7. International HRM and cross-cultural management
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Does the 'Non-Traditional Expatriate' Exist? A Critical Exploration of New Expatriation Categories

ABSTRACT

Non-Traditional Expatriates (NTEs) are rapidly increasing in the global talent pool, but remains a 'black-box' in the Expatriate Management and Global Mobility literatures. The nascent research field on NTEs lacks clarity in terms of the meaning of the term as well as an operationalised conceptual framework. This void challenges researchers on two accounts: how should the concept and social phenomenon of NTEs be operationalised; and are scholars studying what they claim to investigate Furthermore, it is of significant importance for international managers and Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) to grasp the dynamics of non-traditionality and the particular needs of NTEs in terms of managing and sourcing talent. Five propositions have been established in order to respond to the following research question: 'how credible is the NTE term as an expatriation typology and how can the boundaries of NTEs be drawn? If these key issues remain unsolved, there is a risk of establishing flawed research designs which can negatively affect researchers' credibility when providing policy advice on global staffing and talent management to international managers and MNEs. This conceptual article draws upon sociological and social anthropological theories, and proposes a relational research design approach for investigating NTEs.

Keywords: Non-Traditional Expatriate; conceptual framework; critical exploration; relational; social theory; Expatriate Management; Global Mobility: Research agenda.

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INTRODUCTION

The conceptualisation of Non-Traditional Expatriates (henceforth, NTEs) remains a 'black-box' in the Expatriate Management and Global Mobility literatures – and within international human resource management research more broadly (McNulty & Hutchings 2014). Arguably, there is a void of a conceptual framework pertinent to NTEs, and the research to date on this expatriation category has been very limited, despite the fact that NTEs are rapidly increasing in numbers in the global talent pool. Therefore, it is imperative for Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) and international managers to comprehend the dynamics of 'non-traditionality' and the particular needs of NTEs in terms of managing and sourcing such talent (*Brookfield Global Relocation Services* 2014; *IMD World Talent Report 2014*) – including for employer planning of costs and compensation (*AIRINC* 2014). The focus on NTEs' lived experiences as individuals has especially been diminutively explored (Guttormsen 2015; McNulty & Hutchings 2014). This is an important oversight because of the overly focus on characterisations, socio-biological traits, and the labelling of expatriate groups in the nascent literature. If remained unchallenged, the NTE research field would risk limiting knowledge-production in terms of making sense of context-specific needs of NTEs, which in part is constitutive on interactions with other expatriates and organisations as well as geographical and cultural surroundings.

Thus, this paper proposes a theoretical contribution: the research praxis into NTEs which do not simultaneously scrutinise the credibility of creating new expatriation categories (Whetten 1989) should raise awareness about why NTEs are categorised in a particular way – even though they might not actually exist in the way we think about them. If follows,

enhanced understanding of the NTE social phenomenon can be developed, which subsequently challenge how researchers are producing knowledge concerning 'non-traditionality. Such realisation has the potential of expanding ontological and epistemological assumptions in conceptual operationalisation with all expatriate related terms and concepts (Corley & Gioia 2011). Given the void of a conceptual framework of NTEs, two major risks are challenging the fragmented research field. First, how should the concept of NTEs be operationalised? Second, are scholars studying what they claim to investigate if the research field is not in agreement in terms of how to identify NTEs in relation to other expatriates categories (Bridgman 1927; Campbell 1920; Mueller 2004)? If these questions remain unsolved or not problematised then it could lead to establishing flawed research designs (Ardener 1989). Furthermore, this affects researchers' credibility in terms of providing policy advice on global staffing and talent management to international managers and MNEs if their analysis is founded on an unsound operationalisation of the NTE concept (Harvey 2014).

The expatriate research field has been preoccupied with traditional expatriates (TEs) (for exceptions, see Grainger & Nankervis 2001; Guttormsen 2012; Harvey & Moeller 2014; McNulty 2013; McNulty & De Cieri 2011; Shortland 2009). TEs is commonly understood as individuals being expatriated by organisations (Adler 2002; Taylor et al. 2002; Vaiman & Haslberger 2013), and predominantly within corporate organisations (Bonache et al. 2001; Harzing 2001a, 2001b; Hippler 2009; Moore 2006; Peltokorpi & Froese 2009). With reportedly more than 8.5 million corporate expatriates world-wide (*Brookfield Global Relocation Services* 2014); the composition of the expatriate population is changing at a fast pace and with a record-high number of NTEs (McNulty & Hutchings 2014). A contemporary trend relates to the shift from the dominance of middle-aged, white males with accompanying wives in the global talent pool (Andresen et al. 2012; Hechanova et al. 2003; Jokinen et al.

2008; McNulty & Hutchings 2014; Selmer & Lauring, 2012a; Suutari & Brewster, 2000) towards increasing representations of NTEs due to societal changes.

Such transitions are especially evident in the western world, for example as a consequence of changes in the conventional nuclear family set-up (Duxbury et al. 2007; *Brookfield Global Relocation Services* 2012; *Office for National Statistics* 2012). The emphasis on NTEs at the individual level is especially welcome as expatriation tends to be examined at the assignment or organisational (firm) level which dominates international human resource management and international business research (Buckley 2002; Buckley & Lessard 2005; Delbridge et al. 2011, 2009; Delbridge & Keenoy 2010; Harzing & Christensen 2004; Keegan & Boselie 2006; Peng 2004). Furthermore, Andresen and Biemann (2013) pinpoint the void of typologisation and classification of expatriates in academic research (see McNulty & De Cieri 2011 for an exception).

Thus, there is a significant need to scrutinise and problematise how the research field is labelling NTEs as an expatriate category. Taking stock of such ongoing categorisations is critical for examining the relationship between TEs and NTEs. Analysing the literature on NTEs further would help advance scholarly understanding of this social phenomenon as the operationalisation of a conceptual framework serves as the foundation for further empirical studies on NTEs; to develop additional ‘state-of-the-art’ holistic knowledge concerning NTEs as part of expatriation; and to suggest directions for the future research agenda (McNulty & Hutchings 2014). Without problematisation of how the research-field is categorising NTEs both qualitative and quantitative research endeavours risk being built on a non-credible foundation – in relation to: what the differences to TEs are; representations of NTEs in the global talent pool; sense-making of experiences; success factors; particular needs of NTEs; faced challenges of an assumed category (NTEs); and determinants and characteristics of their assignments) (McNulty & Hutchings 2014). A social theoretically founded exploratory

critique of the tacit, underlying processes in relation to current typologisation of NTEs becomes imperative to inspect. Drawing upon lessons from physics, the nature and boundary of a social phenomenon (aka NTEs) in fact materialises through the way in which the fuzzy phenomenon is being deemed appropriate to be measured and practiced (Bridgman 1927; Campbell 1920). The discussion leads to the following research question: 'how credible is the NTE term as an expatriation typology, and how can the boundaries of NTEs be drawn?

