EXPATRIATES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: CONSTRUCTIONS OF EXPATRIATES IN CANADIAN ORAL NARRATIVES

by

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Abstract

Despite social scientists’ interest in globalization, mobility, the effects of colonialism, and the intercultural situations that result, little attention has been devoted to expatriates as a contemporary transnational group. This thesis is an enquiry into the ways eight individuals define themselves as expatriates, through their oral narratives of life in Papua New Guinea. The paper focuses on expatriates’ characterizations of themselves in terms of: their communities; their relationships with locals; their status as foreigners in post-colonial Papua New Guinea; and their experiences of mobility. Set against social scientific notions of expatriates and contemporary ideas of mobility and its relation to identity, expatriates’ personal narratives indicate that scholarly depictions are too simplistic to access contemporary expatriates or the complex situations in which they live.
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Narrators*

Don Baker grew up in Vancouver, and trained in medicine in Montreal. A doctor interested in third world health systems, he spent ten years in Papua New Guinea (1974-1984), working first as head of the provincial hospital in Mendi, and later moving to Rabaul. He now lives in Victoria, and works in provincial health. He has three children.

Originally from England, Jennifer Gibson first went to East New Britain, Papua New Guinea in 1977 in order to do research for her doctorate in anthropology. While living in Papua New Guinea, she married an expatriate, had a son, and lived in Rabaul and Port Moresby until 1990. Jennifer lives on Salt Spring Island with her teenaged son.

Allison Grant was born in Tanzania, where her parents were working. Trained as a teacher, she is currently working on her Master's degree in education at The University of Toronto. Allison spent two years in Lae, Papua New Guinea (1988-1989). She has also lived in Swaziland and the United Arab Emirates.

Kathy Upton grew up in the Shuswap region of British Columbia. With her husband Terry and daughter Sian, she spent ten years cruising in the South Pacific aboard a homebuilt yacht. Kathy lived and worked as an artist and educator in Lae, Papua New Guinea from 1983 to 1988. She currently works as a high school teacher, and lives in the Fraser Valley.

Sian Upton lived with her parents, Terry and Kathy, in Lae, Papua New Guinea for five years (1983-1988), and attended grades 7 to 11 at Lae International High School. She is now completing her Master's degree in anthropology at the University of British Columbia.

Terry Upton was raised in the Okanagan. He worked as a teacher, and later as Deputy Headmaster, at Lae International High School in Papua New Guinea (1983-1988). He is now a high school administrator in Surrey, and lives in the Fraser Valley.

A graduate of the University of Alberta, Kirsty Winger has worked in personnel management at Fort Edmonton Park for the past thirteen years. She and her husband Rick recently began their assignments as CUSO cooperants in rural Papua New Guinea.

Rick Winger is from Alberta. After a rural childhood, he moved to Edmonton. He was manager of plant operations at Fort Edmonton Park until January 1998, when he took two year’s leave of absence. With his wife Kirsty, he now works as a CUSO cooperant in Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea.

Trained as a teacher, Jane Young has lived for many years on a farm in the Chilcotin. As CUSO cooperants, she and her husband Carl went to Papua New Guinea twice (1985-1987 in Southern Highlands Province, 1993-1994 in East Sepik Province).

* With the exception of my own family, I have substituted project participants’ names with pseudonyms.
Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I am grateful for their help in this project. First, of course, the interview participants: thank you for taking the time to talk and write to me. I hope I have done your words justice. Thank you to Professors John Barker and Martin Silverman, of the UBC Department of Anthropology and Sociology, for your guidance. Thanks also to Stuart Wulff, of the South Pacific Peoples Foundation, and many more.

Dedicated to my grandparents

George Kisaburo Fukuhara, Mary Fumiko Fukuhara,

Donna G. Upton, and the late Maurice Upton
There are baggage allowances, expatriate allowances, children’s education allowances, mileage allowances, subsidized housing, squash courts, golf courses, swimming clubs and mostly white clubs... There are holidays... The expatriate has all these rewards together with a distinct knowledge that no one will bother him: he will be helped by the African and overrated by his friends who stayed in England or the United States. He is Tarzan, the King of the Jungle.

(Theroux 1967: 16)

Biography - that optic that fuses individual and event into both a worldview and a narrative genre - lies at the methodological core of much ethnography and history.

(Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:25)

Storytelling is, after all, the traveller’s medium...

(Hutnyk 1996: 64)

Introduction

This enquiry into expatriates, a contemporary transnational population in Papua New Guinea, is approached through the question, how do expatriates define themselves? The thesis is concerned with expatriates’ own subjective self-categorizations. I examine the manner in which eight individuals narrate the experience of being an expatriate in post-colonial Papua New Guinea, and discuss how their personal narratives relate to social scientific characterizations of expatriates and notions of mobility.

As a teenager, I spent five years in the expatriate community in Lae, Papua New Guinea. I led the sort of life often derided for its supposed material extravagance and neo-colonial overtones: spoiled by native housekeepers and the relative luxury of a housing compound, in one of the most picturesquely “primitive” countries in the world, my days revolved around private school, clubs, and “going on leave” - yearly trips “down south” (Australia) or “back home”. My parents and I had a privileged existence. But it was a life limited in scope. The severity of crime problems in Lae meant that our compound resembled a fortress with barbed wire fences, security guards, and dogs. I could not go beyond the compound alone,

1 Throughout this paper I use the term post-colonial strictly in its “legal” sense, to denote the period following Papua New Guinea’s official independence from Australia in 1975.
especially at night. My parents and I lacked not only citizens’ legal rights in Papua New Guinea but also the right to feel completely “at home” there. Though we loved the country and formed strong ties with many of its people (both expatriate and indigenous), ultimately we had to return to Canada. My father says that leaving Papua New Guinea was one of the hardest things he ever had to do.

In Lae, my parents and I lived within a diverse milieu of families and individuals. Some held astonishingly insightful views of culture in Papua New Guinea. While this may have been partly due to the plethora of anthropological writings available on the country, I suspect it was also because these people had the sort of ‘natural’ anthropological sense of curiosity that Lévi-Strauss says, under certain conditions, “one can discover in oneself, even though one may have been taught nothing about it (1973:55).” As Don Baker pointed out in his interview for this project, a certain sense of adventure and curiosity drew many foreigners to Papua New Guinea.

Such an environment should perhaps have spawned an anthropological adventurer immersed in studies of remote indigenous Melanesian groups. Instead, I have become interested in expatriate communities, which I believe constitute an important sociocultural scene in Papua New Guinea. Residing mostly in cities and regional towns (but also in villages, missions, aid posts, and plantations), expatriates comprise about two percent of Papua New Guinea’s population². Demographically, they are identified mainly as Australian, European, North American, Asian, Pacific Islander non-citizens, or as ethnic Non-Melanesians: “Europeans, Asians, Other Oceania, Other, Mixed” (McMurray 1985; U.S. Bureau of the Census International Data Base 1998). Popularly referred to as “mercenaries, missionaries, and misfits”

²The most certain feature of census data for Papua New Guinea is its uncertainty (McMurray 1985: 1). This, coupled with the fluctuating nature of expatriate populations, makes it difficult to obtain a statistical profile of expatriates in Papua New Guinea. U.S. Bureau of the Census statistics show 54,525 non-Melanesians (2% of the population) in Papua New Guinea in 1971, while McMurray’s analysis of the 1980 census (1985) lists 32,670 non-Papua New Guineans in Papua New Guinea (1% of the total population). While this drop may relate to the withdrawal of Australian colonial administrative personnel after 1975, it is interesting to note that expatriate numbers may again be increasing: Population Today recently listed non-natives as 2% of the population (1995: 7). Working from U.S. Bureau of the Census population projections (4.3 million in 1995), this indicates approximately 86,000 expatriates. McMurray calculates that in 1980, 85% of the foreign population of Papua New Guinea lived in urban or rural non-village (RNV) areas - the reverse of indigenous settlement patterns, which are, roughly, 85% rural and 15% urban (McMurray 1985).
- that odd collection of foreigners found in most ex-colonial nations - they form a diverse group. Some come to Papua New Guinea for a few years; others settle there for decades.

European-born novelist Ruth Prawer Jhabvala once wrote of her life as an expatriate in India:

I have lived in India for most of my adult life. My husband is Indian and so are my children. I am not, and less so every year. India reacts very strongly on people. Some loathe it, some love it, most do both. There is a special problem of adjustment for the sort of people who come today, who tend to be liberal in outlook and have been educated to be sensitive and receptive to India. But it is not always easy to be sensitive and receptive to India: there comes a point where you have to close up in order to protect yourself. The place is very strong and often proves too strong for European nerves. There is a cycle that Europeans - by Europeans I mean all Westerners, including Americans - tend to pass through. It goes like this: first stage, tremendous enthusiasm - everything Indian is marvellous; second stage, everything Indian not so marvellous; third stage, everything Indian abominable... I have been through it so many times that I now think of myself as strapped to a wheel that goes round and round and sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down... Everyone likes to talk about India, whether they happen to be loving or loathing it... However, I must admit that I am no longer interested in India. What I am interested in now is myself in India - which sometimes, in moments of despondency, I tend to think of as my survival in India (1986:13, my italics).

While I have not reached the point wherein “I am no longer interested” in Papua New Guinea, I share Jhabvala’s interest in the complex experience of living and working in a country not one’s own, and am struck by the absence of critical enquiry into expatriates and the spaces in which they intersect with indigenous peoples and cultures.

There are strong practical and theoretical reasons for studying expatriates. Considering the current preoccupation with globalization, mobility and resulting intercultural relations, as well as with colonialism and its aftermath, it is surprising that social scientists do not devote more attention to them. There are numerous genres in which limited aspects of expatriates are referred to - literature on colonialism, globalization, migration, international management, cross-cultural psychology and travel, to name a few - but the fragmentary nature of these “expatriate sightings” highlights the undefined nature of the group. Scholars refer to expatriates, it seems, without having first hammered out who - or what - they are.

An exception is sociologist Erik Cohen, who, in his monograph *Expatriate Communities* (1977) set out a blueprint for ethnographic research into the nature of expatriate “roles and adaptive styles.” Admitting that “expatriates are a mixed lot, difficult to define and classify,” Cohen nevertheless asserted
that expatriate communities formed “a generic type and thus provide a basis for a systematic comparative study of expatriates (1977:6-7).” He suggested that expatriates be viewed as the “category of international migrants who fill the gap between the tourist on the one hand and the semi-permanent or permanent immigrant on the other (ibid.7).” If Cohen had hoped to spearhead further discussion, his efforts met with little success. Expatriates have attracted little ethnographic or analytical attention from social scientists since, and the conceptualization of expatriates summarized by Cohen has remained largely unquestioned. Where they do appear in social scientific literature, expatriates figure as caricatures, sketches based more on unquestioned assumptions and writers’ personal impressions than on concerted empirical research:

Expatriates (or ex-expatriates) are people who have chosen to live abroad for some period, and who know when they are there that they can go home when it suits them...these are people who can afford to experiment, who do not stand to lose a treasured but threatened, uprooted sense of self. We often think of them as people of independent (even if modest) means, for whom openness to new experience is a vocation, or people who can take along their work more or less where it pleases them... Nevertheless, the contemporary expatriate is rather more likely to be an organization man... (Hannerz 1996:106)

Adventurous, independent, adult, male (usually Western) professionals who can choose to submerge themselves in the host culture (or not), expatriates appear as powerful, privileged, and secure in their sense of self. It is a profile that expatriates themselves draw on - but only to a degree. For expatriates’ own narratives describe communities that are composed of diverse individuals, and which are located in complex historical and sociocultural contexts.

