



Globalising knowledge networks: Universities, diaspora strategies, and academic intermediaries



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ABSTRACT

As diaspora strategies have become an integral aspect of national economic development strategies, so too have universities begun to formally identify and mobilise diasporic scientists, researchers and scholars in an effort to create global knowledge networks. This paper will identify this new role for diasporic academics. It begins by emphasising the increasing internationalisation of the academic labour market, arguing that an increasing number of researchers have multiple national affiliations and relationships. It shows how diasporic academics have become central to the creation of global knowledge networks. These knowledge networks derive from multiple sources including the institutional ambitions of universities who are seeking to expand their research remits in increasingly resource constrained environments, international and national funding bodies who are increasingly focused on research 'grand challenges', and the aspirations of individual researchers for whom global networks are increasingly important to successful careers.

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Introduction

In recent years growing amounts of academic and practitioner attention have been paid to the institutionalisation of diasporic spaces through what have come to be known as 'diaspora strategies' (Ancien et al., 2009; Desforges et al., 2005; Gamlen, 2008; Ho, 2011; Kuznetsov, 2005). These strategies reflect attempts by international institutions, governments and other organisations to identify and harness the energies and resources of their offshore citizens in order that they are more likely to support the development aspirations of their former home country. Examples discussed in the academic literature include Australia (Hugo, 2006), Jamaica (Mullings, 2011), India (Dickinson and Bailey, 2007), New Zealand (Larner, 2007), and China (Yang and Welch, 2010), amongst others. These accounts show that whereas once the interest in diasporic contributions to economic development was confined to poorer countries, and focused largely on efforts to increase the flows of remittances or to encourage expatriates to return, today such initiatives are increasingly widespread and are promoted by international institutions and national governments alike. Discussions about the economic potential of the diaspora have also moved from questions of 'brain drain' or 'brain gain' and become engaged with questions of knowledge and/or technology transfer through the concept of 'brain circulation' (Saxenian,

2002). There is now an explicit recognition of the value of utilising the high skill diaspora as a strategic advantage and subsequently offshore citizens are the target of both migration and innovation policies in an ever increasing number of countries.

This paper focuses on the case of universities. Specifically, it is concerned to identify why universities around the world are explicitly mobilising diasporic academics and asking them to do new work in the context of an increasingly pervasive emphasis on formal internationalisation strategies. It draws on the growing geographical literature on international students, but is primarily concerned with international researchers and the ways in which they are being repositioned by universities, funding bodies and peak organisations. This repositioning emerges in the context of a globalising academic labour market, and is not simply an extension of the longstanding tendency for domestic academics to gain international labour experience, manifest from the medieval period onwards in the form of travelling scholars, academic travel, international sabbaticals and overseas fellowships (Jöns, 2008, 2009). Rather it marks a new emphasis on explicitly identifying and activating those academics with multiple national affiliations in order to advance internationalisation as an institutional political project (Tadaki and Tremewan, 2013). For example, what are the implications of United States universities being explicitly advised to 'develop strategies to facilitate collaboration between foreign researchers who chose to stay in the United States and local scientists in their home country' (Anand et al., 2009)? Or the

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International Association of Universities observing in their recent call for action that, 'Governments and institutions are creating formal links with academic talent with their own Diasporas to promote brain circulation' (IAU, 2012)? Even Universities UK, an organisation that has come relatively late to discussions about internationalisation, identifies the increased importance of 'global research networks' based on transnational networks of researchers in their most recent analysis of future trends for higher education (Universities_UK, 2012).

The claim made is that this new emphasis on global knowledge networks explicitly positions diasporic academics as transnational knowledge brokers. They are not simply migrants who are lost to their home country (despite ongoing concerns around 'brain drain'), rather they are being asked to act as academic intermediaries for new knowledge configurations. The causes and consequences of this shift in academic life cannot be read off the existing literatures on diaspora strategies which increasingly takes for granted the claim that diaspora strategies are premised on 'neoliberal logics' (Davies, 2012; Mohan, 2008; Mullings, 2011; Pellerin and Mullings, 2013). Universities are not organisations that are becoming 'little fingers of the state' (to use a familiar phrase from a different context), and using the diaspora to help governments and international institutions deliver on wider economic development strategies. Indeed, in some cases, these strategies may well bring universities into direct conflict with governments, as exemplified by the recent furor in the United Kingdom between Universities UK and the Home Office over efforts to keep international students out of the enumeration of high skill immigration. Instead, the paper attributes this new role for diasporic academic to the internationalisation of academic labour markets and the institutionalisation of international research strategies, and identifies how these processes have created new subject positions for researchers working outside their country of origin.

