

# Introduction

## Expatria in Nepal

SITTING AROUND THE HOTEL GARDEN, Iris and I were among the few remaining at the table by mid-afternoon from the group of expatriate women who met for lunch at least one Thursday a month. Much of the day's conversation had centered on recent fluctuations in the value of the Nepali rupee against Western currencies and how this might affect the costs of goods and services. Concerns about this economic event had touched off a wider conversation about other financial worries shared by foreigners working abroad, including changes in home leave policies of employers and the distinct likelihood that several families soon to depart Kathmandu would not be replaced by new expatriate arrivals. After lunch, women began to drift away to run errands, pick up children or fill volunteer shifts until only the two of us remained. Iris had a rare free afternoon and seemed eager to talk about anything, from her daughter's academic problems to her anxiety about her husband's contract not being renewed. After an hour of conversation, she worried that she was keeping me from important tasks, preventing me from doing my research. When I said that talking to people was a big part of what anthropologists did, she tried to clarify, asking why I was wasting time talking to her "when there is so much culture all around us."

She gave herself little credit for a fascinating life. Iris had lived in nearly a dozen different countries. She had grown up betwixt and between, her German father having married an Irish woman, and the family shuttled between the two countries when she was a kid. She had married an Irish mechanic when she was young, just out of high school. Her life took an unexpected twist when he was offered a job in Indonesia for a substantial amount more than his starting salary, just a few years into the couple's marriage. Although in her own



Garden of the Summit Hotel after the Wednesday Farmers Market. Author photo, February 2000.

words her life had been “never dull,” she could not see it being of interest to a scholar. During our conversation, she told stories of her family’s adventures on three continents, but she would claim they were only the tales of a housewife and common to so many of the wives who had been at the lunch. Why would an anthropologist be interested in her, she wondered, when Nepal presented more culture of interest to anthropologists?

In 1994, Iris’s question was one I was working through myself. I was in Kathmandu on a fellowship to develop my Newari language skills and explore a possible dissertation topic examining Newari linguistic and cultural revival groups as well as the emerging Janajati movement, which was seeking rights for minority groups often underrepresented in the government and other spaces of power. During that visit, I was learning about the culture and language of Kathmandu’s long-standing population of artistic and business elites, the Newars, as well as attending Newari rituals and talking to community leaders. My days were spent following the young women who had adopted me as a part of their group to Newari religious festivals, as well as more mundane events like movie viewing parties. Other times, I was trying to practice my Nepali and Newari (but often quickly being converted to English) in meetings with male community

leaders about their concerns over dying Newari practices. Many of the community leaders were ambivalent about allying with Janajati activists, whose fight for linguistic and cultural acknowledgement by the government was centered on claims to exclusion from zones of power, claims that could not be shared by Newars. Janajati and Newari culture movements resonated with the issues of anthropology in the 1990s concerning nationalism and invention of tradition, as well as the rise in ethnic politics in Nepal during that period. Neither my advisors in the United States nor the Nepalis I spoke with found anything odd in an anthropologist studying these topics; it was Iris who was an unexpected anthropological subject. It was a coincidence that my conversation with Iris occurred at about the same time as a discussion that would dramatically shift my research, putting Iris at the center of the story.

Just a few days previously, I had attended a Newari festival celebrating the first rice eaten by a child (see Levy 1992: 661). This *macha janku* was somewhat unusual, as the honoree was the child of a Westerner doing research in Kathmandu. The official ceremony over, the guests sat down to what was for us the highlight of the activities, an elaborate Newari *bhoj*, or feast, with dozens of traditional dishes and *aila*, a homemade rice liquor. Conversations mixing Nepali, Newari and English were taking place in the courtyard and servants with new dishes kept arriving for hours until it was nearly dark. At this point, several Western academics adjourned to the parlor of the host's rental house, a former royal palace, and continued our conversation. I spoke with a senior scholar attending the event about some of the unusual dishes, such as fish gelatin with the head and tail extending from the serving tray, which, I noted, was delicious but also would provide me with good stories to take back home. She remarked that it was no more disgusting than the processed meat parts that went into the hot dogs served at the American Club in Kathmandu. This provoked a good laugh about the unusual world of the expatriates who populated this space and discussions of how their behavior could be incomprehensible to the outside observer, either Nepali or Western academic. I cannot replicate the exact exchange which followed, but I do distinctly remember the question being raised as to why no anthropologist had studied this unusual community, about the impracticality or unsuitability of expatriates as an anthropological topic, and the final proclamation of the most senior scholar present. There was nothing inherent in anthropology that said that this could not be a legitimate topic for research, and in fact, someone should do it, she declared. It took me several years to fully take up this challenge, but this book is an attempt to engage that task.