The anthropologist anxious to avoid the fallacies of cultural reductivism has to distinguish between the locality’s voice to the outside world and its much more complicated messages to its own members. Indeed [she] must try to make the public message intelligible in terms of private conversations... [Her] account must therefore differ from, and seek to enlighten, the gross simplifications of [external characterizations] (Cohen 1982: 8).

From my perch in the overlap between expatriate and anthropology student, in this project, I have had the experience of reading social scientific literature as a double-insider. I have been struck by how writers like Erik Cohen and Ulf Hannerz, in writing about expatriates, are guilty of the very sins of stereotyping and oversimplification that social scientists claim to decry. At the same time, it is difficult to offer a more constructive characterization of expatriates, except to say that, in the sphere of
contemporary global-local relations, they constitute a rich example of a transnational population, and that the extreme complexity inherent in the varied situations of expatriate communities, rather than being unique, indicates just how tangled is the web of global-local relations today. The findings of the present project indicate that existing academic portraits of expatriates are too simplistic, and, in some cases, misleading, to be truly useful in approaching contemporary expatriate life.

In the course of carrying out research for this project, I interviewed six individuals who had lived in Papua New Guinea at some point since 1975 (the year Australia granted Papua New Guinea independence), and two who were going to live there imminently. I wanted to hear how these people spoke of themselves as expatriates, how they described defined “expatriatism” through their own remembered stories. For the most part, the interview participants were Canadians living in southwestern British Columbia, with whom I was able to meet and conduct tape-recorded interviews of between one and three hours each. Two participants lived too far away to meet in person, so we communicated by e-mail. Interviewing a small number of individuals fit with my intention to present a qualitative analysis of personal narrative that would relate easily to the auto/biographical genres that form the bulk of literature available on expatriates in Papua New Guinea.

With issues of voice and representation looming large in anthropology, ethnographers anxious to make their positions clear have turned to autoethnography, “a form of self-narrative that places self within

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3 As Brettell points out, memory is the foundation for much ethnography, particularly in cases of migration, which, being difficult for researchers to witness, are usually retrieved through migrant recollections: “Such narratives are themselves quite appropriate... for it is individuals, or at most families, rather than groups or communities who migrate (1997: 227).”

4 The exception was Jennifer Gibson, who was born and educated in England - see list of Narrators.

5 Numerous autobiographical and biographical accounts of individual colonial expatriates’ lives exist, including Cleland’s memoirs of a colonial administrator’s life (1983); Booth’s account of gold prospecting (1929); Griffin’s anthology of Papua New Guinea Portraits (1978); Nelson’s Taim Bilong Masta (1982), which includes interviews with Australians about life in colonial Papua New Guinea; and, since independence, Bourke et al.’s anthology of expatriate women’s autobiographical writings (1993), Kendall’s account of life in rural Papua New Guinea (1986), and Read’s autoethnographic Return to the High Valley (1986) - the sequel to The High Valley (1965).
the social context (Reed-Danahy 1997: 9),” explicitly incorporating their own life stories into their texts. While the present paper is not primarily autobiographical, strong connections exist between myself, the project participants, and the topic(s) at hand. The information presented encompasses my own life experiences, sometimes quite literally: two of the individuals I interviewed were my parents; another was a friend with whom I attended high school in Papua New Guinea. In attempting to analyse the interviews conducted for this project as texts that have arisen both out of the real experiences of the interviewees and out of the social context of the interview itself, I draw on Richard Bauman’s characterization of oral narratives taken from interviews as “indissoluble unit[ies] of text, narrated event, and narrative event (1992: 7).” During interviews, I hovered between the roles of researcher, fellow ex-resident of Papua New Guinea, daughter, and friend. Except when interviewing my friend Allison Grant, I also filled the role of junior: most of the participants were middle-aged, educated, established professionals. I elicited many stories and attitudes that I had heard growing up; but I also heard much that was new, and which caused me to reconsider my own convictions. Interviews with my parents were like family history sessions in which I found myself talked about and to simultaneously, while my own memories intertwined and diverged unexpectedly with the stories being told.

This project follows both the literary tradition of expatriate biographies in Papua New Guinea and Clifford’s suggestion to research migrant groups through their “travel stories” (1992:110). I focus on expatriate experiences as constructed through stories and the act of storytelling. I employ the ideas of oral tradition scholars in using oral narratives (narratives constructed and performed in an interview context involving the expatriate as the speaker and the researcher as audience/reader (Finnegan 1992: 10)) as a

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6 Scholars often talk of autoethnography in terms of doing “home” or “native” ethnography (Bernard 1995; Reed-Danahy 1997); however, expatriates are by their nature neither at home nor native. I use the term here to emphasize my stance on the importance of personal narratives in anthropological research. Without actually presenting expatriates as a group who have been somehow “colonized” by social scientists, by setting expatriates’ personal narratives in dialogue with academic writings, I draw on Mary Pratt’s definition of autoethnographic expression as “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms (1992: 7).”

7 I made this clear to all interview participants who were not already aware of it, before conducting their interviews.
means to access expressions of what it means to be an expatriate in post-colonial Papua New Guinea.

This methodological approach necessitates certain caveats. If "lived experience...is the primary social reality (Bruner 1986: 5)," it is also true that sometimes "we make up our pasts...you can watch your mind doing it, taking a little fragment of fact and then spinning a tale out of it (Lessing 1994: 13)." Over time, project participants have undoubtedly smoothed out, edited, and in some cases, romanticized their stories. There is little in their accounts concerning the mundanities of day-to-day life in Papua New Guinea; nor, interestingly, is there much discussion of such matters as contract terms, institutional infrastructures, or legal matters (such as official distinctions between expatriates and immigrants, immigration laws, legal rights for foreigners, and diplomatic relations between Papua New Guinea and specific countries) - all of which profoundly affect the situations of expatriates and their communities in Papua New Guinea. Thus it is important to recognize that this project is not so much an empirical study of expatriates in Papua New Guinea as it is an analysis of the stories that a handful of individuals in Canada told me about their experiences in Papua New Guinea. It is an analysis of what people told me, of their subjective self-categorizations. The speakers are not representative of the expatriate population in Papua New Guinea; and removed in time and geography, their stories neither represent the views of all expatriates in Papua New Guinea, nor do they offer a comprehensive view of all aspects of expatriate life. This does not mean that they are mere fiction: I believe that narrators have told their stories honestly. It would simply be naïve to assume that they unmask "the real state of things" (whatever that might be) in expatriate communities.

I have arranged this paper in sections. In "Expatriates in the context of globalization and post-colonialism," I assert that, within current discussions of globalization, expatriates may be viewed as.

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*For instance, missionaries, who form an important sector of the expatriate population in Papua New Guinea, do not figure among the project participants here (there is, however, a significant literature on missionaries - see Huber 1988 for an example); and while expatriates converge on Papua New Guinea from around the world, all but one of the speakers in this project are Canadian.*
transnational group - an internationally-mobile group which maintains connections across national boundaries. I argue that the present project, which concerns expatriates (a group which includes a large number of “Westerners”) in Papua New Guinea, fills a gap in the literature on transnational groups, which has been empirically fragmented and mostly concerned with non-Western post-colonial subject populations.

Following this theoretical orientation, I examine “Scholarly v. ‘expat’” conceptualizations of expatriates and their communities. Whereas sociologist Erik Cohen and anthropologist Ulf Hannerz classify expatriates along occupational and gender lines, expatriates themselves emphasize complex diversity: they employ a variety of value-laden folk models, which are shaped by factors such as length of residence in Papua New Guinea, motivations for being there (which can encompass occupation), socio-economic status and in-group social ties.

Scholars presume that sociocultural differences between expatriates and their hosts, coupled with expatriate problems with culture shock mean that significant social interactions between expatriates and locals rarely occur; yet the “Exceptional expatriates” who speak here describe a number of profound, if unconventional, relationships with Papua New Guineans. In “Expatriate-local power relations,” I discuss how issues of power come into play in these intercultural relations. While vestiges of colonialism still inform social relations between Papua New Guineans and expatriates, the balance of power is by no means clearcut: expatriates continue to employ Papua New Guineans as domestic servants, but they acknowledge the importance of these hausmeris and gadenbois as indigenous teachers and mediators. Beyond the private realm, interviewees’ vivid accounts of criminal attacks illustrate the fundamental vulnerability expatriates feel as a highly visible minority population of non-citizens in post-colonial Papua New Guinea.

Perhaps expatriates’ ultimate privilege is their mobility: do their experiences bare any resemblance to recent theorizations of “travellers” as ideal metaphors of contemporary identity? Social scientists talk of the ability of expatriates to relocate overseas “voluntarily” and to leave “when it suits them,” but in “The experience of mobility” interviewees’ narratives point to the naïveté of this view. Expatriates value their
ability to travel; but they speak of it as a way of life, not as an unproblematic luxury. If some individuals claim to have travelled to Papua New Guinea out of a sense of adventure, others appear to have gone there as a means of escape. Ultimately, expatriates' stories show that the experience of living overseas can result in disturbing feelings of displacement, both abroad and at "home".

Theoretical orientation:
Expatriates in the context of globalization and post-colonialism

There is now a world culture, but we had better make sure that we understand what that means: not a replication of uniformity but an organization of diversity, an increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as a development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory.

(Hannerz 1996: 102)

Social scientists are currently interested in the perceived "compression of the world and the intensification of the world as a whole (Robertson 1992:8)" and its implications for the interpretation of sociocultural relations, practices, and experiences. Like some unstoppable tidal wave, globalization is seen to be accelerating. In this atmosphere, various suggestions have been put forward for conceptualizing contemporary sociocultural relations. Appadurai proposes conceiving of societies as ethnoscapes, "building blocks of...imagined worlds (1994[1990]:329)," in order to fully acknowledge that, though relatively settled communities still exist, "the warp of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons deal with the realities of having to move or fantasies of wanting to move (ibid.329)". While he does not explicitly name them, expatriates constitute one of the groups to which Appadurai's term applies:

By ethnoscape, I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree (ibid.329). Recognizing the continuing, complex relationship between former colonies and their ex-colonizers, cultural studies scholars Ang and Stratton point out that an examination of historical relations must be part of any attempt to understand contemporary global relations: "the adoption of the category of post-colonial stresses
the construction of a distinct transnational relationality based on a particular past and its effects in the present and future (1996:28).” Official decolonization and globalization have not erased old relations of power; they have merely reinscribed these relationships in more complex ways.