Developing Propositions for better Understanding NTEs

Five propositions will be scrutinised by drawing upon key sociological and social anthropological theories. The propositions have been identified based on arising issues relating to operationalisation of any type of conceptual frameworks, in addition to the need for scrutinising the ways which the NTE term is presently being used (i.e. if purposeful as a means to obtain nuanced understanding of NTEs). The particular set of cohesive ad inter-linked propositions accommodates for an in-depth interrogation into potential negative outcomes of the research practices into NTEs; further nuances are unveiled based on building upon the analysis of the other propositions. Achieving more empirically sound research designs would also make recommendations from researchers and management consultants more credible when imparted to international managers. For example, traversing all five propositions, how the research field treats non-traditionality has a tremendous impact on the ways researchers decide to study NTEs.

Drawing upon social theoretical advancements associated with the theorists in this article contributes to scrutinising the usage of the NTE term as well as the lack of a conceptual framework regarding NTEs; Edwin Ardener, Richard Jenkins, and Pierre Bourdieu are independently as well as collectively offering a pertinent social theoretical and critical exploratory lens which can unpack and challenge the tacit, underlying assumptions

concerning current understanding as well as research practices into NTEs. Furthermore, unintended implications of such practices can be elucidated by further developing the NTE research field towards a *relational* approach which moves beyond organising expatriation into typologies. This can be achieved through focusing on the mechanisms underlying how NTEs presently are being identified; labelled as a group; that the individual expatriate and the international assignment are not being differentiated; in addition to how power and history influence the contours of the emerging NTE research agenda.

This approach has been established in this article as the STOEC (*Social Theory + Operationalisation = Ontological and Epistemological grounded Conceptual framework*) analytical "thinking-tool" (inspired by Leander 2008, in Political Science/International Relations disciplines). STOEC highlights the importance of questioning the assumed world-view (ontology) of the operationalisation – and subsequently how we derive knowledge (epistemology) from that assumed 'social world' Berger & Luckman 1964. This method of thinking could also be deployed to scrutinise other expatriation and IHRM social phenomena.

The significant intellectual advancements by Ardener, Bourdieu, and Jenkins largely remain an untapped resource in expatriate management, global mobility, and IHRM research, and the aforesaid critical exploratory lens serves as a contribution in its right in this article (i.e. increased focus on the questionable purposefulness of the current conceptual operationalisation into NTEs).

This article is structured as follows. The first section highlights the importance for international managers and organisations to grasp the subtle but impactful nuances of NTEs. Second, a diagram of the characteristics used to define NTEs is presented, with the purpose of advancing the understanding of current usages of the concept. Thus, a second contribution of this article includes a review of the ontological and epistemological assumptions

underpinning the NTE research agenda. Furthermore, the appropriateness of whether to treat NTEs as a typology or as a mere imaginary concept, is explored:

Proposition 1: The concept of NTEs has a fixed, one-dimensional meaning.

The third section employs social anthropologist Edwin Ardener's work on conceptualisation of a population (which this article relates to NTEs) and shall address the credibility of the NTE term performing as a typology:

Proposition 2: NTEs is a separate typology of expatriates.

Fourth, by drawing upon sociologist Richard Jenkins, the article directs attention towards the social categorisation of NTEs, and thus in effect TEs (the relationality between the concepts):

Proposition 3: The non-traditionality of NTEs relates to unconventional aspects rather than signalling a distinct typology; and

Proposition 4: NTEs is a binary concept in relation to Traditional Expatriates (TEs).

In the fifth section, this article interfaces sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work on symbolic power with aforesaid Ardener, which purposefully tackles the power-issue relating to how and why the boundaries of NTEs are being drawn:

Proposition 5: The process of defining NTEs is neutral without implications on research design and policy-advice.

The final section evaluates the implications on research design as well as global staffing and talent recruitment from the perspective of the relationality, moving beyond the sense-making of definitions and descriptions of expatriate groups – and rather aims to extend the NTE research agenda. Finally, managerial implications and contributions will be discussed.

THE RISKS FOR MNES IF FAILING TO UNDERSTAND NTES

Without fully understanding NTEs, how to identify them, and where to locate them, crucial talent for firms may very easily be lost or not adequately sourced as global employers might not know how, or through what channels, to communicate with NTEs in the most effective and meaningful manner (Al Ariss et al. 2014; Anderson 2005; Collings et al. 2007; Forster & Johnsen 1996; Harvey et al. 2001; Schmitt & Soubeyran 2006). Thus, in terms of staffing and sourcing talent, implemented recruitment practices need to be attuned to the dynamics of NTEs and to be targeted to their particular training and development needs. The rapidly increasing numbers of NTEs and their increasingly complex backgrounds combined with the increasingly narrowing field of global talent and brain-drain intensifies the importance of devising company policies to source and engage with NTEs (Deloitte 2010; Ng & Burke 2005; Roberts et al. 1998; Tarique & Schuler 2010; Tung & Lazarova 2006).

Moreover, the complexities and dynamics of NTEs' international assignments will very likely become even more intricate contemplating on the shift of the global economic center of gravity from the conventional trading blocs (the West) to, predominantly, Asia. This outlook includes (new) rapidly emerging markets which will offer further non-trodden commercial geographic areas as well as more unfamiliar business and HRM practices from firms having evolved in new international business landscapes, as expatriation has mostly

been studied from a Western perspective (Cho et al. 2013; Guttormsen 2015; eds Holden et al. 2015; Sparrow 2007).

MNEs are increasingly looking for forms of expatriation which could decrease the risk related to long-term assignments as well as issues associated with high turnover, costs, and family dual-career couples (Anderson & Boocock 2002; Andresen et al. 2013; Birdseye & Hill 1995; Brewster & Scullion 1997; CARTUS 2014; Demel & Mayrhofer 2012; Harvey 1997, 1998; Schuler et al. 2002; Scullion & Starkey 2000; Selmer 2001). With firms' increased focus on expatriate Return of Investment (eROI) (Doherty & Dickman 2012; McNulty & De Cieri 2011; McNulty et al. 2009; McNulty & Tharenou 2004; Naumann 1992); and that expatriates is the most costly employee group within MNEs (Black 1998; Black et al. 1997; Bonache & Ferdandez 1997; Tung 1987), the focus on attracting and retaining NTE talents will only appeal more to international managers – especially considering the importance of knowledge-transfer between an MNEs' subsidiaries and its head-quarter (Yamao et al. 2009).

ADVANCING NTES IN GLOBAL MOBILITY AND EXPATRIATE MANAGEMENT

This section proposes three 'schools of thought' on NTEs. When portraying NTEs in current research, its use is confusing, and the operationalisation of the concept is largely non-existent. Furthermore, it is not clear if scholars are promulgating NTEs as a typology, or rather if the non-traditionality relates to only certain aspects of an NTE.

