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Article Title: Career capital development of self-initiated expatriates in Qatar: Cosmopolitan globetrotters, experts and outsiders

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**Career capital development of self-initiated expatriates in Qatar:
Cosmopolitan globetrotters, experts and outsiders**

Abstract

This paper explores career capital development of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in the Middle East, reporting on data gathered in Qatar from 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Findings challenge the notion that self-initiated expatriation always leads to career capital accumulation; arguing instead that contextual features impact individuals' agentic efforts towards career capital accumulation and leads them to experience 'career capital stagnation'. Qatarisation is the overarching influence on the status of SIEs in the country and places structural constraints, which translate into limited organisational opportunities and support for SIEs. Individually, SIEs reside rhetorically within complex dualities characterised by feelings of cosmopolitanism and isolation. Whilst individuals narrate the context in utilitarian terms as a means to a broader aim of global experience, everyday practicalities of their work and life are problematised. Narratives of career capital development are organised in three themes: SIEs as *cosmopolitan globetrotters* (micro-individual level) SIEs as *experts* (meso-organisational level) and SIEs as *outsiders* (macro-country level). The paper contributes to broadening the discussion on the relationship between self-initiated expatriation and context, and its implications on careers. Empirically, it adds to our understanding of self-initiated expatriates, in particular their experiences of career capital development in the highly regulated context of the Middle East.

Keywords: career capital, career development, self-initiated expatriates, HRM, Middle East, Qatar.

Career capital development of self-initiated expatriates in Qatar:

Cosmopolitan globetrotters, experts and outsiders

Introduction

The interplay between globalisation, internationalisation of business and increased patterns of international mobility has brought much multidimensionality and complexity to HRM (Brewster and Suutari, 2005; Hoq et al., 2009; Scroggins and Benson, 2010). Landscapes of work have changed significantly and the extension of technological, social, economic, political and migrant networks have brought about different notions of careers as they are enacted by a diverse range of workers. One such group is self-initiated expatriates (SIEs); individuals who independently elect to pursue careers overseas, without sponsorship from an employer (Richardson, 2006; Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010).

Notions of careers that account for the hyper-mobility and independence of such groups have been metaphorically articulated in the literature as ‘protean’, ‘boundaryless’ and ‘kaleidoscope’ (Carr et al., 2005; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Briscoe and Hall, 2006; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009; Inkson et al., 2010; Tams and Arthur, 2010; Abele et al., 2012). These are linked to changes in features of the employment relationship, such as location, mobility, patterns of flexibility, and the psychological contract; and how careers unfold as a result of individual choices.

From an HRM perspective, the previous raises fundamental questions about how to adapt to this dynamic scenario and manage an increasingly international, diverse and mobile workforce. In addition, it highlights the importance of new forms of individual agency

associated with the idea of the ‘borderless world’ (Ohmae, 1990; Diener and Hagen, 2009).

Amid challenges posed by globalisation to organisations, HRM’s strategic imperative is centred on accounting for the complexity and wider interconnected implications that issues such as migration, citizenship, and patterns of mobility have on individual career choices and paths, as well as organisational practices and policies to support and facilitate career development.

As global workers are seen to interact directly with labour markets, HRM’s imperative is to adapt to capital migration and its associated dynamics. There have been calls (cf. Cappelli, 2008; 2009; Farndale et al., 2010; Mellahi and Collings, 2010; Tarique and Schuler, 2010) for theoretical and empirical expansion on the implications faced by HRM in relation to managing global talent, in particular given the importance attributed to foreign work experience as central to “develop[ing] key competencies for a career in a global economy”, “securing ongoing career success”, and embracing a global mindset (Vance, 2005: 374-375; Levy et al., 2007). Additionally, the contextualised nature of HRM practices is recognised given the impact that the wider institutional environment has on the way practices are designed and implemented (Paauwe and Boselie, 2007).

The context of the Middle East presents us with an excellent opportunity to explore these issues. Discussions about HRM in the Middle East (cf. Budhwar & Mellahi, 2007) have highlighted conceptual and empirical challenges. On the one hand, country variations in relation to macro factors that shape HRM in the region have not been fully explored conceptually. On the other hand, the experiences of, and strategic and practical HRM challenges posed by a highly diverse migrant workforce have not been comprehensively captured in empirical terms.

In this paper, we focus on the experiences of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), problematising them from the perspective of individual experiences of career capital development in light of constraints posed by the macro context. Large numbers of individuals self-initiate global careers with some engaging in continuous self-initiation and becoming serial migrants (Ossman, 2004; 2007). However, this particular group has been largely neglected in the HRM literature, which has mainly focused on company-initiated assignments (Richardson and Mallon, 2005; Jokinen et al., 2008; Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010; Froese, 2012).

This paper also responds to recent calls (cf. Al-Ariss, 2010; Al-Ariss et al., 2012) to expand our empirical understanding of careers of skilled migrants, as well as the call for this Special Issue to augment our understanding of the challenges faced by HRM in relation to the management of career development in the Middle East. In particular, fundamental questions remain unanswered about the kind of support organisations should provide to facilitate career development of SIEs; given perceptions that this group has a high degree of self-direction and a low degree of organisational commitment (Doherty, 2012).

The paper aims to address the following question: *What are the experiences of career capital development of self-initiated expatriates in Qatar?* In doing so, the paper provides new insights into the theorizing of the interplay between agency (motive), experience (work) and context (relationships) and its impact on the way SIEs develop career capital. It contributes to our conceptual understanding of the relationship between global careers and self-initiated expatriation, as well as providing empirical insight about the experiences of SIEs in the Middle East and the HRM challenges that result from these experiences.