Though it is not a new concept⁹, sociologists Basch, Schiller, and Blanc have proposed transnationalism as a way of viewing global-local relations that are both fluid and situated. They define transnationalism as those processes by which migrants forge and sustain "multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and of settlement (1994:7).” Generally, social scientists use the term to refer to people who are, like expatriates, “in-between cultures”: migrants who “build social fields that cross geographical, cultural, and political borders (ibid.12).” Case studies of transnationals and their communities abound: Brazilians, Haitians, Cubans and Ecuadoreans are described shuttling between their home nations and the United States (Margolis 1995; Portes 1996); hypermobile Chinese business elite jetset everywhere (Ong 1993).

These studies are empirically rather shallow: as authors attempt to span sociocultural, political, economic, and experiential issues on both a global and local scale in their brief articles, empirical examples tend to float, fragmented, amongst weightier theoretical discussions (e.g. Basch et al. 1994). Transnationalism, it appears, works well as a geographic and theoretical term - describing the movement of groups across boundaries - but it has yet to access the humans who do these crossings in any sustained fashion. While writers acknowledge “the importance of focussing on people and their relationships (Basch et al. 1994:684),” transnational groups figure mostly as sketchy illustrations¹⁰.

Of course, this lack of ethnographic depth may partly reflect the emergent nature of the field: few

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⁹ Angell (1967) introduced the idea of “transnational participation” (expatriate and other migrant activity), while Field (1971) discussed how “transnationalism” was engendering a ‘new tribe’ - expatriates.

¹⁰ For example: though Ong observes that Overseas Chinese boast of their ability to “live anywhere in the world, but it must be near an airport” she barely penetrates the surface of the experience of constant movement across national and cultural borders (1993: 771). Her claim that Overseas Chinese maintain their sense of personal identity by maintaining strong family ties is left largely unexamined, and thus seems too neat. Her explanations do not allow for the complexity - the sense of tangle - of human experience.
researchers have yet ventured into it. Discussions of transnationalism have so far been dominated by cultural studies scholars, who, while claiming to champion the social sciences through combining ethnography, theory, and literature, seem ultimately to put greater store in theoretical discussion than concerted empirical research. As Nicholas Thomas says, such interdisciplinarity can lead to a loss of methodological and empirical rigour (1994:19). However, specialists are not much better. Claiming to illustrate the implications of “transnational connections” for mobile groups like expatriates, anthropologist Ulf Hannerz offers only a smattering of thumbnail sketches. Nowhere does he address how the experiences of transnational peoples reflect (or differ from) theoretical suppositions about them.

The superficiality of empirical work on transnational groups points to an awkward fit between the mobile nature of transnationalism and conventional ethnographic modes of investigation and interpretation of cultures as settled, local entities. As James Clifford states, “the discourse of ethnography (‘being there’) is too sharply separated from that of travel (‘getting there’),” and that the persistence of a “notion of field work as a special kind of localized dwelling” means that “cosmopolitan intermediaries...tend to disappear (1992:98-100).” The central (Boasian) anthropological culture concept, founded on the German philosophical assertion of people as being essentially ‘rooted’ in single national territories, becomes inadequate in situations where groups are part of networks that cross national boundaries (Kearney 1995:557; Young 1995:39-41), where peoples’ lives consist as much of movement as settlement, and where they interact with ‘foreigners’ as often as with ‘locals.’ Research methods and modes of understanding that take into account mobility in conjunction with place, and a notion of culture as fluid - as well as historically situated - need to be adopted and elaborated in order to address these issues.

Anthropological ‘culture’ is not what it used to be. And once the representational challenge is seen to be the portrayal and understanding of local/global historical

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11 Ang and Stratton provide vivid example of how, in discussions of transnationalism, cultural studies scholars speak of encompassing ‘outmoded’ social science categories: “A critical transnationalist perspective would reproduce neither the binary divide between West and non-West, nor the universalizing assumptions of modernity, but aims to gain an understanding of the world as a place juxtaposed, contradictory, and overlapping...cultural studies can be inscribed as the postmodern, transdisciplinary reconstitution of anthropology and sociology, combined in a world where the distinctions between these two modern disciplines has become meaningless (1996: 23)."
encounters, co-productions, dominations, resistances, then one needs to focus on hybrid, cosmopolitan experiences as much as on rooted, native ones (Clifford 1992:101).

One way to approach this task, says Clifford, is by “listening to a wide range of ‘travel stories,’” and by addressing “the way people leave home and return, enacting differently centred worlds, interconnected cosmopolitanisms” - for “the serious, cross-cultural study of travel is not well-developed (ibid. 110, 102).”

While expatriates would appear to fit the category, studies of transnationals have so far concentrated almost exclusively on groups that were formerly colonial subjects. Little attention has been paid to people from the traditional core or post-colonizing nations of Europe and North America - the home bases of many expatriates. This may in part reflect the decentring of academic voices from traditional Anglo-American centres - “the new ability of authors and intellectuals from the previously colonized world to speak and make themselves heard in the old core as well as in their own countries as critics of the consequences of colonialism and the related impositions of ‘modernization’ (Ang and Stratton 1996:30).”

However, at a time when scholars are striving to “decolonize knowledge,” and the field of post-colonial studies is in danger of stagnating (Young 1995:163-164) due to its tendency to homogenize peoples into “the Colonizer and the Colonized,” as if these were two antithetical entities (ibid.5), it is imperative that we consider the situation of expatriates.

Perhaps because of their “traditional distaste for other outsiders on the colonial (or postcolonial) scene (Huber 1988:3),” anthropologists have made few concerted attempts at either ethnographic studies or theoretical analyses of expatriates in Papua New Guinea. This has led to serious misconceptions about the people and their communities. In ethnographic writing on Papua New Guinea, if expatriates appear at all, they exist mainly as faceless agents of Western colonial expansion. They are shadows at the margins of the more exotic ethnographic picture of Indigenous New Guinea. And whereas a small (rather idiosyncratic) literature has accumulated on colonials, expatriates practically disappear from the screen of

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12 Although Chapman and Prothero’s study addresses population movement and circulation in Melanesia (1985), it is principally concerned with cross-cultural movements of indigenous peoples within the region, rather than with migrants moving in from other parts of the world.
post-independent Papua New Guinea. The result is a view of contemporary Papua New Guinea that is virtually devoid of human foreign influence. But expatriates do live in Papua New Guinea. They continue to form a small but important and highly visible sector of the population. If scholars wish to understand the interconnections of global-local relations in ways that address issues of power and intercultural relations in the colonial and post-colonial eras, it is imperative that they consider these supposed ex-colonizers and their communities - contemporary sites of what Mary Pratt calls contact zones\textsuperscript{13}: “the [social] space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other, and establish ongoing relations (1990:6).”

As I stated earlier, a small number of social scientists have written on expatriates; but their conceptualizations of the group are somewhat limited, as becomes clear in the following section.

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\textbf{Scholarly versus ‘expat’ constructions of expatriates and expatriate communities}

Sociologist Erik Cohen defines expatriates as “voluntary temporary migrants, mostly from affluent countries,” who reside abroad for reasons of business, missions, research and education, or leisure (1997: 6). Though Cohen’s definition includes people who temporarily move abroad for purposes of leisure (“owners of second homes abroad, the wealthy, the retired...and other ‘permanent tourists’, bohemians and drop-outs”), it is clear that for him these are marginal groups - naugahyde on the fringes of the ‘real leather’ expatriate: the “organization man.” Despite his admission that “expatriate” is a “‘fuzzy’ term capturing that category of international migrants who fill the gap between the tourist...and the...permanent immigrant,” Cohen and other scholars tend to organize their discussions around the assumption that expatriates comprise “more or less clear-cut occupational cultures (Hannerz 1996: 106, my emphasis).”

While it is indisputable that expatriate communities are, to some extent, occupationally based, it

\textsuperscript{13} Pratt emphasizes that use of the word ‘contact’ draws attention to the interaction rather than separateness between peoples, thus allowing us to examine their “copresence, interaction, interlocking relationships and practices (1990: 6-7).”
is essential that these communities be viewed as more than collections of employees: using occupation as the main classificatory marker marginalizes all those sectors of the community that are not specifically hired to be there. *Spouses and families* accompany employees overseas, and form a significant portion of expatriate communities. Allison Grant went to Lae, Papua New Guinea as a teenager “because my family was moving there, Dad got a job at Unitech.” She attended Lae International High School - one of three schools in town that catered to the children of expatriate families.

Hannerz’s assertion that “the contemporary expatriate is rather more likely to be an organization man (1996: 106)” reflects the rigid gendering of prevailing stereotypes of expatriates. According to Erik Cohen, in the rough-and-tumble world overseas, the typical expat is the “organization man,” and expatriate communities are thus overwhelmingly male-oriented. Those women who *do* live overseas are marginalized as wives or mothers. As such (and simply, as *women*), they are assumed to ‘suffer’ from more severe adjustment problems. Whereas their husbands continue to do their job, women’s lives are disrupted and emptied: *women* must relocate and re-establish homes, families, friendships; *women* must give up their own jobs in favour of their husbands’ career. Legitimized only by their spouses (and their spouses’ jobs), and lacking even the need to do housework (there are, after all, native servants), women expatriates ‘naturally’ turn to gossip...

...[for] relief from the monotony and boredom of everyday *female* expatriate existence. Gossip thereby becomes one of the most important mechanisms of social control...It is the women who, in the expatriate community as almost anywhere else, emerge as the guardians of accepted group standards - and thus help perpetuate expatriate separateness (ibid. 55).

Thus, “the expatriate woman” (a rather rare bird) appears as insular, trivial, dependent, and lacking a community role other than that of ‘guardian’ of questionable social codes. The depiction would be laughable if it were not so degrading and utterly misleading. It is a far cry from the strong individualism

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communicated by the women who told their stories in this project. Even if we dismiss Cohen’s statements on the basis of their age (were things just different twenty years ago?), it is worth noting that in 1980, census data indicated that the ratio of foreign men to foreign women was 132:100 (McMurray 1985: 4). Among the individuals interviewed for this project, Jennifer Gibson went alone to rural Papua New Guinea to conduct research in 1977; and in 1974, Don Baker’s wife Lynnette travelled to Papua New Guinea ahead of her husband, and worked with him as a doctor in the Southern Highlands. In the early 1980s, both my parents were offered jobs in Papua New Guinea. During the time we lived in Lae, my mother worked as a high school teacher, artist, and university lecturer. The Wingers had initially planned to go to Papua New Guinea with only Kirsty working as a CUSO cooperant and Rick living as her dependent. The Wingers made it clear that, in their relationship, Kirsty was the main decision-maker, and the one with a university-level education and corporate career. It is difficult to find any resemblance between Jennifer, Lynnette, Kathy, and Kirsty and this ‘portrait’ in a recent self-help guide for expatriate women:

It’s easy to picture her standing at a cocktail party in some distant land, respectable dressed, sipping from a glass, smiling at some foreign official with whom she’s smoothly engaged in polite conversation...[or] the image you have of her is from a television newscast, where she steps off an emergency evacuation flight in the middle of the night, baby in one arm and toddler clinging to the other... Who is she? She’s the international travelling wife... Married to a foreign service, a multinational corporation, a bank, a newspaper, a church, or merely a small export business, she is the ultimate portable wife and probably a mother too... She’s the backbone of the international family, the emotional rock. (Pascoe 1992)

While labelling expatriate communities as occupational cultures preserves the “ethnographic purity of the tribe (Hoxie 1996: 17)” and condenses expatriates into a convenient unit for theoretical generalization, it submerges a number of layers of complexity. Occupation constituted only one factor

15 The stories in Our Time But Not Our Place: Voices of Expatriate Women in Papua New Guinea (Bourke et al. ed.1993) further undermine the stereotype of ‘the expatriate woman.’ These the autobiographical writings, by thirty-one women expatriates (who lived in Papua New Guinea between 1930 and 1990, who hail from at least ten nations), tell of women’s lives that were deeply, personally, enmeshed with Papua New Guinean people and cultures.

