employment that in many ways sets the terms for discussion of how and why employees should be sent abroad. Critiquing the literature emerging from the field of international human relations, I wish to suggest some of the expectations placed upon the worker sent abroad. Contracts, training and compensation practices of various entities structure the way the expatriate family experiences their posting abroad. The general attitudes and approaches taken to placing personnel abroad are largely set by the research and theories developed in the more general field of international human resource development. As a result of the increasing amount of research on the issue and ever larger number of organizations sending employees abroad, many companies and governments have begun outsourcing the hiring and training of their expatriate employees to specialized agencies who prepare the family to go abroad, regardless of the job they are hired to do. Yet, Nepal’s particular position as an ‘underdeveloped’\(^1\) nation and site of ‘hardship’ for employees situates it at an extreme of the international employment circuit. This degree of preparation and training for expatriate employment is reserved for elite specialists and yet the discourse

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\(^1\) Throughout this work I use terms such as underdeveloped and third world as they are used by interlocutors in development, diplomacy and business. I will mention when these terms are meant to indicate my own divisions or understandings rather than those of my informants.
that surrounds their deployment engages many of the issues discussed in relation to the
off-shoring of other types of work in a neo-liberal economic system. Contrasting flows
of goods and people, the deculturalization of work and the erosion of boundaries between
public and private all are key topics in the international human resource literature. In
looking at expatriate employment as a practice of privilege, I wish to think more
generally about changing ideas of work in an era where the globe is, differentially, both
the marketplace and the labor pool for American business.

In looking at the history of expatriate employment, I find two particular moments
as key: European colonialism and the development of international employment policies
after World War II and into the era of neoliberal economic systems. First, it is worth
noting the historical disjuncture between these two: colonialism, at least in its official
form ended at roughly the same time as the end of World War II and thus the two
practices I wish to use to craft an unusual history did not coexist – and this is part of the
point.\(^2\) I want to engage in a comparison of difference, rather than similarity, attending to
the historical and political differences between both of these practices and the behavior of
contemporary expatriates in Nepal, for the similarities seem more capable of obscuring
the subtleties of each. This is an important point, one perhaps too often forgotten by
scholars engaging in comparative work and at some level most scholarship is
comparative, even if not explicitly so. The difficulties of comparisons of similarities can
perhaps best be seen in the work of early philologists and historians of religion, such as
Max Muller and Mircea Eliade, who wrote of the parallels between different religions,
crafting symbols that transcended any specific tradition. The danger in this type of
scholarship is discussed in Talal Asad’s *Genealogies of Religions* where he presents an
historical argument demonstrating that these comparisons are rarely of equals and more
often than not constricts one practice to the form of another. I do not wish in discussing
expatriate practices to make them look like colonialism merely for the purposes of
crafting history and thus I attempt to focus on their contrasting elements.

\(^2\) A number of books provide interesting accounts of the conjuncture of decolonization and the end of
World War II including, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* edited by Talal Adas (1973), *Colonial
In both colonialism and expatriate business processes, power arrives from the outside, not unlike the typical description of Pacific kingship wherein those who travel across the oceans bring change into an existing world with results that are rarely fully understood. In holding the encounter between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ as central, I want to consider expatriacy as a historical project and engage with its importance in South Asia, thus embedding expatriates within the history of the region. Although expatriates come from foreign lands, they exist in relation to the history of the geographical space around them, whether they are aware of that history or not. Yet, I also want to bring in the processes that facilitate the voyage of abroad and shape the practices of expatriates in Nepal, many of which are begun in the home country. In attending to these two fields, I find a number of issues reappearing, including the double-edged sword of paternalism and the ambiguous divisions between labor and the domestic. Bringing these issues to the current moment, I wish to conclude by looking at a new form of sending power over the seas that has emerged from the practice of outsourcing and off-shoring. The former creates a new relationship between home, host and messenger while the latter reconfigures the relationship between work and ‘identity’. Without conflating the important geographical and economic differences, I contend that the way that difference is remade for expatriates holds lessons for wider practices of international labor and business.

**Nation-State Neoliberalism and After Colonialism**

There are two political moments that produced much of the framework of Expatria: the development of a nation-state system and related economic processes and secondly, European colonialism and its aftermath. Needless to say, these massive world historical conjunctures have been much debated and are extremely complex and convoluted. Yet, I wish to draw what I hope are a few small and not particularly controversial conclusions. The world has not always been defined and divided via a nation-state system but it is certainly largely impacted by this understanding today. Betraying my classicist roots, it is easy to see in the Roman Empire an understanding of being removed from a native land and exile. Yet, there are different understandings of the nature of the physical entity from which one is removed as well as differing
appreciations of one’s relationship with that territory. Regardless of whether attributed to the Treaty of Westphalia, the League of Nations or the end of World War II, contemporary understandings of the nation-state predicate a few general assumptions pertinent to the expatriate condition. First, borders are. The reality of a protected nation-state boundary acts as a physical enforcement of the realities of a statist world, and although expatriates often have the money, privilege and passports that allow them to cross borders with relative ease – and yet passport control is a reality and a necessary part of everyday life. Secondly, expatriates exist within and are attuned to a climate of association between nation and state. Although there is a great deal of debate around this matter and an awareness of the moments when the two are discordant – there is a prevalent understanding that undergirds the most basic practices of expatriate communities. It is the association of national culture that makes coherent such practices as ‘culture fairs’ in which individuals are enjoined to act as representatives of their country through food and performance. Thirdly, the very idea of expatriacy demands a singular association with place – for the premise of moving abroad demands a home of origin. This is an extreme simplification of the impact of a nation-state system on the contemporary understanding of expatriates and radically abridges contemporary concerns about the nation-state. Yet pointing out these now obvious associations does illustrate the moments in which the expatriate community could have been produced differently. In addition, it suggests that contemporary understandings of what it means to be living abroad are premised on rather recent understandings of what it means to have a home nation and one’s relationship with that home. Contemporary scholarship has uncovered both a longer history of movements of goods and peoples throughout the world and scaled back the exploding belief in a contemporarily global world. Yet the particularities of Expatria exist within a relatively short history, if one attends to the demands of practice rather than terminology.

The one-to-one correlation of individual and nation of origin is concomitant with a reciprocal correlation of nation and state, yet one of a particular type. While the

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3 See authors such as J. Abu-Lughod, Mitchell, Schwab, Blaut, Adas and Wolf (1982).
4 See numerous critiques of the ‘McWorld’ thesis discussed in Chapter 5, for example.
philosophical and to a certain degree ethnological and political underpinnings of the nation-state may find complex genealogies, the particular form of nation-statist thinking that has the greatest impact upon the situation of expatriacy is one of “a global of formal horizontalities and symmetries” (Kelly and Kaplan, 2001: 4). Even beyond acting as a major employer, the structuration of the U.N., with its configuration of equality of actors yet underpinned with the power of the Cold War, is the framework that makes contemporary Expatria possible. In being able to act as both acultural human beings with shared diplomatic and developmental mission while wearing a cloak of culture, albeit one that binds some more than others, enables the shared dialogue whereby difference is merely a flavor.

This permiterizing or superficializing of difference into neat categorizations, into niches, must be seen within larger strategies of liberal accommodations to culture. For in a reversal of contemporary arguments over multiculturalism, it is important to note what is left out. If under a liberal rhetoric ‘culture’ is protected – everything else is up for attach. Difference is permitted only within a very narrow wheal and much of what remains is required to be ‘modern’.

**Governments and Businesses**

On a more speculative note, I am left to wonder if in the current era there is perhaps a refiguring of the dynamic between government and business that will in the future greatly impact the way that expatriate work is done. The contemporary era is one in which many American companies exceed in size the economies of many nations. In addition, the lines between government and business are becoming increasingly blurry. The distinction I wish to point to is expressed particularly succinctly by Fernando Coronil who states,

> If under ‘colonial globalization’ (by which I mean the mode of integration of colonies to the global economy), direct political control was needed to organize primary commodity production and trade within restricted markets, then under neoliberal globalization, the unregulated production and free circulation of primary commodities in the open market requires a significant dismantling of government controls previously oriented toward the production of national industries. Before, the exploitation of primary commodities took place through the visible hand or politics; now it is organized by the ostensibly invisible hand
or the market in combination with the less prominent, but no less necessary, helping hand of the state (Coronil, 2001: 75).

The state role as supporter of industry has changed, but in no way been eliminated. Instead, it is merely become more subtle and potentially more powerful, even it its lack of action.

**International Employees Under Neoliberalism**

With this structure of relations between the government and the company in mind, it is necessary to delve into how companies think about their employees under this neoliberal regime. Furthermore, I want to suggest that the corporate models outlined here apply to most if not all of those families employed in Nepal as a result of the predominance of the contract system. Even in those situations where individuals are direct employees of government entities, the ideas held within the realm of corporate employment practices have come to dominant state thinking as well. In addition, the patriotism and loyalty to the state demanded of government employees has extended to the non-governmental employees as well. Once considered the stronghold of stable employment practice, the foreign service is currently gripped with concern regarding the flexible labor opportunities slowing being introduced. Whether centered around the erosion of limits upon the nature of positions that can be politically appointed from outside the career foreign service community or the increasing competition for State Department positions, both within the community and from outsiders who previously held contract positions. In Nepal, the greatest outcry is heard over the ever-shrinking number of official employees at entities such as USAID in favor of short-term contractors and outsourcing. These laments familiar to those acquainted with concerns over the decreasing power of labor against a global neoliberal economic structure have a great impact upon how expatriate workers view their jobs. Yet, they also produce an increasing reliance upon the ideologies produced from within the business community regarding efficient use of international employment. Although of a very different nature, expatriate employees observe the increase in their own form of outsourcing and an increasing view of the bottom line over the vision of career employment.
The Company and the Employee

Although impacted by the same shifting labor relations that seem endemic to worldwide economies, there are also forces unique to the expatriate condition that alter the relationship between employer and employee. Many of the tensions and reconfigurations are a result of negotiations over the nature of expatriate employment, primarily concerning the division between work and non-work – is it a job or a life? Paid labor in its myriad of forms plays a central role the ideology of most social theorists and economists but equally well in how the individual laborer sees him or herself. What I suggest is that in expatriate employment there is a certain confusion but within a shared discourse. Companies and their expatriate employees in many ways share an overarching understanding of the economies of labor, but that this understanding does not have a clear space for the type of work expatriates perform. This is in part due to their interstitial position between 'blue' and 'white' collar occupations, a location in many ways traced to the earlier discussion of expatriates as engineers of development and diplomacy. Perhaps an even greater disjuncture can be found in the ambiguity of the nature of their labor, is expatriate employment a job or a life? The inability to resolve this query is the cause not only of the confusing and complex nature of expatriate compensation but also the basis for many of the conflicts that occur between the expatriate family and their company sponsor.

