

Heather Hindman. 2013. *Mediating the Global: Expatria's Forms and Consequences in Kathmandu*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Most of the anthropological texts related to Nepal are based on extensive ethnographic encounters of either native or non-native researchers with 'the natives.' And, the attempt of such anthropological inquiries is, not to generalize, mostly grounded on the explorations of discourses on cultural politics of identity, political economy of the community, and collective historical memories of the group. Hindman's book *Mediating the Global: Expatria's Forms and Consequences in Kathmandu* offers a distinct take on a transient community that has been viewed with a rather skeptical eye by both academia as well as the public.

The very little I do know of the non-native population residing in Nepal (and specifically in Kathmandu) who have been able to attract the attention of few writers and researchers in the social sciences, is from the fascinating tales of the 'hippies' who came to Nepal in the 1960s and '70s. Mark Liechty, considered to be one of the leading anthropologists in the study of modernity in Nepal, has done some major works on studying this population. In doing so, the native versus non-native debate in the social sciences is challenged, forcing us to rethink about who an anthropological subject or community

can be. Heather Hindman's work adds an important foundation to this rethinking by attempting to study a community that is not a community in its traditional anthropological sense. Subtract the 'mystical allure' of the hippies; and Hindman has to deal with the arduous task of making the mundane captivating for the readers.

This book is a result of an intensely rich and reflexive interaction of about two decades (from 1990–2012) with the expatriates in Nepal wherein the author attempts to demystify the 'strange foreigners who act crazy' and primarily explores the historical transformations in the nature of Expatria. From the onset, Hindman acknowledges the challenges of conducting an ethnographic research on a mobile and thus, despatialized community. She defines Expatria as "an attempt to capture the feeling of familiarity within geographic dispersion that is a part of what makes the experience of [this] transient life more like continuity than disjuncture" (p. 175). Expatria then can be understood, despite its 'deterritorialized' nature, as an actively transforming cultural and political space. In the book, Hindman argues that the changes in the labor and gender roles along with the bureaucratic frameworks of the global and local market continue to define and redefine the boundaries of Expatria. In the six chapters (excluding the introduction and conclusion), she simultaneously unravels and weaves the narratives of expatriates by situating them in historical, global, and local spaces of shifting discourses and practices in international human resource management (IHRM) and global-local labor market.

The book begins with a historical perspective on colonialism and its association with the contemporary Expatria whereby Hindman analyzes the similarities and dissimilarities that make the expatriates distinct from the previous notions of 'foreignness.' She also identifies Expatria as a site where development discourses are practiced. This becomes a crucial context for other chapters to bring into discussion the politics of development, especially in Nepal. Despite the colonial image evoked when mentioning expatriates, Nepal's encounter with the foreigners has a distinct trajectory because of the varied nature of the foreigners – from travelers to trekkers, and researchers to bureaucratic diplomats. However, Hindman is very selective as to defining who an expatriate is and thereby, demarcates the boundaries of Expatria to the world of subcontracting of development works. The notion of subcontracting development highlights the disjuncture between what is envisioned (planned and contracted) and what is implemented (a labyrinth

of sub-contracts). This *is* perhaps the innards of how development is ‘practiced;’ and how Expatria becomes a thriving space that is shaped and, in turn, shapes the paradigm of development in countries like Nepal.

Hindman interlinks the historically transforming global perspectives on labor, resource, and development with a critical analysis of the transforming politics of gender relations, labor, and expectations in Expatria. She provides empirical narratives on how an expatriate, expatriate family, and expatriate home are constructed – where the families become an integral part for either the success or the failure of the expatriate. She indicates a significant shift in how women have become a part of Expatria. The women – wives or trailing spouses of the 1990s – were the focus for maintaining and continuing a gendered performance of ‘home-makers’ (quite literally) and in doing so, experienced a loss of their identity (which came as a fixture to the expatriate men) and devaluation of their labor. The expatriate men, for their part, also had to perform the role of the breadwinners. However, Hindman points out that “greater opportunities for ‘work-life balance’ and gender equity” (p. 130) – promises of the protean career in the Expatria of the 2000s – were never realized. The problem of dislocation, deskilling, devaluing and de-culturing continued to exist for the female expatriates (as well as male expatriates) although they may not be ‘trailing’ behind. In my opinion, a critical analysis of how gender and labor intersects in the process of producing expatriates in the global market is at the crux of the author’s argument and understanding Expatria.

