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Guttormsen, D. S. A. (2018). Does the 'non- traditional expatriate' exist? A critical exploration of new expatriation categories. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 34(3), 233-244 Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2018.05.004>

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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. This article advances the conceptualisation of NTEs, due to the nascent research field is lacking construct clarity in terms of the meaning of the term as well as an operationalised conceptual framework. Five underlying assumptions in the scarce extant literature are identified and discussed, as a means to responding to the following research questions: (i) how credible is the NTE term as an expatriation typology?; and (ii) how can the conceptual framework of NTEs be operationalised? If these key issues remain unsolved, there is a risk of establishing flawed research design which can negatively affect researchers’ credibility when providing policy advice on global staffing and talent management to international managers and Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). This conceptual article draws upon key social anthropological and sociological theories, and proposes a relational research design for investigating NTEs, as well as propositions for future research.

Keywords: category; concept; Non-Traditional Expatriate; operationalise; social theory; relationality.

1. Introduction

As a social phenomenon, Non-Traditional Expatriates (henceforth, NTEs) began attracting scholarly interest as a new ‘black-box’ in Expatriate Management and Global Mobility literatures – and within the International Human Resource Management (IHRM) discipline more broadly – as recently as mid-2010s (e.g., Kang et al., 2017; McNulty, 2015, 2013; McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). There are several reasons why achieving a better understanding of NTEs are increasingly important for Multinational Enterprises (MNEs), international managers and other international work organisations. 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 arguably with a record-high number of NTEs. Thus, NTEs are also increasing in the global talent pool. Consequently, MNEs might lose out on sourcing crucial talent if overlooking NTEs in the job-market, possibly as a result of global employers not knowing how, or through what channels, to communicate with NTEs in the most effective and meaningful manner. Additionally, there is also the risk of mismanaging NTEs already hired if not appreciating their particular training and development needs (Al Ariss et al., 2014; Anderson, 2005; Collings et al., 2007; Forster & Johnsen, 1996; Harvey et al., 2001; Schmitt & Soubeyran, 2006). Thus, employers need to plan for costings and compensation accordingly (*AIRINC*, 2014; *Brookfield Global Relocation Services*, 2014; *IMD World Talent Report*, 2014). The competition for NTEs is likely to intensify in the increasingly narrowing field of global talent and brain-drain (Deloitte, 2010; Ng & Burke, 2005; Roberts et al., 1998; Tarique & Schuler, 2010; Tung & Lazarova, 2006) – especially considering the importance of knowledge-transfer between an MNE’s subsidiaries and its head-quarter (Yamao et al., 2009) and firms’ increased focus on expatriate Return of Investment (eROI) (Doherty & Dickman, 2012; McNulty & De Cieri, 2011b; McNulty et al., 2009; McNulty & Tharenou, 2004).

Research to date on NTEs as an expatriation category has been very limited (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016), as with typologisation and classification of expatriates in academic research (Andresen & Biemann, 2013). There is neither a universally accepted definition of NTEs nor has a conceptual framework pertinent to NTEs been devised. NTEs have been defined as:

‘special’ circumstances that standard global mobility policies typically do not address. They differ from traditional expatriates in terms of their family composition (step, single-parent, split, overseas adoption, multigenerational) and family challenges (special needs or gifted children). They also differ in relation to family status (single expatriates, accompanying family members besides children), sexual orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) and gender (female breadwinners with male trailing spouses, single female expatriates) (McNulty, 2015a).

This article demonstrates how current underlying assumptions of boundary condition in defining NTEs have led to conceptual confusion and definitional ambiguity as a result of poor construct clarity (see McNulty & Brewster, 2017). Although recent attempts to achieve more construct clarity has advanced this debate, most attempts in extant literatures to advance conceptualisation on expatriate categories have been limited to proposing new or modified definitions/constructs through altering the boundary condition(s) (e.g., McNulty & Brewster, 2017). The present article, however, draws upon on social anthropological and sociological theories regarding categorisation, to propose a novel conceptualisation of NTEs. This is achieved, in particular, by consulting Bourdieu’s notion of ‘field’ and relationality (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The overt focus on definitions, has led to that the assumptions *underlying* the meanings attributed to boundary conditions have not been contested before.