In the nearly twenty years since that initial question, I have searched for something like “expatriate culture in Kathmandu”—culture that might parallel more conventional ethnographic subjects like Newari heritage protectors and Janajati activists. In the process, I have found both a more complex and a more simplistic sense of an “expatriate culture” and, like many other anthropologists of the twenty-first century, come to question the value of the concept of culture. The presumptions of uniformity and stability that were necessary for culture to be captured, as if in an ethnologic zoo, were never particularly illuminating, sometimes strategic and often objectifying (cf. Handler 1988; Anderson 1991; Malkki 1992).<sup>1</sup> Although my research on the “strange foreigners” of Kathmandu’s expatriate community initially relied on these past codifying anthropological models of culture, subsequent research with this unusual ethnographic subject highlights the lacuna that such approaches encode as well as the difficulty of escaping the culture concept. To destabilize this framework and keep readers conscious of the constructed nature of all ethnographic subjects, I have resorted to the neologism *Expatria*, a polity that this study grounds in Kathmandu. Yet before trying to triangulate what shapes the network of associations called *Expatria*, I need to return to Iris’s provocation and ask why expatriates are a difficult topic for anthropological study, perhaps particularly in Nepal.

The invisibility of expatriates to ethnographers has not always been the case; in the 1970s two manuscripts on the topic were written by scholars who went on to be key figures in the anthropology of tourism, *A Community in Limbo: An Anthropological Study of an American Community Abroad* (Nash 1970) and *Expatriate Communities* (Cohen 1977).<sup>2</sup> Yet, it is not until the rise of “mobilities” scholarship (e.g., Urry 2007) that interest in expatriates as an ethnographic subject appeared again, albeit often under the rubric of “transnational mobile professionals” (e.g., Beaverstock 2005; Walsh 2006; Fechter 2007; Nowicka 2007). The often ambivalent reaction of anthropologists to expatriates (and vice versa) stems in part from their having very different relationships to “the field” as well as ideas of “home” and “away.” The challenges presented by an ethnography of expatriates in Nepal are encapsulated in two encounters I had with people frustrated with expatriates. In two very different venues, nearly the same phrase of exasperation about “those people” erupted—a phrase laden with contempt and a lack of cultural relativism rarely explicit in settings with a mission of cultural acceptance. Seven thousand miles apart, the problem of studying expatriates became apparent as they were deemed horrible in one venue and insane in another. In Boston, the question was “how can you stand those people?”

In Nepal, it was “why are those people so crazy?” Either “those people” were an irrational group—a community not worthy of contextual understanding—or there was something more to this story.