16 A publication from the Culture Shock! Successful Living Abroad series, a ‘how-to’ guide to living overseas that offers, along with general cross-cultural advice, pseudo-ethnographic portraits of expatriates and their lifestyles.
among many in interviewees’ descriptions of expatriates and expatriate communities in Papua New Guinea.

Using a grid metaphor, Don Baker identified several dimensions that defined the foreign community in the remote highlands town of Mendi:

I think it’s a series of filters. I mean, to wind up in a place like that...you can’t survive in a place like that without a job, so most of the people... Even the army guys were technicians, they were tradesmen and so forth, so virtually everybody that I met had either public administration training and experience or a professional degree... There was some sort of educational grid or screen, if you like. And then there was an adventure grid or screen: why would people elect to go to a place like that? You’ve got to be seeking out something out of the ordinary. And then there’s almost, for many people an altruism thing... A desire to truly help$^{17}$.

Several interviewees categorized expatriates according to their motivations for being in Papua New Guinea.

Sometimes employment and career concerns masked more personal reasons “why they came”:

Some of them were escaping something - I wasn’t sure what: they weren’t too forthright about it. Some I think felt they didn’t fit in normal, in a conventional cultural setting, so they were looking for something else. *** Some were there because their spouses were there - simple as that, and they wanted a job. A few of them were long-timers whose spouses had businesses in Lae. *** Others saw it as a place to gain quick promotion, to move on or move up in the countries where they came from; [for] some it was to make money because the salaries were very good. I think a few of them came just out of a sheer sense of wanting to learn about the culture (Terry Upton).

Overall, interviewees emphasized the diverse backgrounds and places from which people in expatriate communities came, and the range of experiences and attitudes that individuals brought with them.

One aspect of our life was that I was meeting a lot of expatriates. And they were coming from virtually everywhere, and they had interesting backgrounds, and they all seemed to have a little bit of an adventurer streak in them. They were very nice people (Terry).

There’s one thing about living in those end-of-the-road places, you get a lot of really interesting people. And...being that way yourself, it was nice to find others who were weird, you know [laughs] (Don Baker).

In his overview of Expatriate Communities, Cohen chooses to concentrate overseas Americans, as a particular “‘national expatriate community’ - the citizens of one country living in a given locality of

$^{17}$ The passages of personal narrative in this paper are taken from interview transcripts or written e-mail exchanges between myself and project participants. I have tried to preserve what I take to be speakers’ intentions, but in the interests of coherency, I have in some cases welded together statements from different sections of a speaker’s narrative. In such cases, the seams are indicated by “***”, while phrases or words deleted from a single passage of narrative are indicated by “...”
another country (1977:24).” This is a common tactic amongst scholars examining expatriates: in the case
of Papua New Guinea, Wu’s ethnohistory is solely concerned with the Chinese population (1982), and
Nelson’s (1982) history of the colonial period focuses on the Australians. Such nationality-based studies
give the impression that people of the same nationality tend to cluster together overseas. While most of
the participants in this study were Canadians, they did not particularly stress socializing with other
Canadians while in Papua New Guinea. Rather, they emphasized the international richness of the circles
in which they moved, and spoke of interacting with people who frequented the same social settings, or who
held similar interests and values. My father noted that some non-Westerners in the community tended to
band together, but he attributed this to an internal community stratification based on socioeconomic status:

There was another group of expats... who were Filipinos, who were artisans and tradesmen
from developing countries. They... didn't get paid the same way we did. It was quite a
stratified subculture, the expatriate community.

When I asked my mother to describe the expatriate community in Lae, she answered, “Cliquish”:
people with similar backgrounds, interests and attitudes stayed together. In smaller towns and settlements,
expatriates did not have this option; but as my father explained, in Lae, a town of approximately 70,000
people with a foreign population of about 5000 (he estimated), expatriates formed a loose enclave: “You
got a fair bit of unity, for example, if someone got raped: they would come together a little bit. But other
than that it was made up of subsets. Like there was the university crowd; there was [our] crowd from the
[international] high school; there was the provincial high school - we didn't mix much with the teachers
there.” Along with several other interview participants, my father characterized expatriates and described
their community in terms of the social circles in which they moved and the institutions they frequented -
especially clubs\textsuperscript{18}: “You kind of knew about them by where they hung out. Like there was the Aviat Club,
there was the Yacht Club, there was the Golf Club, there was some club attached to the Exhibition
Grounds, because people kept their horses there...” Drawing on a combination of personal perceptions and

\textsuperscript{18} “The heart of the social life of expatriate communities is the social club (Cohen 1977: 41).”
the collective attitudes of the community, he categorized expatriates according to a series of value-laden 'personas' and arranged them into a rough social network model:

The Aviat Club...was [the domain of] lower-middle class tradesmen from New Zealand and Australia and other places, who were big time drinkers, quite opinionated, and perhaps narrow-minded... [At] the Yacht Club, which was the place I frequented the most...there were several expats who had lived in the country a for long time, and in some cases had married Papua New Guinean women...they would come to the Yacht Club to have their lunch - sit at the bar and drink a few beers and eat. And then they'd come back and have dinner in the evening, and drink until closing time. Seldom if ever did I see them with their wives... So there was a small group of regulars... There was another group who frequented the Yacht Club fairly regularly, and they were tolerated by other members, because when they were sober they were pretty good guys, but when they got drunk they exhibited racist attitudes and behaviours... But then on Tuesday nights you would see quite a cross-section of people from the community...some of them, like the Samuels, would be mixed marriage situations. It was kind of like a family night. There were some people from the university, teachers, business people, some of them were regulars mixed amongst them all. Then there were quite a few people in the community that must have met in other places like the hotels... I don't know where the pilots met...there was a flock of them in Lae, flying for the two or three airlines in town. I know they hung out together a lot of the time, even lived together.

My father's characterizations were not unusual: everyone I talked to in this project brought up these sorts of folk models. Depending on how long expatriates had lived in Papua New Guinea, their reasons for being there, the institutions they frequented (such as schools or clubs), their occupation and socioeconomic status, and their place of residence (whether rural or urban), they were described as “the oldtimers”, “the pilots”, “the doctors”, “the do-gooders” (development workers, and sometimes, missionaries), “the kiap-types” (retired colonial administrators who had stayed on in Papua New Guinea after independence), and so on.

“You’ve heard the phrase haven’t you,” said Jennifer Gibson, “that all of the expatriates in Papua New Guinea are either mercenaries, missionaries or misfits.” This “alliterative category,” originating in the colonial period (when most Westerners did come to Papua New Guinea to seek their fortune, spread Christianity, or to let free their eccentricities) (Nelson1982: 91), was well-known amongst interviewees. While there seemed to be some continuity between the historical situation and the present, most narrators employed the “three M’s” with a touch of humour, knowing them to be stereotypes. They were prepared to describe each archetype - “the mercenary,” “the missionary,” and “the misfit” - but few speakers applied
the categories to themselves.

Thus mercenaries - who appeared to be the easiest to describe and condemn - were the “organization men” who “were just counting their days off, basically, until they could go home, and they just wanted everything to be as much like home as possible (Jennifer Gibson).” Mercenaries came to Papua New Guinea to work for large companies, with the goal of becoming wealthy. They were not particularly interested in Papua New Guinea or its people; rather, they were lured overseas by short contracts (two to three years) offering generous terms (including paid holidays abroad, housing, school tuition allowances for employees’ children, and large salaries). According to Jane Young “‘mercenaries’ meant consultants - those who worked in the country for big bucks.”

Missionaries, on the other hand, elicited both empathy and derision. Viewing them as cultural intruders, Rick Winger declared that “missionaries, by their definition, are generally detrimental to the cultures,” while Jennifer argued that missionaries, who often dedicated themselves to life-long relationships with local people, were partly responsible for the openness with which the Tolai people in New Britain welcomed her into their communities.

There are many missionaries who have been in Papua New Guinea a long time, and I think a lot of rural Papua New Guineans have had experience with these people. They can see - Papua New Guineans have very good bullshit detectors - these people who are there because they really want to help, and they respect that.

Jane Young praised the Apostolic Mission near her home in the Southern Highlands, where missionaries “learned the local language, advocated family planning and in the 80's had convinced their local pastors to have vasectomies to role-model for the local men. Rather liberated, I think.” She was less positive about a church organization elsewhere:

I felt the church was a critical factor in the lack of development in the province. There I learned that priests do not always tell the truth, that they partake in sexual liberties with young men and women, and [that they] operate with the same paternalistic attitudes common a hundred years ago... The priest in A--- felt no-one was trustworthy nor capable of doing anything but menial tasks. This attitude was distressing to us and contributed to my less than happy time in the [region].

Jane Young was the only respondent who explicitly situated herself and her husband within the “Three M’s” model: “‘Misfits’ meant us, the volunteer types - we didn’t make much money and most of
us were not practising Christians.” For many interviewees, the term implied eccentrics, or individualists, who came to Papua New Guinea out of a sense of adventure, or by chance, and who sometimes settled in the country for decades. Misfits constituted an important and positively-valued category—both in terms of how interviewees wished to portray themselves, and in terms of what they spoke of as memorable and noteworthy in their experiences expatriate communities in Papua New Guinea. The way my father described some eccentric “oldtimers” fit them into this category: “[there] was the Justice of the Peace whose wife taught at our school. He dressed like a kiap... Many of them had a story to tell; they’d lived in the country for many, many years.”

Thus expatriates construct views of themselves that emphasize far more communal complexity and diversity than is suggested by social scientific models. Their descriptions of social relations with Papua New Guineans also put scholarly assumptions to the test, as shall be seen in the next section.

Expatriate-indigenous social relations: the exceptional expatriate?