One of these assumptions relate to that conceptualisation of NTEs takes form as a binary, i.e., categorised as either an NTE or a Traditional Expatriate (TE). NTEs became what the IHRM research field perceived TEs *not* to be (e.g., Andresen et al., 2014; Bozionelos et al., 2014; Clark & Altman, 2016; Fischlmayr & Puchmüller, 2016; McNulty & Hutchings, 2016,

2015a, 2014a; McNulty, 2015a, 2015b, 2014, 2013; McPhail & McNulty, 2015; McPhail et al., 2016; Paisley & Tayar, 2016).

In terms of categorisation, NTEs have been assumed to include short-term assignees (Shaffer et al., 2012); flexpatriates (Suutari et al., 2013); frequent fliers/international business travellers (Welch et al., 2007), which is similar to international business commuters (*PricewaterhouseCoopers*, 2005; Reiche, 2013); global virtual teams (Welch et al., 2003); and international rotational assignees (Collings & Scullion, 2006; Scullion et al., 2007). NTEs are also associated with various forms of non-standard assignments, such as being relocated for shorter than a year (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). According to McNulty and Hutchings (2016), previous research has heavily focused on investigating TEs, who typically have been “senior managers, Western, males in their late 40s or early 50s, with an accompanying female spouse and children” (p. 699) and being white and expatriated by corporate organisations (Björkman & Gertsen, 1993; Hechanova et al., 2003; Selmer & Lauring, 2012a; Vaiman & Haslberger, 2013; Hippler, 2009; Peltokorpi, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Nonetheless, they share the claim that NTEs constitute a new expatriate category. Symptomatically, NTEs’ lived experiences as individuals has especially been diminutively explored (McNulty & De Cieri, 2014a, 2014b). Following from the lack of a universal NTE definition, there is also a void of a clear conceptual framework and an operationalising approach of the latter. This is an important oversight because of the overly focus on characterisations, socio-biological traits and the labelling of NTEs in the nascent literature.

However, construct clarity has surfaced as a key contemporary debate in broader IHRM research field (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). In a symposium during the 2017 European

Academy of Management (EURAM) annual conference (McNulty et al., 2017), panellist David Lepak, Editor in Chief of International Journal of Human Resource Management rightfully uttered that "... to advance any field of research, we have to agree on what we are talking about, otherwise we are just talking past each other". Similarly, Mila Lazarova highlighted that usage of definitions and frameworks are "sloppy" and that new expatriation categories are done as a contrast to other and therefore definitions matter and need to be explored. From this conundrum, the following research questions emerge:

- (1) how credible is the NTE term as an expatriation typology; and
- (2) how can the conceptual framework of NTEs be operationalised.

The organisation of this article is as follows. First, the importance of establishing a credible conceptual framework based on concept clarity is outlined. Second, NTEs in extant Global Mobility and Expatriate Management literatures are positioned. Third, theoretical advancements in Social Anthropology and Sociology will be deployed as a critique regarding the underlying assumptions of said concept. The fourth section elucidates five limitations associated with current perspectives on NTEs. Contesting the underlying assumptions of categorisation is particularly fruitful when devising a conceptual framework as they scrutinise why certain boundary conditions have been chosen. This type of approach was the foundation of Shenkar's (2010) successful dismantling of the widely used 'cultural distance' construct. Finally, implications on research design as well as global staffing and talent recruitment shall be evaluated by proposing a framework of relationality to grapple with non-traditionality. This approach moves beyond adding new definitions which inevitably does not escape the issue of boundary conditions (see McNulty & Brewster, 2017). Managerial implications and proposed contributions will also be proposed.