In terms of the first 'school of thought', McNulty and Hutchings (2014) make an important contribution to the emerging research agenda on NTEs. Their initiative represents what is possibly the first attempt to establish a research agenda regarding NTEs (for additional work, see McNulty 2013). The authors define NTEs to include the traits summarised in Diagram 1. This School arguably features an orientation of 'socio-biological

characterisation' of the individual NTEs. When scrutinising the boundary of such ontological assumption, another revelation emerges; this article suggests that the assumed characterisations appear to be constrained to only three (but overlapping) spheres.

[INSERT DIAGRAM 1 AROUND HERE]

The singling out an individual expatriate's characteristics has led to a wealth of expatriate research during the past four decades concerning TEs. Noticeable examples encompass, for example in regard to relationships between personal characteristics and various antecedent variables (Banai & Reisel 1993; Black 1990; Cerdin & Le Pargneux 2014; Mamman 1995; Peltokorpi & Froese 2014; Selmer 2004; Shen & Jiang 2015); relationships between personal characteristics and adjustment variables/perceptions (Black & Gregersen 1991; Firth et al. 2014; Hays 1971; Kim & Slocum 2008; Koveshnikov et al. 2013; Malek et al. 2015; Mendenhall & Oddou 1985; Miller 1977; Peltokorpi & Froese 2014; Selmer 2006; Selmer & Lauring 2012b; Shaffer et al. 1999); relationships between background factors and various independent/dependent variables (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Kempen et al. Manev & Stevenson 2001); relationships between gender and global assignments (Caligierui & Tung 1999); relationships between HR activities and national culture (Brock et al. 2008) or other organisational phenomena (Gregersen et al. 1996; Reiche 2011); as well as relationships between psychological factors and relocation and work (De Cieri et al. 1991; Selmer & Lauring 2013). In terms of methodology, the sheer volume of published work has been quantitative (for exceptions see Doherty et al. 2012; Olsen & Martins 2009, and for reviews and conceptual work, Dabic et al. 2015; Hechanova et al. 2003; Podsakoff et al. 2007; Takeuchi 2010; Yan et al. 2002).

On the other hand, there is a wide range of approaches to what constitutes TEs by deploying numerous definitions of an 'expatriate' (for some examples, see Cole 2011;

Guttormsen 2012; Harvey et al. 2013; Kostova & Roth 2003; Mayerhofer et al. 2004; Selmer & Lauring 2011; Shaffer 2012; Welch et al. 2001). With the plethora of different and existing definitions of expatriates and their various forms of expatriation, additional terms and concepts can be included as part of this 'school of thought'. For example, mainstream definitions of Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs; those who are "internationally mobile individuals, who have moved through their own agency (rather than through an organizationally-assigned expatriation) to another country for an indeterminable duration" (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry 2013:79)) and skilled migrants ("a well-educated individual who moves from one country to another for work" (Harvey 2014:172, 2009; Al Ariss & Syed 2011; Carr et al. 2005; Cerdin et al. 2014; Harvey & Groutsis 2014)) are not excluded as an SIE might be associated with any of the characteristics in Diagram 1.

The second 'school of thought', which can be termed as having an 'assignment-level' orientation, focuses on non-traditionality in terms of the actual international assignment and not the individual expatriate in isolation (Diagram 2). Grainger and Nankervis (2001), for instance, define non-traditionality as "non-traditional approaches to the staffing of international operations essentially because of the increasing demand for flexible and differential employee conditions". They include HRM techniques but also overlap with the first 'school of thought': "local or international sourcing and outsourcing (Strawn and Nurney, 1995:65*; Reynolds, 1997:118*); shorter-term contracts and "single status" (i.e. expatriates who are unattached, or who are unaccompanied by their partner and families) assignments (Solomon, 1999:38*)."

[INSERT DIAGRAM 2 AROUND HERE]

This article proposes that a third 'school of thought' has a 'cross-over' orientation. Bozionelos et al. (2014) do not operate with the NTE term but features resemblances of NTEs

when referring to *different* forms of traditional expatriation. Consequently, mobility and SIEs and different types of international work are included (Baruch et al. 2013; Selmer & Fenner, 2009; Shaffer et al. 2012), such as perspectives of motives (Doherty et al. 2011). A commonality with other Schools relates to the focus on special needs (Thompson et al. 2013). Collings et al. (2007) refer to non-standard forms of assignments. Similarly, in another recent Call for Paper, Andresen et al. (2014) utilise the term '*alternative* forms of global mobility' (my italicisation), which will also lead to shedding further light on non-traditionality but is nonetheless, overall, constrained in terms of its ontological focus to:

> a) Primacy given to either the firm/organisational-level and the assignment level); and
> b) Characteristics of the individual expatriate or assignment (and thus little focus on lived experiences – for example, Mayerhofer et al. (2004:647) denote flexpatriates for 'frequent flyers of international work').

Thus, the latter call resembles the first and second Schools but also highlights the need for research in other industries. Furthermore, Andresen et al. (2014) also include short-term assignees (Starr 2009; Starr & Curie 2009); frequent fliers/international business travellers (Welch et al. 2007); international business commuters (*PricewaterhouseCoopers*, 2005; Reiche 2013), global virtual teams (Welch et al. 2003); as well as international rotational assignees (Collings & Scullion 2006; Scullion et al. 2007) which are often assumed to be various forms of non-standard assignments (Tahvanainen et al. 2005). This particular school of thought could be merged with either preceding aforesaid schools, which should materialise as a result of demarcating the meanings of the terms and conceptual framework (infusing the third school). This exercise is also important in its own right in terms of identifying the nature of expatriates being studied.

<u>Proposition 1: The Concept of NTEs has a Fixed, One-Dimensional Meaning.</u>

The first proposition cannot be supported, as highlighted by the above analysis of the nascent literature on NTEs. The NTE concept, on the contrary, is fluid (evident in the third school of thought) and multi-dimensional. Derived from the first 'school of thought', as a tacit assumption underlying the purported ontological view, non-traditionality is not only demarcated to the facet of over-emphasising socio-biological characteristics – but also, in fact, constrained to non-work realms only (Diagram 1). Operationalising NTEs are not one-dimensional as non-traditionality needs to traverse the boundary of the non-work spheres. Furthermore, multi-dimensionality is also evident (extending on Diagram 2) in that there is a constant diffusion between the individual expatriate and the level of the international assignment where non-traditionality might operate on a scale between 0-100% conjunctionally in either spheres.

These discoveries beg the question of what other realms of non-traditionality there might be. In Diagram 3, this article depicts the current research agenda concerning NTEs as well as illustrates gaps in the literature on non-traditionality, especially regarding lived experiences of NTEs at the individual level. Enhanced focus on lived experiences is essential if the NTE research agenda wants to achieve an ontological and epistemological focus beyond simple characterisations of NTEs.