*Within the placid lagoon of air-conditioning...and iced drinks, of cocktail parties and cyclical dinners, the community floats undisturbed. No Asian enters here, save into the periphery; and no Western man, especially no Western woman, cares to leave it*  
(Palmier 1958:410)

*Today the dominant models often stress separateness, passing by altogether the process of acculturation whereby groups are modified through intercultural exchange and socialization with other groups...it is striking...given the long history of cultural interaction, how few models have been developed to analyse it.*  
(Young 1995: 4)

According to Erik Cohen, “expatriates tend to associate primarily with other expatriates; in this they resemble mass tourists, whose principal relationships tend to be with other tourists rather than with the natives (1977: 46).” He explains this alleged insularity in terms of Simmel’s concept of *strangeness*

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19 Elsewhere Cohen muses, “It is indeed remarkable how little social intimacy, beyond interaction with elites, exists between expatriates and regular, non-elite members of the host society (1977: 65).” For other examples see
and its well-known counterpart, *culture shock* (coupled with *return culture shock*) (ibid.; also Richards 1996). Cohen goes so far as to state that “the strangeness of the environment is the key element in the expatriate’s experience as well as the principal problem with which he and his community have to cope (1977: 15).”

Interviewees initially agreed that “there’s this big gap between expatriates and the Papua New Guinean people (Kathy Upton).” My mother recalled her first impression of Lae:

I remember seeing all these black people walking along the side of the road, just hundreds of them. They were walking beside the road and then on the other side of them, the other side of the road, there were these raintrees, and then these high fences with barbed wire on them. Behind the fences you could see these mansions, these houses. I remember thinking, this is like we’re in South Africa; this is what apartheid must be like.

Jennifer Gibson described expatriates in Rabaul as deliberately isolated and unwilling to attempt forming relationships with local people - or to interact with them at all - except on their own (Western) terms. “They might say that they were [interested in friendships with Papua New Guineans], but they would also say, we tried, we invited them but they didn’t come, or, it was too difficult,” she said. “And because they didn’t mix with the Papua New Guineans, and they didn’t *read* anything, there was no way they could find out really, unless they were ready to make the effort... And because they were ignorant...they would make judgements that were completely up the spout.” Yet Jennifer cited herself as an exception, “My experiences were not typical...because I was an anthropologist... I was living in a village my myself.” In fact, almost every individual interviewed spoke of themselves as “the exception,” and went on to recall meaningful relationships that they had formed with Papua New Guinean people.

Did I simply interview exceptional individuals? Magnifying strangeness and perceived social

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Hannerz 1996; Palmier 1958; Cohn and Wood 1983.

20 “Simmel sees strangers as possessing the paradoxical qualities of being both near and far at the same time...the stranger is physically near but socially remote, in that he or she will have different values and ways of behaving (Richards1996: 557).” Cohen outlines three aspects of strangeness: a cognitive dimension, wherein differences between the stranger’s and host ways of thinking may lead to culture shock; a normative dimension, which relates to the manner in which the stranger may find normative expectations in host society unacceptable; and a social dimension, which relates to the stranger’s remoteness and the absence of obvious bases for social interaction with host peoples (1977: 15).
distances between expats and locals distracts our attention from the significant intercultural transactions that do occur. If we apply Cohen’s assumption, that “the greater the socio-cultural distance [between locals and expatriate cultures], the stronger the tendency towards institutional autarchy and social segregation from the host society (1977: 24)” to the context of Papua New Guinea (a country defined in the popular imagination as the antithesis of Western civilization), the resulting vista is of an unbridgeable chasm between foreigners and locals. Moreover, the blame for this ‘problem’ falls primarily at the feet of ill-adjusted expatriates who cannot cope with their feelings of strangeness. “The best-cared for, pampered and well-heeled group of migrants there ever was”, they nevertheless appear weak and insular, drawing in their wagons protectively and regarding the surrounding community as “either terra-incognita, or...positively hostile (ibid. 56, 32).” Under these circumstances, any social interaction beyond the superficial begins to seem extraordinary.

I am not arguing against the presence of strangeness in expatriate experience, but on the basis of interviewees’ narratives, I do dispute the simplistic manner in which it has been treated by scholars. For, if interviewees discussed their experiences of ‘culture shock’ quite candidly, they also incorporated their awareness of it into their description of an particular kind of intercultural competence. Through their stories, they explained how their attempts to overcome cultural discomfort involved learning how to “accept” local people and their ways, and to balance local cultural values with their own. On arrival in the Tolai village of Pilapila, Jennifer Gibson experienced culture shock “as numbness,” which she coped with by “suspend[ing] judgement. I was just accepting everything...I had been in foreign cultures a lot before, so I wasn’t frightened. I was lonely but I knew I would be lonely, and I had mentally allowed myself two months to be lonely... [And] I had lots of [Tolai] people being amazingly, wonderfully helpful.” During his first few months in Mendi, Southern Highlands province, Don Baker faced a daunting combination of work-related and cultural stresses:

First of all it was culture shock, because I went there in ‘74, it was just 20 years post-contact... They were still walking around in their traditional clothing, living their traditional ways, subsistence farming. They’d come into town but... You were suddenly
right there in the middle of a very different culture. *** That, and the belief system, where you suddenly realize that every death is a murder... And it was the volume of pathology that came through the doors of that place. There were so many sick people, and so much death. It really got to you after a while, people dying all the time. And you were living beside the hospital and almost every night there’d be people wailing because a child had died. That was heavy, you know? *** Then on top of that, I’d been travelling for about three years, so suddenly I was back at work again, putting in regular hours, plus having to deal with a huge amount of human disease...which I felt only marginally competent to deal with. It was scary and stressful. For the first six month to a year it was just... I remember the first few months I hardly slept.

Eventually, by accepting the volume of sickness and the differences between his own and local beliefs (particularly about death), he adjusted to the situation: “Once I got to that point, it was a lot easier for me.”

Linked to insularity, foreignness would seem to be one of the defining factors of expatriates and their communities. “The one common bond was that we were outsiders,” recalled my father; but he went on to cite significant exceptions. He observed that, at the international schools in Lae, foreign children mixed with “the kids of mixed marriages” and “the National [Papua New Guinean] kids who came from wealthy families.”

Cohen claims that only select locals infiltrate expatriate-controlled “ecological subsystems” and as such they are not regular locals, but rather an elite “third culture (1977: 31,61).” My father seemed to agree, in that he described the Papua New Guinean and mixed-marriage children at the international schools as “living in a twilight zone between cultures.” But did this render them so extraordinary in contemporary Papua New Guinean society? As a rapidly increasing number of Papua New Guineans form new upper and middle classes, and begin to take part in international communities and ‘traditional expatriate’ institutions such as international schools and clubs (Errington and Gewertz 1997), expatriate communities are growing increasingly porous and the distinction between ‘native outsiders’ and ‘elites’ are becoming blurred.

It appears that many expatriates in Papua New Guinea have neither the ability nor the inclination to completely dissociate themselves from the host societies that surround them. Jane Young explained that, as CUSO cooperants (development workers) working in a rural village at a considerable distance from a town, she and her husband “didn’t have many chances to socialize” with the expatriate community.
Among the Nipan people of the Southern Highlands, they “made many Papua New Guinean friends and...the students frequented our house almost every day for ‘storying’ [visiting], making music, sewing and mending and so on.” As the only foreigner in Pilapila village, Jennifer Gibson described herself as “living with the Tolai. I was the only one there. I was living at the same material level as they were. I was speaking their language.” Even urbanites like my parents and Don Baker - who were neither researchers nor grass root aid workers - described relationships with Papua New Guineans, particularly in the workplace.

The people with whom you got quite close to were your workmates. For example, Yoba was a guy who assisted me in the operating room [in Mendi]. He and I went through all sorts of crises, day after day...for years and years (Don Baker).

My mother’s description of her round of life shows that she interacted with Papua New Guineans in almost every major context: as a lecturer at the University of Technology she worked with native colleagues and taught native students; at home she (rather than my father) dealt with the native housekeepers; and many of her friends were Papua New Guinean colleagues or native women who had married foreign men. Contrary to Cohen and Palmier’s portraits of expatriate women as insular and marginalized, my mother, along with Jennifer and Jane, had as many or more contexts for interaction with Papua New Guinean people than some expatriate men.

Though he acknowledged a cultural gap between himself and Papua New Guineans, Don Baker did not speak of it in terms of suspicion or hostility. “I think there was good will between people on both sides; people were genuinely trying to be friendly,” he explained, “there was just so little in common from one’s childhood [or] culture, it was very hard to get what felt like genuine friendship.” Still, plenty of expatriates and Papua New Guineans made attempts at intimacy. Most interviewees knew of foreigners

21 It is important to underline the presence and intercultural transactions of expatriate women in Papua New Guinea, for as Bulbeck points out, portraits of colonial-era expatriate women are even more scathing and have strongly influenced later characterizations of women overseas: “Female writers have been forced to interrogate an earlier (and usually male) claim that white women, and not men, were the more racist members of colonial society. By some accounts, not only were white women more intolerant and ignorant of the colonial enterprise, their attitudes cost Britain its empire, and Australia its chance at creating a civilized Papua New Guinea (1992: 2).”
who had married or become involved with Papua New Guineans. My parents’ best friends in Lae were two
“mixed marriage” families - Papua New Guinean women who had married Australian men. While those
relationships appeared to be stable, as Jane Young narrates, others were fraught with difficulty:

One [woman], originally a CUSO teacher from Alberta, married a local teacher. They had
two boys. The wife found it increasingly difficult to cope with the wantok system - each
pay fortnight their house would be full of his relatives wanting some money. I remember
her telling me that they could not save any money, that she felt a stranger in her own
house, that the personal habits of her in-laws distressed her and she worried about her
sons’ future. After her husband started drinking and going with other women...she
eventually tricked her husband into letting her take her sons home for a visit and she did
not return.

If Don Baker spoke of the impossibility of having “a true friendship where there’s real communication”
with a Papua New Guinean in the same sense as with a fellow expatriate, both he and my father described
specific relationships that they developed with individual Papua New Guineans in the workplace that were
unconventional yet undeniably meaningful. My father talked at length about Koni Conrad, the Sepik-born
maintenance foreman with whom he worked at Lae International High School. They “were very close,”
but at the same time they “had a funny relationship,” and both were deeply struck by their mutual
differences.

One time he came into my office and said he was going to quit his job and he was going
to leave his wife and his family. I thought, Jesus, what brought that on? He said he’d
been at a party the night before out near Unitech and he’d met a sorcerer. I found out later
too that he was drunk. The sorcerer told him that he had to leave his wife; he had to leave
his job and leave Lae and do all these things...whatever the guy said, Koni was going to
do. So I spent a good part of a morning arguing with him in my office. Finally I
convinced him to go and see some of his folks...take a week off, and think about it. So he
did that. Came back, and by this time he’d changed his mind. Everything went back to
normal. What I learned from that was that I didn’t understand Koni as well as I thought
I did, and [that] he was operating on two different cultural levels. *** I think he found me
very perplexing at times. I think he liked me; we were very close... But I think he found me
a very hard person to deal with. Not in the sense that I was mean or unfair; he just
didn’t quite understand my values at times... Of course it worked both ways. *** I thought
he was really stressed. Trying to meet the expectations in two different cultural systems
was taking a huge toll on him. He was trying to prove that he could cope with the Western
system, that he could do all the things that one would do in a Western society as a
foreman...and then on the other hand, he’s got his own people, his own village, his family,
his kids. He wasn’t being paid the same. And yet he had a very intimate view of how
expatriates lived.