Although perhaps particularly apparent to me as a result of my interest in the domestic space of Expatria, I believe that much of the difficulty and confusion centers on the family. Put simply, because the company is responsible for the entire life of the employee, they demand that the employee give his entire life. This sounds somewhat dramatic, but it is a perception that also works reciprocally, as employees who give more than mere hours to the company expect the company to be responsible for not merely their time on the job but also other aspects of their lives. In some ways, returning to the earlier distinctions between colonial and post-colonial relations of domination, the expatriate model is colonial – there is a greater inequality and demand upon the subject but also a certain, perhaps paternalistic, responsibility taken on by the superior party.
International Human Relations

The approach to employment that I describe is not expressed in philosophical treatises about the relationship between work and leisure but rather the practices in which employers engage as well as the considerations of various approaches to international employment discussed in journals devoted to the topic. In conversations with administrators in various organizations about their philosophy of labor, most individuals pointed me to the various journals as well as conflicting theories discussed therein regarding how to treat international employees. After expressing interest in this subject, one man discussed his bafflement with the changing ideas, suggesting that what seemed to be recommended by research in one year would be discounted the next. His confusion does seem reflected in the conversations in journals such as The International Journal of Human Resources Management, that seem to consist of an ever-increasing number of statistical surveys and dialogues between the group of six to eight scholars who focus upon the issue of expatriate employment.
Figure 4.1
Diagram of Scholars Working on Expatriate Concerns
from article entitled "The Persistent Myth of High Expatriate Failure Rates"
by Anne-Wil Harzing
From talking to those responsible for hiring and training in the companies, these journals were not the direct source of their information; rather they often received missives from their head office on new ideas. Sometimes this circulated in the form of newsletters and pamphlets designed either to given to the new employees themselves or address directly to trainers and those making hiring decisions. In larger companies and governments, the information was often circulated in more general topic magazines, often addressed to a wider audience. These general interest magazines contain a variety of articles addressed to managers as well as tips on everyday life.

**Compensation**

Money and other forms of compensation are perhaps an appropriate place to start observing how employers and employees thing of their relationship. Financial gain is certainly one of the major reasons employees choose to take on international assignments. Some of the gains are immediate, in the form of raises, bonuses and supplements but an equal attraction is found in the potential for expatriate employment to produce future gains. The immediate financial rewards grouped under the rubric of the 'compensation package' takes on a double meaning in so far as it not only compensates the worker for their labor, but also compensates for the life abroad and often implicitly for the extra labor of the spouse required as a part of expatriate life. There are complex calculations couched in the rubric of precision for who receives what allowances, bonuses and additional pay in a variety of different settings. Considering what variables are considered significant in the calculations of salary reveals a great deal about how Expatria considers international employment.

First, I will focus though on the longer-term gains promised and the potential that is part of taking on an international assignment, particularly one considered difficult. Accepting an international assignment is widely seen as a means to 'jump rank'. In corporate circles this can mean quicker promotions or the opportunity to gain job status that would not be available in a home office, which is then retained on return. A young employee who might not be able to find assignment as a project manager in their home country may be able to be hired at that level for an overseas assignment and then having
attained this status will retain the status in future jobs. A similar logic applies in the foreign service in many governments. Diplomatic staff find that accepting assignment in smaller or less prestigious countries allow them to be placed at higher levels than would be possible in more populous countries. Nepal, being of limited diplomatic interest to most Western nations usually receives diplomats who are neophytes in their particular position. These are all examples of situations where rewards accrue to individuals for accepting international assignments, there are also incidents in which the requirement to work abroad can be imposed upon a worker, who is told that without accepting such an assignment, they have no chance for advancement. One reluctant worker abroad recounted a conversation with a superior when he was told that unless he accepted this particular assignment, he would never again be promoted, as he had turned down earlier international opportunities. Another person described the 'glass ceiling' that confronted individuals in his organization who had not worked abroad and the necessity of accepting international assignment to reach the higher levels of the company.\(^5\) These situations all point to the importance, whether wielded as a carrot or a stick, of accepting international assignments to having a successful career in various jobs. The need to work abroad for many employees is the source of one of the more common debates between those within Expatria and those questioning the experience from outside.

‘Volunteering’ to be posted abroad, the choice to move or not to move, is one of the central dividing questions of scholars who study the movement of people. With tourists at one extreme and refugees at another, expatriates exist in the wide and complex territory in the middle of those who move. Although contemporary scholars of migration are seeking new models to understand a variety of ways of living within the space of the world, most analysis still rely on judgments of choice and force as well as analytics of temporality and presumed temporality of the experience. Expatriates, still burdened with the association with the 1920s artistic community are often seen to be migrant communities of choice. In addition, their orientation continues to be a reference to some non-local home country, an association that would appear to put them into the diaspora

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\(^5\) These two conversations occurred in South Korea, a setting that has many more businessmen than Nepal.
category. Without seeking to classify expatriates within any one of the available rubrics, nonetheless, I think it relevant to consider the eruption of the issue of choice in everyday conversation.

Expatriates complain, perhaps even a lot, although, rather like the academy, this complaining more often takes the form of social bonding over shared hardship. The responses of those outside the community is rarely sympathetic and many see the laments as baseless. Particularly in Nepal, a setting that many resident foreigners seek out as an appealing destination, the question is raised, "if you are so unhappy, why don't you just go home". For those in the home country as well, expatriate life is seen with a rosy glow. After all, Nepal is Shangri-La and for expatriates, it is paid Shangri-La with servants and hot water. A compulsory paradise is no paradise at all and for expatriate employees and their families the experience is largely seen in the light of obligation rather than paradise. Although certainly not in the same way as refugees, most employees who accept international assignments see themselves as having only a limited amount of choice in the matter as a result of the various rewards and punishments that are produced as part of the expatriate life. The conversation over the pain and pleasure of living in Nepal is certainly one rehearsed with those friends and family members abroad, but it is more often a source of contention between expatriates and foreigners residing in Nepal for other reasons. The contrast is between individuals who perform a job that allows them to remain in Nepal and others who are in Nepal because it allows them to remain in a job. This is the locus of much of the hostility between resident foreigners and expatriates, with the former expressing hostility that expatriates not only do not love the country that they labor so greatly to remain in, but even express anger and frustration with living in Kathmandu.

The employees who engage in international assignments as a means to forward their career goals are often quickly confronted with the ways in which the same assignments can be a detriment to their careers. The phrase ‘out of sight, out of mind’ is of particular relevance to the expatriate employee and is frequently mentioned as a

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6 An extended discussion of the relationship between expatriate practice and diaspora, see my article "The American Diaspora in Nepal?: Reconsidering Race, Class and Meaning in Mobile Populations."
danger of the life. Regardless of the importance placed upon the tasks that individuals are engaged in abroad, being 'out of the loop' is a constant concern of the employee and as much as international assignments can help an individual's career, being away from the home office can hurt it. This is true even in diplomatic circles where international work occupies a majority of the workers career, nonetheless, stories circulate about foreign service officers who spent too much time away from the capital and were forgotten when appropriate opportunities were available. In some diplomatic circles, return to the country is a mandatory part of the individuals career trajectory and those who, for whatever reason, do not return are subject to demotions and wage reductions. For those outside the foreign service, the situation is in many ways more difficult, for mechanisms to keep the internationally posted employee involved in the everyday activities at the home office are less institutionalized. Thus, the employee must strike a fine balancing act, for being away from the center permits advancement but be away too long and the same noble act can obscure an individual’s presence in the organization.

These impacts of international employment upon a worker’s career are much discussed and debated both by the employees themselves and their spouses. Much less discussed but no less relevant are the monetary compensations that expatriate employees receive for their work abroad. These compensations take many forms and although the result is almost always an increase in money made, the categories under which these supplements are granted are a significant illustration of how companies think about the nature of international employment. Supplements range from 'hardship allowances' to 'differential adjustments' and the differences in how money and other forms of wealth are categorized also give information to the new expatriate family about their posting. A hardship allowance must mean there is hardship to be endured. Through explicit statements of the fact, but perhaps more importantly through these economic incentives, employees learn there are problems and difficulties to be endured abroad and that these difficulties are worthy of compensation. I do not wish to suggest that expatriate employees are naïve about working abroad, instead, that the precise nature of the compensations granted are not merely a pile of cash as any other, but due to the categorization of these various forms of recompense expatriates learn more about the specificity of their new home. In addition, these categories emerge, particularly for the
family, as injunctions rather than information and recommendations. Thus, funds offered in such categories as 'private schooling' or 'household staff' act as strong suggestions that families will need to pursue these things.

The first incentive most employees become aware of is the direct salary increase, whether gained as a result of promotion incurred as part of the international assignment or as a direct raise given to expatriate employees. This is merely the most straightforward form of compensation. More complex are the calculations to be made regarding the standard of living bonuses and changes in buying power that are a part of expatriate employment. The overarching ideology that shapes this system is a desire to ensure that the expatriate employee is given the same way of life they would enjoy in their home country. At the level of capital, that is usually calculated from a 'hardship index' or a 'differential allowance'. Countries are ranked based upon a wide range of criteria to designed to assess the disparity in living conditions between a normative home and the posting. The hardship allowance is the most known aspect of supplementary compensation factors, particularly in Nepal, and often is used to describe the general package of incentives. In specific, the hardship allowance is calculated based upon an accounting of goods, services and difficulties endured as part of daily life. A ranking is assigned to describe the degree of hardship that is associated with specific countries and at time even specific cities. In most countries, and certainly in the United States, the national government rates are often used by private employers, unless there is some mitigating circumstance.