### The Difficulty of Studying “Those People”

The first question about “those people” was put to me by an audience member at an academic conference where I was presenting some initial research on the expatriate community in Kathmandu. The inquirer, a fellow ethnographer, could not comprehend how I could “stand” to spend time with a population of foreigners who showed little interest in “local culture” and spent all their time at American clubs. She “knew those people” from international schools and social events she had been to when she was in the field, and although she occasionally had been “forced” to enter the world of expatriates, she described how eager she was to escape to the more real world of fieldwork. Her tone was sympathetic towards me, suggesting that it was a great sacrifice to work with such a population, although she remained contemptuous of my research subjects. Such denigration seemed out of place, given the general inclination of anthropology towards cultural relativism and appreciation of all humankind.<sup>3</sup> Her disdain licensed a communal outpouring of frustration among other audience members, who interjected with their own anecdotes about lazy wives who appeared to spend all their time on tennis lessons, spoiled children with local servants who picked up after them and men who played golf all day. There arose in the room a general exasperation at the lack of knowledge about local customs and language demonstrated by people who had lived for two years in a foreign country. One commenter expressed jealousy, exasperated at how fortunate these expatriates were able to spend years in “his” field site while he was only allowed a few weeks away from his family and university teaching responsibilities every other summer. While he struggled to get a few moments off to visit Nepal to keep up his contacts and research interests, these expatriates were wasting their opportunity. In part, it was his job that compelled him to go to Nepal as well, but what was the exasperating distinction for this anthropologist between his work-related relationship to Nepal and the work done by the expatriate other?

The content of my presentation became superfluous during responses to the panel, overwhelmed by the collective effervescence of a community sharing repressed anger. Later I was able to reflect upon the contempt cast on these mid-level workers in development and business who lived in Nepal—condemned as people of leisure, lacking the appropriate interest in the local—particularly in

light of one of the examples I had given in the paper. It was one expatriate's story of trying to get a job in Nepal, a place he had asked to be posted on several occasions. Many years previously, he had done a tour in the Peace Corps in rural Nepal that had allowed him to study Nepali and gain some familiarity with the country. For several rounds of overseas assignments his application to be posted to Nepal had been rejected for fear that he might "go native." As the human resources professional had explained to him, they wanted to be sure that his loyalty was to his home country and to the employer—that he did not simply desire to be in Nepal.

### Why Are "Those People" Crazy?

The second question about "those people" was put to me during a visit to a rural area of Nepal where a Kathmandu friend's schoolmates lived. In an attempt to escape the dusty heat of the city, we went for a few days of rural life and to enjoy the jackfruit currently ripe in the area. During one late-night conversation (although it was probably only eight o'clock—with no electric lights it seemed later), we became embroiled in a discussion about *bikas*, or development.<sup>4</sup> My Nepali companions were far more educated on the changing theories of aid work than I, but they hoped I could answer one question that perplexed them, why were the foreign aid workers they met "crazy"? Insanity was the only explanation they could find for the constantly changing organizations and practices that invaded their community every few years. One year the project was rural electrification, the next, irrigation, the following year brought the removal of the old irrigation system under a new agenda of sustainable agriculture. The cast of foreigners rotated in and out even more quickly than the policy changed, and the urban Nepali managers stayed even less time in their village than foreigners. For this relatively wealthy area of Nepal, it was a source of amusement—what are the crazy foreigners going to come up with next? Although part of my goal in this trip was to practice my language skills, what I found was a much larger problem of translation.

Upon returning to Kathmandu, I began to investigate what promulgated the "crazy" behavior of expatriate development workers. What I found was a world driven by shifting intellectual and economic fashion. Governmental and nongovernmental aid agencies would generate new calls for proposals—requesting bids for aspects of a given project—every few months. Aid workers were constantly chasing the shifting priorities of granting agencies. Even permanent employees of aid organizations worried about how they might be affected by each new directive, especially one expatriate worker who de-

scribed his current job as “spin doctor.” This task required that he change the language of the program materials every six months to claim that the work they were doing in Nepal was precisely in line with the agency’s new emphasis on “women and children” or “the environment” or “democracy.” This had gone from being a small part of his job to taking up most of his time and he lamented that he had gotten into this line of work to help people, rather than to write reports.