This analysis is informed by documentary research, including institutional, sectoral and policy reports, secondary data, and extensive participant observation based on first hand experiences of these processes as an international student, then academic, across three settings – New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. This experience has been complemented with seven years as a senior university administrator, first as Faculty Research Director and now as Dean delivering internationalisation in social science research and education. However while the account draws on both empirical research and tacit knowledge, the primary contribution of the paper is conceptual. It asks that geographers interrogating the under researched field of globalising knowledge networks pay attention to the role that diasporic academics play in these new 'global assemblages' (Ong and Collier, 2005). This approach herein, with its focus on political rationalities, institutional strategies and modes of subjectification, is distinct from those that position diasporas in cultural or ethnic terms (Brubaker, 2005; Walter, 2001). Instead it contributes to broader arguments about how best to understand economic development strategies that both assume and help constitute globalising spaces and subjects (Larner, 2009; McCann and Ward, 2011; Ong and Collier, 2005; Roy, 2012). In doing so it also maps out a new research agenda for those working on diaspora strategies and the globalisation of universities, and identifies the questions that emerge when these academic fields are brought into closer conversation with each other.

Global governmentality and higher education

The International Association of Universities recently stated that 'Globalisation is now the most important contextual factor shaping the internationalisation of higher education' (IAU, 2012). This statement exemplifies the way in which a wide range of

institutions and organisations now premise their activities on the assumption we live in a globalising world, and argue that new relationships and strategies are needed. It also underlines a longer standing conceptual argument that globalisation can be usefully understood as a 'governmentality' (Barry et al., 1993; Dean, 1999; Larner and Walters, 2004; Rose, 1999). This neo-Foucauldian literature draws attention to the role of discourses and practices in producing objects and subjects of governance, and has proved an influential way of rethinking a range of familiar themes in political and economic geographies (Amoore, 2006; McCann, 2008; Sparke, 2006). Of particular relevance to this paper are the proliferating analyses of 'global governmentality' which show that state agencies are not the only actors involved in globalising processes, and that these processes involve a diverse set of organisational, relational and calculative practices.

Geographers have used the global governmentality literature to interrogate the discourses and practices through which different groups of off shore citizens have been identified and enrolled in diaspora strategies (Larner, 2007). They have also examined the implications these efforts have for both sending and receiving countries, and for members of the diaspora themselves (Dickinson and Bailey, 2007; Gamlen, 2013; Ho, 2011; McConnell, 2012; Mullings, 2011). Rather than taking the fact of the diaspora for granted, and examining the political processes through which they are mobilised, analysts influenced by the governmentality literature are concerned to understand how diaspora strategies constitute the diaspora as a particular kind of governmental category, and how it is that off shore citizens are constituted as particular kinds of political-economic subjects (Kalm, 2013; Kunz, 2012). To date, however, these discussions have remained overwhelmingly either state and/or community focused. There is some recognition that non-state actors play an important role in constituting diaspora strategies; for example, attention has been drawn to the roles of international organisations, think tanks and expatriate networks in supplementing the work of governments by 'courting' and 'counting' (Kunz, 2012). However this paper argues the need to look well beyond state agencies to understand how off shore citizens are being engaged, and why and how diasporic subjects are being positioned in new ways in globalising development strategies.

In developing this account of universities and diaspora strategies it is also helpful to draw on the wider educational literature. As geographer Nick Lewis (2005) recognised early on, and has described in the paradigmatic case of New Zealand, higher education is now a globalising industry. While universities have long been part of international knowledge networks (Altbach, 1998; Jöns, 2008), they are now pro-actively establishing transnational relationships in order to advance their teaching and research ambitions. This is having implications for the sector as a whole (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). To date much of the geographical discussion of the globalisation of higher education has focused the educational remit of universities, and has highlighted the processes associated with marketisation. Particular attention has been paid to the international students who have become a valuable commodity in many countries; indeed in some cases crucial to keeping the higher education systems afloat (Findlay et al., 2012; Olds, 2007; Them, 2009; Waters and Brooks, 2011; Waters, 2006). This new emphasis on international students is having implications for the internal organisation and curriculum of universities. Many universities now have fully equipped international offices whose job it is to recruit international students, and new roles for 'brokers' such as offshore recruiters and agencies are being carved out (Sidhu, 2002). Former international students are being actively used by both marketing and alumni offices to build stronger 'in country' relationships in key areas of the world. Foundation years, language programmes and study skills initiatives have inexorably followed the recruitment of increasing numbers of students.

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