[INSERT DIAGRAM 3 AROUND HERE]

IMAGINING THE POPULATION OF NTES: EDWIN ARDENER AND COUNTING

Thus far, this article has established the importance of conceptualising NTEs as a social phenomenon and the important need to operationalise the conceptual framework. This section draws upon seminal work by prominent linguistic anthropologist Edwin Ardener (1989a, 1989b) concerning relationships between language, ethnicity, and population as well as social anthropology and population. Ardener's work is very helpful in evaluating if NTEs can be

considered as a typology – or if not, what the implications would be. This hoists two warning signs: if we are not able to identify who is an NTE – are research projects then investigating the forms of expatriation they have promised to do (Andresen & Biemann 2013)? And secondly, encouragements to quantify NTEs (see McNulty & Hutchings 2014) might be unfeasible and subsequently rendered obsolete.

Ardener demonstrates that even seemingly fixed concepts such as population, geography, and nationality are not as predetermined as we tend to believe (Chapman 1989). Therefore, static relationships between these phenomena cannot be assumed. This ties directly in to the encouragement of quantifying the NTE population (McNulty & Hutchings 2014). Nascent bodies of literature and emerging research fields often become preoccupied with establishing neutral definitions and quantifying the numbers of the subjects which are being investigated. Thus, without a typology, neither scholars nor practitioners would be able to measure the size of a social phenomenon, unless based on a definition. Any research designs needs to be carefully crafted. Guttormsen and Chapman (2013) demonstrate that if relying on definitions from academic discussions (as opposed to those evolving in the minds and actions of those expatriates being investigated), then researchers risk measuring meaningless things.

Ardener expressed this through his longitudinal research on kinship – predominantly through studies of the relationship between marriage and fertility, through demographic and ethnic studies, as well as through linguistic case studies (see Ardener 1962; 1971a,b; see Hocart 1937). It would be commonly expected that the above-mentioned phenomena would be observable and thus easy to quantify, i.e. to determine the size of the population. However, Ardener (1989a) demonstrated that quantified demographic studies have not always been coinciding with statistical analysis. He drew upon his fieldwork in Africa, where the boundaries of post-colonial countries were drawn based on the victories of colonial powers – and not in accordance to dynamic factors such as the aforesaid social phenomena. A revealing

example relates to an African tribe, which counted their *own population* based on those who remain and lived within the enclosure around the tribe's designated living area (see Ardener 1989a; 1989b). As Ardener noted, a definition has implications for the count; if the definitions of the people who are being studied are allotted primacy, then scholars must count and enumerate within those definitions as well (Chapman 1989).

This underscores the importance of focusing on the individual level, as propagated by the first 'school of thought' (McNulty & Hutchings 2014). Similarly, counting Norway's 2.3 million sheep is not as straightforward as laymen might think (without comparing sheep with expatriates!) – but carries substantial implications on governmental policy and income for the agricultural-sector (NOK 1.6bn). A sheep is just not a sheep: depending on if being an "utgangersau" or "vinterforsau" (outside the whole year or only part of the year), subsidies are higher for the latter (Johansen 2014).

Proposition 2: NTEs is a Separate Typology of Expatriates.

The second proposition cannot be supported. As the first proposition revealed, when a fixed boundary cannot be demarcated, we also cannot count them. Taking key lessons from the natural sciences, it becomes imperative to be aware of this especially when sense-making of untrodden social phenomena, as the meaning-attribution to NTEs becomes alive through the way the research field decide to count them. However, any approach is not free from biases, tacit assumptions, or power-bases (Bridgman 1927; Campbell 1920). Thus, problematising the way NTEs have been and continue to be researched is significant in its own right: what constitutes an NTE is also not an exact science, which highlights that it is not particularly fruitful to decide on definitions, as a major gap in the literature (i.e. lived experiences) unfolds and performs as relationality between and across NTEs and TEs, and between individuality and the assignment level. It would be easier to count gender, for example, in relation to the

issue of the ‘glass-ceiling’, herein that only 20% of expatriates seemingly are women (Adler 1984, 1987; Insch et al. 2008). To operate with a typology of NTEs is not internally valid, credible nor plausible from an empirical point of view.

BOUNDARY-MARKERS OF EXPATRIATE CATEGORIES: SOCIOLOGIST RICHARD JENKINS AND SOCIAL CATEGORISATION

This article problematises the identification of NTEs, regardless of being a typology or not, as processes of social categorisation. The latter performs as the vehicle for any classifications and to establish the labelling of a group (Jenkins 2000). Jenkins (2000:7) promulgates that “social identification, involving both similarity and difference, is constituted in a dialectical interplay between internal and external identification”. This social categorisation process signifies an accentuated “us” and “them” which creates a sensation of “same-ness” and uniqueness from others (Jenkins 1997). From this, thus, follows the ability to claim an identity of NTEs. From this detection, to identify NTEs (and their relationship with other categories of expatriates and forms of international assignments) based on fixed meaning and properties of the definition, would limit the understanding of NTEs as a social phenomenon. Such a negative outcome would be a result of failing to spot important and major gaps in the literature due to constraining the ontological lens – as a priori definitions would give primacy to preconceptions rather than the natural and organic unfolding of NTEs’ lived experiences. Guttormsen (2015) demonstrates that such an approach would deny agency to intersubjectivity and interaction amongst expatriates as individuals and their social categorisation (Jenkins 1997), and social construction of ‘reality’ (Berger & Luckman 1964). This cyclic research process is, for example, pivotal to ethnographic research (see Moore 2011), which has been a widely used research approach within the social sciences from the early 20th century (Denzin 1997).

As discussed earlier, how researchers define NTEs is pivotal (Bridgman 1927; Campbell 1920). This labelling is thus also a research philosophical issue due to scope of the definition (reflecting the ontology) also becomes the scope of which knowledge is produced from (epistemology). The decided underpinning of any research design dictates the direction of the research being carried out as with any research endeavour (Crotty 2003). Moreover, not conjoining the intentionality with the intention of the study, would too easily lead to falling short of the requirement highlighted by Sinkovics and colleagues (2008): credibility, trustworthiness, and transparency in (qualitative) research. As elucidated in the preceding section, there is dialectic interplay between the expatriate as an individual and the level of his or her international assignments. Thus, a risk emerges to unjustifiably conflate NTEs with non-traditional assignments. This has important implications on researchers' credible ability to provide policy-advice to international managers and MNEs.

Proposition 3: The Non-Traditionality of NTEs Relates to Unconventional Aspects Rather Than Signalling a Distinct Typology

This article supports the above-mentioned proposition. For example, if assuming that NTEs also means having non-traditional assignments, such ontology would quickly, but counter-productively, lead to overlooking that TEs on a traditional assignment (i.e. white, male, and middle-aged (see Hechanova et al. 2003; Jokinen et al. 2008; McNulty & Hutchings 2014)) – might also feature non-traditionality, for example being a man caring for children with special needs, or being gay. This elucidates the imperative need to also scrutinise the conceptual-boundary markers during social categorisation and how meaning is attributed to the identity of the NTE/TE based on operating with only a sole boundary-marker. In other words, NTEs/TEs identities are composed of multiple boundary-markers – some of them shared,

others are not. As Jenkins (2000) demonstrates, social identification involves both similarities but also differences – between internal and external identification.

