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Review of 'Mediating the Global: Expatria's Forms and Consequences in Kathmandu' by Heather Hindman

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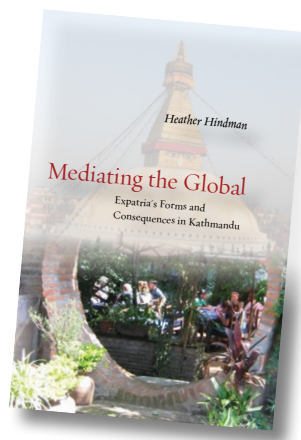
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Mediating the Global: Expatriate's Forms and Consequences in Kathmandu.

Heather Hindman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013. 277 pages. ISBN 9780804786515.

Reviewed by Mark Liechty

Rather than anthropologists' usual attention to either development policy or outcomes, in *Mediating the Global* Heather Hindman keeps a sustained focus on the idea of *development as practice*. Hindman insists that we consider the actual *agents* of development: the aid workers, bureaucrats, diplomats, and technicians who have to live day to day lives in places foreign to them. She makes a compelling case for why we have to see development (and its myriad problems and failures) as inescapably tied to the everyday lives of those people who implement policy or, as Hindman puts it, "mediate" between abstract global directives and the nitty-gritty of local implementation.

The core of Hindman's argument is that "development" is not just policy or ideology, but also a kind of uniquely situated and constrained *labor* in which aid workers are not simply conduits but agents who themselves have profound impacts on development outcomes. Here Hindman provides a detailed look at the actual lived context in which this labor takes place. She shows how everything from the most abstract

global business policy to the most mundane concerns for food and friendship come into play as foreign workers attempt to implement policies in Nepal. Given that attention to the actual *agents of development* has been almost completely absent from anthropological critiques and theorizations of development and globalization, Hindman's book represents a significant contribution (and corrective) to our understandings of what "development" is and how it works.

I confess to having been skeptical of the idea of an ethnography of expatriates—a population that anthropologists are perhaps uniquely positioned to revile since their intentionally shallow attachments to any one place are antithetical to the "deep" commitment that anthropologists are expected to have to their "field sites." But it wasn't long before I was drawn to Hindman's idea of "Expatria"—a "place" that I had long observed from a disdainful distance but never understood. As does all good ethnography, Hindman's book allowed me to make sense of a world that has a set of dynamics and logics that are only apparent from the inside, where Hindman takes us. Expatria nicely captures the cultural location produced by the demands of transnational labor forms and practices. Hindman does a good job of laying out how labor demands structure this cultural domain and how changing global economic conditions have transformed the cultural world of Expatria. This allows her to

convincingly show how "expatriates" are distinctly different from "resident foreigners." Hindman is able to show in detail how specific conditions of employment, recruitment, and management practices, as well as institutional ideologies, create a kind of person ("expats") and a kind of (non-) place (Expatria) that certain foreigners find and inhabit wherever they are posted.

I found especially fascinating Hindman's discussion of what she calls "the management of culture" within Expatria. At a time when the culture concept is increasingly under fire *within* anthropology, Hindman shows how "culture" has taken on an emic life of its own in the world of business, diplomatic service, and management (among other places). Thus one of the conditions of Expatria is an essentialized notion of culture as a "local problem" to be overcome in a world imagined to be becoming increasingly "globalized" and homogenous—or "normal." In this world the culture of the expat is unmarked (except for stereotypical "national culture" like dress and food) while locals have "culture" that has to be overcome, modernized, or "developed."

In what may be the most important theoretical contribution of the book, Hindman is able to show how this specific "management of culture" does not spring simply from the elitist whims of expatriates but from the very ideological premises that drive global business and

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Mark Liechty on *Mediating the Global: Expatria’s Forms and Consequences in Kathmandu*

management policies. This is where Hindman’s ethnographic and archival work leads readers into what are probably (for most anthropologists) some of the most rarified and inaccessible domains of “Expatria.” These are the international labor recruiting policies and practices, business rationales, management guidelines, and “best practices” that characterize the economic logic of the neoliberal era. Hindman repeatedly helps us trace the lines between formal (and ideologically driven) policy, its implementation, and outcomes in the day to day practices and possibilities of expatriate lives. Most interesting is how the logic of neoliberal “best practices”—that business and development expats are expected to introduce and enforce—is the same logic that increasingly makes the “traditional” long-term expat obsolete in favor of new “protean” laborers. These “flexpats” both give up much of the security of the old labor forms, and bring an even more radically technocratic (one size fits all) set of answers to complex development problems. If “development” is a phenomenon known for its perpetual failure, Hindman’s account of recent transformations gives us little hope for change.

This points to another of the book’s strengths: its longitudinal nature. By following developments over a twenty year period Hindman is able

to graphically illustrate not just what has changed, but how and why. As someone who has spent a lot of time in Kathmandu over these same decades I was fascinated by Hindman’s ability to explain a whole range of phenomena that I had seen but never really understood or connected or contemplated. For example, this is the first work I have encountered that attempts to make sense of the amazing rise of “voluntourism” that is now *everywhere* in Nepal. The “hollowing out of aid-land”—with long-term development professionals replaced by a combination of short-term technicians and deskilled volunteers—is something that I witnessed but never understood. In fact a recurring sensation I had while reading this book was of the organization of what had been (for me) random impressions collected over the years into a new image that suddenly helped make sense of things I had observed in new ways. In short, by focusing our attention on the lived experience of expats in their world of “Expatria,” Hindman has given us a valuable new perspective on development and globalization.

Mark Liechty is an Associate Professor in the departments of Anthropology and History at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the author of several books on Nepal and co-editor of the Nepal Studies journal Studies in Nepali History and Society.

Trans-Himalayan Linguistics: Historical and Descriptive Linguistics of the Himalayan Area.

Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill, eds. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2013. 444 pages. ISBN 9783110310832.

Reviewed by Luke Lindemann

Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill have compiled a collection of historical and descriptive papers on the languages of the Himalayan region. These articles are derived from papers and talks presented at the 16th Himalayan Language Symposium at the University of London in 2010. It is not easy to assemble twelve distinct papers into a single volume, and Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill have done an exceptional job of building a solid narrative.

The twelve papers of this volume are divided into three topics: historical linguistics, language description, and language planning. The first seven papers contribute to issues in the historical reconstruction of the Tibeto-Burman and Indo-European language families. The next four consist of detailed descriptions of the phonology, morphology and syntax of particular languages, and the lone contribution of the third section is a proposal for an orthography based on phonological research.