This “spin doctor” and other direct employees of aid agencies and governments were the main expatriates I encountered in Nepal in the 1990s, families on three-year tours to various countries in the Global South. By the new millennium, there was a different paradigm—many of the “crazy aid workers” did not identify with the job title of “aid worker”—they did not self-identify as development professionals. They were subcontractors, brought in for a specific job, asked to design a bridge or an irrigation system. Employed by third-party organizations to fulfill the objectives of development projects, these technical specialists were unconcerned with the constant changeover in aid priorities, they were just doing a job—and might be doing the same work in a few months in Des Moines or Accra. This process further separated the work of aid from politics or local context, as they continually focused on building the next bridge or democracy project, which required networking with other subcontractors rather than concern over the local impact of their labors (Ferguson 1994; Hindman 2011). This left me only more confused. Who are (or were) “those people”? And what was happening abroad that drove their “crazy” behavior in Nepal? This book is an attempt to answer these questions by taking seriously the transformative power of global middlemen, those people trapped between central policies and local conditions, all the while trying to conduct a mobile life.

### Expatriates and Expatriate Packages

In Kathmandu in the 1990s, who was an expatriate seemed self-evident. It was an explicit term of self-reference—expatriates were who other expatriates identified them to be. Nepal presents some unusual boundary-making challenges for expatriates. Given the large numbers of tourists who visit Kathmandu, the city teems with Western (and more recently East Asian) faces, some seeking the spirituality associated with the location, others the natural wonders and some just to participate in the continuing hippy trail and low cost of living (Moran 2004; Liechty 2005a). Nepalis varied in their capacity to distinguish between tourists and expatriates, as well as their interest in doing

so, depending upon the nature of the encounter. For expatriates, the distinction that was most salient in defining who was a part of their self-understood community was the receipt of an “expatriate package.” Expatriate package contracts defined for families the reason and conditions of their presence in Nepal. For employees, such contracts described a particular set of payments and services provided as part of their overseas posting, distinguishing package-employed personnel from other foreign workers in Nepal. Yet “packages” also produced the community by creating regimes of consumption that drove the social habitus of those who identified with the category expatriate. From an employer point of view, an expatriate package was a financialized list of compensations, such as hardship allowances and moving expenses, incurred to post a worker to a location abroad. The variety and nature of these compensations were important to expatriates as recompense and distinction-making, but equally important was what having these packages communicated about the relationships between workers, their families, the employers and the home and host country locations. Expatriate packages made expatriates and brought them to Nepal; and although this would change in the new millennium, in the late twentieth century the majority of foreigners were employed under this model.

For many, having an expatriate package meant that one had a career that happened to bring one to Nepal. Kathmandu was, for these people, not an intentional destination but one they came to as a result of the demands of their job. Foreign Service personnel, development workers and those businesspeople who ended up in Nepal all shared an understanding that they had undertaken positions that would require them to move every three to five years where their services were needed. Although they might assert some influence on where and when those moves would be made, they realized that moving was an assumed part of the job. This perspective reconfigured many of their significant relations. It made their home nation not only a place they would live in infrequently but also a reference within the package regarding the right to “home leave” and the currency with which they were paid, thus making it more distant yet at times more important than to a permanent resident<sup>5</sup> foreigner living in Nepal. Home became, in part, a bureaucratic category, one that might require a family to return to Australia, if that is where the company and employee were based, even if the family’s relatives and friends were in Britain. Home also served as a performative category for expatriates, for example when families demonstrated where their home was through their choice of dress on “International Day” at the local school for expatriate children.



The displacement entailed in a package expatriate position reconfigures the worker-employer relationship; in displacing the worker, the employer assumes new responsibilities for the employee's life outside the workplace, in ways both supportive and intrusive. Most dramatically, the expatriate package entails a reconfiguration of the family, drawing spouses and children (but not other extended family) into the work of the employee. The employer takes on responsibility for finding housing for the family, supporting the schooling of children and providing services that might otherwise be offered through the state or on the public market. Concretely, the work of one family member—when displaced thousands of miles over multiple years—transforms the lives of all other members of the family. Thus, in pointing to the expatriate package as a central defining feature of expatriates in Nepal, I take the word “package” in two senses, first as a descriptor of worker compensation, but also to exemplify how it “packages” a set of actors, connecting workers to their family and their employer in a novel way.