2. Advancing NTEs in the Global Mobility and Expatriate Management literatures

This section highlights three emerging perspectives to study NTEs from the very scarce studies scattered across different subject-fields in extant literatures. Due to aforesaid limited research on NTEs, it makes sense to also include Call for Papers (CfP); this because CfP portrays underlying assumptions when it categorises and defines NTEs and, thus, indeed performs the function of materialising how a fuzzy phenomenon should be studied (Bridgman, 1927; Campbell, 1920). Therefore, time is at essence to offer a conceptual critique, before this materialising of the NTE research field becomes a meta-narrative and, thus, dictating the nature of the research in the area regardless of already highlighted risks. When portraying NTEs in current research, its conceptual use is confusing and contradictory, and the operationalisation of the concept is largely non-existent. Construct clarity is needed. 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.

3.1 Emerging perspective 1: 'socio-biological characterisation'

In terms of the first emerging perspective, McNulty and Hutchings (2016, 2014a) made an important contribution to the nascent 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 following types of arrangements (noting that this may not be an exhaustive list)” (summarised in diagram 1, below). In a similar vein, McNulty (2015a) provided the following definition of NTEs: those with “‘special’ circumstances that standard global mobility policies typically do not address”. This approach arguably features an orientation of ‘socio-biological characterisation’ of the individual NTE, including Clark and Altman (2016),

Fischlmayr and Puchmüller (2016), McNulty (2015a, 2015b, 2014), McPhail & McNulty (2015), McPhail et al. (2016), Paisley and Tayar (2016), which collectively address – but limited to – women, marriage and sexual orientation aspects. When scrutinising the boundary condition of such ontological assumption, another revelation emerges; that the assumed characterisations of an NTE appear to be constrained to only three (but overlapping) spheres (see diagram 1).

[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 & Luring, 2012b; Shaffer et al., 1999); relationships between background factors and various independent/dependent variables (Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Kempen et al., 2015; 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 & Luring, 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, see 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; Harvey et al., 2013; Kostova & Roth, 2003; Mayerhofer et al., 2004; Selmer & Luring, 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 approach to research NTEs. 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 organisationally-assigned expatriation) to another country for an indeterminable duration” (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013, p. 79)), and skilled migrants (“a well-educated individual who moves from one country to another for work” (Harvey, 2014, p. 172, 2009; see 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.

3.2 Emerging perspective 2: ‘assignment-level orientation’

The second emerging perspective to investigating NTEs can be termed as having an ‘assignment-level’ orientation. This 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 emerging perspective: “local or international sourcing and

outsourcing (Strawn & Nurney, 1995, p. 65*; Reynolds, 1997, p. 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, p. 38*).“

[INSERT DIAGRAM 2 AROUND HERE]

3.3 Emerging perspective 3: ‘cross-over orientation’

The third emerging perspective features a ‘cross-over’ orientation. Bozionelos and colleagues (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 emerging approaches 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 CfP, 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 arguably, 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, p. 647) denote flexpatriates for ‘frequent flyers of international work’).

The latter Call resembles the first and second emerging perspectives but also highlights the need for research on NTEs operating in other industries. Furthermore, Andresen and colleagues (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).

3. Discussion: exploring five underlying assumptions in defining NTEs – a social categorisation perspective

This section discusses why underlying definitions in current categorisations of NTEs as a social phenomenon leads to concept confusion and, thus, a less credible foundation to operationalise a conceptual framework of NTEs. Categorisation unavoidably includes establishing a boundary condition, where the boundary signifies what is deemed to warrant being labelled a NTE (i.e., inside of the boundary) and by default, what are to be excluded (i.e., outside the boundary). Therefore, drawing upon categorisation work from Social Anthropology and Sociology – through Edwin Ardener, Richard Jenkins and Pierre Bourdieu – becomes highly pertinent and fruitful for scrutinising underlying assumptions for boundary conditions (first research question) – beyond solely focusing on if being relevant to create a new typology. The identification of aforesaid assumptions functions as an unsolved issue regarding current boundary conditions and, thus, needs to be problematised. Furthermore, the above-mentioned theorists unlocks an alternative and novel approach to operationalisation of a NTE conceptual framework (second research question).