Thus, identifying NTEs based on a sole marker is neither credible nor empirically sound. Social categorisation, by individual expatriates themselves, makes upholding a boundary of the definition unsustainable. For example, as Guttormsen (2010, 2009) illustrates in his research on Scandinavian expatriates in Hong Kong – identification is also dependent on context-specific circumstances, which does not necessarily equate to external identifications (see Jenkins 2000):

> I am not exactly with your "average company" (…) it might be interesting for you to learn about a *different type* of "expat" life.

The above interview quote (a Swede working in a non-governmental organisation) reflects a NTE (also on a non-traditional assignment) who is further creating expatriate categories as a distinction to those on the "typical expatriates on lucrative contracts where everything are done for them" (Guttormsen 2010). TEs on traditional assignments (as per conventional definitions in the literature) might not necessarily also feature the boundary-marker of 'lucrative contract' but rather be on a local-contract (see Guttormsen 2010).

This article introduces three new terms in order to incorporate the above: (i) NT-IEs (non-traditionality in terms of the individual expatriate); (ii) NT-IAs (non-traditionality as far as the international assignment is concerned); and (iii) NT-Expatriation (when non-traditionality relates to both the individual expatriates as well as the assignment).

<u>Proposition 4: NTEs is a Binary Concept in Relation to Traditional Expatriates.</u>

Social construction and the diffusing nature of the assignment and individual levels demonstrates that in lived experiences, expatriates are not either/or, and this article

consequently in part rejects the fourth proposition where the assignment and/or organisational/firm levels are inherently given ontological primacy. However, analytically, the fourth proposition cannot be rejected completely. Although McNulty and Hutchings (2014) do not necessarily claim a typology for NTEs, using the term non-traditional unavoidably implies being *different* from the traditional – and regardless of the intentions – the practice of the research field risk (re-)producing delimitations of the social phenomenon (Bridgman 1927; Campbell 1920; Mueller 2004). This, again, reflects the importance of problematisation and scrutinising the operationalisation of conceptual frameworks. The first 'school of thought' is prefaced on such binary – however, this article encourages the research field to rather focus on social categorising and conceptual boundary-markers (as supported by propositions 1-3).

SCRUTINISING ROLE OF 'POWER' WITH ARDENER AND PIERRE BOURDIEU

This section scrutinises the role of power in regard to categorising somebody as an NTE. Elucidating, also, how to distinguish "them" from "us" is also a paramount question of who (and why) somebody or particular strands/dynamics of the research fields have been able to assume and hold the power of doing so. The labelling of expatriate categories poses important implications. Scholars wanting to investigate them as part of a wider expatriate population globally as well as for advising corporate policy on not only managing and sourcing NTEs but also how to retain such potentially unique talent and respond to possibly needs and motivation may be specific to NTEs. One form of a biased power-base could be argued to encompass the ontological primacy of the firm; i.e. that expatriates and their lived experiences are exclusively made sense of, analysed, and impinged with a particular moral perspective – from the view of what would gain the work organisation only.

From a historical perspective, defining NTEs uncovers the question if contemporary challenges in terms of research design and managing NTEs have ensued through history or rather being a product of the present time. Expanding on the intriguing encouragement by Jones and Khanna (2006) to bring history back into IB research, what constitutes non-traditionality today has not always been the case – nor most likely will it sustain infinitely. Non-corporate expatriation remains a 'black-box' in the adjustment literature (Anderson 2005; Bonache et al. 2001; Brewster 2002). Historically, expatriation has in fact occurred predominantly beyond formal organisational boundaries (especially those of contemporary MNEs). Such forms of expatriation encompass, for example, Catholic priests, secular organisations, and cultural minorities serving as a key success factor in creating economic growth in Europe (Landes 1998), as well as many an empire and colonial settlement, early 20th century bohemian American writers and artists residing in Paris (Cohen 1977; Earnest 1968), in addition to travelling traders in the bronze age (Kristiansen & Larsson 2005). More recently, in the 1980s the label of non-traditionality would already be placed on expatriates only because of not being North-Americans (see Boyacigiller 1989; Tung 1987). This would not hold true today, although the research field is heavily dominated by a 'western' perspective (Cho et al. 2013; Dabic et al. 2015).

This discussion also elucidates the non-neutrality in terms of labelling NTEs which also depends on the historic development of academic disciplines. There is a broad literature on expatriates, or more commonly known as professional or high-skilled expatriates/mobile workers in the more long-standing subject-areas/disciplines of Migration Studies, Geography, International Relations, Political Science, and Sociology. In these disciplines, 'corporate expatriates' would in fact reflect non-traditionality as far as their approach to study global mobility and expatriation is concerned (for example, Cohen 1977; Fechter 2007; Harvey

2009; Labrianidis & Vogiatzis 2012; Neumann 2008; *Sussex Centre for Migration Studies* 2009; Walsh 2006).

In terms of the role of power, it is pertinent to query why do we count NTEs in a particular manner, and for whom? Dr Harrison and Dr Boyce (cited in Ardener 1989b:110) succinctly encapsulate this issue:

> "… because there are many factors determining the ways populations are defined … the situation may be much more like a continuum of overlapping categories than a series of clusters" (p. 110).

And further,

> "… however, whilst it is possible to conceptualize populations in these terms, in practical considerations populations are recognised according to some particular component which is of interest. And the major components on which interest focuses are demographic, genetic, social and ecological" (p. 110).

Subsequently, Ardener raises the question of whose interests are accommodated when counting and labelling a population: who possesses the power to decide if a grouping of individual should be consolidated on the basis of names or numbers? And who are naming them and for whom? Consequently, Ardener (1989a) posits that bodies of numerical data do not necessarily warrant a culture-free or neutral (demographic) science. This applies in more areas than expected, and as Ardener (1989b) indicates, it is not only a tribal issue. Engaging with such discourses is a helpful analytical approach in terms of making sense of understanding changing communities with an increasing number of blurry and contradictory "overlapping categories" (see Ardener 1989a).

<u>Proposition 5: The Process of Defining NTEs is Neutral without Implications on Research Design and Policy-Advice.</u>

The fifth proposition cannot be supported: defining NTEs depends on the ontological, disciplinary, theoretical, geographical, and historical outlooks. Whereas Ardener illuminates the importance of appreciating the underlying mechanisms for how interests and power impact the above, Bourdieu's symbolic power (as part of his wider Theory of Practice) is important to substantiate how the structures in narrating NTEs are being sustained and re-produced (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Jenkins 2002). Bourdieu (1991:164) postulates that:

> "Symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it."