The paper can be framed within discussions about “new” careers (Haviland et al., 2010; Dries and Verbruggen, 2011). Arthur et al. (2003:23) define a ‘new career’ as one that “does not conform to the expectations of traditional employment thinking”. They note that new careers emerge from workers’ idiosyncratic and versatile approach, where they leverage one job opportunity in order to obtain another, engage in mobility, and adjust their career behaviour to fulfil personal priorities (e.g., family or children). An important feature of these new careers is workers’ focus on personal fulfilment and learning, where success is constructed in their own terms. Due to the main feature of SIEs, which is the choice to pursue international mobility without sponsorship or support from an employer, we position them within this group.

Through the problematisation of the tensions experienced by SIEs in Qatar in relation to career capital development, the paper aims to contribute to debates about the relationship between self-initiated expatriation and context. This has been conceptually theorised in relation to the management of global talent (cf. Jokinen et al., 2008; Mellahi and Collings, 2010; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Schuler et al., 2011). However, there is a scarcity of empirical insight in relation to both career development of SIEs and HRM in the Middle East; therefore, the discussions in this paper about the experiences of career capital development of SIEs in the highly regulated context of the Middle East are a timely contribution.

The paper is organised in seven sections. After this introduction, the first section discusses career capital and global workers, highlighting the impact of the new work order on workers and their ability to exert agency in the global labour market that allows them to develop career capital. The second section examines SIEs’ careers. The third section discusses work and employment in the Middle East, focusing on Qatar. Subsequent sections provide an

overview of the research, and present and discuss the findings. The last section concludes and identifies contributions, limitations and directions for future scholarly work.

Career capital development of global workers

Workers are central actors in debates about global(ised) labour markets. A momentous degree of international mobility has seen this period being considered as the “age of migration” (Castles and Miller, 2009:2) with workers showing differing patterns of interpretation of, and engagement and interaction with work, employment and careers. Whilst ‘career’ is “an extraordinarily pervasive concept” (Gunz and Peiperl, 2007:4), there is agreement of its significance in narrative terms in the construction of identity (Bujold, 2004; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009; LaPointe, 2010; Del Corso and Rehfuß, 2011). Through the articulation of narratives of self in relation to work, individuals make sense of different forms of capital acquisition and contextual possibilities. This allows them to address the expectations they have about themselves and expectations that others have about them in terms of success and status. A fundamental shift in the nature of careers from linear to multidirectional has also been noted (cf. Lichtenstein and Mendenhall, 2002; Baruch, 2004), where individuals identify alternative choices for themselves and construct career paths to suit their needs.

Understanding global workers as inherently internationally mobile and as carriers of knowledge highlights two important points. On the one hand, the suggestion of the unrestricted possibility of work and employment might bring alternative rationales for choice of employer, where context and other features such as workforce diversity or perceived multiculturalism could play a role. Stalker (2000) refers to ‘workers without frontiers’ to highlight the seemingly unrestricted patterns of labour mobility, which see workers engage in

different forms of migration (national, intra-regional, inter-regional and international). On the other hand, the independence of the global worker is linked to the idea of the freedom of movement of knowledge, as well as different understandings of what makes a worker competitive. Ackers (2008) notes that internationalisation has become a critical metric in career progression, and argues that the more dislocated the process of migration, the more competitive a worker becomes.

The previous is related to the idea that expatriation bestows on individuals five different types of human capital: scholastic, social, cultural, internal and external (Baruch et al., 2005; Altman and Baruch, 2012). For example, it is assumed that *social capital* would be enhanced through networks/personal contacts established in different contexts. These are facilitated by social relations and social structures that operate within a framework of obligations and expectations; information-flow capability of the social structure, and a system of norms and sanctions (Coleman, 1988). This is what Bourdieu (2008) frames as part of group membership, noting that it “provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit...” (p. 51). Through expatriation, individuals would then find a form of global credential that can help them expand their networks and increase their global positioning as workers.

Similarly, expatriation is seen as a source of *internal and external capital*, which helps to develop self-confidence, self-awareness, self-efficacy, and market value through a combination of intellectual capital and credibility in the labour market. According to King (2004), these are determinants of competency in career self-management. Moreover, following Bourdieu’s (2008) idea of capital, these would be the embodied form of global workers’ accumulated labour, which materialises as central to their career identity.

More recently, literature on careers has shifted to developing more comprehensively the notion of career capital, which aims to highlight a broader set of capabilities that global workers develop as part of their international experience (Inkson and Arthur, 2001; Cappellen and Janssens, 2005; Dickmann and Harris, 2005; Suutari and Mäkelä, 2007; Singh et al., 2009; Inkson and Thorn, 2010). These capabilities are understood as three ways of knowing: knowing-how, knowing-why, and knowing-whom. *Knowing-how* refers to investments in explicit knowledge, skills and expertise (Terjesen, 2005; Jokinen et al., 2008). *Knowing-why* refers to motivation, confidence and self-assurance to pursue a desired career path (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). *Knowing-whom* refers to social networks and contacts and according to Jones and DeFillippi (1996:97), it “involves creating social capital by gaining proximity to those who provide opportunities and important resources”. Singh et al. (2009) locate these ways of knowing within individual and relational dimensions; according to the authors, the first two are individual as they are related to knowledge and motivation, whereas the latter is relational as it involves relationships in the work environment.