3.1 Assumption 1: the concept of NTEs has a fixed, one-dimensional meaning

As earlier identified, emerging perspectives regarding conceptualising NTEs largely assumes they can be categorised as having a fixed and one-dimensional meaning. This article does not support an assumption underlying the boundary conditions of such purported ontological view. On the contrary, it argues that the NTE concept is fluid (evident in the third emerging perspective) and multi-dimensional. Fluidity is evident as non-traditionality cannot neither solely be demarcated to the facet of socio-biological characteristics nor to be constrained to the non-work category (diagram 1). Operationalising NTEs are not one-dimensional as non-traditionality needs to traverse the boundary into non-work spheres.

Contemplating on NTEs as a social phenomenon, it would be illogical to assume that an individual confines his or her lived experiences only to the work-sphere. Thus, it becomes unreliable to research NTEs assuming they are. 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. Consequently, categorising an NTE, as in extant literature, equating an NTE to the international assignment also becomes unreliable. If the research field continues using boundary conditions in this way, a research design by default would also equate a human being (expatriate) to the assignment (a work task). That would be beyond comparing apples with pears. Additionally, it would assume that equal amount of non-traditionality had to be associated with either realm. Even within extant literatures, this illogicality is present. For example, a 50 year-old might conduct a non-traditional assignment; however, that does not change his socio-biological characteristics of being an TE as per extant definitions and categorisations.

These discoveries beg the question of what other realms of non-traditionality there might be, in addition to the nascent assumption in extant literature. This article purports that an enhanced focus on lived experiences (see McNulty & De Cieri, 2014a) is essential if the NTE research agenda wants to achieve an ontological and epistemological focus beyond simple characterisations of NTEs. Therefore, the following propositions can be recommended.

Proposition 1: Expatriates' experienced non-traditionality transpires both at work and outside work as well as in other realms.

Proposition 2: Non-traditionality differ between the individual expatriate's socio-biological profile and the nature of his/her international assignment.

Thus far, this article has established the importance of categorising NTEs founded on being a social phenomenon (as a lived experience) and the importance of operationalising the conceptual framework based on a credible boundary condition. However, as analytically demonstrated above, when the meaning of the NTE concept cannot be categorised, it becomes crucial to assess if NTEs can, indeed, be devised as a typology or not. Extant literature is yet to problematise this issue for NTEs and is currently assuming such a categorisation is possible, enabled through its own boundary condition where NTE is upheld as a distinct group.

This inquiry into typologisation draws upon seminal work by 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. With this revelation, two warning signs are hoisted: if we are not able to identify who represents an NTE – there is a danger that research projects might investigate a form of

expatriation that is perhaps different from the one they promised to examine (Andresen & Biemann, 2013); and that encouragements to quantify NTEs might be unfeasible and subsequently rendered obsolete (see McNulty & Hutchings, 2014).

Ardener demonstrated that even seemingly fixed concepts such as population, geography and nationality, are not as predetermined as we tend to believe (Ardener, 1989a, 1989b; Chapman, 1989). Therefore, static relationships between these phenomena cannot be assumed. This ties directly in to the encouragement of quantifying the NTE population (see McNulty & Hutchings, 2014). Nascent bodies of literature and emerging research fields often become preoccupied with finding supposedly 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. However, researchers risk measuring meaningless things if relying on definitions from academic discussion, as opposed to those evolving in the minds and actions of the expatriates being investigated.

Ardener expressed this through his longitudinal research on kinship – predominantly in his extensive fieldwork on the relationships between marriage and fertility; demographic and ethnic studies; in addition to numerous linguistic case studies (Ardener, 1971a, 1971b, 1962). 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 are also at times in conflict with statistical analysis. A revealing example relates to how an African tribe counted their *own population* based on those who lived within the enclosure of the tribe's designated living area (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 emerging perspective to study NTEs. Similarly, if someone was to count Norway's 2.3 million sheep, it is not as straightforward as laymen might think (without comparing sheep with expatriates!) – but carries substantial implications on governmental policy and income for the Norwegian NOK 1.6bn agricultural-sector. 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). Any categorisation which does not generate typologies also means that the boundary condition does not suffice to establish mutual exhaustive membership of said category – and it has been seen that NTEs do not have a fixed and one-dimensional meaning. The following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 3: The size of the NTE population is not possible calculate.