**Hardship Allowances**

The government also pays a post differential (commonly called the hardship differential) to employees at those posts where living conditions are extraordinarily difficult, physical hardships are excessive, or conditions are notably unhealthy. The differential can be saved or spent by employees to help offset conditions at the post or to get away from the post for a temporary change in environment. It serves as an incentive in recruiting and retaining personnel for the more difficult locations abroad. Approximately one-third of all U.S. Government posts abroad qualify for a post differential. The post differential for each post is established on the basis of a standard evaluation of environmental conditions. The evaluation procedure consists of the collection of information concerning post conditions, primarily from a *Post Differential Questionnaire*, and the rating of the post for 121 specific environmental factors, weighted for relative importance. Depending on the total
hardship rating, employees at qualifying posts are paid differentials of 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25 percent of base pay.\(^7\)

This paragraph from the U.S. State Department describes the institution’s approach to hardship allowances. A twenty-two page form used to determine the differential percentage is completed each year by a member of the American Mission staff in each posting and updated quarterly in situations where conditions are changing regularly. The staff member is asked to evaluate factors such as the difficulty of reaching emergency medical care, environmental pollution and availability of goods. These figures are closely watched by foreign service personnel as well as other expatriates whose salary will be based on these figures. Employees themselves, more than their spouses, often discuss the fairness of various rankings. Complaints are made about the local ranking as well as discussing which countries might be desirable next postings as their percentage may be overvalued or critiques made of places where a lazy officer’s inability to express the changing problems in their country did not lead to a needed adjustment. The hardship allowance does not include danger pay or cost-of-living allowances which are a part of a different calculation. Nepal currently has a 20% ranking, which it has held for some time. Neighboring India ranges between 15% to 25%, depending on the city of posting, for example.

**Cost-of-Living**

The cost-of-living allowance has less impact on the employee posted to Nepal, but the complex calculations entailed in the determination of this percentage is revealing of the many considerations taken into account by expatriate employers and employees. This figure is an attempt to analyze the buying power of the employee’s spendable income on predetermined types of goods. As with the hardship differential, these numbers are largely set by the government and adopted by other employers. To again quote from the State Department,

\(^7\) This quote is from the January 2002 version of "Compensation of American Government Employees in Foreign Countries," found in foreign service handbooks. The latest versions are posted on the State Department website at http://www.state.gov/m/a/als.htm
Indexes of living costs abroad, as computed by the Office of Allowances of the U.S. Department of State, measure the cost in dollars of goods and services (excluding housing and education) purchased by Americans at foreign posts compared with the cost of comparable goods and services purchased in the Washington, D.C. area.

Thus, the cost-of-living allowance fixes Washington as equivalent to 100 and foreign postings are compared to this benchmark to receive a numerical assignment generally between 80 and 150, which is thought to correlate to the ability to buy a certain basket of goods abroad; often referred to in the business community as the ‘market basket’ phenomenon. The idea behind this is to find ways to make it possible for the individual abroad to purchase the same collection of goods available abroad. Before discussing the nuances of the market basket, it is worth delving into how the U.S. government makes its calculations to determine the cost-of-living allowance.

The calculations are based upon the Retail Price Schedule used for other calculations by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and analyses the cost for 120 different goods and services. These items are chosen not only for their importance in the life of the anticipated average American but also as particularly comparable items; things available and appropriate worldwide. Survey officers travel to various locations, assessing the cost and comparability of various items on the list at the two most popular locations for expatriate shopping for the given item. With only these factors to consider the calculation is relatively simple, but things become more complex as other factors must be considered. Three factors complicate this singular number, first the fluctuating exchange rate, secondly the different types of expenditures individuals make abroad and finally the differing access to government services for various employees.

The complexity of these calculations as well as the precision with which they are determined is overwhelming. Without expounding on the full intricacy of this system, it is worth noting a few things. The exchange rate, unsurprisingly, plays a significant role, as each item purchased abroad is converted to U.S. dollars for comparison to the Washington item and as exchange rates change, this comparison is greatly affected – although the individual's salary is not as the presumption is that all salaries are paid in U.S. dollars. Yet, currency fluctuations can also impact the cost of buying goods abroad.

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8 Again, see the State Department web site at http://www.state.gov/m/a/als.htm.
particularly imported goods. The result is often that even a massive currency fluctuation may have limited impact upon the index. Nepal's currency recently lost nearly 20% of its value relative to the dollar, causing a revaluation of the cost-of-living adjustment between January and April of 2002. Yet the numbers changed little, particularly for government employees who were still purchasing items from the commissary with U.S. dollars in dollar prices, while for non-government employees their cost for purchasing a market basket decreased slightly (99-94 relative). Thus the importance of the second factor, access to government services. As the Department of State is aware of the use of their tables for calculations by other international employees, they also determine the difference in costs of buying the market basket for those without access to services such as a commissary, pouch mail and other facilities. This second figure, or 'local costs' analysis is generally five to fifty points higher than the 'U.S. government costs,' due to the difficulty and costs of obtaining goods and services without the support of government employment.

The final calculations might be considered a form of lifestyle analysis. The *Retail Price Schedule* must be considered in relation to the *Consumer Expenditure Survey* to arrive at the benchmark number for Washington. This second calculation takes into consideration the percentage of spendable income an average family with two or three dependants, spends within various categories in their household budget, with the base salary set at $47,900. Housing and education are excluded as these are a separate calculation in salary supplement, other expenditure categories include food at home (13.9%), clothing (7.4%) and recreation (17.3%). These percentages come into play as the costs of individual items are averaged within subcategories, frozen fish, fresh fish and canned fish are given relative ranking within the 'fish' subcategory and then contribute to

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9 Without complicating this description further, it is worth noting due to the dramatic shift in currency in Nepal, it is one of the few exceptions to the higher costs for non-governmental employees. This is true in the direct market basket comparison where the increased buying power of the dollar makes locally purchased food cheaper to the foreign buyer than the commissary. This differential disappears when the different types of items purchased in Nepal are taken into consideration.

10 These percentage weightings are based upon figures recalculated every five years, with 1999 being the most current U.S. government weighting analysis.
the 'food at home' category in relation to the presumed importance of fish within the average family's diet. This is relevant to the international cost-of-living calculation because these percentages are seen to vary from posting to posting. If entertaining is presumed to be a larger part of life in a given posting, 'alcohol and tobacco' may receive a higher weighting as a percentage of the family's overall spending, whereas in Nepal, the importance of household staff means that the 'domestic service' category has a higher weighting. As a result, all of the figures must be seen from two different perspectives. The first calculation, or the relative figure, represents the cost of buying exactly the same goods and amounts as the archetypical Washington D.C. family while the index figure reflects the different buying patterns of those living abroad. Examples given by the State Department include food costs that will be higher at locations where spoilage is a particular problem or additional clothing expenses where climate and cleaning methods lead to particular deterioration. Thus, each year four figures are released for each of the more than 180 locations given cost-of-living index ratings: local relative (99 for Nepal in January 2002), local index (107), U.S. government relative (89) and U.S. government index (97).

There is a further calculation that must be reached to determine the amount of salary supplement the employee receives. Employees posted in locations with a rating of 103 or less receive no bonuses, nor is worth noting is their pay in any way decreased – cost-of-living can be only an additive calculation. First, the employee's spendable income is calculated as a percentage of total salary, approximately $26,000 for a typical employee. Then, the index figure is correlated to a table resulting in a percentage of spendable income supplement. Thus, the typical employee following Nepal's local index rating of 107 is in the lowest category of compensation, receiving only a 5% supplement or $1,300. By comparison, Japan's Okinawa Prefecture, home to a large number of U.S. military families, regularly receives index number around 190 that correlates to a 90% supplement.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} This is a somewhat anomalous example, as the large military presence also means a large PX system. As a result there is great differential between the U.S. government employee index and the public employee. In 2002, public indexes were 191/192 while U.S. government indexes were 137/139.
The cost-of-living adjustment gives a number of indicators of how expatriate employment is analyzed. The centering of the norm upon an average Washington D.C. resident with a particular income and spending pattern stems from the foreign service practice of returning employees to D.C. every few postings and often employees maintain a home in the area. Also entailed within this benchmark individual are presumptions about family, spending patterns and lifestyle. This certainly places those outside this model family in a difficult position, as their choices in spending may not be reflected in the compensation structure. The State Department is currently struggling with one particular example of this in new demands for compensation related to elderly family members. Yet, more than the financial incompatibility, there are the expectations that accompany these figures. Budgets for alcohol and entertaining, recreation and domestic service suggest that these should be a part of one's life, particularly when they receive greater weighting in Nepal. In a different way, confining education costs to the needs of children provides little incentive for adults to continue their education abroad. Perhaps the most striking presumption of the structure of the U.S. government cost-of-living allowance as well as other calculations that I have studied is the presumption of a single income family. Single employees and working spouses do not appear as entities with different needs from the traditional family norm.

**Market Basket**

Yet, even taking the typical family as a given, what was initially most striking to me was the presumption that employees living abroad would wish to buy the same goods as they would purchase at home. Practically, from the perspective of the employer, utilizing such a standard list of goods enables a statistical comparison that creates numerical ranking of locations, thus facilitating the remuneration strategies described above. From my ethnographic analysis it also creates expectations. Although many of

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12 This is perhaps one of the greatest changes in the concerns of expatriates over the past several years. The demands upon both time and money of those charged with care of elderly relatives are not accounted for within the expatriate system. In my limited experience, the needs of aging and ill parents are becoming one of the most common reasons for expatriates rejecting an international posting as well as a reason for cutting short an assignment.
the women I spoke with had been through the expatriate posting and reposting enough that they had established their own patterns and habits, new families are often overwhelmed by the new life they seek to establish. Although most government agencies and companies provide predeparture training, this often focuses on things such as varying compensation packages. Thus, a part of a new expatriate wife's training is learning about the market basket expectation.