An important point about the relevance of the notion of career capital is hinted by DeFillippi and Arthur (1996:119) who argue that these competencies are not intrinsically valuable but their value “is dependent on [individuals] being employed in settings that recognise their potential contribution and provide corresponding opportunities”. Research by Cappellen and Janssens (2010) suggests that individuals have a strong sense of awareness of the previous and make use of it in order to develop international employability. Their findings indicate that individuals intentionally engage in career practices to deal with perceived organisational barriers to developing a career in the global economy. In that respect, there is recognition that global workers exert agency in different ways and in particular, the highly skilled are seen to

have more leveraging power to self-direct their career choices and paths and become career capitalists (Inkson and Arthur, 2001).

Nonetheless, features of the movement of workers also need to be problematised. For instance, Favell et al. (2007) argue that labour is not as mobile as other factors of productions as a result of political and cultural reasons, such as international relations, national policies, border controls, and international governance. Other scholars (cf. Weiss, 2004; McDowell et al., 2007) note that skilled migrants navigate regimes of class and status through mobility, where migration can be a form of upward mobility whilst at the same time skilled migrants might have to struggle to legitimise some forms of capital (for instance, human or cultural) in a given host country or for an employer. Having set out the key features in the careers of global workers, in the next section we problematise careers of SIEs.

Understanding the careers of self-initiated expatriates

There is an assumption that the ‘self-initiated’ status of SIEs signals a significant degree of agency as they “take advantage of the employment opportunities available in the global economy with a shortage of skilled workers” (Tharenou, 2008:183). In addition, inherent in discussions about SIEs is the notion that they are temporary migrants, which creates a homogenising view of the group. In recognition of the conceptual danger of these generalisations, there have been calls to expand our understanding of this group, with some scholars (cf. Author) challenging the notion of temporariness as the defining feature of SIEs and calling for more comprehensive understanding of how they make sense of their careers amid specific temporal and spatial frameworks.

The problematisation of career capital of SIEs is related to their varied experiences and differences in career paths, as well as HRM features applied to this group (Cerdin and Le Pargneux, 2009; Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010). When thinking about the career management and development of SIEs, it could be assumed that this group epitomises the notion of ‘boundaryless careerists’. Their decision to pursue self-initiated migration suggests that they do not problematise spatial, temporal or material boundaries. In addition, seeking a global career is seen as a defining feature of this group hence they could be considered global careerists (Suutari et al., 2012).

Research on motives for self-expatriation has noted that these are primarily associated with motivational intangible and non-financial rewards such as adventure, seeking new experiences, personal desire for travel, and generally a pursuit of what we term ‘a fantasy of the global’, which is associated with a perceived cosmopolitan identity (cf. Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Richardson and McKenna, 2003; Thorn, 2009; Mäkelä et al., 2011; Doherty et al., 2011; Froese, 2012; Suutari et al., 2012; Author). This has generated a view of transiency in SIEs, which poses the challenge of this group being viewed as globetrotters rather than global workers, with the added assumption that SIEs are serial movers and therefore not interested in committing to an organisation. Furthermore, Shaffer et al. (2012) challenge the notion of global careers arguing that for many individuals, it is better to conceptualise these activities as global work experience which is part of an individual’s career. Such a perspective widens our understanding of how global work is experienced and its link to specific notions of career and career success.

The same authors also point out that there is a dearth of research exploring the consequences, both positive and negative, of global work experiences on the careers of self-initiated

expatriates. When discussing careers of SIEs, there is a gap that pertains to the interplay between SIEs' career expectations, career choices and success. Considering the previous, an organisational imperative emerges given the importance of managing global workers' diversity in order to capitalise on individual talent as a strategic differentiator (Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001). In that respect, there is a need to make sense of the challenges and opportunities that SIEs bring for HRM. Previous research (cf. Fang et al., 2009) has identified the need for employers to develop HR training policies and practices to integrate and leverage the talent (realised or potential) that skilled migrant workers possess. They argue that this not only increases individual probability of career success but has the potential to increase firm performance.

Self-initiated expatriates bring significant global capital to organisations (i.e., diversity, international market awareness, cross-cultural competency, and so on). However, it cannot be assumed that this group does not need organisational career development and support because the fluidity in paths of organisational career development and success have been centrally linked to networks of inter-organisational mobility and extra-organisational career support (Arthur et al., 2005; Abele et al., 2011). The previous section has highlighted the key characteristics of SIEs' careers; in the next section we bring this to the contextual level by exploring work and employment in the Middle East, with a focus on Qatar.

The localised future of work and employment in the Middle East: A view of Qatar

The importance of the national level remains fundamental in discussions about International HRM because in order for organisations to operate successfully in the global market, they need to understand local production regimes (Whitley, 2010). Work and careers are

embedded within national economic and institutional environments so upon entering labour markets, global workers need to play by the national rules (Mayrhofer et al., 2007).

HRM is acknowledged to be a challenge for both international and local organisations in the Middle East. The particular influence of socio-economic factors, such as gender norms and religion (Robertson et al., 2001; Metcalfe, 2007; Omair, 2010) is coupled with a complex political economy that has a direct impact on business systems and organisational management practices (Harry, 2007; Rees and Althakhri, 2008). For instance, literature about the Middle East (cf. Al-Ali, 2008; Forstenlechner, 2010; Al-Horr and Salih, 2011) has made reference to the challenges resulting from organisations' lack of investment in human resource development, which arises from the combined challenges of having a large number of temporary (and in some cases itinerant) migrant workforce, and the limited professionalisation of the HR function.

Amidst these complexities, Qatar provides a unique opportunity to highlight the impact of context on individuals and organisations. Qatar is a religiously conservative nation with a stable authoritarian regime and tribal societal structure (Crystal, 1989; Kamrava, 2009).