The above quotation highlights the substantial importance of problematising the way we research NTEs. What might be non-credible approaches are being re-produced whilst at the same time remaining unquestioned, but becomes the assumed approach through the same research practices (see Bridgman 1927; Campbell 1920; Mueller 2004). The NTE conceptual framework risks being operationalised on a flawed basis, and subsequently, not achieving the important "methodological fit" as far as research design is concerned (Edmondson & McManus 2007:1155). The IHRM discipline has witnessed a similar case – the 'expatriate failure' concept – where high failure rates had not been contested until Harzing's (1995) commendable scholarship which demonstrates the empirically unsoundness for such claims.

Symbolic power is based on possessing symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990) and as evidenced in the analysis in this section, a plausible argument emerges herein that although the dynamics of expatriation is changing to become less Western – mainstream research approaches appear to be very much revolving around Western perspectives. Furthermore, it can also be argued that there exists a somewhat disciplinary isolationism (constrained in this case to general Business and Management studies) in terms of what has become assumed to

constitute mainstream research proper, without considering other key disciplines which have engaged with similar and related constructs.

This also impacts organisational policy work in terms of global staffing and talent management: corporate policies attuned to meeting specific training needs, recruitment, and compensation for the current decade might very well be quickly dated. Comprehending the external environment for IHRM practices can only become even more crucial (see eds. Özbilgin et al. 2014) as an effort of avoiding the 'death-spiral' as part of the 'trap of success' phenomenon (Nadler & Shaw 1995).

IMPLICATIONS: TOWARDS RELATIONAL RESEARCH PRAXIS

A commonality between emerging research agendas is the problematic grappling with sorting out the conceptual vocabulary, in particular the defining of existing and new key terms and concepts (for examples from another fields, see Carroll & Shabana 2010 for corporate social responsibility emerging in the 1970s; and Modelsksi 1972 concerning globalisation). What ensued was a (re)conceptualisation of the social phenomenon and further focus on alternative perspectives, implications, and scrutiny of knowledge-production per se. Furthermore, aligned with the thrust of the present article's main argument, dwelling with demarcating definitional understanding of NTEs are both empirically unsound and not particularly purposeful or meaningful. Based on the identified dynamics of NTEs, this article directs the attention towards an explanatory-frame – argued to be empirically sound and relevant for the nature of the NTE social phenomenon (and expatriation in general).

This article proposes to circumvent the problem of defining NTEs by rather conceptualising non-traditionality as relational in accordance to relational sociology (relationality), i.e. to consider the social world as "dynamic unfolding relations" as opposed to "consisting primarily in substances or in processes, in static things" (Emirbayer 1997:281).

Such theoretical posture offers a ‘conceptual map’ rather than a tool-box of definitions. Although a full treatment of Bourdieu’s (1977) vast and complex Theory of Practice is beyond the scope of this article, to introduce the idea of ‘field’ – albeit in an isolation manner – can nevertheless be constructive for understanding NTEs in more depth. Bourdieu has, however, been drawn upon in expatriate management and global management literatures before. Al Ariss and Syed (2011) deploy Bourdieu’s forms of capital in order to analyse capital mobilisation of skilled-migrants and SIEs – but largely disconnected with relationality underlying Bourdieu’s broader Theory of Practice.

Bourdieu explained ‘field’ as a ‘social space’ with an embodied spatial element and its own logic shaping action. There are multiple fields, and Bourdieu emphasised that “to think in terms of field is to think relationally” (Wacquant 1989:50), which is “recognising the centrality of social relations to social analysis” (Jenkins 2002:84).

Thinking relationally, where social relations are assumed to be the core of social analysis, changes the focus from definitional properties to NTEs’ (and expatriates in general) practices and thus critiques methodological individualism. Contemplating on the call from McNulty and Hutchings (2014) to improve focus on expatriates’ lived experiences – deploying the concept of ‘field’ is timely: it links the expatriate literature to the ‘practice turn’ in contemporary social theory, which also can be linked to Bourdieu (see Reckwitz 2002; Whittington 2006). First, in all its simplicity, the ontological focus becomes more focused on what NTEs do rather than what they are. Second, deeper and more nuanced understanding of NTEs can be achieved through thinking relationally due to the structures and stakes of the field(s) in addition to context which become unavoidable to leave out in the equation (aka social analysis). Take the example of the Swedish expatriate mentioned earlier working in an NGO; her sensemaking of the surrounding social reality as far as different, socially

constructed expatriate categories are concerned – was heavily dependent on the Hong Kong socio-cultural context and perceptions of other expatriates and their types of assignments.

Third, as the different forms of expatriation are only formed in relation to other groupings, relationality, thus, positively forces researchers in their analysis to avoid engaging in isolationist and compartmentalised thinking; if investigating NTEs, the nature of TEs is part of the narrative and must be engaged with in order to comprehend the former as they are mutually and constitutively linked (see Bourdieu 1984). This stance has support from the analysis of propositions 2 and 4. Fourth, regardless of conducting scholarly research or consultancy for an MNE, the output is likely to be more relevant for practitioners as well as empirically sound as it would reflect the lived experiences in natural, context-specific settings. For instance, key issues such as identifying the role of non-traditionality in relation to failed international assignments is difficult to capture if relying on the dominant first 'school of thought; (socio-biological traits). Fifth, analysis founded in relational fields gives primacy to the individual expatriate level and better elucidates the relationship and interplay between the expatriate and the assignment as far as non-traditionality is concerned.

Sixth, the focus on social relations is not only helpful in terms of circumventing hurdles in defining and typologising any expatriation grouping, but can also cast a fresh lens on other expatriate and IHRM phenomena which may offer deepened understanding. For example, the standard approach to typologise expatriates according to those who are expatriated by their organisations versus those taking the initiative themselves (SIEs), do not reflect particularly well that there are also expatriates being the initiator – but *within* an organisation. Furthermore, thinking relationally in the area of expatriate failure has shown to be very fruitful in terms of identifying unconventional failure and success factors – between individuality and the firm level, and traversing the work and non-work spheres (Guttormsen & Chapman 2012).

Seventh, deploying a Bourdieusian ‘field’ also assists with scrutinising expatriates’ lived experiences across typologies as well as traversing different aspects of everyday and work-life. For example, Guttormsen (2010) demonstrates the importance of building understanding and theory “bottom-up” granting primacy to field-research and expatriates own social construction of realities – by introducing the term ‘combi-expatriates’. This term, based on research on Scandinavian expatriates in Hong Kong (often small and medium-sized enterprises) reflects that traditional long-term expatriates (both SIEs and those assigned by their organisation) are also better understood in the ‘field’ as a combination of non-traditional and short-term assignments, or ‘international business traveller’ (Welch et al. 2007) as smaller companies often expatriate employees in the conventional manner, but also being used as a satellite office serving a larger geographical region as part of their long-term assignments. In other words, expatriates should be analysed on the basis of fields of traditionality and of non-traditionality.