As I will discuss in relation to the structure of predeparture information, there is an odd elision that takes place. While the structures of expatriate employment seek to facilitate certain activities, to teach women how to do particular things, they actually teach them more about what to do. Popular consensus suggests that the concrete knowledge that allows women to enact these dictates must be learned locally, through social networks and trial and error. As a result, in the granting of market basket allowances, families learn what to buy, but not really how to buy it. As discussed in Chapter Six, learning where to get the items that women are expected to procure for their families is a challenge that is saved for the new posting. What becomes apparent to the expatriate spouse in the compensation structure and training is that it is good to buy the same goods that they would buy at home and that they have a big job ahead of them turning the monetary supplement of the cost-of-living adjustment into the items themselves.

**Other Compensation**

Outside of hardship allowances and cost-of-living adjustments, there are a number of more specialized services and funds provided by the expatriate employer. These include either free housing or a supplemental living allowance, education costs either locally or abroad as well as the cost of transportation for children traveling to and from school. In situations where it is considered unfeasible for the family to reside in-country with the employee, a supplemental living allowance is provided to offset the costs of maintaining two households. In addition, there are supplements for some of the particular costs of living abroad, include a yearly trip home and relocation expenses as well as storage. There is also a wide-range of very specialized payments that I found from speaking to workers, must be sought out and studied. They include such payments
as a 'wardrobe expense' given to employees traveling from one extreme climate to another, particular payments for expenses incurred as a part of an evacuation and rewards to employees for learning difficult languages. The complexity of this system is a frequent topic of conversation among expatriate employees, both sharing information about potentially obtainable supplements as well as comparing the various policies of different employers and different places. Always avoiding direct conversation about who is paid how much, the discussions seems more collaborative than competitive.

**Variety within Compensation**

The compensation structure I have described here is largely based on the model put forth by the United States’ State Department. The numbers and policies generated within this agency are the standards against which most other entities employing individuals abroad set their guidelines. This is particularly true for smaller employers and the various businesses that contract with government agencies. Other nations set their own policies for compensation, yet many of the features are similar to those of the U.S. policies. Other than these nationally and internationally determined systems for compensation of international employees, there are a number of businesses that specialize in providing services associated with international employment including assessing the appropriate compensation to be given to employees at various locations. The particular nature of Nepal's expatriate population combined with its size and a lack of interest in business investment in the country means that this corporate analysis does come into play; nonetheless, it is worth being aware of the larger industry that exists to support expatriates.

In the course of my research on expatriates over the last five years, I have seen a great increase in this form of consulting services designed to assess the demands of the corporate international employment world. Due in part to new facilities for distance communication as well as the greater interest in how to run a successful multinational

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13 I will be interested to follow how these policies are impacted by multinational government formations such as the European Union. I do not know all of the details of the Commonwealth plans, as they are not
corporation, these consulting companies have multiplied and expanded of late. Not unlike outsourcing and specialization occurring in other globalizing settings, these entities with names such as Associates for International Research Incorporated and Integrated Resources Group have grown out of the human resources departments that were once within the structure of individual corporations.

Recently, synergistic relationships have formed between various interests in the business of employing expatriates. In the past, expatriate employment support was both local to companies and postings, now the same services are supplied by large consulting organizations with links to various service entities.

publicly available, but from what is available they are modeled on the U.S. system. The United Nations follows similar structures for its international recruits, thought not for those individuals hired locally.
Virtual Expatria

One new phenomenon has been the rise of internet based support groups, many of which have become affiliated with or incorporated within these multifunction entities. The early 1990s, largely influenced by the writings of Robin Pascoe, saw expatriate women, and to a lesser extent men, turning to email and on-line list communications to share their concerns and advice with other expatriate women regardless of location. In 1992, Pascoe wrote a book that has become widely read by expatriate women. As part of the Culture Shock! Series of travel books designed to provide cultural knowledge and everyday advice to the short or longer-term international visitors, Pascoe wrote the series’ first book not center upon a nation, but instead entitled, Culture Shock! A Wife's Guide and followed a year later with Culture Shock! A Parent’s Guide. These books drew upon a wider genre of advice literature that had long circulated within the community of families working for a particular company, but rarely made available to those outside the organization. Wives of Shell Oil employees have long operated an occasional literary magazine of stories and poems about the expatriate experience that was perhaps the first of this type. In addition, a number of newsletters, perhaps exemplified by SUN – the Spouse's Underground Network, provide support and advice to other expatriates, yet Pascoe’s book came out at an important moment in the changing regulation of expatriate families. Newsletters were still hampered by slow international mail service and expatriate employment was no longer dominated by just a few large companies. A new conversation arose via a variety of technologies to connect dispersed expatriate women to discuss issues of concern. These bulletin boards and list serves grew quickly and Pascoe and others appeared on these forms as unofficial experts and moderators.

These discussions emerged at the same moment as the consulting organizations were developing and many of the internet based communities found homes within these support companies, as the support organizations saw this as a nearly free way to provide a form of counseling for their anticipated clients. Some were subsumed under web sites that later became proprietary to those who were receiving services from the consulting organizations through their employer while other communities remained fairly independent. What had been open fora for exchange of advice were sold as support
services with the addition of a monitor/councilor. These companies were subsuming or affiliating with other organizations, including international real estate agencies, insurance agencies, moving companies and international shipping providers. Sometimes, these affiliations are merely joint advertising support, in other situations what is built is a single entity designed to serve all the needs of the company seeking to post employees abroad.

Shell Oil has had the reputation of being the most organized and complex company supporting an extended expatriate employee community. The company has provided space for a great deal of community activism, particularly by the wives of employees and one of the ways women have utilized these facilities is in producing achieves and volumes of information about past expatriate wives and the experience of living as an expatriate in various times and places. Whether because of the superior services provided by Shell or due to facilitating a situation where scholars such as myself can learn more about the services provided, Shell is an icon to those interested in the history of expatriate employment. The particularly isolating nature of work within the oil company combined with the need for men to be at the worksite for long periods created tight knit communities. Women formed groups to share time together while caring for children, exchanged information and passed on advice to newcomers. What is perhaps unique is the degree to which the company embraced these activities, though funding social events and publishing and circulating newsletters for the women. As many of the companies’ worksites were located outside of metropolitan areas, women did not have access to the urban foreign women's groups that existed in some locations early on and continue to today. Instead, Shell wives felt affiliation with other Shell wives, regardless of location. The Shell Ladies' Project published collections of short stories and exchanged recipes. As new facilities for communication across space developed, Shell made these available to the women's groups: faxes, internet connections, high-speed data lines. Shell also created in its own support activities, including training programs and language classes, but in many ways the emphasis was on facilitating women's ability to create the resources they needed. As these internal documents accumulated, Shell developed local offices where they had large numbers of employees centered. These 'outposts' housed local information, women's publications as well as serving as a community meeting space.
This open format facilitating the women's own activities is slowly changing to look more like the models that are growing up around Shell's organization, Outpost, and even Shell is branching out into the consulting entities that have become the norm. The new model has replaced a forum for communication with subscriber-only web services putting women in contact with a professional facilitator. Agencies such as ExpatExchange, Expatica, Transition Dynamics, ExpatForum and Pascoe's own ExpatExpert, now exist mainly as web-based businesses bringing together experts and services. Companies are able to hire these companies to facilitate their entire international employee system, from vetting potential expatriates to repatriation counseling, the goal is a full-service facility that allows companies to remove the complex business of placing employees abroad from its offices.

The professionalization of this process is striking to me in comparison to earlier varieties of expatriate interaction. The support of expatriates has become a business with a large body of research and specialists, disconnected from the specificity of either the type of business, of posting or of employee. In what is, but perhaps should not be, an unusual parallel, expatriate support services have come to resemble the specialized services utilized elsewhere in global businesses. As Saskia Sassen describes with respect to corporate services, such as accounting, in the global city, “Producing certain highly specialized services inside the firm has become increasingly difficult because of the rising level of specialization and the cost of employing in-house specialists full time” (Sassen, 2001: 99). A similar strategy is pursued by corporations in dealing with expatriates as companies seek out firms that can negotiate the complexities of international regulations with respect to visas, work permits and benefits. As important is the ability to occlude and dispel the complexity of international employment. By placing responsibility for the difficulties of employing expatriates in the hands of an outside source, companies are able to erase the impact of distance to a greater degree. While the inability of the home office to understand the difficulties of working and living in a particular location has long been a complaint of the expatriate, outsourcing the task of expatriate support to an outside source also allows the company to outsource awareness and consideration. As a result, the expatriate support service may be engaging in a mental health support live internet chat with an employee discussing the importance of accommodating the demands
of local employees on the same day as a employee receives criticism from the home office for decreased productivity during a local holiday season.

**Perks of the Job**

The myriad of supplementary services and bonuses offered by companies often hold more sway with employees than other direct payments. For the women whom I spoke with, less monetarily valuable perks held particular appeal. Club membership was often mentioned as a desirable extra proffered by companies. One women mentioned that her company provided health club memberships to staff member’s families, and she was able to convince them to give the cash value of such a membership to her husband as a bonus, in lieu of any locally available offerings. Other women used the same supplement to pay their monthly dues to the American Club in Kathmandu, to obtain membership to the golf course or to pay for access to hotel recreation facilities. Some companies offered short ‘mental health’ vacations to their employees, enabling them to travel to some of the tourist resorts in Nepal while others provided the opportunity for employees to bring their families along on work related trips to near by locations. Also mentioned were the numerous minor bonuses that could be collected in various situations, from a mid-posting shipping allowance to entertainment supplements when superiors from the home office visited.