However, the economic boom resultant from its large reserves of natural gas has had consequences on the supply and demand of labour in the country (Berrebi et al., 2009), where the demand for skilled and unskilled labour far outnumbers what the national labour market can provide. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of expatriates (Malecki and Ewers, 2007), which has had two main consequences.

On the one hand, alongside the UAE, Qatar has the highest percentage of non-national workforce in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region (Suliman, 2009), where SIEs

account for 94% of the economically active population (Qatar Statistics Authority, 2012). This means that Qataris have in fact become a minority within the labour market. This is consistent with a trend in GCC countries where expatriates are said to represent 61.7% of all workers, holding a third of all public sector jobs and two-thirds of all private sector jobs (Rutledge, 2009; Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). However, the issue goes beyond the binary opposition of Qatari and Non-Qatari nationals and further complexity is added by differential treatment of different migrant groups (Leonard, 2003:133).

On the other hand, national policies of localisation in the GCC countries have been developed to reduce the number of expatriates in local work and employment. In the case of Qatar, Al-Horr (2010:124) sums up Qatarisation as “the identification and development of quality, competent Qatari males and females to assume permanent positions”. The principles of the policy rely on the need to facilitate development of the local workforce, with the aim of increasing the proportion of nationals to 50% in the energy and industrial sectors, and to 100% in non-specialist positions in government (Kamrava, 2009).

However, this policy has been deemed unclear and unachievable (Government of Qatar, 2005). More importantly, it has been highlighted (cf. Fasano and Goyal, 2004; Kapiszewski, 2006; Kamrava, 2009) that forcing organisations to take on local workforce and assume responsibility for their development does not consider the implications of replacing the expatriate workforce with nationals amidst a shortage of skills in the local national labour market. In addition, this overlooks the strong reliance on migrant labour in the primary oil and gas based industries (OGBI), which sustain the Qatari economy. Williams et al. (2011) argue that there are many barriers to the implementation of Qatarisation, which include among other things, an inefficient quota system; a culture that prioritises prestige over

performance; gender norms that hinder the access of women to the productive sphere, and education systems that are not market driven.

Overall, the impact of the policy shows the interplay between national frameworks and business and management systems. The challenge is particularly complex for organisations given that, as a ‘positive state’, the government owns the majority of the productive and important sectors of Qatari economy and dictates and implements policies (Harry, 2007). In relation to SIEs, the policy has practical implications as organisations in Qatar do not invest in non-national workers’ development, which is explained by the scope of the policy. As expatriates are temporary workers hired on fixed-term contracts, investment to train them is not seen as economically viable (Al-Horr and Salih, 2011:50). One of the consequences of Qatarisation is the temporary status of all expatriates in Qatar. Whilst this could be seen as an intervention to control migration; it also limits expatriates’ incorporation into the social system (Boswell, 2011). It could be argued that this limits career capital acquisition and development.

The previous sections have highlighted the complexity of the interplay between international/global work experience, self-initiated expatriation and contextual features. Thinking about the importance of understanding different types of workers and different notions of work and careers in the global economy, in the following sections we explain how we explored the experiences of career capital development of self-initiated expatriates in Qatar and the results from the study.

Researching SIEs in Qatar

This paper derives from research on experiences of self-initiated expatriates in Qatar. The research examined different dimensions of social and work experiences of SIEs working in professional occupations. Researching the experiences of migrants in professional occupations presents an interesting opportunity as most research has focused on low skilled migrants (Al-Ariss et al., 2012). Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with self-initiated expatriates working in professional occupations in a public shareholding organisation in the OGBI, which is the most significant economic sector in Qatar (Jolo, 2008; Al-Horr, 2011). In this organisation, 88% of the workforce was comprised of SIEs. For confidentiality purposes, no further details about the organisation are disclosed, and to maintain anonymity, individual names have been randomly allocated initials.

The research followed a qualitative, interpretive approach and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Given that they combine structure and flexibility (Legard et al., 2003); semi-structured interviews provided the necessary space to pursue participants' thoughts and ideas and allowed researchers to engage in a dialogical exchange with participants to unpick individual narratives emerging from the lived experienced (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The latter was particularly relevant to explore the way individuals made sense of their careers, the priorities they set for themselves in terms of developing them and their expectations of organisational support. We frame these analytically within the central features of career capital: knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom. In addition, interviews were deemed the most contextually-appropriate method given the political characteristics of the research site (Buchanan and Bryman, 2007).

Access to participants was secured via the Managing Director of the organisation, who served as gatekeeper and provided us with a list of all non-national workers with details of gender,

country of origin, job title and period of tenure. We adopted a purposive sampling strategy; choosing to invite individuals whom we believed would help us to answer the research question (Patton, 2002; Saunders, 2012:41). This is; we purposely sampled skilled self-initiated expatriates, excluding self-initiated expatriates in low-skilled positions for which tertiary education was not required. All self-initiated expatriates working in professional occupations were invited to participate. Twenty agreed and were interviewed.

******* INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE*******

As Table 1 illustrates, the sample was diverse. Eight participants were women and twelve were men. Age range was 31 to 63 with an average age of 42. Period of tenure ranged from 1 month to 7 years. Participants' countries of origin were: the UK (8), The Philippines (3), India (2), and one each from Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, South Africa, Syria, and the US. Most participants had previous international experience in more than one country, and four had previous experience in Qatar with a different employer. The shortest length of this experience was 3 years and the longest was 25 years. Participants were not excluded based on short tenure as we felt that it would be valuable to capture a range of perspectives, given the subjective and dynamic nature of understandings and expectations of career development.

