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Title "Always facing the wind"? The working lives of foreign-born scholars in British academia

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Brexit has placed international academic mobility at the forefront of academic, public and policy debates, and turned it into a topic of perhaps unheard-of relevance. Although academic migration is not a new phenomenon, the current numbers of academics employed in a country different from that of their birth are unprecedented (Welch, 1997; Altbach, 2007). This paper offers a case study of foreign-born academics who come to the UK, and sets out to explore two main themes. First, the paper seeks to understand the character of scholars' international mobility. Then, the paper investigates the implications of the increased number of individuals pursuing an international career for the academic profession. This line of enquiry is important because it addresses the fundamental issue of migrant academics' inclusion in the workplaces abroad. Despite being essential for the understanding of academic mobility, this topic appears to have been overlooked in many of the current debates on the subject.

As an area of investigation, the migration of academics spans two contrasting frames of reference, namely that of knowledge society and of knowledge economy. The former is an egalitarian perspective concerned with the expansion and internationalisation of higher education. It speaks about migrant scholars as potential contributors to the development of a hosting community (Sörlin and Vessuri, 2007). The latter perspective, on the other hand, involves the economic debates on the international competition for talent, referred to using the value-conveying terms such as brain drain, gain or circulation/exchange. The international labour market is thus seen as a zero-sum game where the loss of one country is a gain for another (Fahey and Kenway, 2010) and policy efforts are directed at winning the 'brains' to enhance the country's competitive position (Reich, 1993; Bell, 1999; Rienzo and Vargas-Silva, 2014). Reflecting the goals of both the egalitarian and the economic views, there is now an infrastructure of international academic mobility comprising schemes like Marie Curie or DAAD, the recent Directive (EU) 2016/801 on researchers' migration, or the inclusion of foreign staff numbers among the university assessment criteria (e.g. EQUIS, QS World University Rankings). International mobility, therefore, is believed to bring material and developmental advantages for countries, universities and individuals.

In this context, studies on academic migration are often concerned with one's international career, understood as a series of job transitions (Bailyn, 1989). This theorising places migrant scholars along the relational continuum of privilege(d) and disadvantage(d). The optimistic view attributes foreign scholars to the boundaryless knowledge elite who can move abroad easily, relying on the marketability of their knowledge and skills (Castells, 1996; Mahroum, 2000; Fernando and Cohen, 2016). The more critical frame of reference, by contrast, is more perceptive of who moves where, when and why and reveals that migrant academics are a fragmented group (Richardson, 2009; Oliver, 2012; Sang, Al-Dajani and Özbilgin, 2013; Bauder, 2015; Loacker and Sliwa, 2016). What tends to be forgotten is that international careers are not entirely at one's discretion because their pattern is conditioned by the occupational structures whose influence increases the more employers rely on the external labour market and

contingent labour (Tolbert, 1996). Therefore, there is scope to abandon the well-trodden path of theorising and instead look at migrant scholars' inclusion in occupational structures abroad (Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012).

Occupations are a particular type of social groups whose bonds are primarily economic (Weber, 1978). Their structures, therefore, are established and increasingly institutionalised to protect the shared economic interests from competitors (Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Central to this alternative view is the notion that occupational structures are dynamic in shaping the context within which migrant academics' working lives unfold: as the number of immigrant academics changes, so does the profession. In the UK, for instance, the number of foreign academics grew while the profession endured increasing neoliberalisation manifested through managerialism, precarisation or growth in external control mechanisms among other elements, all of which affected the traditional ways of organising academic work (Deem, Hillyard and Reed, 2010). Whether this has turned migrant academics into more mobile or immobile, and under what terms, remains to be known.

A qualitative study was thus designed to understand migrant scholars' experiences of migration to and employment in the UK. In total, sixty-two interviews with foreign-born academics working in thirteen British universities (six in Scotland, six in England, one in Wales) were conducted between November 2014 and November 2015. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, although some also took place via Skype with the use of a webcam, or via phone. All interviews were digitally recorded, fully transcribed by the researcher, and sent to participants for content review before using them as data. The total interview length is 66 hours and 39 minutes. Empirical data was analysed manually, using both pre-determined and emerging codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2009).

Findings remind that positional competition takes place not only across but also within societies (Brown, 2000) and that individual motivation to move abroad is not sufficient to understand international mobility. The growing number of foreign-born academics in the UK does not imply their greater inclusion. Rather, findings reveal uneven power dynamics among the different workplace groups, and inequalities emerging in the context of managerialism along the lines of scholars' country of origin, time of migration, seniority, native language, academic discipline and job functions. The key contribution of this paper is therefore to provide an explanation of the terms and conditions of migrant scholars' work and employment abroad. However, this timely study also has significant practical implications because its nuanced account of migrant scholars' working lives in the UK can contribute to the development of more considerate educational and immigration policies following Brexit.

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