A final benefit for expatriates posted to Kathmandu is a result merely of the economic power that foreigners wield in Nepal. The arts and crafts that are available inexpensively are discussed in other expatriate locations as well as in popular media like tour books and travel articles and most of those about to be posted to Kathmandu are aware of the shopping possibilities that will be available to them. Calculations of buying power can not account for the presence of absence of goods in a posting, and Nepal is considered a particularly good posting for making one’s post differential translated into leisure goods, if not certain basic commodities.

**Expatria: A Job or a Life**

This compensation structure illustrates on of the great tensions within expatriate life - the shifting of boundaries between work and home, job and family. Although
always centered on the presumed male breadwinner, expatriate compensation is focused upon the family unit. Education allowances, accommodations and moving subsidies all are granted with a focus on the family unit. This, in and of itself, is premised upon company’s awareness of the different demands of living abroad. Yet, in taking responsibility for the employee’s family, the company in various ways expects compensation. Training procedures during the hiring process all stress that the task of the primary employee cannot succeed without family support and both members of the couple can be screened to assess their suitability to posting abroad. Governments and companies are explicit in their statements that they are hiring a family, a point that initially seems only to refer to emotional stability and organizational support, but later is seen in a different light. Expatriate jobs are rarely a strict 9-5 endeavor. The employee is often responsible for managing local employees and it is his task is to ensure the job gets done. Particularly in situations where the employee is required to be at a field site frequently, the cycles of home and work are disrupted. Although sharing some of the domestic duties and entertaining expected of the stereotyped ‘50s housewife, the division of home and work is not as clean. Similar to that model, women often find themselves drafted into secretarial service in times of crisis or creating emergency dinner parties when unexpected out of town guests arrive, but equally true is the long absence of husbands and the woman’s greater managerial role. The double-edged sword of paternalism becomes the daily company of the expatriate wife, given support and comfort, but at a certain cost of independence.

Training (Inter)National Citizens

Although a focus long before the rise of the profession expatriate services firm, these institutions have amplified what has long been the cry of international human resources specialists: carefully choosing and training the expatriate and his family before departure is the key to project success. Job needs are usually the first consideration of a company in selecting employees for expatriation, numerous other factors come into consideration, either through the intervention of a consulting agency or due to the experience of the company itself. Opinions vary widely over what type of selection and training to undertake, in no small part due to the burgeoning research on the topic and
interest in ensuring expatriate success. Before considering the modes of selection and subsequent training of first-time expatriates, it is necessary to understand the criteria upon which these decisions are based as well as the expectations for what expatriate success means to a company or government.

The Literature

There are two distinct but related arenas of discourse that exists, somewhat in dialogue, regarding how to hire, train and retain expatriate employees. The first exists within broadly considered academic circles while the later is mainly by and for professionals in the business. The history of the scholarly study of expatriates, like the term itself, is fairly brief. It was not until the 1980s that Human Resources Management became widely seen as an important aspect of business training but it grew quickly from these early days. Stemming from an increasing professional class of workers focused upon the relationship between personnel and organization, Human Resources became a focus in and of itself, and with its placement as a mandatory element of business training in the Harvard MBA program in 1981 became a necessary part of the corporate hierarchy (Poole, 1990: 2). Following definitions adopted at Harvard, "...Human Resources Management (HRM) is seen to involve 'all management decisions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and employees – its human resources'" (Poole, 1990: 2 citing Beer et al., 1984:1). It is this field of study from which scholarship on expatriates, considered under the rubric of International Human Resources Management, emerges.

In the mid-1980s, articles addressing the specific concerns of those managing personnel abroad begin appearing in journals open to Human Relations issues such as Journal of Organizational Behavior, The Journal of Business Research and Human Relations. A critical interest in the topic was reached in 1990 and a number of prominent scholars formed what has become the flagship journal for the topic, International Journal of Human Resource Management. This journal along with articles in similarly youthful periodicals such as International Journal of Intercultural Relations and The Journal of World Business have developed a small but prolific field of scholarship on the topic of expatriate employment. Although the management of
expatriate employees has long been of concern and interest to businesses, the creation of a scholarly tradition on the topic has transformed the terms upon which the topic is discussed. Without delving into an extensive discussion of IHMR as a field, it is worth noting a transformation that appears to have taken place.

Academics also began to take notice of the importance of international communities abroad. In the 1960s the position of Americans and others abroad seemed to catch the interests of social scientists who created a minor trend in the field, culminating in an issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* devoted to the topic of "Americans Abroad" in November 1966. The key figures in this discussion, including Ruth and John Useem, Erik Cohen and Dennison Nash, 14 remained within academic circles, only occasional finding consulting work with governments and businesses interested in the practical application of their research. The scholarship produced in this period was largely descriptive and historical. Meanwhile, those engaged in sending employees abroad were focused upon retention; concerns over how to keep their employees happy and healthy while abroad. The compensation structure described above in many ways emerged from this approach, generally focusing upon abstract concerns with the challenges of living abroad.

It was not until the development of the new academic field of IHRM that the terms of the concern were reversed. What had been money given to expatriates in a concern over their health and happiness – a state of mind presumed to result in success on behalf of the company, changed in nature and became an investment in productivity. Success became more critically evaluated and the cost balancing of return on investment in expatriates became a concern. Statisticians began calculating the amount companies spent on expatriate employees and sought to determine if this was a worthwhile expense based on the productivity of employees. Given the expense, the goal these authors set was to determine where money for expatriates could be spent most effectively and how to select and place expatriate employees so that money that is spent is well used.

14 I must thank Dennison Nash for discussing with me the emergence of his interest in expatriates and the state of the field in the 1960s.
The link between these articles in journals such as those mentioned above and the governments and businesses making the decisions is indirect, being mediated through the outsourced human resources firms. As a part of their full service operation, some consulting organizations produce articles digesting the issues presented in these journals, presenting the arguments and concerns without the research.\(^{15}\) These are sometimes produced by academic consultants to the firms, other times by specialists who created such articles for purchase by the consultants. This genre can be best recognized in the magazines that produce simplified versions of the issues presented in the journals. Not unlike the digested business books or simplified management books frequently appearing on the best seller list,\(^{16}\) periodicals such as *Personnel Journal* and *Human Resource Magazine* describe similar theories to those describe in more academic journals, but with attractive Power Point-like graphics and direct prescriptions for action. It is from these magazines and digested articles that policy is extrapolated and the focus that emerges is on failure.

### Failure

Failure is perhaps the most discussed and least understood idea by those who manage expatriate employment. The difficulty in understanding this topic results from a double disorder, first within academic conversation on the topic and secondly in the way those conversations are put into action. As one significant player in the conversation states, "...it has become almost 'traditional' to open an article on expatriate management by stating that expatriate failure rates are (very) high" (Harzing, 1995: 458). This is in no small part because the stakes are seen as high, figures are produced enumerating the costs of sending expatriate abroad, around $300,000 per expatriate per year according to some (Fukuda and Chu) or three to six times the cost of employing the same individual at the home office (Freeman and Cane). This combines with high estimations of the percentage

\(^{15}\) This is exemplified by the whole genre of condensed business books, such as *Who Moved My Cheese* that are intended to present simplified and motivational themes to professional in order to improve their production and business acumen.

\(^{16}\) For a more through, critical and humorous discussion of this type of business writing see Thomas Frank's *One Market Under God*. 
of expatriate employees who fail, where statistics range from single digits to 79% in developing countries (Shilling). In addition, families are largely considered to be the culprit for expatriate difficulty. One study finds between 60 and 80% of those refusing expatriate assignments sight family as the reason (Munton and Forester) while others calculate that 80% of expatriate failure is due to spouse related issues (Hawley). Even within the authors of these articles, such estimates are seen as largely unreliable, yet they allow the conversation to persist within this conversational space.

The expense and rates of failure expounded upon by these scholars are difficult to reproduce and defend, nonetheless, the explanations offered in these articles for such problems are picked up by those seeking to post expatriates abroad, particularly the consulting agencies who offer solutions to the problems suggested by INRM literature. Failure is seen as a problem of personnel and training, not of the system or of expectations. When assessing what it meant by failure, it seems two categories are significant, first the expatriates ability to follow an expected career trajectory and secondly the employees success in meeting particular goals for productive action abroad. Career trajectory concerns focus upon early return to the home office; not completing the expecting period abroad, but can also include such wider concerns as unwillingness to undertake a second overseas assignment or in ability to receive expected promotion upon return to the home office. Simply not moving up the career ladder as quickly or in the expected manner can appear statistically as employee failure. Concern over the successful completion of a mission also holds complex definitions, from agreed upon mission goals not being completed, to inefficiency in comparison with home office based employees or inability to reach particular targets of time or production. A further concern with the rhetoric of failure might be found in the obscuring of difference in the nature of the expatriate assignment. Although there are exceptions, most of the studies focusing on expatriate failure actually conduct their research within a small population,

17 It is worth bringing attention to the work of Anne-Wil Harzing, who has spent her career trying to reevaluate the research on failure rates. In a number of articles she demonstrates the haphazard citation of statistics within this field, resulting in a reproduction of mistakes and inaccuracies. Ultimately, she does not dismiss the rhetoric of failure in and of itself, only current research. I want to note that in using these writings and research what I want to point to is a field of conversation rather than any specific conclusion.
for example studying expatriates with a single home country and form a single company going to a single host location. This seems rather specific to generalize to a statistic on 'expatriate failure rates'. What I want to offer is not merely a critique of the methods used by these scholars but to point out both the stakes of the conversation over failure as well as way in which scholars in the IHR field look at analyzing expatriates.

**Preventing Failure-Making Expatriates**

When these specific studies are adapted to the needs of the company or outsourced support organization, all complexity is erased in favor of more general presumptions about producing good expatriates. There are two basic components to producing expatriates; the selection of the employee and their training to go abroad. There are as many different approaches to both of these practices as there are consulting organizations and many disagree strongly with one another. It is nonetheless worth looking at the debate, not to reach a conclusion on the right way to make good expatriates but to see the terms of the debate. Through understanding what parameters are considered worth developing in the pursuit of good expatriate employment, it is possible to understand more about how employers see expatriate employees, in addition, how expatriates are selected and trained provides them the framework with which they and their families approach life abroad.