The interviews followed a conversational guide that primarily focused on motivations for becoming an SIE, considerations in the choice of destination, strategies for socio-cultural adaptation, work dynamics (socio-relational experiences), career dynamics (progression, development and expectations), and future prospects (in personal and career terms, either in the organisation, in Qatar or elsewhere). Interviews lasted from 45 - 60 minutes and in agreement with participants, they were conducted in a private room facilitated by the organisation.

Interview transcripts were analysed using a narrative approach. Given the relationship between career and identity where the former could be seen as a function of the latter, this approach was deemed appropriate because it is “particularly sensitive to subjective meaning-making, social processes and the interpenetration of these in the construction of personal narratives around breaches between individuals and their social contexts” (Emerson and Frosh, 2004:9). Its use allowed us to unpick how SIEs understand their social world and articulate narratives to explain it (Czarniawska, 1998).

We analysed the data thematically using NVivo 9 as an organising tool. The analysis can be classed as thematic coding (Ayres, 2008; Flick, 2009), where we identified themes within three analytical clusters: macro-country, meso-organisational and micro-individual. Each of us initially conducted independent open coding using a thematic structure based on our reading of existing literature (See Appendix 1 for a template of the thematic coding). The initial coding consisted of several readings of all interview data. We then collaboratively conducted selective coding in order to generate thematic domains, which consisted of identifying categories of encounter for the narratives. We defined three main thematic domains: SIEs as cosmopolitan globetrotters, SIEs as experts, and SIEs as outsiders. We then categorised interviews, grouping narratives and identifying similarities and differences, which we developed in the analysis using examples and quotes. For the purpose of this paper, we focus on aspects pertaining to career capital development.

Career capital development of SIEs in Qatar

Findings for this study suggest that careers of SIEs operate within three distinct levels: macro-country, meso-organisational, and micro-individual. These provide insight into

contextual features and how these pervade organisations and impact specific individual experiences. The thematic domains we associate with these three levels are as follows: SIEs as *cosmopolitan globetrotters* (micro-individual level) SIEs as *experts* (meso-organisational level) and SIEs as *outsiders* (macro-country level).

At the *macro-country level*, the impact of Qatarisation is the overarching influence that defines support available at meso-organisational level for career capital development and agentic opportunities at the individual level. As noted by a participant:

“I have a feeling I will stay in the same position, not because I am not qualified, but that’s the way it’s structured here. My boss has been pushing, and putting in a good word for me for a promotion and it’s not happening because of the Qatarisation program” (IL, 45 years old, female, Philippines).

The previous also suggests that at the *meso-organisational level*, there are restrictions given the structural constraints of the localisation policy, which translates into a specific focus on supporting career development of the local workforce. In particular, given the diverse forms of capital that SIEs have, it is perceived that in hiring them, their skills are being ‘bought in’, as the following quotes suggest:

“It’s not [the company’s] policy to train expats. We expats come here bringing our own knowledge and skill sets. We are trained, that’s why we are here” (IA, 62 years old, male, Indonesia).

[Are there any career support practices in the organisation?] *“Not that I’m aware of. They have a career development path or CDP, which is for Qataris only”* (SC, 55 years old, male, Syria).

At the *micro-individual level*, SIEs reside rhetorically within complex dualities. On the one hand, they recognise the impact of the localisation policy yet downplay its implications and impact on their careers, attributing this to “the price to pay” for being an SIE. On the other hand, they express frustration with the limited opportunities. These issues are problematised in the following quote:

“Coming here is like a step back in time. It’s like 15 years behind you, which is like 2 or 3 jobs behind you. If you manage to move that on by a few years, that’s the most you can do. You aren’t able to bring it up to a level anything close that you were, forget it! And if you come here with the attitude, I’m going to help to do so much, and set this place on fire, you might as well hit your head on the wall because it’s just not going to happen.” (AZ, 43 years old, female, United Kingdom).

SIEs as cosmopolitan globetrotters

This theme is related to the micro-individual level and captures dynamics of individual agency. Findings highlight that for the majority of participants, motives for self-initiated expatriation to Qatar were not linked to development of career competencies. Contrary to the perspective that individuals expect to accumulate career competencies and resources as a result of international work experience; our findings highlighted that this group of SIEs does not seem to be articulating their experiences in career terms. Most participants indicated that their motivation was associated with ‘moving somewhere different’ and ‘seeing the world’.

The following comment illustrates this:

“I recommend the expat life to like anyone and everyone. When you move from place to place, you live many lives. Every country you enter, you begin to live their life. [...] It has been a very rich experience. Being an expat adds to that, it enriches your life [...] once you live abroad once, you become more open and interested to learn and experience more. It did create this commitment, and I never had a problem saying no to working overseas” (MI, 46 years old, male, Pakistan).

Very few participants narrated their decision to self-initiate expatriation within a positioning that considered ‘knowing-why’ in relation to a career plan or strategy. However, there was awareness of lack of development of competencies and networks, with participants referring negatively to the expatriation experience in Qatar in relation to this:

“There is a bureaucratic approach in oil companies here, and that’s the danger of coming here. If you come in at a level, make sure you come in at the right level, and if you think you are promised something, forget about it [...] Growth is not something you often see here. Promotion too; training and development is for Qataris only [...] people develop a certain attitude there. You have to fight to survive the whole time” (WY, 57 years old, male, South Africa).