One of the key outcomes of the “expatriate package” is the production of a group of people with a distinctive style of movement. The routines of packing and moving to a new city every few years are common points of experience for expatriates, and as they move, it is frequently sharing the challenges of this style of movement that brings people together. What becomes clear, although often not until people cease this style of motion, is that institutions, like international women's organizations and national clubs, make this life more comfortable for those who participate in it for multiple circuits than a stable life in a single country—than life at home. The expatriates I spoke with in the 1990s in Nepal described how they followed a network of similar organizations and familiar practices as they moved around the world. I had the opportunity to observe these parallel institutions myself. Taking advantage of graduate school colleagues doing research around the world, I visited several countries in Asia and Europe and had no difficulty discovering SIWA (Seoul International Women's Organization) based on my experience with UNWO (United Nations Women's Organization of Nepal). As expatriates I had spoken to in Kathmandu described, it was easy to walk into a group in Seoul or Berlin and find a welcoming atmosphere to newcomers as well as personal connections to people I knew in Nepal; these were people who had been posted to the same place or participated in the same club when they were in Dhaka, or Delhi. Both in Nepal and in its wider global formation, Expatria shared many of the characteristics of a small town—everyone knew everyone else, even at a distance of thousands of miles.

Expatria, although a product of the package expatriate labor system, depends less on the actual nature of the work that expatriates do and more on these institutional and bureaucratic frameworks, and thus there is limited discussion of the everyday work of expatriates in this book for two reasons. First, there is a problem of anonymity. Given that many of the people I spoke with were connected to either governments or nongovernmental organizations, information on their work is readily available online. Thus, were I to describe the work of a Canadian health care worker involved in a maternal health improvement program in the late 1990s, it would be very simple to attach a name to that story with a little online research. The other challenge is that the work that expatriates in Nepal do is quite standard across what are traditional divides, such as government, development and private sector business. Regardless of the industry, many expatriate workers find themselves spending much of their time on computers, writing reports or doing research, not unlike what similar workers might do at a home office. There was also a significant amount of time devoted to meetings with local officials, experts and expatriates in other agencies. The field site visits that one might imagine being the main labor of expatriate workers—visiting or exploring project sites outside of Kathmandu—were occasional breaks from the far more common routine of paperwork and consultation between agencies. Particularly as political tension and violence erupted in the rural areas of Nepal in the late 1990s, trips outside the Kathmandu Valley became increasingly rare for foreigners. When I visited the offices of workers and followed them throughout the day, more than half of their time was devoted to writing reports, sometimes short casual emails to a home office about recent activities but more often long and formal missives required by their employers, which were structured to allow comparisons across sites and to provide quantifiable data about projects. This format of daily labor held true to a large extent across various industries. The workers and families I describe in the book came to Nepal with the assistance of many different industries: career diplomats for European, American and Asian countries, professional aid workers for both private and government agencies, and businesspeople involved in import-export concerns, alternative energy products, and banking and finance. Thus, on the same day, two expatriates might be writing reports on the potential of solar energy in Nepal, one employed by an aid agency, the other for a solar panel sales company, and later in the day these same individuals might meet to collaborate and discuss the aid agency's interest in buying solar arrays from the company. The drama of movies like *The Constant Gardener* about aid and development work have little resonance

with the piles of paperwork that command much of the time of the mid-level expatriate in Nepal.

The small town feeling of shared work and social life depends on a common experience of employment and mobility as well as a cohort of those sharing the same pattern of movement. By the time I was back in Kathmandu conducting research in the 2000s, the clear boundaries of the expatriate community were fading. Thus, one of the issues this book explores is the nature of the expatriate community, or Expatria, in its instantiation in Kathmandu, but also its potential demise, or at the least transformation, in the present day. The initial chapters of the book present “package expatriates” in their most typical form, the middle chapters show a time of transition, as expatriates, institutions and employers are changing their approaches to overseas labor, albeit often in conflicting rather than coordinated ways, while the concluding chapter points to a new era of expatriacy, one not predicted by experts but a result of local contingencies and global conjunctures. As a community created and dependent upon a particular structure of global labor and employment policies, changes that produce deskilling and outsourcing among expatriate workers transform the experience of those who work abroad as well as their families, eroding long-standing support networks as well as shared practices. While the expatriate community in Kathmandu in the 1980s and 1990s largely consisted of Western families staying in-country for several years, this population is declining. Instead one sees more single Westerners working in Nepal for only a few months, some as volunteers occupying formerly professionalized jobs and others as highly paid consultants. In addition, greater numbers of aid workers and business people are arriving from Japan, South Korea and China, some of whom adopt the expatriate package model, while others are employed under a variety of new models of elite overseas work.