My father lamented losing touch with Koni. “I wrote a few letters to Koni, and I can understand why...I
mean, I’m pretty lousy at writing letters, but I did write...I was hoping that Koni would respond back, but he never did. He’s pretty erratic. I understand he’s left the school. I don’t know where he is now.”

Anthony Cohen states that “we are not aware of the distinctiveness and the circumscription of our own behaviour until we meet its normative boundaries in the shape of alternative forms (1982: 4).” In Lae and Mendi, in Pilapila and in Nipa, expatriates and Papua New Guineans encountered each others’ “normative boundaries.” The kinds of interactions that ensued should not be devalued by being viewed as merely the results of maladjustment on the part of expatriates: they are better understood as particular attempts by individuals to negotiate each others’ differences - while operating from within complex relations of power, as shall be discussed in the following section.

Power in expatriate-local relations

_I wish to open notions of power and resistance to a more diverse politics of agency, involving a dense web of relations between coercion, negotiation, complicity, refusal, dissembling, mimicry, compromise, affiliation and revolt._

- Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather

We were all Great White _Kiap_, whether we were the Great White _Kiap_ electrician or the Great White _Kiap_ doctor, whoever you were... It seemed to me very hard to remove [this barrier], particularly because I didn’t speak the language. Maybe that would have made the difference; I don’t think so though. There was an unspoken understanding that you were here and the Papua New Guinean was there (Terry Upton).

Interviewees acknowledged that historical colonial inequalities of power inherently affected their status in Papua New Guinea and their relationships with native people. However, their stories illustrated that this ‘neo-colonial’ status was neither absolute nor secure. Some of the most interesting expatriate-local interactions in Papua New Guinea that individuals described occurred between themselves and the _domestic servants_ they employed. Though painfully aware of the colonial master-servant overtones of the situation (as implied by the Tok Pisin terms _masta, hausmeri, gadenboi_), and knowing full well that “there was really no need”, my parents employed two different _hausmeris_ to maintain our house in Lae. “You almost
felt like you had to have one because that was the way it was,” explained my father. “You felt like you had to support the local economy and you didn’t want to break with the protocol of the compound.” Employing a housekeeper (at very little cost) certainly gave our family more free time; but as my mother stressed, the relationship between my parents and their *hausmeris* was a two-way street involving complex, though admittedly unequal, power relations:

The *hausmeris* had been [working] at the houses ever since they were built... So I had to feel them out, because I didn’t know anything about the house or the country or anything. I had to let them teach me (Kathy Upton).

Thus, *hausmeris* and *gadenbois* can be seen not only as servants, but also as indigenous teachers and mediators within expatriate households, regulating new expats’ views of indigenous culture and, by setting the tone for employee-servant relations within the home, introducing expatriates to particular codes of behaviour in the community. My parents’ stories offered hints that, even during the colonial period, rather than being one-sided and “fatal in impact,” power relations between expatriates and their servants were probably contradictory and ambiguous.

“It is misleading even to attribute uniformly to colonizers an imagining of, or a will to, total dominance,” says Nicholas Thomas (1994: 15). In Papua New Guinea, where the Australian administration (particularly during the tenure of Sir Hubert Murray) practised an adapted form of Lugard’s “indirect rule”, many native people experienced colonialism as somewhat distant and benign. Jennifer Gibson claimed that even in areas where Papua New Guineans encountered colonial expatriates more intensively, their relationship was uniquely amicable:

I think because there were many genuinely dedicated missionaries there, it was one of the reasons why Papua New Guinean didn’t have the same kind of colonial experiences as say Africa, where there very strong independence movements. In Papua New Guinea, people got independence before they were asking for it. There were a few students at the university and some of them in the newly graduated elite were making noises...but people in the rural areas had a different attitude. I was told there were many Tolai who cried when the Australian flag came down.

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22 “If our interest is in colonial culture, it is important to recognize that a variety of colonial representations and encounters both precede and succeed periods of actual possession and rule,” writes (Thomas1994: 16). I have tried to follow Thomas’ suggestion and point out “how former colonial discourses and the present might be related (ibid. 21)” through oral narratives of expatriate experience in (officially) post-independent Papua New Guinea.
Jennifer claimed that since the Tolai communities on New Britain experienced a long, yet largely positive relationship with outsiders (mainly missionaries), and since they now “ran the show,” their attitude towards foreigners was one of open confidence:

[Tolai] can afford to welcome expats in; they don’t feel threatened in the same way as some other people in Papua New Guinea feel... *** Certainly you’re elite as an expatriate in that country, but I never got the impression that Papua New Guineans ever thought that I was any better as a person just because I had a white skin... And that’s wonderful because that just removes a whole level of potential difficulties in intercultural relationships *** That’s not to say that we did actually interact all the time as equals, because, of course, expatriates, generally speaking, have more bonds of external power. But there are many circumstances in which Papua New Guineans are not concerned about that. They’re operating outside of that whole system (Jennifer Gibson).

The nature of expatriate-indigenous power relations appear even more complex in the context of contemporary law and order problems in Papua New Guinea. Unlike the contributors to Our Time But Not Our Place: Voices of Expatriate Women in Papua New Guinea, who were “[reticent] to dwell on law and order problems and...vulnerability (Bourke et al. 1993: x)”23, participants in this project told narratives imbued with stories of crime, corruption, and violence - experienced by interviewees themselves, or by relatives, friends, or acquaintances. A sense of personal and collective vulnerability figured prominently in the way interviewees portrayed the situation of expatriates in post-independent Papua New Guinea.

I know a sixty-five year old woman whose husband was decorated by the Papua New Guinea government for service to the country; she was raped by five men, holding a gun in her open mouth while they raped her. An old lady. She lived around the corner from me.***

I’ve been tear-gased twice in my lunch-hour; shopping or just going to get a quick bite of a sandwich...in my lunch hour in the shopping area of Boroko. And I’ve had to physically fight a guy off from grabbing my purse from under my arm. I ended up getting one of those personal alarm things that automatically trip themselves. So these aren’t rumours. These are real experiences. And, I mean, I cannot count the number of people I know who were raped, and many of them gang-raped (Jennifer Gibson).

23 Perhaps this was because they were talking(rather than writing) to me(rather than directly to an unknown public), a fellow ex-expatriate; for crime stories are, I think, a major topic of conversation between fellow expats. Most of these stories are essentially reflect an aspect of expatriate relationship with local people - and as Richards observes, “many expatriates spend much of their social...time talking about their hosts, particularly telling stories about them, [and] it would appear that the stories are not intended to be written (1996: 561, my emphasis).”
In 1974, Amirah Inglis published *Not a White Woman Safe*, a searing interpretation of "sexual anxiety and politics" amongst expatriates in colonial Papua New Guinea. Backed by a barrage of statistics, legal documents, newspaper articles, letters, Inglis portrayed the 1923 enactment of the White Woman’s Protection Ordinance, a law that virtually erased human rights and social freedoms for colonial-era Papua New Guineans, as the result of colonial male sexual insecurity, insular (and sometimes petty) colonial politics, community paranoia, callousness and white racism in a starkly segregated society. The disturbing immediacy of Inglis’ portrayal of the hysterical fear of "the black peril" was deliberate: Inglis claimed to have been inspired to write the book by the "determined whiteness and fear of black assault" of the expatriates she encountered while living in Port Moresby during the 1960's and early 1970's.

Racism, paranoia, insularity. When I suggested these explanations for expatriate stories of crime in Papua New Guinea to Jennifer Gibson, she hotly replied,

I must say, I don’t consider myself to be paranoid. I have hitch-hiked all over South America, I went alone to a Tolai village, I’ve done a lot, I’ve travelled a lot, alone around the world. I’ve been in some very difficult situations. I have been attacked...and so I don’t think I exaggerate the physical danger!

A 1984 IASER report on *Law and Order in Papua New Guinea* claimed that, set “against a world-wide increase in crime,” the problems in Papua New Guinea did not look so bad; yet the authors were forced to ask, “why does law and order appear so large in PNG, and why does it cause such public concern (Clifford et al. 1984: 2)?” They acknowledged that official statistics probably accounted for a mere twenty percent of all criminal activity in the country, and that criminal attacks tended to victimize particular groups repeatedly (ibid. 2). In the case of expatriates, their extreme visibility - in racial, social, and economic terms - their tendency to live in urban or settled areas (where crimes occur with the greatest frequency), and their powerlessness to fight back (politically or legally) certainly made them obvious targets for attack. Expatriates interviewed in this study recounted their own and other expatriates’ experiences of break-ins, thefts, muggings, ambushes, rapes, gang-rapes, and even murders - at the hands of urban *raskol* gangs24.

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24 *Raskol*, a Tok Pisin term, is commonly used to refer to criminals in Papua New Guinea.
Fear of *raskols* often dictated the ways they organized their lives, from the types of houses and
neighbourhoods they inhabited to the way they conducted themselves through public spaces and travelled
around the country. My father’s account of his first day in Lae illustrates how strongly the expatriate
community held to its collective feeling of threatened security:

[An expatriate friend] said that he’d take us in the car for a drive around Lae... He drove
us around to the areas where the expatriates lived. There were very high wire mesh
fences, some of them with barbed wire along the top, and big gates, locked with chains,
and dogs on the other side. I remember the houses, most of them had wire mesh over the
windows, or bars. Jesus, I remember that. The houses, the first time I saw them, looked
ugly; and I was really thrown by all this security. ...Those were my first impressions. Very
lush, big trees, [and] all these barred houses, fortified. ...I wasn’t prepared for what I saw.
I don’t think I remember anywhere in the South Pacific that was like this. Nothing
compared to it.

My father explained the “strong clustering tendency” of expatriate residential patterns in Lae not merely
as evidence of expatriate paranoia or colonial insularity, but as a practical measure: “companies had
compounds where they would put houses inside fenced-in perimeters with security guards and so on, like
we had, because of worries about *raskols*, about rape, about the horrible, horrific crimes that had been
committed in and around Lae. We were no different; we lived inside a fenced compound.”

Fearing *raskol* attacks, my mother described the daily precautions she took when going out alone
in Lae. Usually nothing happened; but having been mugged during her first month in Papua New Guinea,
she felt the need to be alert:

Often times I used to go shopping or to the market by myself, but I’d always be aware of
being by myself, that things could happen so fast and there’d be nothing I could do about
it. There were times when I’d be driving out to the university, and I’d have to slow down
because there’d be a roadblock, and out of nowhere came hundreds of people. And I’d
think, uh-oh, let’s just hope I can get out of this alive.