Nonetheless, the previous was not explicitly problematised in relation to future career plans. In many cases, there seemed to be a sense that their presence in Qatar (or any other country other than their home country) would be in itself sufficient to fulfil their perceived goal of cosmopolitanism, and that surviving the hurdles of the environment would prove sufficient to demonstrate their ability as global movers. This was highlighted by references made to an ultimate goal of mobility, where participants described a positive orientation to further ‘international experience’. This term was construed mainly around cultural features, such as understanding other cultures, getting to know different value systems and travelling to different places. This suggests a cosmopolitan globetrotter with a global mindset rather than a global careerist.

SIEs as experts

This theme is related to the meso-organisational level and captures dynamics associated with work/roles. Central to participants’ accounts was a prevailing sense of organisational positioning of SIEs as experts. This idea of ‘expertise’ was articulated by the context to refer to SIEs when compared to the local workforce. This is associated with Qatar’s skills shortages rather than based on SIEs being part of transnational managerial or technical elites. Participants engaged with this construction and it seemed to help to provide coherence to their stay and circumstances in Qatar. Some participants referred to themselves as “developees” with one indicating that “part of your job is to hand over skills and transfer knowledge” (OK). In addition, there was an identifiable age dimension to narratives, with a participant suggesting that,

“You have to be experienced here to find a job that’s fulfilling. The culture here looks up to age. To have a good job that you find challenging and for people to actually listen to you, young people don’t have a voice in organisations” (MA, 41 years old, female, United Kingdom).

However, this idea of expertise was not left unproblematised. Some participants indicated that whilst they were ‘experts’ in Qatar, they might struggle to be employable in other countries due to factors such as age and lack of training, as highlighted by the following comment:

“[Back home] there is a limited opportunity when you reach a certain age. The older you get, the harder to get a job. Here age is not a barrier” (OR, 37 years old, female, Philippines).

The lack of training is a particular feature of Qatari organisations, where organisational cultures lack the commitment to support workers with training or career paths. This issue could be directly linked to the policy of localisation and the increasing transiency it creates due to SIEs remaining indefinitely on renewable three-year visas as well as the restrictions to mobility experienced by SIEs once in the country. The following comment highlights this:

“I think in ways [the visa sponsorship policy] is unfair. But that goes back to the mentality of the Middle East. There has to be that level of control, and they like to be in power. That’s one of the things you accept coming here. I don’t agree with it. You have a much better workforce when people are free to choose and to look for the best for themselves, and I think that helps people to strive to improve. Whereas I think here you lose some of that” (AZ, 43 years old, female, United Kingdom).

In that respect, the construction of ‘SIEs as experts’ seems to be a double-edged sword; their career capital at entry point in the organisation stems from the experience and skills they possess, which gives them the desirable ‘knowing-how’, which is of limited availability within the local labour market. However, this also places them in a disadvantaged position. Findings show that structural arrangements for SIEs in Qatar limit the investment in career development opportunities to support SIEs, which is further exacerbated by this positioning as experts, as the following quote suggests:

“Our MD doesn’t believe in it [career development opportunities]. The idea is, since you’re an expat, you shouldn’t need to train. But that is the expat philosophy. You’re bringing them in because of the skills and expertise they have. So why would you train them if they are at that higher level? The only training that would be done is for the Qataris” (AZ, 43 years old, female, United Kingdom).

Participants also noted that this pervaded their needs for and expectations of professional and career development opportunities:

“Qataris mainly get training and development and it’s not a lot [but for the rest] it’s hey we brought you as an expat, you’re already supposed to know this, you don’t need training. But you can’t expect everyone to be sharp; some people need some refreshment and learn initiatives. People start getting sour and stale” (OK, 63 years old, male, United States).

An important feature of the duality between expertise and career development opportunities for SIEs was its perceived ethnicitisation, where individuals noted differences in experiences based on national and ethnic demographics and their value and recognition in the Qatari context. The following comment elaborates on this:

“I am able to achieve a senior level in my department, and I feel I have proven myself, but nothing has happened. There is not a lot of movement in the company, Qataris move up, and other nationalities like the white people and the Arabs, but never a Filipino or Asian” (IL, 45 years old, female, Philippines).

SIEs as outsiders

This theme is associated with the macro-country level and captures the impact of context. SIEs’ accounts highlighted their positioning as outsiders. Following up from the previous idea of SIEs as experts, the link between the lack of resources invested in SIEs’ development and their legal status as temporary migrants also highlights their status as outsiders within the wider country context as well as the organisation. As outsiders, the status of SIEs is legitimised in transactional economic terms: coming into the country in order to perform a job. Some participants acknowledged this in their accounts:

“An expat is only “invited” to come to do a job. This is not your country, or your home. You should come here to do a job and a job only, and then you should leave. Expats have to accept that, and they should understand this before deciding to come here” (CA, 35 years old, female, Peru).

In that sense, the positioning of SIEs as outsiders occurred in three ways. First, it results from their temporary legal status within both Qatar and the organisation. Second, it emerges from their lack of social and professional integration with Qataris; participants noted difficulties given the cultural context, in particular gender and social norms. Third, many participants found themselves increasingly dislocated from professional and social circles outside of their current context. Quotes from participants noted these issues:

“It’s very hard to find friends outside work. There isn’t anywhere to meet people apart from hotels. And you don’t want to spend all your social hours with colleagues. The first few months I found extremely difficult, and I wondered whether I made the right decision” (MA, 41 years old, female, United Kingdom).