The package and packaging of expatriates, both in its older forms in Nepal and the more recent processes, places work at the center of the life. Whereas the rigid divide between work time and leisure time is by no means transhistorical, the disciplining of work time, even in the age of flexibility, is still very strongly instantiated in much of the world (Thompson 1967; Lefebvre 1991: 29–42). Leisure and work are, as Lefebvre and others argue (29), mutually constitutive, yet expatriacy introduces space into the equation in a way that entangles work in private realms in an unusual way. The radical physical displacement necessary for expatriate employment extends far beyond the time and task of the employee to the entire life-world of the family. The result is the incorporation, to use Callan and Ardener’s phrase (1984), of entire families in the

work of one member. This experience—of incorporation and displacement as a result of work—is shared by all expatriates. It is not merely the long hours demanded of expatriate employees that erode the private sphere, but the necessity of doing that work thousands of miles from home and displacing one’s family as a result.

While Expatria is a global phenomenon, it is often less cosmopolitan than one might imagine. Despite the many moves made by most package expatriates, the infrastructure of Expatria itself provides familiarity and insulation from many encounters with the Other. The ethics of development often espouse a universalism that projects the obligation for care and understanding beyond the bounds of the nation-state, yet the practices of expatriates are often those I call “enclavic cosmopolitanism.” As with gated community dwellers or business travelers, movement and superficial forms of diversity need not extend to complex or sophisticated interest in Others (Iyer 1998; Low 2003). Expatria exists at the intersection of what has been described as strong and weak (Friedman 2005; Foster 2008) or rosy and dark (Appadurai 2006) forms of globalization. Scholars of globalization, either in celebrating it or in accusing it of destroying local cultures, often slip into a conceptually and spatially flattening rhetoric.

My argument here is that expatriates are often able to live what one might call “provincial” lives, even while they move through many spaces. Thus, what one observes in the mobilities of expatriates, particularly those hired under the package system, is a despatialized community, albeit one that shares similar places where “transnationally organized circuits of capital, labor, and communications intersect with one another and with local ways of life” (Rouse 1991: 16). Similarly to James Clifford’s concept of “discrepant cosmopolitanisms” (Clifford 1997: 36), which opens up the disjunctures and frictions that exist in the global flow, enclavic cosmopolitanism questions if mere mobility brings about understanding. Even this caution is not enough, as cosmopolitanism threatens, as Timothy Brennan argues, to occlude history and economic inequality in order to seek hope in a world always in tension (Brennan 1997). To call expatriates cosmopolitans would neglect their particular embeddedness in enclavic places as well as within institutions like the United Nations, which could easily gloss over the inequalities of globality in favor of its liberatory potential (cf. Kelly and Kaplan 2001).

Expatria is thus a community defined by a unique labor structure above all other features. While the development workers, diplomats and business-people who make up the majority of the expatriate community in Nepal may

have very different job titles, those who share the experience of being under an expatriate package have a great deal in common. Conversations about hardship allowances, the relative quality of local schools and the problems of keeping in contact with the home office during power outages are shared by those who come to Nepal for work with an embassy, an aid agency or a multinational corporation. Exploring what makes expatriates in Kathmandu define their own boundaries nearly always led to the structure of employment rather than to the employer. An individual aid agency, particularly in recent years, might employ two or three Western expatriates as well as a dozen or more Western interns, consultants and volunteers, who are often not a part of the social milieu of their package-employed colleagues. The central role of institutions like women's clubs, church organizations and school groups creates a divide between those who are in Nepal for an extended period of time with a family and those only passing through for several months, who sometimes find more in common with the tourist population.