3.2 Assumption 2: NTEs signify a separate typology of expatriates relevant for conceptualisation

Taking key lessons from the natural sciences, it becomes imperative to be aware of the above, especially when sense-making of untrodden social phenomena, as the meaning-attribution to NTEs becomes alive through the ways in which the research field decides to count them. However, any approach is not free from biases, tacit assumptions or power-bases (Bridgman, 1927; Campbell, 1920). Thus, problematising the ways NTEs have been, and continue to be researched, is significant in its own right. It has been shown that what constitutes an NTE is also not an exact science, which highlights that it is not particularly

fruitful to devise conceptual frameworks based on definitions as the key driver. Any typologisation leads to excluding some forms of expatriation which otherwise might be relevant and/or deemed by somebody to in fact warrant being labelled as an NTE. On the flip-side of the coin, there are also uncertainties in how to define TEs. The latter makes any effort of defining NTEs empirically unsound due to the latter is relational to what constitute TEs in existing literatures. In comparison, it would be easier to count the sex of expatriates, for example, in relation to the issue of the 'glass-ceiling', herein that only 20% of expatriates seemingly are women (Adler 1987, 1984; Insch et al., 2008). It can be argued that to operate with a typology of NTEs is not internally valid, credible nor plausible from an empirical point of view. The following proposition can be developed:

Proposition 4: TEs and NTEs cannot be divided into two separate populations.

This article problematises the identification of NTEs in terms of categorisation processes. Thus, the performativity of boundary-markers (aka boundary-condition) of expatriate categories needs to be highlighted. The latter performs as the vehicle for any classifications and to establish the identity-labelling of a group (Jenkins, 2000). Jenkins (2000) promulgates that “social identification, involving both similarity and difference, is constituted in a dialectical interplay between internal and external identification” (p. 7). 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 detection, to claim an identity for 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 is found to be a result of failing to spot important and major gaps in the literature due to

constraining the ontological lens, as apriori 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, individuals' social categorisation (Jenkins, 1997), and social construction of 'reality' (Berger & Luckman, 1964).

As already discussed, how researchers define NTEs is pivotal (Bridgman, 1927; Campbell, 1920). This labelling is, therefore, also a research philosophical issue due to the scope of the definition (reflecting the ontology) also becomes the scope from what knowledge is produced (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 the international assignments. Thus, a risk emerges to unjustifiably conflate NTEs with non-traditional assignments. This has important implications on researchers' ability to provide credible policy-advice to international managers, MNEs and other international work organisations. The following proposition is offered.

Proposition 5: Expatriates' meaning-attribution to what constitute non-traditionality renders it impossible to develop a universal definition of the aforesaid term.

3.3 Assumption 3: non-traditionality of NTEs assumed to relate to unconventional aspects rather than signalling a distinct typology

The article acknowledges that the above underlying assumption is not without merit. 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 (Hechanova et al., 2003; Jokinen et al., 2008)) – might also feature non-traditionality, for example being a man caring for children with special needs, or being gay (which McNulty and Hutchings (2014) assumes to constitute non-traditionality). 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 (i.e., a more complex boundary condition) – some of them shared (e.g., the boundary marker ‘working abroad’), others are not (e.g., ‘being gay’); as Jenkins (2000) demonstrates, social identification involves both similarities but also differences – between internal and external identification.

Thus, the present article argues that 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 (2016) 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 (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 (p. 112).

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 is done for them (Guttormsen, 2016). TEs on traditional assignments (as per conventional definitions in the scarce existing literature) might not necessarily also feature the boundary marker of ‘lucrative contract’ but rather be on a local contract (Guttormsen, 2016).

As a result, this article introduces three new terms in order to incorporate the above nuances: (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). Thus,

Proposition 6: Construction of non-traditionality as experienced by expatriates can most credibly be appreciated through identifying the conceptual boundary markers being deployed.