The above discussion has implications on research design. This article has demonstrated the empirically unsoundness and limitations associated with typologising expatriate categories, and when not studying expatriates’ lived experiences in this fashion. This article proposes that approaches based on categorisations should be devised in a way which investigates NTEs in relation to other groupings of expatriates and contexts. A Unit of Analysis (UoA), thus, does not need to be expatriates but could also include their narratives and lived experiences. Moreover, the Unit of Observation (i.e. the context in which the UoA is studied within) (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005:71) should particularly be carefully crafted and incorporated in research endeavours as the surroundings and relationality elucidate important part of the tales of NTEs. If removing British colonial history, only a very small part of India’s story on building democracy could be told and properly understood (see Kohli 2001). Similarly, if discounting Bourdieu’s hierarchy of fields, such as ‘field’ of poverty and the

higher ‘power-field of politics’ as a means to appreciate domestic issues in Somalia – the analysis of maritime security and piracy would be very limited (Shortland & Varese 2014).

CONCLUSION: CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This article has scrutinised NTEs from the individual level in the Expatriate Management and Global Mobility literatures. Two major risks concerning the lack of an operationalised conceptual framework has been identified; are scholars studying what is claimed to be scrutinised – and if this remains unsolved – this will likely result in flawed research designs and thus less credible theoretical contributions and policy-advice which is produced for international managers when it comes to global staffing and talent management.

The proposed substantive contributions of this paper relate to reviewing and consolidating the extant NTE literature; scrutinising the short-comings with the current operationalised conceptual framework concerning NTEs; illustrating the relevance of a relational approach to investigate NTEs; and introducing the STOEC analytical “thinking-tool”.

The current operationalisation of the NTE concept as a Bourdieusian field and thinking relationally are also helpful for practitioners and management consultants, particularly in regard to better understanding the specific needs of NTEs (and expatriates) during global staffing and talent recruitment. A set of carefully crafted policies in the area are likely not to capture the holistic experiences of the expatriate but which needs to be understood in depth in order to recruit, retain, and motivate talent. It can become costly for an MNE if failing to appreciate aspects of non-traditionality even if having assigned the employers themselves. Thinking in terms of fields also reminds us about expatriates in non-private sector organisations. Does it remain fair to consider corporate expatriate in non-conflict areas as having ‘hardship’ when ten thousands of expatriates are working in refugees

camps in war-zones and escorted by armed security guards everywhere they go, or where natural disasters have made cities unrecognisable as witnessed in Nepal? Furthermore, appreciating the 'stakes' in each field and how these fields influence each other, can also unveil important understanding of NTEs' lived experiences, their behaviour, motivations, and intentions in both in international work-life and beyond.

This article introduced the analytical "thinking tool" of STOEC (*Social Theory + Operationalisation = Ontological and Epistemological grounded Conceptual framework*) in order to examine the five propositions derived from the posited research question: is it credible to operate with the NTE term as an expatriation typology, and how are the boundaries of NTEs drawn? Proposition 1 was rejected because there are several definitions of the NTE concept and thus fluid across three 'school of thoughts'. NTEs are also multi-dimensional, in terms of non-traditionality can exist across different work and non-work spheres and depending on being located at the individual level or at the assignment level. Proposition 2 was also rejected due to the implausibility of typologising NTEs as a distinct expatriation category. Therefore, it becomes difficult to count the numbers of NTEs as those individuals are not necessarily only associated with non-traditional characteristics.

This article finds support for Proposition 3. Although, non-traditionality cannot be treated as a fixed category, it would be plausible to propose that there are *aspects* of non-traditionality in play. For example, an individual expatriate might be associated with non-traditional elements relating to their personal backgrounds and/or the nature of their assignment. For this reason, Proposition 4 can only partially be supported: the present construction of meaning linked to NTEs is essentially prefaced on the concept being binary (either/or non-traditional – or not). However, as this notion constraints relationality, this article does not encourage this practice. Proposition 5 is rejected because power and the disciplinary, theoretical, and historical context evidently influence the ways NTEs are

conceptualised. Thus, the nature of the conceptual operationalisation is highly likely to change with time.

In concert, the above discoveries leads to the proposal of operationalising the conceptual framework beyond merely grappling with definitions (and their boundaries) and moving towards a Bourdieusian relational 'field' (to think relationally) as a much more credible, internally valid, and empirically sound approach to unpack NTEs' lived experiences. This article provides a substantive contribution in terms of devising an operationalised conceptual framework of NTEs in the broader IHRM literature. To move the operationalisation of the NTE conceptual framework towards Bourdieu's relational field is facilitated by the STOEC analytical tool. The following innovation is encouraged to become integral to the NTE research field.

Relationality can positively lead to a stronger ontological and epistemological focus on NTEs' lived experiences. As discovered in the literature review, the research field is dominated by understanding NTEs based on socio-biological traits and testing relationships with other variables. As demonstrated when scrutinising propositions 2-4, to think relationality also lead to the discoveries of the dynamics of non-traditionality. Current practices of the conceptualisation of the NTE social phenomenon is not empirically sound, and this was unveiled by interrogating the ontological and epistemological foundation of such practices. Bourdieu's field can provide further nuanced understanding of NTE's lived experiences as what the 'stake' is in which field (and the position in the hierarchy of that field) serves as an additional context-specific explanatory source. This relevance also extends to expatriation in general: it reflects a critical stance against the over-emphasis on personal traits. Not as a replacement of current school of thoughts, but as an important compliment to analytical approaches in the research field – including the strong encouragement of redirecting the focus towards tacit, underlying assumptions in research practices.

The above-mentioned mechanisms are not unique for NTEs. Consequently, the STOEC approach can be deployed to scrutinise tacit assumptions of any IHRM and expatriate concepts and social phenomena. The introduction of the STOEC analytical approach also serves as a methodological contribution where 'theory as method' plays a key role in understanding a social phenomenon (NTEs) in more depth and prescribes and unpacks how such scrutiny can be applied.

Future Research Directions

Finally, based on identified major gaps in the literature and proposed contributions, this article proposes three key avenues for future research directions. First, in terms of empirical endeavours, more focus on NTEs' lived experiences as a focal point would complement the extant literature. Important narratives from those actually experiencing being an NTE will further broaden the body of literature beyond the overly focus on socio-biological traits and quantitatively testing of hypotheses. Thus, there is a lot of scope to examine the role of and how non-traditionality interface with other expatriate and IHRM aspects. This constitutes a 'game-changer' as far as the NTE research agenda is concerned (but also expatriation as a whole). Practitioners who are devising policies for sourcing and managing talent and expatriates would particularly appreciate accumulating how NTEs are experiencing their international assignments. Such knowledge would substantially contribute towards implementing necessary context and industry specific training and HRM activities relating to cross-cultural adjustment challenges as well as success and failure factors during international assignments and repatriation. Understanding the motivation for expatriation for NTEs could be enhanced by using the typology of Cerdin et al. (2014). Specifically, to comprehend how non-traditionality unfolds in NTEs' lives can greatly help MNEs to appreciate NTEs' specific motivation, training, and adjustment needs during what might be considered a traditional

assignment. To focus especially on NTEs has a lot of potential due to the TE literature has for most part treated expatriates as a homogenous group (Andresen et al. 2015).