### Spaces of Expatria

Doing ethnographic research with people who move every three years presents challenges, but it is the solutions that expatriates themselves use to overcome the a mobile life that provided me with my pathway into the community. Although I was able to undertake brief trips to Nepal in 1994, 2007, 2010 and 2012, the bulk of the research for this book was conducted in two longer trips to Nepal, in 1997 to 1998 and 1999 to 2000. Each time I visited, I was able to find some families who had been in residence since my last visit, but often my first stop was the same as for many expatriates, a visit to one of the frequent "New-comers Coffees" that are sponsored by local women's clubs. At these events, I was able to see who was still in town, learn about events and institutions, and meet new people. The inherent challenges of studying moving populations were undercut by the common experience of being a new arrival.

At these meetings, the lack of a spouse whom I was trailing or a history of expatriate experience was rarely a topic of conversation. In part, my appearance as a young white Western female fit me into a known position, even if my career did not, and my relative youth made many of the women quickly assign me honorary daughter status, with concern about my well-being and that I was alone. With time, the challenge became to remind people of my research agenda and my work as an ethnographer, which I often reiterated explicitly in moments of more intimate conversation and tried to emphasize by publically taking notes. Western researchers were not unknown presences

at expatriate clubs, and despite the protestations of my anthropologist audience member, Kathmandu's foreigners clubs often saw academics, Fulbrighters and Peace Corps volunteers as visitors. Time was one of the most useful attributes that contributed to my involvement in expatriate life; the ability to say yes to the many activities that followed from formal events both allowed me access to other parts of daily life, and marked me as someone without daytime office-work responsibilities. Beginning with events that were designed for new arrivals, I was able to build connections with other organizations, participate in the lives of expatriate families outside of formal social events and visit workplaces of the employed members of families. Also, through contacts at an organization that trains Nepalis to work in the homes of expatriates, I was able to speak to housemaids and drivers about their experiences working for Western foreigners, although these conversations, even when conducted in Nepali, were undoubtedly influenced by my status as a foreigner and thus potential employer.

My "ethnographic sites" in Kathmandu were eclectic and I went to meetings spanning every possible interest, participating in an amateur theater production, learning to quilt and attending sophisticated costume balls. I also visited two-room offices as well as elaborate embassies to see expatriate workspaces and enjoyed lunches and dinners at people's homes or local restaurants. I became a fan at the local international school basketball games and learned to read bulletin boards to find out about and attend Norwegian Day or meetings of the Hash House Harriers. The size of the expatriate community in Kathmandu was such that there was one overarching social circle, and once people became aware of my interests, they were eager to suggest other people I might want to meet. Many important conversations occurred in the back of the white Jeeps that are the predominant mode of transportation for expatriates. A trip across town from a club meeting to the grocery store might take as long as an hour if traffic were particularly bad or if a political protest blocked the path through town. My experience of workplace life for expatriates often stemmed from connections with women who would introduce me to their employed husbands and open up opportunities to observe life in aid and diplomatic offices. Businessmen working in Nepal often had more ambiguous workplaces, some attempting to establish new enterprises, working largely from home or a rented office space, while others had established relationships with local companies or agencies and worked from within their offices. My own foreignness was a distinct privilege as well as a limiting factor in these settings: it allowed me access to restricted spaces and permitted my easy acceptance as a potential new

employee or newly arrived spouse, while making conversation with Nepalis a hierarchical challenge predetermined by my race. Often I had the most success in talking to Nepalis about their experiences with expatriates in settings where I was already known from my previous research on Newars. Thus, the limits of this research go beyond the difficulty of working with mobile populations to my own presumed position in the structure.