Proposition 7: Expatriates’ social construction of non-traditionality is not universal due to depending on the impinging cultural and geographical contexts of their lived experiences.

3.4 Assumption 4: NTEs is a binary concept in relation to TEs.

The article finds both grounds for dismissing as well as partly supporting the above-mentioned assumption. For the former, social construction and the diffusing nature of the assignment and individual levels demonstrates that in lived experiences, expatriates are not either/or – as the assignment and/or organisational/firm levels cannot be inherently be given

ontological primacy. However, analytically, the assumption is not without merit. 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 ones – 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 concept confusion and scrutinising the emergent operationalisation of conceptual frameworks. The first emerging perspective in extant literature is arguably prefaced on such binary. However, this article encourages the research field to rather focus on social categorising and conceptual boundary markers (i.e., collectively being the boundary condition). The following propositions are put forward:

- Proposition 8:* Expatriates possess both ‘traditionality’ and non-traditionality facets integral to their international assignments and lived experiences – and NTEs and TEs is therefore not a binary concept or social phenomenon.
- Proposition 9:* Binary nature of expatriate social phenomena becomes unintentionally assumed by researchers due to use of language.

The above discussion also illuminates an additional issue associated with concept confusion and non-credible operationalisation of a conceptual framework. Various definitions have in extant literature attempted to define different key forms of expatriation, including SIEs; they share in common that they focus on nature of mobility, degree of organisational affiliation and characteristics of their job-situation (see Guttormsen, 2016; Tharenou, 2015). Non-traditionality, however, relates to aspects of an individual’s lived experiences irrespective of the above-mentioned three realms. Indeed, both TEs and SIEs can be NTEs, herein non-traditionality does not perform at the same type of categorisation due to being a social dynamic. Therefore:

- Proposition 10:* Any categories, including typologies, of expatriation can also feature non-traditionality and, thus, credible to label as NTEs *as well*.

It now becomes necessary to also scrutinise the role of power in regard to categorising somebody as an NTE, as there is a risk of marginalising the voices of individual expatriates themselves. 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 possible needs and motivation which 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 begs 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, this article puts forward the notion that what constitutes non-traditionality today has not always been the case – nor most likely will it sustain infinitely. Corporate expatriation has occurred for more than two hundred years. However, 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). These sentiments and boundary conditions 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 Development, 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 are 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 becomes pertinent to query why do we count NTEs in a particular manner, and for whom? Dr Harrison and Dr Boyce (cited in Ardener, 1989b) encapsulate this issue very succinctly:

... 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 categorising a population: who possesses the power to decide if a grouping of individuals 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. This article argues that 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). The following propositions are encouraged to be investigated:

Proposition 11: If underlying assumptions of an emerging operationalisation of a conceptual framework remain uncontested, researchers risk buying into particular “truths” or “meta-narratives” which might be counter-productive for generating credible knowledge and policy-advice.

Proposition 12: The nature of operationalising a conceptual framework is impacted by the historic development in the research field.

3.5 Assumption 5: the process of defining NTEs is neutral without implications on research design and policy-advice.

Following on from the preceding section, the article does not find the above-mentioned assumptions frequenting on the current research agenda, credible: defining NTEs depends on the ontological, disciplinary, theoretical, geographical and historical outlooks (see

Guttormsen & Luring *forthcoming*). 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) 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 (p. 164).

The above quotation highlights the substantial importance of problematising the way scholars research NTEs as 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, p. 1155). The IHRM discipline has witnessed similar cases, e.g., the 'expatriate failure' concept – where high failure rates had not been contested until Harzing's (1995) commendable scholarship which demonstrated the empirically unsoundness for such claims; and validity of the Black et al's (1991) expatriate adjustment scale (Haslberger et al., 2013).

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, the

paper argues 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). The following proposition can be suggested:

Proposition 13: The nature of operationalising a conceptual framework is impacted by which camp of researchers who have monopolised (or been attributed) the power to define the mainstream of ideas in the research field.