**Assessing the Good Expatriate**

The first criterion for expatriate selection is often the presumed one, although it is also the one that many consulting companies question. Job skills, the knowledge and expertise needed to perform whatever task is in need of completion abroad is generally the first consideration of the employers, with willingness to relocate a quick second. These are also the categories that the HRM organizations hired to assist a given company in expatriate selection can do the least to affect. Ultimately, most argue that focus on these issues is a mistake and often the cause of expatriate 'failure'. As one organization describes in an article entitled "Proactive International Human Resources Management",

The successful expatriate contract starts with selection. All too often the company has the habit of selecting the employee based on perhaps his technical
competence and maybe a recommendation from one line manager or senior executive that he/she is the right person for the job. Two mistakes here… The first mistake is that the selection of the expatriation is not solely about technical competence of what someone who has never been an expatriate recommends but has to be about ensuring that the expatriate has the desired traits/profile required to handle a tough assignment… The second mistake is that the IHRM has no or very little contact with the spouse and the spouse has not been assessed for his/her fit for the new venture. (Hawley, nd: 1)

This suggestion that job skills are emphasized by companies over 'traits/profile' is fairly common across the various organizations and one of the main services these companies provide is an evaluation of the skills seen as specific to working abroad. Consultants seek to remedy these lacunae through a number of means including interviewing both potential employees and families and the administration of standardized tests. These include general-purpose psychological tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI), Meyers-Briggs and Rorschach testing. In addition, some administer job skill specific tests or intelligence testing. Most particular to the expatriate situation are tests to measure how an individual might relate to a novel cultural situation, including the Overseas Assignment Inventory and the popular Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI).

The CCAI seems particularly indicative of the types of qualities considered as part of the non-technical skills consultants seek to measure. The approach is to determine how an individual will adapt to any cultural difference. "The culture-general approach assumes that individuals adapting to other cultures share common feelings perceptions and experiences. This occurs regardless of the cultural background of the person or the characteristics of the target culture" (Kelly and Meyers, 1995: 1). The test is arranged to measure four characteristics determined to be pivotal to success in cross-cultural situations: emotional resilience, flexibility/openness, perceptual acuity and personal autonomy.
Individuals given this test must respond to fifty questions and are given six options, ranging from "Definitely True" to "Definitely Not True". The questions address each of the characteristics in random order and some are 'reverse scored', i.e. the same characteristic is sometimes defined by the "Definitely True" response and sometimes by "Definitely Not True" response. Questions include

"I like to try new things." (ER)
"I don't enjoy trying new foods." (ER – reverse scored)
"I like being with all kinds of people." (FO)
"I am not good at understanding people when they are different from me." (FO – reverse scored)
"I have a realistic perception of how others see me." (PAC)
"When I am in a new or strange environment, I keep an open mind." (PAC)
"I believe that all people, of whatever race, are equally valuable." (PA)
"My personal value system is based on my own beliefs, not on conformity to other people's standards." (PA)
The completion of such a test allows organizations to generate statistics along a wide variety of factors in an attempt to assess how 'successful' a potential expatriate, or sometimes their spouse, will be, but how to get from these numbers to a choice of expatriate is not particularly clear or agreed upon. This is amplified by the way in which the CCAI and other related tests are generally fairly transparent, meaning that most individuals are able to give the 'right' answer, or at least the answer that will allow them to produce the result they wish, whether that is posting abroad or not.\footnote{I do have to say that expressions of will demonstrated by these tests can be interesting in and of themselves. I heard from one tester of a case where the spouse did not wish to go abroad and yet was not willing to say so directly in interviews. Instead, while her husband was given a high cultural adaptability rating, hers was quite low, a fact that the researcher attributed to her desire to undermine the posting abroad through indirect means.}

Even putting the issue of skewing aside, there is little consensus regarding the correct characteristics of an expatriate employee. One of the most prominent overall assumptions is that companies currently focus too much upon the employee without enough attention to the family, a fact that agencies can see proven in the statistical analysis of reasons for expatriate failure. Another school of thought is that cultural sensitivity and experience of diversity is a prime attribute, while others see this as a false assumption. One consultant suggests the following about selection,

> If the ability to live in different places and speak other language, an intellectual curiosity and an interest in different cultures aren't the principal factors for international success, what are? What, for example, enables a couple who have lived their entire lives in small-town Texas to move to northern England and do a terrific job … To predict how well individuals will adapt to a foreign environment, we have to look at the ways they think and act, what they tell us about their beliefs, and how they manage tasks, make choices and interact with other people. (Kozloff, 1996:2)

Thus, despite a battery of testing and scores of interviews with families and workers alike, there is little agreement on what a successful expatriate looks like. Even if testing were as scientific and precise as it is claimed by some to be, two different agencies may not agree upon the ‘right’ score. Cultural adaptability, personal stability, job skills, family support – all these factors certainly contribute to how an expatriate will experience life and work abroad, but how to measure these and what weight to give the results is
The only point that receives generally agreement among the consulting organizations is that companies are currently not doing a good job of selecting expatriates, a statement they can prove using a wide variety of available 'failure' statistics, and that the company needs to better assess skills, hopefully using their organization's services. Thus, in many ways proclamations of failure and the complexity of assessing success feed into demand for the services of the consulting agencies. The same people who are doom-saying provide the solution for the crisis — thus only perpetuating more negative proclamations.

**Training Expatriates**

A similar conundrum is encountered in relation to the next step of the expatriation process, employee training. There are two distinct arenas of training and support expatriates are given as part of their posting abroad: what might be called ‘talk therapy’ and a more tangible dimension of services and support. One of the important, and somewhat unique, points I would like to make is that expatriates learn from the later as well as the former. To take a dramatic example, if the cultural training is about the similarity of the new culture and their home culture and the interesting food that the expatriate should sample while on the other hand the family is given long list of things to bring abroad and told about all the health dangers and food problems, the two forms of training can not help but conflict. It is the verbal counseling and sharing that most expatriate consulting organizations offer, while the other forms of support are either gained through local, haphazard arrangement or outsourced yet again to specialized shipping and housing agencies.

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19 A side note, medical issues are never mentioned in the literature on this topic, although many expatriates I spoke with saw this as one of the greatest factors influencing their decision. I also know that many companies require medical exams previous to posting, although usually not for the family. I am unsure if medical issues are a presumed concern or if it is of particular importance in Nepal, probably both.
Talking through Culture

Expatriate training, as practiced by both internal human resources professionals and outsourced agencies, usually centers on ideas of culture. The starting point of the training is often the employee's earlier testing, which is used to assess the arenas in which the individual is deficient in their cultural adaptability skills. The main activity undertaken under the rubric of training is some form of discussion with a professional counselor or coach. These range from one-on-one interactions to lectures on particular issues in the expatriate process to small groups. Those being coached are also often given reading material, ranging from publicly available books on culture shock to in-house pamphlets and checklists. From my research, much of the direct training of expatriates and their families consists of the sort of 'culture-general' issues that appear in the CCAI. Although employees are given written material discussing their specific location of posting, the individual interactions are of a more general cultural awareness nature. These focus on the importance of accepting difference and adapting to different situations with ease. Some companies use role-playing as a means of simulating potential moments of cultural conflict and giving participants suggested appropriate responses. In addition to the cultural sensitivity training, expatriates are also told what to expect out of the expatriate experience. Many companies lead seminars on the stages of culture shock, following research on the topic and preparing individuals for the 'W' of culture shock, a common description in this literature about the ups and downs of the experience of difference that those abroad undergo over time. In speaking to expatriates about their training experiences, some women stated that they had been left out of any training experience while others said that they vaguely remember some seminar but were too busy with preparing for departure to really concentrate. Women who were part of organizations expatriating larger numbers of people remembered more of the experience, mainly focusing upon the interaction with other women in the group. In speaking to the mainly male employees, their memories of training were of receiving a large amount of reading focused upon the country to which they were to be posted, which they were told to do at their leisure and never found the time to look at before they left, although found some of it useful once in country. Of the individual training exercises, they were able to
remember a number of Power Point presentations presenting culture-general issues as well as job-specific presentations important for the task they were to undertake abroad. Although much emphasis is placed on the importance of preparing children for the experience of expatriation and many of the consulting and training companies offer special seminars for youth, I could find no one who had been involved in such training. In my very informal discussions with women and their husbands about training and what it contributed to their experience abroad, most saw the information presented as somewhat obvious. Nonetheless, some women said that merely having the opportunity to reflect on the issues was helpful while others saw it as "a total waste of time. I was just so busy with last minute things, I skipped after the first meeting."

The reading material expatriates are given seeks to fill in the gaps that therapy and workshops are not able to address. As most of the presentations must be very general in order to appeal to a wide enough audience to make the workshop worthwhile. To supplement this, pamphlets and books emphasizing the themes presented by the consultants are distributed to allow the message of training to be taken into the new country. Some companies even arrange for follow-up or supplementary training once families are posted abroad, hoping to be able to answer questions that emerge after the chaos of the move itself.20 More of the written material is addressed to the specifics of whatever posting the family is headed to next. Much of this is considered the purview of the woman, many of whom also often seek to supplement the distributed material with their own collection of popularly available books. The content expatriates explore with respect to their new posting is generally the same material one might find in a tour guidebook. In fact a number of women reported receiving copies of introductory chapters to popular guides to Nepal as well as the supplementary reading lists such books often provide. While few women find the opportunity to read this material before posting abroad, many begin their reading soon after arriving in their new post. In Kathmandu, local used bookstores are filled with volumes on local religion, history and geography, which expatriate women consume in great numbers.