What I learned in Kathmandu in the 1990s showed me that this story extended beyond the confines of Nepal and even the various cities in which expatriates resided, to the structures and institutions that produced expatriate lives in a particular form. Between trips, I was able to fill in this aspect of the expatriate puzzle through investigating the employment practices and training programs that I had heard discussed in Nepal. Although much of my research on how expatriates are managed as employees and the perception of families' impact on overseas laborers was conducted via published sources, I also spoke to cross-cultural trainers and several expatriate services professionals about their jobs. This U.S.-based "fieldwork" was necessary to gain a perspective on how the structures of expatriate employment were built and understood away from their sites of implementation. Through tracking how workers in Nepal experience their employment, exploring fields of scholarship devoted to culture contact and transnational elite labor management, and talking to those who were responsible for translating scholarship into policy, I came to better understand lives of expatriates and what made them appear crazy from several different angles.

### Mediation and Globalization's Middlemen

What emerged from this combination of on-the-ground ethnographic research in Kathmandu and contextualizing investigations of ideas of transnational employment policy is a book that places labor at the center of the story, not only the work of expatriates but the work done to make them expatriates. The commonalities of expatriate life draw from the way in which their labor is structured by their employers, and the extension of these workplace logics into the everyday lives of foreigners resident in Kathmandu. Thus, the unifying aspects of *Expatria in Kathmandu* stemmed from the mediating character of the labor and the expatriate packages that governed not only workers' presence in Nepal but also to a large extent the behavior of their families. Workers posted to Kathmandu are often at the midpoint of their careers, and their jobs are to connect metropolitan goals to local conditions. What appeared to be changing between 1990 and 2000 was that expatriates in Kathmandu were starting to experience

negative effects of business efficiency, rhetorics of global flatness and neoliberalism, even as they were engaged in promoting similar ideas in Nepal. Thus, although economically far better off than their Nepali counterparts, expatriates in Kathmandu are globalization's middlemen—in the sense of being neoliberalism's advocates and its objects as well as being mediating forces connecting Nepal and elsewhere. In their lives, one can see advocates of new forms of financialization being negatively impacted by the policies they promote.

Philosophically, Expatria indexes mediation as a role beyond the extremities workers and families might be seen to be mediating among. In the claim to the special role for global middlemen, one is continually thrown back into the idea of a global-local duality, threatening to make real the constructs that it is the job of expatriates to negotiate or negate. The work of expatriate middlemen may be assumed to be transmitting a message between two parties, but more often they are mediating among a diverse set of actors not simply defined by global versus local.<sup>6</sup> Expatriates participate in a complex and transformative process of translation, one of mediation, wherein they are “endowed with the capacity to translate what they transport, to redefine it, redeploy it, and also to betray it” (Latour 1993: 81). For Latour, the key distinction is to be made between intermediaries and mediators, with the former presumed to be neutral actors who emit consistent and predictable results while the latter are more agentive and transformative.<sup>7</sup> The process of implementing a development project or negotiating a trade agreement is rarely predictable, and yet the agency and intervention of the expatriate middlemen is rarely given attention. Expatria is an attempt to (temporarily) capture and ethnographize this type of labor and to focus on “amongness,” rather than here and there, as itself a possible field of study (Oppenheim 2007). Thus, “the goal is not to *replace* the cultural figure ‘native’ with the intercultural figure ‘traveler.’ Rather, the task is to focus on concrete mediations of the two, in specific cases of historical tension in relationship” (Clifford 1997: 24).

More specifically, Expatria describes a world of moving-without-moving, where geographical displacement is trumped by social coherency. I intend Expatria to be a destabilizing term—one that acts as a continual reminder of the problematic rooting of people in place (Malkki 1992: 26; Appadurai 1988: 37) and the practices that are made invisible by the expectation of stability. It also is intended to mark the possibility of spatially discontinuous community, not unlike what Roger Rouse calls a “transnational migrant circuit” (Rouse 1991: 14). Expatriates live in many places, deeply linked in ways that allow everyday life to be conducted in multiple spaces simultaneously, if not evenly.<sup>8</sup>