Furthermore, there are vast opportunities for contributing to the NTE literature by illuminating case studies of countries and regions less focused upon, for example Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South-America – including between these countries – due to expatriates has predominantly been researched from a Western perspective (Cho et al. 2013). This point also applies to non-corporate sectors such as charities, non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations, and higher education institutions. These types of organisations are often working alongside the private sector, and often employ a high number of non-corporate expatriates such as diplomats, bureaucrats, emergency relief workers, and in the military realm. Knowledge-sharing between the academe and practitioners could be further improved as a result of interrogating actual HRM practices in relation to expatriates. To investigate NTEs/non-traditionality in relation to local employees would be particular fruitful as such enterprise is lacking in the expatriation literature as a whole (see Caprar 2011).

A second direction of future research relates to the methodological realm. The STOEC analytical tool (also when using a different set of theories and theorists than in this article) could be used as a vehicle into a subject-area's research practices themselves. Researchers should engage with examining knowledge-production when devising new research designs (reflexive deliberations) (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). The STOEC interrogations into ontological and epistemological tacit assumptions can explore if the NTE research field contains limitations and obstacles for relevant knowledge accumulation for practitioners as a result of non-credible operationalisation of research designs and conceptual frameworks. In order to more effectively capture context-specific, lived experiences, more use of narrative, action research, and various forms of ethnographies would be fruitful, as meaning-production

and knowledge about social reality is produced, and re-produced, between the individuals and their social interaction with their world (Berger & Luckman 1966). Bourdieu's forms of capital could be used as an analytical lens on NTEs/non-traditionality, which currently has only been exposed to high-skilled migrants and SIE typologies (Al Ariss & Syed 2011).

Third, further transdisciplinary and relational research can be achieved through deploying the full range of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977). An additional entry point into the 'theory as method' sphere entails conceptual boundary-markers integral to identity-formation as a means to deepen the understanding of NTEs' challenges during intercultural interaction (Guttormsen 2015). This profitable path also directs focus towards lived experiences in NTEs' natural geographical and socio-cultural settings. Transdisciplinary research can also be increased by including other sociological and social anthropological theories and concepts as part of the STOEC analytical "thinking-tool". Such efforts could also be enhanced by situating the research question within additional global/macro trends, such as migration patterns, cultural globalisation, changes in legal frameworks, and fluid global identities. Lastly, the wider social scientific theoretical landscape has yet to fully explore the relationality between aforesaid boundary-markers as well as between Bourdieu's "thinking-tools" integral to this Theory of Practice. Because of this, NTE research in this area has thus a strong potential to contribute to substantive developments also beyond Business and Management studies (see Swartz 2008).

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Diagram 1 (first 'school of thought': 'socio-biological' orientation)

Relationship/Familial relations-sphere

-Reversal marriages / partnerships (female expatriates) with a male 'trailing spouse'.
-Female expatriates generating the primary income.
-Expatriate couples cohabitating outside of legal marriage (with or without accompanying children).
-Expatriate families adopting foreign children in the host-country during an assignment.
-Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender expatriate partnerships, with or without children.
-Single expatriates unaccompanied by a partner or children, including split families where an assignee's immediate family members remain in the home country or prior location.

Relationship with children-sphere

-Blended expatriate families with step-children from prior relationships subject to custodial arrangements and not sharing the same family name.
-Single parents with or without international custody arrangements.
-Expatriates with special needs children.

Generation and age-sphere

-'Empty-nesters', or semi-retired expatriates over the age of 60.
-Expatriates with multigenerational responsibilities.
-Accompanied on assignment by elderly parents or other family members.

Diagram 2 (second 'school of thought': international assignment level)

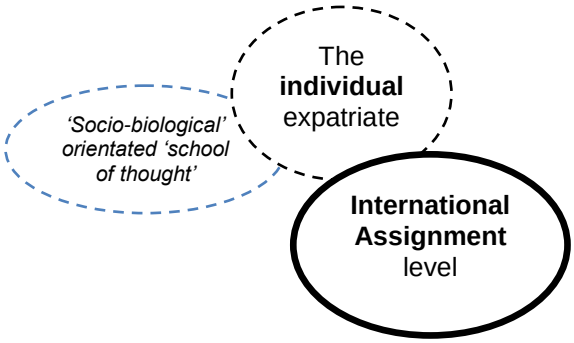
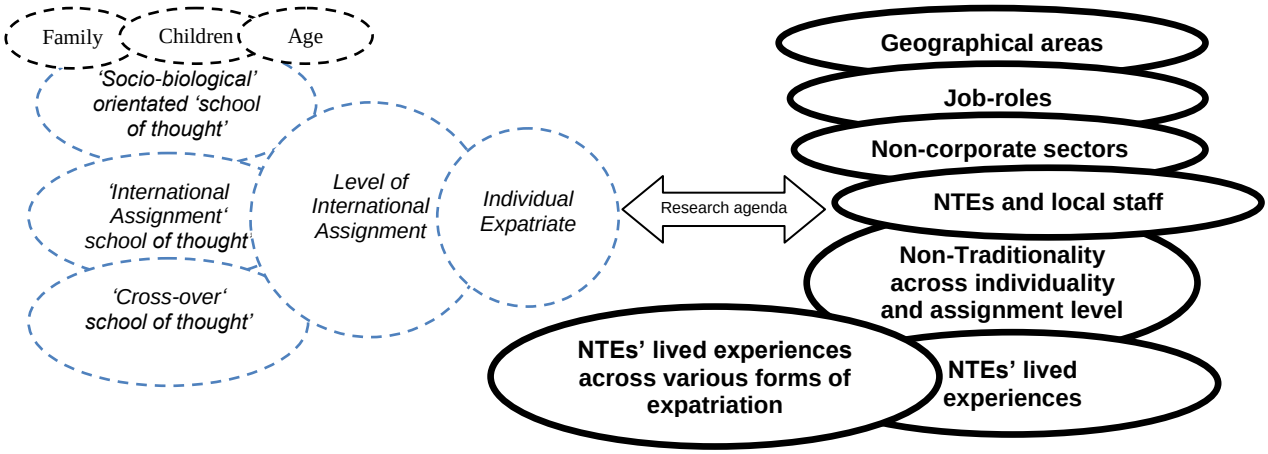


Diagram 3 Research gaps relating to NTEs



The circles to the left of the arrow ('research agenda') depict the proposed three 'school of thoughts' in the extant NTE research literature. The circles to the right in bold signals gaps in the aforesaid literature.