20 This generally does not happen in Nepal as most of these training sessions are done over the internet or by video conference, technologies which are still not easy to access in Kathmandu.
Recommended Reading

Recommended Nonfiction:
Nepal Handbook by Kerry Moran (best for traveling in Nepal)
Just for a laugh in Kathmandu and Off the Beaten trek in the Himalayas
by Lawrence M Priestley

Recommended Viewing:
Caravans (came out in the fall of 1999 and has been nominated for an academy award)

The plight of the Tibetans has been a central theme is several recent popular movies including:

The Cup
Little Buddha
Seven Years in Tibet

Figure 4.4
List of recommended readings from Real Post Reports Nepal

Dismissing an analysis that would find this type of preparation good or bad, I want to suggest that the form of training is important. Women are taught that what they need to know about Nepal is different ethnic groups, religious rituals and local dress – the same cultural icons that make up popular conceptions of difference. They are given few resources for understanding contemporary Nepal and following available literature, tend to see Nepal as a country continuing to exist in the past. This becomes particularly problematic as expatriate employees and their families meet their new local friends and coworkers, who hold little resemblance to the exotic figures they see in guide books and are likely to have gone to school in Europe and know little more about rural ethnic groups in Nepal as expatriates themselves.

Training beyond the Trainers

What many families I spoke with appreciated most about any expatriate training they received was practical advice and support. In some context this takes the form of
lists of things to bring and support from outside agencies; particularly appreciated were opportunities for workers and their families to contact expatriates already posted in the country they planned to visit. The information conveyed through these informal channels is usually country specific and generally issues considered the domain of the women. As the companies providing outsourced expatriate training rely on the previously mentioned "culture-general" approach, they often lack the knowledge and experience necessary to providing this type of information. Such practical knowledge is generally acknowledged as important, but seems to slip out of the systems of training currently used in International Human Resources Management. Thus, in one particularly poignant example, an expatriate wife who received considerable training before being posted abroad never received information about electrical currency differences between her home country and new posting, thus creating a panic when the appliances she had ordered specifically for her home in the new country were incompatible with the household current.

This disjuncture has always struck me as problematic, as many of the formal training seminars stress that the transition to life abroad is eased considerably by acquiring more knowledge about life abroad, yet expatriates are told little about what their life will be like abroad. Such concerns are addressed only at an abstract level, giving families means for coping with stress and change, rather than telling them about specific changes to expect. What is both most desired by women and most absent from training is knowledge about what everyday life for the expatriate abroad is like, in part because of the specific local experience that would be required to impart such information and in part because the structure of training preclude this type of learning.

**Do it Yourself Training**

There are moments when this information becomes available to expatriate families, and they eagerly seek out these situations. Many of the major governments and aid agencies that do business in Nepal have created some pamphlet or booklet to provide such information to their employees. There are also a number of internet resources that are becoming a source of information for families about to be posted abroad. One organization has sought to provide women with contact information for women's clubs
overseas, and often these organizations will help newcomers learn important predeparture information, but one must know to look for these resources, as they are generally not made a part of training programs. One of the most complete, but rarely utilized, sources for practical information for women moving abroad is a non-profit volunteer organization that collects from women currently living abroad what they call, "Real Post Reports." Expatriates are solicited to submit answers to specific questions as well as general impressions of expatriate life abroad. The questions are a good indication of what many see lacking from their training and desire to know, including: commuting time, availability of yards as a part of housing, evaluations of international school options, cost of a Big Mac, pet care, availability of TV and newspapers, types of grocery stores and what to bring and not bring. The last categories, familiarizing women with the local availability of various items is particularly important, as most employers provide an initial shipping allowance, but few opportunities to bring goods from abroad later, except in the overburdened suitcases that most expatriate families carry back from home leave trips.

What to Bring? What to Expect?

Gathering information on the everyday realities of what to bring abroad and what to expect is of prime importance to soon-to-be expatriated families. Printed information on the specific issues relevant in various countries is often available if one knows where to look. The difficulty is that in general women do not learn about these resources until after their first posting abroad, as the privately circulated pamphlets and hidden websites that distribute such information are not a part of the world of outsourced training. Generally, it is through the assistance of an insider that women learn of these important facts and gaining the right connections is often a challenge for the first time expatriate unaware of the social networks that exist abroad.

It is interesting to note that this is one of the moments when the offerings of new technologies do little to transform the situation of expatriate employees. Instead, it is only through personal contacts that women find out the information they deem most

21 See Appendix 2 for Nepal’s Real Post Report.
helpful, and generally they must make such contacts independently. Thus, although websites such as FAWCO (Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas) are designed specifically to put future expatriates in touch with women and organizations in their new posting they are little utilized in my experience. Instead, it is a more informal face-to-face connections that can create a stream of information about new postings. This is often brought about by connecting families soon to be expatriated with either recently returned employees or those already in the field. Larger companies and governments often have more formal mentorship programs for expatriate spouses and children, usually run by volunteer spouses. It is these connections that often answer the questions that trouble the family member anticipating setting up a new home abroad.

Through exchanges of letters, women generally receive reassurance as well as detailed information about life abroad from those already at the posting. Most women coming to Nepal as either their first posting or their first posting outside of Europe saw the connections they made with those already resident abroad as invaluable in facilitating their arrival in Kathmandu. In general, such relationships seemed mainly to have consisted of general letters of sympathy and comfort, accompanied by printed details about life abroad. Some women were sent a copy of the “Newcomers Guide to Kathmandu” published jointly by the two largest women’s groups in Kathmandu. This covers important issues such as what medical facilities are available, particular things children will need that are not available in Nepal and the various churches that serve the expatriate community. Others received pamphlets generated by their employer’s, such as the United Nation’s “Living Conditions in Nepal,” which includes a long list of items unavailable in Kathmandu, along with information about television channels and recreational opportunities. If, as many of the IHRM professionals claim, knowledge is one of the keys to easing the stress of the expatriate experience, it was knowing everyday details like the availability of goods and social opportunities that reassured women rather than information about ‘culture shock’ and cross-cultural communication. It was these

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22 This resource is discussed in detail in both Chapters 6 and 7.
23 The list of items to bring from this handout appears in Appendix 2.
practical resources that helped women were to serve as the emotional supporters for their families, as most IHRM literature expects them to be.

The difficulties and fears associated with living abroad are lessened for those families with experience in the expatriate system. For some, it is even considered a homecoming of a sort, as a period of placement with the home office has worn off its nostalgic feeling and families long to return to life in Expatria. Yet, few expatriate families are posted multiple times to the same location, thus every new posting entails learning a new place and new problems. As mentioned above, what experienced expatriate families have at their disposal is generally a better awareness of where to find the information they need and a knowledge of how the system works. They know to ask about details such as the deadline for shipping things abroad without incurring import duty or problems with mold and availability of dehumidifiers in-country. Thus, although women I spoke with who had lived within the expatriate system for many years said that each posting brought new worries, most had developed routines and methods for dealing with moving and relocation that gave them strategies for dealing with the anxiety of a new posting.

**Repatriation**

Repatriation, the return of expatriates to their home office and thus their home country has become a much-discussed topic in IHRM literature. Chastising past scholarships for neglecting this topic, current writers note that ‘coming home’ is rarely as simple as it may sound and that expatriates often experience similar tension and difficulty upon return as they did on departure. I want to briefly explore this for a number of reasons. First, because repatriation is the most recent issue to sweep the literature on expatriate employment and its current popularity says something about how theories of international employment are and are not changing. Secondly, I see the reasons why repatriation has become a concern as emblematic of how expatriate families are seen as resources to be utilized and maximized. Finally, I feel that there is validity to a concern with the processes expatriates experience in returning to a home country that has changed in their absence, and that acknowledging this discontinuity is important as well as illuminating. With respect to my own research,
reviewing the way in which change is discussed when the culture is home rather than host may be helpful in understanding the relationship of ‘culture’ versus race, development and progress.

Repatriation difficulties often come as a surprise to expatriate families, who anticipate the return to be a homecoming, yet what they describe experiencing is a new posting, and one made even more difficult by the expectations associated with the return. As discussed later in relation to expatriate’s concepts of home, the home country often is idealized in communities of those living abroad; unpleasant features are smoothed over and in the course of representing the best of a home nation or home town to others, one occludes the problems of the place. In addition to the disjuncture between an imagined ideal homecoming and the realities of return, there are often economic and lifestyle changes associated with return. Children who have become accustomed to a household staff willing to make sandwiches at any hour of the day find this is not a service available at home and the profusion of long-desired goods often conflicts with a salary diminished without the additions of hardship allowances. Repatriation thus comes with its own difficulties, difficulties that until recently received little attention. Thus while families are prepared for a new posting abroad through training provided by the employer as well as accompanying expectations of difficulty, returning home is expected to be easy, an expectation rarely fulfilled.

Although concern with repatriation is new to IHRM literature, the reasons for interest in the topic is the same one that emerges from other topics in the discipline: failure. Studies in the 1980s revealed what was an unexpected problem. Employees who returned from positions abroad were often deemed less productive upon their return, some did not progress along an expected career trajectory as quickly as their non-expatriated counterparts while a large number left their employer soon after returning. As a result, valuable experience gained abroad was lost to the company or government. This challenge was quickly picked up by consulting organizations that found in repatriation a new product to sell and a good deal of research supporting the need for this. One training company describes the importance of repatriation in their summary brochure

**Fallacy 3: To return home after an assignment abroad is to return to the familiar.**

The final fallacy leads companies to ignore repatriation programs. Yet one must ask why 20% to 25% of all American returnees leave their company within a
year after their return. (Think of the waste of investment and talent this represents!) Coming home after several years abroad is, quite surprisingly, a disorienting and profoundly upsetting experience for many people. It’s upsetting because they never imagined they’d feel so foreign in a place that superficially seems so familiar.... Companies that recognize returnees as a precious resource are lining up for repatriation training in order to protect their six- or seven-figure investment. (Grove and Hallowell, 1996: 3)

Acknowledging the discontinuity of the return process is thus correlated to loss of productivity and a low return on investment.