The liminal nature of Expatria – the ‘between and the betwixt’ – is further elaborated in the chapters by focusing on consumption practices of expats, putting together of compensation packages, and the changes in dealing with ‘the problem of culture.’ Hindman is able to capture the shifts in these practices from the expatriate families of the 1990s to the ‘flexpatriates’ of the 2000s. She argues that while “a sense of expatriate culture [is] produced by the shared negotiations of these practices” (p. 88), the fact that IHRM firms and companies are administering different kinds of surveys to come up with a “package” that can create the “protean expatriate” is never taken into consideration. She problematizes this process of homogenization to overcome the result of the physical and cultural displacement among expatriates and identifies it as one of the reasons why expatriates in Nepal are so alienated and struggle to become fully integrated into the cultural spheres of Nepal. On the one hand, the expatriates are required to practice cultural and local

sensitivities in their professional sphere, yet on the other hand, they continue to live in a decultured personal sphere fuelled by the consumption of globalization. This constant contradiction between local versus global ‘cultures’ of expatriate consumption provides a unique insight into the world of Expatria. While the expatriate narratives that Hindman presents are able to elicit her arguments, I find the way Hindman portrays these narratives problematic because they are unable to move beyond its anecdotal nature thereby being limited to ‘examples’ and not ‘narratives.’

Hindman has built her argument on how the expatriates become global middlemen or middle-women onto this transitional state of the expatriates. This mediation does not only entail translating global policies into local practices; but is also enmeshed with everyday negotiations of the expatriates. The author critiques the neo-liberal practices, whereby the expatriates become a stereotypical representative of agents/actors of the ‘developed’ nations who ‘implement’ development projects in countries like Nepal, which fails to look at the complexities of how expatriate identities are played out. She acknowledges the transformative powers that expatriates have as mediators who can become networks of influences in transforming global policies and practices of development. However, in juxtaposition with this idea of global mediators is the shift to ‘flexpatriates’ – in Nepal’s case, a breed of European or Western white single male expatriates who live in hotels, visit touristic destinations, complete their tasks, and move on to another country – who are an alienated and disconnected labor force unable to realize those powers. If the only need realized is the need to eliminate ‘compensation,’ then the local needs will remain invisible to both the expatriates and the development projects that they are a part of. This discussion is linked with the previous skewed idea of ‘subcontracting’ development, where the agents hired to implement elements of development are never considered as part of transforming that very practice.

Hindman discusses briefly about ‘feminine and masculine’ cultures, yet how this ties in with the thesis of her book is unclear. This is mainly because of the limited space it is given in the chapter, and because it stands as an isolated sub-topic that is embroiled in the un-packed dichotomy of what feminine and masculine cultures actually mean. While she claims that her attempt has been in displacing the dyads – public and private, and global and local – this particular section is a setback to that attempt. It is possible for the readers to become overwhelmed with the many sub-sections of the

book that constantly attempt to make sense of the vast world of Expatria, perhaps because of the fact that it is also a rather disorienting process for the expatriates themselves in trying to make sense of their economic, cultural, and political locations and dislocations in the wider global-local labor market. The institutions and organizations like United Nations Women Organization (UNWO), Active Women of Nepal (AWON), American Recreation Club, and other clubs/groups that have been set up from the beginning to provide some sense of social coherency in Expatria also struggle to create stability when confronted with the shifting practices of IHRM. Hindman discusses at length various institutions, non-virtual and virtual in nature, which reflect the lives of expatriates at flux.

To a certain extent, what Hindman is describing is the global consumption of ‘modernity’ in Kathmandu – be it in terms of labor, or lifestyle – and the expatriates are one of the many other groups of population who are gradually acquiring a more ambiguous and decontextualized identity. While the migrant workers of Nepal who go to foreign countries is not the focus of her argument, I think bringing this dynamic into discussion would have probably brought about a stark comparative angle to the gap between IHRM practices of the *Global North* and the labor migration practices of *South Asia* (the terms she uses in her books). While Nepal receives these expatriates and sends its human resources abroad, one cannot help but recognize the wide gap (and absurdity) in these two contrasting practices of labor – whereby who is called an ‘expatriate’ and a ‘migrant laborer’ is dependent on which part of the globe they belong to and go to. On the one hand, the expatriates go through a process of deculturation and homogenization to become the ideal and efficient human resource; and on the other hand, the Nepali migrant laborers go through a process of devaluation and de-humanization. This set of literature on human resource management and global labor market practices can demonstrate how the politics of labor occurs in today’s globalizing world.

In conclusion, Hindman states that “the boundaries of Expatria in Nepal are becoming more firmly established in some ways and in other ways, becoming unfixed” (p. 190) indicative of the wider transformations in IHRM practices situated in the politics of ‘global versus local.’ What this also does is locate Nepal in this global scene – not just in terms of a site for the practice of Expatria but also as a site of constant contestations and negotiations of identities, gender relations, and labor exchanges. Hindman’s book is a notable contribution to understanding the various complex forms and politics of

Expatria in Kathmandu, which this review only begins to investigate and discuss here. Not only this, her book is able to push the boundaries of anthropological practice in Nepal at many levels – the blurring of etic and emic perspectives, the rigorous historical and global contextualizing of the issue, and addressing the gender dynamics of labor at the crux of her argument. Therefore, *Mediating the Global: Expatria's Forms and Consequences in Kathmandu* provides a critical and comprehensive perspective into the fluid and fractured world called Expatria.

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