Jennifer Gibson asserted that since Inglis’ book had been published, times had changed. Papua
New Guinea was no longer a colonial territory; and whereas colonists once feared losing absolute power
to their native subjects, post-colonial expatriate power was far less obvious or stable. No more the lords
of the land, expatriates were now ultimately at the mercy of Papua New Guinean laws and officials.
Furthermore, since the withdrawal of Australian colonial administrative personnel, the number of
expatriates in Papua New Guinea had decreased: expatriates now formed a small, vulnerable minority with a limited ability to protect themselves from law and order problems that were getting undeniably worse.

Don Baker, whose ten-year residence in the country spanned the transition from Australian rule to independence, agreed that law and order problems had increased since independence.

> When I was there I felt immune to violence. Our house [in Mendi], we used to leave the door open. One time we got ripped off, but there really wasn’t that kind of an atmosphere there. You felt quite comfortable, people were quite respectful... It’s clearly changed *** I came back [to Canada] at the end of ‘84, and since then four people that I knew, friends of mine, have been killed there. The violence has escalated.

Jennifer pointed out that the threat of crime was not exclusively an expatriate problem: while foreignness could be a factor in raskol attacks, Papua New Guineans too were at risk. The former head of a national program on violence against women in Papua New Guinea, she underlined cultural attitudes towards violence and women as the decisive factors in personal attacks - “men they just rob them and attack them, maybe knife them...and women they rape - as well!” Don Baker concurred, “It’s rough for women in this culture. *** Domestically there’s a huge amount of violence...Everybody beats their wives. It’s a culturally acceptable thing.” Foreign-ness constituted a secondary element: “I knew how the gangs operated, and that raping a woman was one of the initiation rites. And raping a white woman was one of the initiation rites for a couple of the gangs (Jennifer Gibson).”

A sense of powerlessness in the face of well-organized criminals and an incompetent justice system pervaded interviewees’ stories.

> ...my attitude is that you do all you can to ensure your safety, and then you forget about it! Because it’s pointless to carry on worrying about it. And [yet] when we were in [Port] Moresby, the crime situation did get so bad I actually considered getting a gun. Because the gangs had guns. And the gangs had tools, so they were jemmying the doors, in many cases they were just blasting right through the doors of places, so you couldn’t prevent them from getting into your house, if that was what they wanted to do. And then they had guns when they got in there (Jennifer Gibson).

Unable to bring themselves to use real guns, Jennifer and her husband resorted to toy replicas. “We carried one each in the car and one by the bed. They were also illegal, because the gangs were using them too.”

Both my parents and Jennifer said that crime and risk to personal safety ultimately forced them to
leave Papua New Guinea. There was nothing else they could do. “The raskol business started to get too close,” said my mother. “I think after you have a...friend gang-raped and killed, things start to get a little bit too close to you, and you start thinking, when is it going to be my turn?”

Jennifer and my parents dealt with their vulnerability as foreigners by leaving the country: perhaps travel is expatriates’ ultimate privilege. But as interviewees explain in the following section, travel is more than just a privilege: it is a way of life, and one which entails its share of difficulties.

The experience of mobility

Who would have thought that ‘travel’ could come to mean so many things?
-Sunpreet Arshi, “Why Travel?”

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure where one belongs...
-Zygmunt Bauman, “From Pilgrim to Tourist - or a Short History of Identity”

Once, browsing through a website called Expat Forum, I followed a discussion between expatriates in the Middle East, Britain, Japan, Spain. Everyone agreed with the discussant who wrote, “I know it seems arrogant to say it, but people who aren’t living this lifestyle don’t understand the problems that expats go through: we’re comfortable everywhere, at home nowhere.”

In the recent flurry of publications on mobility and culture by post-modern and post-structuralist theorists, travellers, nomads, and migrants have figured as metaphors for identity, belonging, and cultural and intellectual experience (Cresswell 1997: 360). As Zygmunt Bauman observes, “if the modern ‘problem’ of identity was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable25, the postmodern ‘problem of identity’ is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open (1996: 18).” In particular, “the nomad” represents the ideal contemporary sensibility - the “lifestyle of a free people”:

25 In The Homeless Mind (1973) Berger, Berger and Kellner mused darkly, “Modernity has indeed be liberating...it has opened up for the individual previously unheard-of options and avenues for mobility... However, these liberations have had a high price. Perhaps the easiest way to describe it is...as ‘homelessness.’” Milton Gordon described the ‘problem’ of identity for migrant peoples through a pathological profile of “the Marginal Man”: “frustrated and not fully accepted...ambivalent...and beset by conflicting cultural standards, he develops...personality traits of insecurity, moodiness, hypersensitivity, excessive self-consciousness, and nervous strain... [While] at least one acute observer...has pointed to the possible desirable traits of marginality, such as greater insight, self-understanding and creativity, the sociological position may certainly be discerned... It is the position occupied by the social deviant... (1964: 56-57)”
neither the superficial tourist nor the exile searching for home, the nomad’s “home” is on the move, movement being the privileged “site” of philosophical epiphany (Kaplan 1996: 78). For the well-educated Western “nomad”, “the local is a shabby thing,” Baudrillard states urbanely, “There’s nothing worse than bringing us back down to our own little corner, our own territory (quoted in Kaplan 1996: 78).” Not surprisingly, critics complain that such images reflect contemporary theorists’ narrow notion of experience, and point out that “travel is not simply a luxury or a leisurely philosophical activity… [it also] operates as a metaphor for the cultural displacement and sense of unfamiliarity engendered by social change (Kaplan 1996: 82).”

One might expect studies of transnational groups to have redressed the paucity of empirical data in theoretical discussions by now. But while scholars of transnationalism purport to examine peoples who are defined by their mobility, their studies concentrate on the socio-political and economic ties that transnationals forge between countries (or the ties that nations attempt to impose on their transnational citizens). Transnational people’s own attitudes towards their mobility, and their experience of movement, is discussed superficially at best: businessmen travel to make money and boast of their ability to live anywhere (as long as there is an airport nearby); Brazilians flee to New York and rack up huge phone bills talking to relatives left behind; everyone is bilingual (Ong 1993; Margolis 1995; Portes 1996).

As narratives of transnational movement, the stories told by participants in this project play against contemporary theoretical conceptualizations of movement in ways that point to complex, and far more human, notions of mobility, identity, and belonging. Their stories articulate expatriate life as involving both a commitment to travel and an awareness of the importance of place and belonging in the formation of personal identity. They illustrate how the experience of being an expatriate - of moving overseas, living in a place, and moving again - can lead to complex (often confused) and highly individualized sociocultural and spatial self-identities.

26 I have borrowed the phrase “complex spatial self-identity” from John Western’s study of geographical concepts of home amongst Barbadian Londoners, A Passage to England: Barbadian Londoners Speak of Home (1992).
Kipling once said, “there are only two kinds of men in the world - those that stay at home and those that do not (in Chatwin 1987: 220, my emphasis).” Travel has long been considered a male enterprise:

‘Good travel’ (heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous, ennobling) is something men (should) do. Women are impeded from serious travel. Some of them go to distant places, but largely as companions or as ‘exceptions’ (Clifford 1992: 105).

When I asked Jennifer Gibson if she had travelled much before going to Papua New Guinea for the first time she nodded sagely. “I hitch-hiked alone around South America... Not a wise thing to do, I can tell you!... I was twenty-three when I did that. And lived to tell the tale. Learned plenty of lessons from that one.” She went on to say that Papua New Guinea “was my second fieldwork. I had actually done some fieldwork in the West Indies...” She had also lived and worked in the United States, Greece, Germany, and West and East Africa: “I had travelled a lot.”

In their long, intertwined narratives, my parents articulated the process through which they developed an increasing commitment to travel as a lifestyle. My mother began with stories of childhood trips - journeys made within British Columbia and remembered primarily in connection with family members or childhood friends. My mother made her first trip outside of Canada shortly after getting married: she and my father went to Mexico. “I believe that was the first time I’d ever been on a plane,” She recalled.

Oh, it was fabulous; I love Mexico!...[We went] to various cultural things like the Museum of Anthropology, the Art Gallery, wonderful places, the theatre, Folklorical Ballet d’Mexico...We went everywhere where there were murals by the famous Mexican muralists. It was the year of the Olympics in Mexico, 1967... This was the second time your Dad had been to Mexico City, so he was sort of showing me around.

Soon after returning from this trip, my parents became interested in sailing. They bought a small yacht and learned to sail it on the weekends. After an inspirational meeting with the famous yachting couple, Alan and Sharie Farrell27, they agreed that “it would be really nice if we could turn this into a lifestyle, not just a weekend-type of thing (Kathy Upton, my emphasis).” They decided to “build a bigger boat and take off and live like that (Terry Upton, my emphasis).” By 1974, my parents and I were living aboard Spellbinder,

27 Legendary boat builders and sailors Alan and Sharie Farrell are well-known amongst Canadian and American yachting enthusiasts for their articles in Pacific Yachting.
a 45-foot homebuilt ferro-cement yacht. In 1979, we left Canada.

The plan was that we were going to take a leave of absence... Our plan was to go down the coast of North America to the Baja, then go across to the Marquesas, the Tuamotus, the Societies... And then we were going to go north to Hawaii in the second year, [sail] through the Hawaiian islands, then sail back to Vancouver. *** I guess it was around Bora Bora, I remember having this talk with Dad, and he said, you know, we’re having such a good time, if we go back to Vancouver, it’s going to take us ten years before we can make it back to where we are. And he was right, ‘cause you know, you get caught up in life. So we have to decide, he said, what do you want to do: should we just keep going and take our chances?... It was a big decision because, if we came back, we knew what that would lead to, it was pretty predictable. But if we chose the other thing, we’d lose our jobs, our seniority - everything... But at the same time, what is life for anyway? So I thought, I’m willing to take the chance, I’d like to do this instead of going back. So that’s what we did (Kathy Upton).

Thus my parents’ interest in travel broadened in concept from a marginal activity to a way of life. All interviewees stressed that “travel is a pretty significant focus in our lives (Kirsty Winger).” For my mother, this attitude took a decidedly anthropological tone.

Getting to know how people lived in the places where we came to: I guess that was my main interest. I really liked finding out how people lived, from day to day. Just what they eat, what they wear, what they do, how families spend their time...what they do during their celebrations. What’s basic to everybody.

Rick Winger described being an expatriate as the ultimate approach to travel. As a tourist, “you’re flowing through and you don’t get to become part of [the culture],” he said, “whereas this way [going to live overseas as a development worker], you get to become part of it.” My mother explained that the longer she spent in a particular place, the more layers of understanding she felt able to penetrate:

I think that if you stay in a place one day, you get one kind of an impression. If you stay for a week you realize that your first day’s impression has changed, and if you stay for three weeks or a month you find that you have a different impression altogether...

