
Moving Ideas and Mobile Researchers: Australia in the Global Context

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Abstract

This paper draws from the ARC Discovery project called Moving Ideas: Mobile Policies, Researchers and Connections in the Social Sciences and Humanities – Australia in the Global Context (2006-2009). This project explored the ways that ideas travel and how knowledge transforms through travel. One aspect of the study was the critical examination of various research policies around the world that are associated with moving ideas and moving researchers. These are often coupled with notions of “brain drain-gain/mobility” and diaspora. A second focus was on the mobility biographies of globally mobile intellectuals with various links to Australia and on the implications of their mobility for their ideas, politics and national and trans-national identifications. It is our view that the actual experiences and insights of such people have the potential to enhance researcher (academic) mobility policies. A third concern has been to address the question of what it means to globalise the research imagination. In addressing this question we have drawn on leading researchers from around the globe who undertake research on globalisation itself. The paper to follow draws from selected publications associated with this project. The book from the project, to be completed in 2010, is titled Moving Ideas and Mobile Intellectuals. It should be noted at the outset that our focus in the project and in this discussion paper is on researchers in the social sciences and humanities including but not exclusively educational researchers. We begin by asking what it means to globalise research and how is this related to the nation-state?

Introduction

The spatiality of globalising research

Although it is often unacknowledged, conventional ideas of research in the social sciences and humanities are often implicitly if sometimes subtly connected in one way or another to the nation-state. This is hardly surprising as along with the state apparatus, the nation-state is, as Saskia Sassen suggests, one of “the most complex and

accomplished organisational architecture[s] we have constructed” (Kenway & Fahey, 2009, p. 117). Research is often focussed on matters interpreted in ways that are most pertinent to a particular nation-state and its people. It is often funded by either the nation-state or by those bodies that primarily identify with it or with issues seen from within its borders. Of course some researchers have always focussed on places or issues beyond those states within which they live and others have addressed matters that are inter- or trans-national. But this has not necessarily meant that their research has been free from national influence. Certainly many researchers like to think of their epistemological communities as beyond the nation-state – as transnational; however this may often be more a conceit than a reality. The nation-state in effect has long constrained, if not totally contained, research.

There is however an ever-growing recognition that the nation-state has a porous quality, that its sovereignty is insecure, and this has had significant implications for governance, including research governance (Bullen, Kenway & Fahey, 2010). Further, many of the economic, political, social and cultural issues that provoke the contemporary research imagination are global. But at the same time global issues usually have regional, national and sub-national inflections. Alongside all this, in terms of the university itself, various academic activities are increasingly being systemically internationalised and normalised, from above through the logics of knowledge economy policy discourses (Kenway, Bullen & Fahey with Robb, 2006) and via such practices as “knowledge networks” and “knowledge transfer” of the sort promoted by the European Union and its regional approach to global knowledge politics (Kenway & Fahey, 2008). Further, all universities are now ranked globally with regard to their research via such schemes as the Shanghai Jiao Tong Institute of Higher Education’s global rankings index and *The Times Higher Education Supplement*’s “World University Rankings”. Overall, the number of students and academics travelling around the globe to undertake and share research is rising significantly too. This exchange of knowledge is also facilitated by innovations in information technology. As a result, universities and researchers are coming more and more to see themselves in global and trans-national as well as in international terms. Accordingly, this raises many matters for researchers about entry points, standpoints and knowledge flows with regard to research questions, issues and problems, and communities.

Together such matters point to the necessity to globalise the research imagination. However, it is difficult to consider what globalising the research imagination involves without an understanding of globalisation itself. The manner in which one comprehends globalisation, theoretically and politically, will influence the ways in which one understands and engages in the globalisation of the research imagination. So, how do researchers make sense of globalisation?

The debate about how best to comprehend globalisation has been persistent and politically charged. Certain bodies seek to determine its meanings through what might be described as a view from on high – a top-down perspective, and the top is usually understood as peak multinational corporations and multi or supranational political organisations. This common view of globalisation from on high is often developed and circulated by those at the top and by those who adopt their standpoint, particularly certain economists. Further, this view is widely proselytised by right wing research think tanks, many national governments and much of the popular media. It is from this perspective that we hear of the so-called new and consensual economic world order. In education, the research results emanating from the OECD is a prime example.

This standpoint strives to colonise the ways in which globalisation is imagined and enacted. Here globalisation becomes an ideological concept that obscures differences of power and interests. The master narrative is neoliberal economics with its associated calls for structural adjustment in national economies and state promoted free trade (Harvey, 2005; Ong, 2006). The underlying logic is deterministic: economic globalisation that accords with the neoliberal agenda, portrayed as unstoppable. The logic is often also advocatory – globalise (according to such prescriptions) or perish. The endless repetition of the same economic rationale dulls rather than illuminates, it limits the capacity to envisage otherwise and inhibits the power to think differently. It is produced by and produces a stunted imagination.