“You know I was warned repeatedly in the States not to move abroad, because you’ll neither be fish nor fowl. To a degree, that’s true [...] I think the issue is because I was out of the country so long, the perspective is, you don’t fit in. The law, the practices, if you’re out of the US for 10 years, you’ve got to start all over from the beginning! [...] From an HR perspective, if you’ve been out of pocket for 10 years, reintegrating is a challenge. You basically have to make a decision that once you leave your domestic location; it’s not so easy to get back in. Because international jobs in corporate life disappear, you can find yourself trapped” (OK, 63 years old, male, United States).

This has significant implications for the development of knowing-whom competencies. In addition, limited structural mobility within the country resulted in few social networks and contacts, which hindered their proximity to those who provide opportunities and important resources. Overall, accounts highlight how individuals struggle to position their experiences and development in the wider context of the perceived privileged status held by global workers such as SIEs.

Discussion

Some literature (cf. Dickmann and Harris, 2005) contends that international work experience, company-assigned or self-initiated, results in the development in competencies and insights that can enhance the career capital of individuals. Underpinning these discussions are

assumptions of the unfettered agency of individuals to pursue a career strategy, develop their competences and accumulate career capital within the context of a global career.

Expanding on previous work (cf. Forster, 2000; Dickmann and Doherty, 2008) that has explored career capital development of company-initiated international assignments, findings from our research question the assumption that self-initiated international work experience will positively influence an individual's career capital. Furthermore, findings have highlighted the overarching impact of context on opportunities for career development in organisations and career capital development of SIEs. Qatarisation raises the fundamental question of how organisations can implement strategies to support career development of SIEs amidst complex national policies that limit these prospects for SIEs.

Similarly, Qatari social structure makes this problematic; Qatari society is highly classed between Qataris, and has clear divisions between Qataris and non-Qataris (Nagy, 2006). These divisions pervade spatial arrangements, facilitating residential segregation and also the division of migrant labour.

The notion of career capital is seen to arise from an increase in cultural capital (knowing-why), internal and external capital (knowing-why) and social capital (knowing-whom), which assumes an interwoven network of dynamics that link organisations' internal and external environments and facilitate that individuals engage with different actors within these. The findings of this study show that, for SIEs in Qatar, international work experience does not necessarily result in the development of career capital mainly due to restrictions in relation to their ability to engage internally and externally beyond ethnic networks (e.g., other SIEs from their same nationality). On examination, we identify a complex and fragmented process

where the value and recognition of capital is subject to fluctuations given many intersecting factors such as age and nationality. These factors are relevant to understand the construction of difference for SIEs; for instance, Jones (2008) has used the concept of the ‘inferiorised other’ to explain the relevance of nationality in creating hierarchies of migrants. Comments from participants in relation to expertise and promotion opportunities hinted at this issue and even when this was not extensively problematised, the idea was still counteracted by references to their status as experts through positive narratives that legitimised their positioning as ‘experts’.

Career capital has been associated with the accumulation of motivation, expertise and network connections during career engagements (Inkson and Thorn, 2010). These three dimensions did not seem to be fully present in the narratives of the SIEs in relation to their careers. Whilst their motivation to travel remained, this was associated with experiencing new environments in the cultural sense. In terms of expertise, SIEs bought into the notion of ‘expert’ as articulated for them by the Qatari labour market. However, this seemed more linked to skill valuation as a function of structural needs, such as local market mechanisms and rationales of return on capital and labour control (Spenner, 1990).

More importantly, SIEs in this research did not actively display awareness of career competencies but spoke about careers as synonymous with global mobility. Based on what we know from the literature, this group would appear to be gaining career capital as they do engage in international work experience, participate in global networks and acquire valuable cross-cultural skills. In that respect, the relativity of the experience of SIEs shows that whilst it could be assumed that career capital development is inevitably gained through mobility

(Inkson and Arthur, 2001), given the features of the context its quality is limited and its quantity is insufficient.

In summary, these findings suggest that this group of SIEs seem to be engaged in international work experience but are not enacting ‘global careers’ because they do not seem to be increasing career competencies (knowing-why, knowing-how, knowing-whom) to allow them to develop their career capital. This research adds to existing calls (Mayrhofer et al., 2007) to understand further the complexities of this experience in relation to the context in which it occurs. In addition, it challenges the notion of SIEs as skilled careerists strategically making decisions to gain in career terms and consequently enhance their career capital. In unpicking participants’ narratives, we encounter that the assumed associated capital is more localised and situated, and characterised by shallow internationalisation and artificial cosmopolitanism (Ackers, 2008).

Participants from this research seemed to primarily prioritise the personal value of their experiences with limited insight into strategies oriented to develop or advance their careers. In that sense, whilst there is the assumption of a positive association between mobility and career development (Inkson and Thorn, 2010); this is not developed concretely. More importantly, internationalisation in itself seems to be the metric for progression (Ackers, 2008) with limited regard for the qualitative characteristics of the process. In some respects, this raises questions about how much purposeful agency can be attributed to SIEs, and whether having a ‘global career’ is being conceptualised in a way that allows the term to be inclusive of experiences of SIEs in complex contexts, such as Qatar.

Going back to Shaffer et al.’s (2012) idea, it might be more appropriate to speak in terms of global work experience rather than global career. The perceived notion that they are serial

movers seems to be what drive SIEs. Consequently mobility was problematised more centrally than anything else, including career capital. Furthermore, in the particular case of Qatar, the restrictive nature of the environment puts into question the extent to which SIEs are able to increase their career capital beyond the broad notion of ‘international experience’. In unpicking features of their careers and dynamics pertaining to career capital development, a salient element was the normalisation of disadvantaged work conditions with apparent disregard for their implications on careers.

