

# H-Net Reviews

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**Heather Hindman.** *Mediating the Global: Expatriate's Forms and Consequences in Kathmandu.* Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013. 277 S. ISBN 978-0-8047-8855-7.

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## H. Hindman: Mediating the Global

For anyone who has lived, is currently living, or will soon live among expatriates in the context of a developing country, Heather Hindman's book provides a unique point of departure for better understanding the forces that influence the culture of expatria and the predominant frameworks at work behind overseas employment. Her work focuses primarily on midcareer elite western workers within the arenas of international business, aid, development, and diplomacy, analyzing changes and trends that have emerged in expatriate employment over the past two decades. She posits that a recent reshaping of employment structures has had radical impacts on expatria with many consequences in the ways that foreign workers live and interact within their host culture. Within her work, Hindman strikes an effective balance between ethnography, historical background, and current trends in international business. The book is structured such that her analysis of employment structures and social aspects of expatria are interspersed with insightful anecdotes into the lives of families and individuals that she met and interviewed during her time in Kathmandu. It is the firsthand observations and tangible experiences of expatriate employees that lend both strength and cogency to her observations and arguments.

Hindman's theories are based off the preconception that employment structure is the predominant force influencing forms of expatria. She outlines how compensation packages offered by employers can influence all aspects of life for employees and their families, including consumption decisions, living arrangements, and major

life decisions such as having children or getting married. As a result, Hindman posits a theory that companies intentionally structure their compensation packages and employment policies in order to reduce the risk of expatriate failure by purposefully shaping how expatriates live and interact with their surroundings during their foreign posting. She argues that employment and compensation structures have created expectations that drive expatriate consumption patterns, encouraging workers to recreate similar lifestyles as they would in their home countries with the goal of reducing the risk of employee failure. Building off of theories posited by Saskia Sassen, Hindman notes that one of the primary transformations currently occurring among the frameworks of expatriate employment is the same sort of outsourcing of business functions that is characteristic of the neoliberal business models typically found in global cities See Saskia Sassen, *The global city*, New York 2001. .

Motivated by an attempt to reduce expensive instances of expatriate failure, international employers have begun to employ the services of international human resources management organizations which structure how employees interact with their new foreign work environments. These agencies, which are contracted to help companies reduce costs and responsibilities associated with foreign placement, have radically transformed the dominant forms of expatria, largely resulting in a decline of long-term expatriate employees who relocate with their families in tow. The book explores the reasoning behind a widespread belief in business literature

that expatriate failure is predominantly caused by family difficulties. She posits that these impressions have led to the emergence of a new form of employee she calls the "flexpatriate," representing the expatriate manifestation of Douglas Halls "protean career." See Douglas T. Hall, *The Protean Career: A quarter-century journey*, in: *Journal of vocational behavior*, 65 (2004) 1, S. 1-13. . Characterized by short-term contracts of about three months, flexpatriates are predominantly single or unattached male workers whose loyalties are mainly to the project for which they are employed. Typically these workers will have multiple employers throughout their careers and will move with relative ease from country to country on contract assignments. These cheaper forms of employment provide companies with increased flexibility and decreased risk of expatriate failure, but have also resulted in employees who are less interested in local language and culture and are less able to act as mediators between cultural contexts. Although Hindman focuses nearly exclusively on Kathmandu as a case study, her observations hold true for forms of expatria across the developing world. As a result, this book serves as a unique read for any who have been, currently are, or will soon count themselves among expatriates working abroad. Throughout the book, I was reminded of expatriate families and individuals who I had gotten to know across both Africa and Latin America, leading to speculation on how employment structures had influenced their day to day lives. For the reader with experience living in the developing world, the book can lead one to reflect on the forces that direct and influence daily life within

foreign cultural contexts.

Hindman's ability to provide a thorough analysis of the expatriate scene in Kathmandu is the result of nearly 20 years of living and traveling in Nepal. Through the relationships and connections that she has built over that time, Hindman has developed an intimate understanding of Kathmandu and the changes that have been occurring in expatria since her first visit in 1994. Indeed, the publication of *Mediating the Global*, represents the denouement of a series of articles that Hindman previously published on expatria, Nepal, and expatria in Nepal. Currently assistant professor of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, Hindman approaches the study of expatria with a background in anthropology and sociology. By focusing on forms of expatria in Kathmandu, *Mediating the Global* serves as an excellent point of reference for further studies examining how international businesses and development agencies operate in developing countries. Expatria as a subject of study provides a unique way of looking at the actors that act as facilitators of globalization on the ground. While most work in development studies is focused on society as a subject, Hindman's contribution shows that it is also important to consider the mediators and individual actors that work locally within the context of international aid and development. With a nod to the cliché "think globally, act locally," further studies in international business and development stand to benefit from acknowledging how changing forms of expatria play a significant role in mediating the global.

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