4. Implications: from socio-biological traits towards a relational approach

A commonality between emerging research perspectives is the problematic grappling with concept confusion and conceptual vocabulary, in particular establishing the boundary conditions for defining a lived social phenomenon. 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 this paper’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, attention is rather directed towards a novel explanatory-frame – which is

argued to be more empirically sound and relevant for the nature of the NTE social phenomenon (and expatriation in general).

4.1 Towards relationality from Bourdieu and Sociology

The current article proposes to circumvent the problem of defining NTEs by rather conceptualising non-traditionality as relational in accordance to relational sociology (relationality). Relationality entails to consider the social world as “dynamic unfolding relations” as opposed to “consisting primarily in substances or in processes, in static things” (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 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 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, p. 50), which is “recognising the centrality of social relations to social analysis” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 84).

It is posed that thinking relationally, where social relations are assumed to be the core of social analysis, changes the focus from definitional properties and boundary condition towards NTEs’ *practices* (and expatriates in general). Contemplating on the CfP from McNulty and Hutchings (2014) to improve focus on expatriates’ lived experiences – deploying the concept of ‘field’ is particular timely: it links the expatriate literature to the ‘practice turn’ in contemporary social theory, where Bourdieu serves as a key theorist (see Reckwitz, 2002; Whittington, 2006). Therefore, it is argued, 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 earlier example of the Swedish expatriate working in an NGO; her sense-making 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 the types of assignments, which have formed due to the aforesaid contextuality.

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). Fourth, regardless of conducting scholarly research or analysis for an MNE, the output is likely to be more relevant for practitioners and 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 assignments is difficult to capture if relying on the dominant first emerging research perspective identified at the beginning of this article (socio-biological traits).

Fifth, analysis founded in relational fields provides 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, international management and international business 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 within an organisation (e.g., personal motivation driving the organisation to perhaps staff a position overseas with an expatriate instead of another local employee). 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, 2014).

Seventh, Bourdieu’s ‘field’ is hierarchical – meaning there are also layers of fields where the higher positions have more influence on those beneath in terms of what ‘stakes’ matter. This aids a more reflexive analysis where influential fields such as disciplines and other social theories can be identified in terms of their potential impact on lower fields, as illustrated below. Eighth, the endeavour to deploy 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 (2016) 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 ‘comb-patriates’. This term reflects that traditional long-term expatriates (both SIEs and those assigned by their organisation) are also better understood in the ‘field’ of non-traditional and short-term assignments, or ‘international business travellers’ (see Welch et al., 2007). Smaller

companies often expatriate employees in the conventional manner, but also being used as a satellite office serving a larger geographical region.

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. Following this, the article proposes that approaches based on categorisations should be devised in a way which investigates NTEs *relational* to other groupings of expatriates and contexts. A Unit of Analysis (UoA), thus, does not need to be expatriates but also their narratives and lived experiences. Moreover, the Unit of Observation (i.e., the context in which the UoA is studied within) (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005, p. 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 and institutions could be told and properly understood (see Kohli, 2001). Similarly, if moving the 'field' of poverty and the higher 'power-field of politics' (in Bourdieu's hierarchical fields) as a means to appreciate domestic conflict issues in Somalia – the analysis of maritime security and piracy would be very limited (Shortland & Varese, 2014). The following proposition can be propagated:

Proposition 13: Relationality and Bourdieu's 'fields' provide a more nuanced and credible analytical lens for investigating and comprehending non-traditionality.

5. Conclusion: contributions and future research directions

This article has scrutinised the credibility of underlying assumptions in current attempts to categorise NTEs in the Expatriate Management and Global Mobility literatures – and IHRM and International Business disciplines more broadly. Additionally, the article has also problematised the associated concept confusion and the need for construct clarity as well as the associated risks for flawed operationalisation of conceptualising NTEs based on being lived social phenomenon at the individual level. Having posed the following two research questions, this article proposes several theoretical contributions.