More fundamentally, SIEs in this sample seemed to have a unique understanding of their careers, where they construct the meaning of career, career development and career success ambiguously and mostly in terms that engaged with the restrictions in the context. By avoiding accountability of their experience in career terms, SIEs challenge the reification of careers (Dries, 2011) instead focusing on the social reality and how it fits in with their wishes and expectations. It could then be argued that their narratives re-signify the meaning of career capital.

Whilst they might not develop career capital to the extent that it has been theorised; they learn skills to navigate the complexity of a highly regulated system, both practically and rhetorically. This could certainly allow them to survive subsequent cross-cultural experiences. More specifically, the invaluable knowledge drawn from the messiness of the process in such a highly regulated context would provide SIEs with an advantage in knowledge and understanding of global labour markets in similar contexts.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the development of career capital of SIEs in Qatar and in doing so, to augment our understanding of the challenges faced by HRM in relation to the management of self-initiated expatriates in the Middle East. Findings add insight into the ways in which dynamics at macro, meso and micro levels influence the experiences of career capital development of SIEs, an area where there have been calls for research (cf. Kohonen, 2005). Experiences of SIEs in Qatar suggest that SIEs develop career capital in an ad hoc fashion rather than as a result of strategically planning and seeking to develop their careers and increase their employability. Similarly, understandings of the importance of career development seem limited and absent from organisational activities and processes available to SIEs. Within the wider context of the Middle East, this is reflective of the tensions between macro-country structures and arrangements, and how organisations respond to the challenges of managing an increasingly diverse workforce that relies on a large number of self-initiated expatriates.

In relation to the micro-individual level, the argument that individuals add value to themselves by pursuing international career opportunities is challenged by SIEs in this study as participants did not extensively problematise advancement and career progression. Individuals' self-agency in seeking to improve their career capital is evident in that they are choosing to migrate to Qatar. However, there seems to be limited scope in the long-term planning of their careers, with limited prospect of advancement and development. Going back to Altman and Baruch's (2012) idea of the relationship between expatriation and capital accumulation; findings for this study challenge this notion and instead seem to suggest that individuals undergo what we term '*career capital stagnation*' as a result of structural barriers at the macro-country level. This translates into limited organisational activities and processes

to support them to manage and develop their careers. Similarly, the social and relational aspects of their experiences are limited so they do not develop useful networks.

The previous has theoretical and empirical implications. On the one hand, it highlights the complexity of institutional and systemic factors in relation to business systems and organisational management practices. This is to say, it emphasises the need for theoretical knowledge that emerges from what happens in the Middle East in terms of ‘doing management’ or ‘doing HRM’ (cf. Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007) particularly in relation to SIEs. This group operates outside of traditional organisational arrangements; for instance, theirs are not company-assigned international experiences and as such they navigate macro-country structural arrangements individually. Within the context of the Middle East, this is exacerbated by the impact of policies of localization. On the other hand, it has practical implications as it sheds light on how SIEs construct understandings of their careers and the types of strategies they use to manage and develop them. This could be helpful to organisations in the Middle East to develop talent management strategies in order to support this group but also to embed this support within meso-organisational strategies (e.g., mentoring, knowledge transfer and sharing) to develop the local workforce.

Findings and discussions presented in this paper make a distinct contribution to theory, research and practice. These contributions pertain to broadening the conceptual discussion on the impact of context on career capital development as well as distinct ways in which careers are understood and enacted by SIEs amid contextual constraints, which highlight the uniqueness of the Middle East as a context for human resource management and development. Furthermore, on-going discussions about careers of SIEs do not consider

comprehensively different versions of career or career success. This paper has presented alternative constructions that help to illustrate features that are context-specific.

A limitation of this work is related to ecological validity; in particular given that the research was “authorised” by the organisation. Moreover, despite recognising that results in qualitative research are intended to be general in respect to theory and not to population (Yin, 2003); we still deem it important to highlight that realities in social settings in Qatar are not uniform so based on the characteristics and aims of the research, findings from this study cannot be taken to represent experiences of all SIEs in Qatar, in this organisation, in the OGBI sector, or in the Middle East as a whole.

In order to advance discussions and empirical work in this area, three future directions for scholarly work are identified. *First*, discussion should shift towards a more comprehensive conceptual framework that challenges ideas taken for granted in the literature about self-initiated expatriation. This is related to developing approaches to deal effectively with SIEs – SIEs position themselves as global citizens and are perceived to have limited organisational commitment, which has implications for the support they receive to manage and develop their careers. In some cases, contextual constraints play a role in the way organisations react to career development needs. More specifically, a challenge for HRM in the Middle East materialises in relation to establishing an approach that provides clearer insight into the benefits of adequate global talent management for organisations in such contexts. In addition, given the power of multinational enterprises in shaping “best practice” in HRM, approaches need to account for organisational diversity resulting from an increasingly international workforce.

Second, it is relevant to question assumptions of boundaryless and protean career orientations, and their applicability in different contexts, given unique features (e.g., localization policies in the Middle East) that translate into constraints for SIEs. In that respect, whilst we follow Howe-Walsh and Schyns' (2010) call that organisations have a duty to contribute to the development of SIEs; scholars need to engage more actively in exploring the characteristics of SIEs and how they navigate specific contextual constraints. *Finally*, there is the opportunity to adopt a broader approach that includes other HRM functions such as recruitment and retention, which would help to draw combined data to provide more comprehensive insight into HRM systems in specific country cases and, as suggested in the call for this Special Issue, to move on to a more comprehensive and complete picture of HRM challenges and practices in the region.

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