Travel has always been a powerful idea in Western thought. As Georges Van Den Abbeele has observed, “the dearest notions of the West nearly all appeal to the motif of the voyage: progress, the quest for knowledge, freedom as freedom to move, self-awareness as an Odyssean enterprise(1992: xv).” Rick Winger expressed interviewees’ collective, idealized conceptualization of travel when he remarked that it “throws a different perspective on the world.” Participants highlighted their own travel experience - the more ‘exotic’ the better. Adventurousness was a highly valued quality. Often their narratives seemed like adventure stories, Papua New Guinea being just one stop in a life-long trajectory of movement. Rick
Winger, who grew up in rural Alberta, proudly declared that he had “been across the Serengeti twice” and what was more, “I personally have been up to the...gorillas that Diane Fossey [worked with] in Rwanda.” Don Baker described working for the Flying Doctor Service in Zambia, of backpacking around the world; like my parents, he had sailed across the Pacific.

For people with such a strong sense of adventure, going to Papua New Guinea - to live, no less - represented the ultimate experience. Jennifer remarked, “One of the reasons I chose Papua New Guinea was because it was as far out of the way from England as I could get...and it was a part of the world that I hadn’t travelled to under my own steam.” For my father, one of the main attraction of life in Papua New Guinea was its radical exoticism - “what I mean by exotic is, outside of my experience.” Rather than shrinking from the ‘strangeness’ of the place, he spoke of embracing it. “Most of what I saw there was...with fresh eyes. I didn’t take very much of my experience in the country for granted.” Even the danger of raskols added a certain thrill:

You knew, in one sense, you were living on the edge. I think when you are living in that kind of environment you’re maybe more aware... You’re not inclined to take things for granted like you would where you felt really safe and comfortable. ***I thought we were playing Russian Roulette...and the longer we stayed there, sooner or later the odds were going to [come round] and somebody in our family was going to get it. There was a fair bit of luck involved.

Expatriatism is often defined as a lifestyle that is voluntarily entered into. Hannerz stresses that expatriates can move between ‘home’ and a given ‘foreign’ country “when it suits them.” Certainly, the adventurism communicated by interviewees indicates a certain sense of privilege. But it would be naïve to attribute expatriates’ way of life simply to their freedom to move. Some expatriates, like those in Lae described by my father, travel overseas as much to escape as to find something new. Though not formally exiled, these people - like Harry Lawson, one of the colonial-era expatriates in Taim Bilong Masta - may feel forced to leave home:

I came from New South Wales and I had a spot of trouble socially speaking, in Sydney,
mainly at Government House at the Queen's Birthday levee. Being socially unacceptable, I decided to come to the islands and I’ve been here ever since (in Nelson 1982: 14). Like Burdick’s fictional emigré in The White and the Black, some expatriates escape their home nations for idealistic reasons: “Proust has described life in Paris and its rottenness very accurately...I came to Polynesia, to a tiny island, to escape all this (Burdick 1964: 136).” For the individuals I interviewed, a sense of adventure was often mixed with a perceived need to escape the familiar. The way my father reminisced about the exoticism of life in Papua New Guinea contrasted starkly with his view of life in Canada: “It just seems to me that the main object is to work. And pay all the bills.”

For expatriates, having the opportunity to travel and live overseas can be both an advantage and drawback. After living in Papua New Guinea for five years, my father found he had developed an attachment “that was stronger than to any place I’ve lived in my whole life” - and then had to return to Canada, “right back into the rut that I was in before.” My father had wanted to stay in Papua New Guinea - “one of the hardest things in my life was to leave that place.” However, making Papua New Guinea “home” permanently would have been difficult:

The attitude towards naturalized Papua New Guineans was unwelcoming. They make it very difficult to become Papua New Guinean, to get Papua New Guinean citizenship. And then you’re never trusted anyway. There’ll always be remarks in the press, and there are always comments being made in parliament about these white folks who come and take our citizenship just so they can rip us off even more. Even if you were taking citizenship for idealistic reasons, and I know a number of people who did that, you were still tarred with the same brush. Like Professor M...she took PNG citizenship for idealistic reasons, and as a result - she knew this full well - her salary was cut to a quarter...it was only to show solidarity that she took citizenship...[yet] she suffered from the same number of break-ins at the university as all the other expatriates and she suffered a lot BECAUSE of it, and ended up retiring back to Australia, a lot poorer that she would have if she had stayed an expatriate...she’s over seventy now and she’s still having to work because she gave up her pension (Jennifer Gibson).

In his article Global Villagers (1996), Alejandro Portes writes of the “global contacts” that Mexicans, Dominicans, Ecuadorian and Chinese businesspeople gain as they travel across borders.

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20 Burdick’s classic short story of a French emigre living in monotonous isolation on a Polynesian atoll. “Zola was typical of a whole breed of men, white men that live in the South Seas. Sensitive to the rawness of their native society, they flee to the apparent tranquility of the South Pacific. But by then the damage has been done.”
"Transnationality and its dual counterpart, dual citizenship, may [be]...the vanguard of the direction that new notions of community and society will be taking in the next century," he concludes (1996: 76). Portes' progressive tone is not unusual. It seems to be an accepted fact that a major aspect of transnationalism is that it engenders international contacts (it is no mistake that Hannerz entitles his book *Transnational Connections*). In the case of expatriates, the issue is not so clearcut. The mobility of their lifestyle means that the settlements they inhabit are in constant flux. If this contributes to the diversity of communities, it can also be hard to live with:

You make attachments with these people, and some of them we got pretty close to, and then they leave. I found the longer I was there, the more hesitant I was to make attachments with new expats, because it was really hard...You almost felt like, well, why should I invest my time if they're only going to turn around and leave anyway (Terry Upton).

My father's comment illustrates more than the strain of constant change in expatriate life: it offers a glimpse at the constraints on expatriate social relationships. It is hardly surprising that "olddiers" distance themselves from newly-arrived expatriates and view them as "fly-by-nighters," as my mother observed in Lae. Moreover, knowing that one is going to leave Papua New Guinea eventually - and possibly never return - can make a person leery of initiating serious friendships with local people. Consider this cautionary tale:

One young VSO [Volunteer Services Overseas employee] became involved with a local girl, who had two mixed race children. When she became pregnant, the VSO skipped the country. He had confided to me he felt trapped, didn't want to live in PNG nor did he feel he could take the girl back to England with him. Some expats felt his actions were unconscionable. His friend was later threatened by the girl's brothers and VSO pulled him out of the country (Jane Young).

If moving constantly can discourage expatriates from forming long-term relationships, staying in one place has its own disadvantages:

Near Mount Hagen we visited a New Zealander who was running a construction company up there... His ambition [had been] to come Papua New Guinea, make a lot of money as a young adventurer, and then go home to New Zealand and live the 'life of Riley.' When we went to see him, he'd only been back in the country for about a year. He'd done what he said he was going to do: he'd made a lot of money and went back to New Zealand...and he realized he didn't fit in anymore. He felt like a stranger. He'd lost all his connections,
I suppose, and he was very unhappy and came back to Papua New Guinea (Terry Upton).

Ulf Hannerz claims that expatriates are distinct from *exiles* because their presence overseas is voluntary, and as such, “they do not stand to lose a treasured but threatened sense of self (1996: 106).” While expatriates may not be subject to the “rigid proscriptions” of enforced banishment, moving back and forth between “home” and various locations can result in a very troubled sense of self indeed. As Edward Said says, those who do not have a secure sense of home often perceive an powerful link between home and self. They may wonder, “what is it like to be born in a place and live there more or less forever, to know that you are of it (Said 1984: 52)?” My father described several expatriate children at Lae International High School who, though born elsewhere, had lived in Papua New Guinea for most of their lives. As part of the expatriate community (and lacking Papua New Guinean citizenship), they did not feel completely at home in Papua New Guinea; yet returning to their country of birth was not a clear option either. According to my father, these adolescents were afflicted by a strong sense of dislocation, or what Said calls “the perilous territory of not-belonging (1984: 51).”

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**Last Word**

The experience of living overseas, like that of doing field research, can continue long after one has left the field. Though my father left Papua New Guinea more than ten years ago, he continues to regard the country with an undisguised love. He says that he feels unable to share his experiences with people who haven’t been to Papua New Guinea themselves. “I don’t want to impose,” he says. “But I think about it often. I dream about it sometimes...”

I dream about it. Just scenes. The last year I was there I started taking pictures, which I’d never done before, and I’ve left lots of places... I wanted to have a graphic record of the things that were very evocative of what it felt like to live in Papua New Guinea. I thought the country was extraordinary. In the evening, just about five, six, just before dark; those streets with those big raintrees. Any residential street in Lae, for that matter. And the village next to our international high school... I don’t think I’d have ever taken that place for granted. I could have lived there a long time.
Why has there been so little interest in expatriates in the social sciences? Many scholars are themselves expatriates: while we all talk about the need to turn our gaze from Others, perhaps there is still a grain of truth in the assertion that:

An individual is generally ready to admit that he is ignorant of...places on the other side of the globe, But he is much less likely to admit that he is ignorant of his own period and his own place, especially if he is an intellectual. Everyone, of course, knows about his own society (Berger et al. 1973: 4).

Or perhaps, as my father and novelist Hilary Mantel30 imply, it is a reflection of how expatriates' experiences abroad silence them at home. In any case, there are plenty of stories to be told, and it is high time that researchers listen.

The stories told by Jennifer Gibson, Kirsty and Rick Winger, Don Baker, Allison Grant, and Kathy and Terry Upton depict expatriates in Papua New Guinea as neither underprivileged nor all-powerful. While they may form a “new class” of contemporary cosmopolitans - “people with credentials, decontextualized cultural capital...[which] can be quickly and shiftingly recontextualized in a series of different settings (Hannerz 1996: 109),” they are always at the mercy of larger social and political powers, and thus they hold an unstable position in their host country.

Whereas social scientists like Erik Cohen and Ulf Hannerz define expatriates as an occupational category distinct from other “types” of travellers such as tourists and exiles, the personal narratives presented here point to serious problems with these generalized categories. No social category exists in isolation, and attempting to delineate such fluid social groups is a thankless task: “fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change (Young 1995: 4).” The stories told by expatriates depict their lives and communities as being highly contextualized, complex, and sometimes contradictory; thus expatriates cannot be contained by a single, bounded definition. While it may be necessary to group people in some way in order to interpret their movements on a global scale, existing

30 “Ralph had feared intrusive questions, but instead there was an indifference that he felt as an insult. He made a discovery common to those who expatriate themselves and then return: that when he and Anna went abroad they had ceased to be regarded as real people. Out of sight, out of mind. Nobody...wanted to hear anything about Africa.” Taken from Mantel’s novel, A Change of Climate (1995: 252).
scholarly notions of expatriates are too simplistic to be useful accessing them as a transnational group. If social scientists seriously wish to understand contemporary global-local relations, they must critically examine their assumptions about transnational groups, and lay them open, through extended ethnographic enquiry into the “experiential worlds of meaning (Cohen 1982: 9)” of transnational people. The present paper has been merely an introduction to this topic. Drawing on a small-scale study of oral narratives, I have sought to point out what I take to be some of the most glaring problems with existing social scientific assumptions about expatriates; but before new conceptualizations can be mapped out, a great deal more empirical research needs to be done:
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