**Making efficient expatriates**

This example points out one of the endemic difficulties with both research on expatriates and attendant training programs. While both researchers and trainers express concern over expatriate health and well-being this interest is ultimately in the service of productivity and the economic bottom-line. This presents multiple problems, both in achieving success in their self-defined project as well as in providing a full picture of expatriate life. While many of the scholars involved in both international and national research on human resources acknowledge difficulties with analyses based on productivity, for practical reasons they often end up returning to this position. This is a challenge faced by any scholar wishing to communicate their research to an audience desirous of practical applications. The nuances and complexities of research that shows that expatriate employees face difficulties upon returning to home thus becomes returnees fail and repatriation training is created.

The diverse literatures that seek to explain aspects of expatriate employment exist within their own systems of logic. I found this particularly well illustrated by Nick Forster and Anne-Wil Harzing’s caustic studies of IHRM articles addressing the topic of expatriate failure. In their analyses, each reviewed numerous articles produced by a very small number of individuals based on an even smaller amount of original research. Thus, any bias of a particular study was multiplied by its various users and even amplified by what they saw as careless citation procedures that rounded, estimated and paraphrased various studies. More than these accusations of poor research methods, I see a discourse that presumes particular bounds for study of the topic of expatriate life that it is finding continuously questioned an unable to adequately justify. The ‘discovery’ of spouses as
the primary reason for expatriate ‘failure’ caused a revolution in writing about IHRM, and the role of the family in expatriate employment became a cause cœura. Now, repatriation is the ‘problem’ and studies of returning expatriates have gained popularity. Perhaps rather than finding new causes for failure, it is worth questioning failure itself.

**Conclusion**

The coaching, training and counseling of expatriate or soon-to-be expatriated families does far more implicit work than explicit work. By this, I suggest that the system of agencies and companies that hire, train and employ individuals who are sent to other countries as part of their work create the space in which the employees are able to understand their encounter. Although expatriates and their families come to the experience of working abroad with ideas about other places and peoples, those ideas are supplemented and structured by the expatriate system. This distinction is significant in rethinking the naturalization of what an encounter with difference is permitted to look like. This system does not train expatriates; it makes expatriates, and makes them in particular ways. In bringing the issues discussed above together, I want to suggest two significant trajectories that the production of Expatria brings into being as well as the limits of understanding this as a uniform system and difficulty of thinking about Expatria as a system. Returning to themes of the production of expatriate families, I want to suggest the ways in which the training of participants frames how they will experience difference, prefiguring their experience abroad and giving them a framework in which to encode their experiences. In particular, I want to note the difference between the local/cultural and the international/acultural. These two dimensions receive very different treatment within the experience of expatriate training. Encoded in this division are differentiated understandings of the value of community and difference that hold opposite positions within an understanding of the impact of difference in production and consumption processes.

Finally, I want to suggest some of the difficulties in bounding Expatria, the limits of the entity and the challenges in emplotting the phenomenon within temporal and spatial bounds. Although I have at time tried to point out the limits of the presumption, much of this argument has presumed that there is a singular and coherent process of
expatriation and a unity within conversations about expatriate training. This is in part because of the way that training organizations themselves think about expatriates – the ‘culture-general’ approach that trains a general expatriate rather than a specific one. Under this regime, the type of job, the type of family, the location of posting – none of these matter - training is one size fits all. Yet, the generalizing of expatriates is also a strategic decision, one necessitated by the particularities of the project in which I am engaging. What I have tried to construct is an ideal type or better what Wittgenstein might call “boundaries for a special purpose” (Wittgenstein, 1953[2001]: 28 - #69).

Thus, in this particular vision of the expatriate, I claim not exactness, but explicitness about what my purpose is. What I see in the system of expatriation are family relations that allow me to make specific points. As argued early in the chapter, there are a number of particular historical and economic shifts that caused international employment to take on new casts and that it is important to note the adjustments that occur as a result of these sea-changes.

Expatriate is certainly an emic term, but one I have extrapolated for my own needs as well. Expat, expatriate, expatriot are all terms used in Nepal and elsewhere by individuals employed abroad to refer to themselves and those with whom they feel affiliated. In addition, like many identity-based terms, it is also relational; depending on who was participating in the conversation finer or grosser distinctions would be made about who fell under this rubric and who did not. Military families, missionaries and long-term travelers were included and excluded depending on the circumstance. Such distinctions made based upon reasons for travel and career were openly discussed and conversations about how life on a military base is and is not like life as a diplomatic spouse were common. The less discussed distinctions in who fell under the rubric of expatriate were racial and economic. Although these divisions often correlated to occupational differences as well, there were also larger reasons for the difference encoded within the different preparations given to groups for their experience abroad. The different origin points of expatriates allowed unspeakable distinctions to be reencoded within a speakable language. Most often, distinctions made within the expatriate community explicitly took the form of an ‘I know one when I see one’ argument. From my position, I found this often correlated to distinctions based upon
national origin, performance of class position and social position, yet they were learned
distinctions and it was within the expatriate training system that these divisions were
learned.

My own distinctions about the center point of expatriacy were largely impacted
by the understandings of those with whom I spoke, but also were founded within the
particularities of my interests. In making an argument about the role of female spouses of
employees working abroad, I came to see this as a particular limiting factor of the
category and Nepal’s specific temporal interaction with the world gave the category
temporal bounds. Throughout the past chapter and in the chapter that follows, I track
what is a particular limitation of what could be a wider definition of mobile populations.
My own bounds are neither natural nor arbitrary. In an entity bounded with a purpose, I
want to make explicit the particular focus of this project. Thus what I try to show is a
particular type of social unit, defined both by the understandings of participants
themselves as well as my own particular interests and secondly one without limits,
instead existing in degrees. In the words of Fredrik Barth, Expatria “entails the
assumption that the two [group members] are fundamentally ‘playing the same game’”
(Barth, 1981: 204). Although the focus in of much of the ethnographic work that follows
is upon those emplotted close to the center of Expatria, I seek also to engage with those
whose practices differ as they have a great deal to say about how the center is made.

From vague emotional concerns over culture shock to instruction about what
brand of breakfast cereals are available abroad, expatriate families learn through training
not only the direct messages of the training but also the more subtle messages encoded
within the existence and thematics of training itself. Large shipment allowances tell
families that goods abroad are unacceptable and ones from home are required;
information on adjusting to the foreign country suggests that national difference is
traumatic and requires unique coping mechanisms. These implicit elements of the
expatriate training curriculum have a greater impact that the explicit ones. I point this out
not so much to question these messages as to pull them out of their obscured context. A
great deal of concern and study is focused upon how to keep expatriates from failing but
little attention is focused upon the failure itself. Likewise the presumptions of cultural
difference are implicit and assumed, it is how to cope with them that requires thought. It
is at this point that one can look beyond the locality of an expatriate community in Nepal to consider what it is that drives this system to think in particular ways.

In exploring the type of training that expatriates receive, the expectations placed upon employees working abroad and the attendant compensation given to families on international assignment, I see two different assumptions that combine to suggest something about the movement of global capital in the current era. Put quite simply, culture is a barrier to capitalism. In the international employee phenomenon, IHRM professions appear to be seeking an individual outside culture, unencumbered by national affiliations or attachments to local goods or people. In the system of expatriate compensation, the employer seeks to mitigate the difficulties of cultural displacement, creating a neutral space of home outside the marked space of the placement. Expatriate families pick up these presumptions, seeing out their status as acultural, neutral, normal and modern in opposition to the location to which they are to be posted. Labor and production exist outside of the realm of culture. Such presumptions are interestingly consistent with the ideology that engages those at the opposite end of the spectrum of a global neoliberal economy. The presumptions that enable the outsourcing of sweatshop labor shares an ideology with the deculturalization of the expatriate worker, although the outcomes for the participants are very different.

Culture does have a place in this economic system though, one made particularly salient in Nepal. Within the dimension of consumption, culture is a positive valuation. Difference is marketable and as a means of sales is an important tool. This is sometimes the reason given for sending expatriates abroad, to attempt to understand the local situation to enable the company to better market locally. Within the large crafts market in Nepal, culture is an asset, a claim that makes goods more, rather than less, desirable - certainly to the expatriate audience and in a different way to the Nepali buying public as well.\footnote{See Mark Liechty’s book \textit{Suitably Modern}.} The presumptions attendant in this mode of thinking about difference also make their way into expatriate training as expatriate families are given a means of encountering difference through consumption. Thus, the information those going abroad receive about the local setting focuses largely upon ritual, religion, clothing, dress and food - all
dimensions that allow difference to be made safe through embedding it in specific niches. Through collection and consumption, expatriate families find a space for culture and put culture in its place, excluding difference from the ‘acultural’ space of the expatriate home through allowing discreet units of ‘the other’ in comfortable form.

What is ultimately at stake in the construction of Expatria? I suggest that in this phenomenon there is an opportunity to both catch a side-long glance at the workings of global capitalism, not so much through the direct communication of expatriates and their training, but through the subtle messages of the system itself. The way that companies and governments train and consider expatriate employees and their families can be read as the implicit curriculum of contemporary international political and business practices. In the approach taken by expatriate specialists to private life, difference and compensation, a great deal is expressed about how these entities see the world and their place in it. Secondly, in looking at the various spaces allowed for difference, one is granted access to a conflicted vision of community and culture, in which distinction is not merely a matter of good and bad, but where the encompassment of various forms of ‘otherness’ within the rubrics of community, identity and culture begin to fall apart. This fragmentation requires one to look beyond the words and liberal celebrations of culture to the way difference is constrained.

Culture thus becomes the curio - made small for easy transfer, devoid of complexifying detail, tamed for consumption, uniform across comparison, separated from labor and made distinct from the self, like a miniature spoon collection from every state. By giving difference its place it can be celebrated with fear of contamination. The acultural Western individual remains pure while practicing the values of multiculturalism. The space for culture and on the other hand its excision from certain aspects of life says much about how race, nation and place seep their way into discourse and must be uncovered, yet also the jump to culture as curio and celebration of difference, of a particular type threatens to make all difference manufactured.