6.1 Research question 1: how credible is the NTE term as an expatriation typology?

Scrutinising extant literature on NTEs from a categorisation perspective revealed that although several attempts to define and typologise this particular expatriation group, a singular approach does not seem to exist. Currently, definitions relate non-traditionality with the expatriates' socio-biological traits, the primacy of the assignment-level (or the firm) and the form of the assignment. The main focus remains being on identifying the appropriate boundary-condition as a means to create construct clarity. Part of the construct confusion relates to there being no consensus on what level or realm where non-traditionality exists. From the starting point of NTEs being a social phenomenon with actual lived experiences at the individual level, the article demonstrates how the underlying assumption of extant categorisation remain non-credible and illogical as the non-traditionality in NTEs cannot be pinpointed to any one mutually exclusive categories. Indeed, non-traditionality exists but this article promulgates that a definition empirically, logically or analytically cannot capture what non-traditionality is at the same times dictating what it is *not*.

This article contributes with several new insights into NTEs. First, NTEs do not have a fixed and one-dimensional meaning – there exist multiple meanings-construction to the concept and they are 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. Second, typologising NTEs is deemed implausible and it therefore becomes difficult to measure the population of NTEs as those individuals are not necessarily only associated with non-traditional characteristics. As underscored by McNulty and Brewster (2017), there is no universal agreement of defining TEs either. Thus, as an analogy, extant literature is through claiming a typology and looking for answers through changing boundary conditions, also fallaciously claiming to be able to have the mathematical answer to the impossible: x (expat population) = y (NTEs) – z (TEs). Third, 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. Thus, fourth, a binary understanding of NTEs cannot be supported due to its constraints relationality between different expatriation categories.

6.2 Research question 2: how can NTEs be conceptualised?

The next theoretical contributions do not involve providing yet another categorisation definitional exercise, but to think differently about how non-traditionality can be conceptualised beyond the basis of extant definitions which feature concept and lack of construct clarity. Fifth, conceptualisation and its operationalisation cannot be deemed neutral 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.

Finally, this article provides a contribution in terms of devising an operationalised conceptual framework of NTEs beyond merely grappling with definitions (and their boundary conditions) and moving towards a Bourdieusian relational ‘field’ (to think relationally) as a much more credible, internally valid and empirically sound approach to unpacking NTEs’ lived experiences. To move the operationalisation of the NTE conceptual framework towards Bourdieu’s relational field is argued to be fruitful, and it is therefore encouraged to innovatively integrate this into the NTE research field: that relationality can positively lead to a stronger ontological and epistemological focus on NTEs’ lived experiences. To think relational also leads to the discoveries of the dynamics of non-traditionality. Current practices of the conceptualisation of the NTE social phenomenon are not empirically sound, which have been 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 research approaches, 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: similar efforts to scrutinise tacit assumptions can be deployed to any IHRM, International Business and expatriate concepts and social phenomena.

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 field 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 thousands of expatriates are working in refugee camps in war-zones and escorted by armed security guards everywhere they go? 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. The latter point is particularly important, as 'spill-over' theory illustrates the importance of understanding how social, non-work factors may have an impact on work-performance and vice versa (Crouter, 1984; Luring & Selmer, 2009).

6.3 Future Research Directions

First, in terms of empirical endeavours, the paper encourages 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 (see McNulty & Hutchings, 2014). Thus, there is a lot of scope to examine the role of and how non-traditionality interface with any expatriate and IHRM/International Business 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 NTEs to relocate could be enhanced by using Cerdin et al.'s (2014) typology. Specifically, to comprehend how non-traditionality unfolds in NTEs' lives can greatly help MNEs to appreciate NTEs' specific motivation, training and adjustment needs. To focus especially on NTEs has a lot of potential due to the traditional expatriate 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 (see Jonasson et al., *forthcoming*). 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. It can also be highlighted that investigating NTEs/non-traditionality in relation to local employees would be particularly 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 interdisciplinary efforts can be used as a vehicle into the field's research practices themselves. Researchers should engage with examining knowledge-production when devising new research designs (reflexive deliberations) (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This includes interrogations into ontological and epistemological tacit assumptions and to 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. The article also finds that 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; Crotty, 2003). 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).

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