Another set of ideas about globalisation, which opens out analyses beyond those that are both systems-based and that focus on structural effects, draws on the notion of complex global connectivity and identifies the modalities of interconnection and interdependence involved. In this respect, when thinking about the links between globalisation, the nation-state and research or knowledge we suggest that Australia, as a nation-state in the globe, exists on the edges of empires of knowledge.

Jane Jacobs' (1996) phrase "edge of empire" refers to Australia's geographical isolation from the centres of empire in the global North. Jacob's term also describes Australia's status as a settler colony and is used to consider how histories of colonisation and imperialism are manifest in contemporary times. Of course, certain social and spatial demarcations are no longer the same or as clear as they once were when empires were Empires. This latter notion resulted from the most recent "Age of Empire (1875-1914)" (Colas, 2007, p. 4) at the end of which "most of the world outside of Europe and the Americas was formally partitioned into territories under the formal rule of informal political domination of one or other or a handful of states: mainly Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, the USA and Japan" (Hobsbawm, 1995, cited in Colas, 2007, p. 4). Further, such spatial sensibilities, such as the East/West and North/South, are no longer so un-problematically applied.

Pertinent here is Australia's awkward global position as an outsider on the inside. Australia is and isn't Eastern. It is part of but also apart from the Asia Pacific region. Australia is Western and was a former British colony, yet it is not part of the USA or Europe. It is thus rather tangential to the dominant West².

In global times, geographies of knowledge/power refer to the ways that territoriality and spatiality are linked to knowledge and the ways in which knowledge within these geographies is linked to power. Arguably, the politics of knowledge production, circulation and consumption can be mapped according to a global geography of knowledge/power wherein Europe and the USA act as empires of knowledge. Arguably too in the so-called developed world and the West, countries and regions can be charted according to whether they are at the centre or on the edge of knowledge production, circulation and consumption within such empires. Australia can be seen as on the edges of these knowledge empires. So what are the implications of undertaking research from the edges?

The intellectuals we interviewed suggest that the implications of such knowledge/power geographies vary with regard to Australia and in relation to different social sciences and humanities disciplines. They may, for instance, include a tendency to uncritically import research findings and theorising from the centre of empire because these are assumed to have more weight and status than those that come from the edges. Further, research and theorising that emanates from the edges of empires of knowledge may not be taken seriously by or be deemed as of much relevance to the centres of empire – except perhaps for its exotic quality. And thus, knowledge from the periphery may remain peripheral knowledge. Certainly the traffic of knowledge is more likely to be from centre to edge rather than the reverse – although the reverse does happen. However, while this may be one broad long-term pattern, it is also the case that Australia has moved away somewhat from the intellectual cringe that characterised university research in the first half of the twentieth century (Kenway & Fahey, in press). Further, theories from various centres may be domesticated – reworked within and in relation to Australian circumstances. What emerges may involve a synthesis of ideas from different sources, which in turn may actually make the research less parochial than that from the centres of empire. Indeed, perhaps being on the edge produces edgy research because of this dynamic and because the distance from the centres has a liberating effect.

Of course the traffic in ideas is influenced by the embodied and virtual travel of researchers themselves. And the international mobility of researchers is a significant feature of the globalisation of knowledge and of the university sector more broadly. Further, the manner in which universities and knowledge globalise is a matter of concern not just to nation-states but also to those researchers who seek to contribute to an understanding of the complex asymmetrical connectivities involved, as well as

those who seek to ensure that such globalisation does not mean that the intellectual power of empires of knowledge is reinvigorated. Therefore, we believe that one key priority for educational research in Australia is developing an understanding of the complex issues involved when thinking about the international mobility of researchers with connections to Australia.

Mobile Researchers and the National Interest

Many of Australia's most inventive researchers are on the move around the globe and in the future their numbers will grow. The questions thus arise: is our national interest best served by trying to attract them back or, is it better served if we think more creatively and generously about this issue? In relation to these questions, it is our view that Australia is missing the mark – not because many of our high calibre researchers are on the move, but because our policies and institutions are often rather unimaginative in dealing with researcher mobility. As researchers increasingly address the big global issues of our times, their mobility is crucial. So too is challenging narrow versions of the national interest.

The perspectives evident below on researchers' international mobility involve a mind-shift away from simple equations of loss and gain and territory and identity – notions still perpetuated in policy conceptions of brain drain-gain/mobility and diaspora. Further, here we go beyond narrowly defined understandings of national and regional interests, thereby moving the mind towards a more nuanced, generative and generous perception with regard to national reputation and relationships and considering the ways in which researchers might contribute to such a perception. We understand reputation in a cooperative as well as a competitive sense that includes inviting a genuine concern for the interests of other nations and regions and for the global public good.

Australia invests a lot in training and developing researchers. Although it cannot stop them leaving, it can more creatively and generously consider how best to benefit from the researchers who leave for good, those who return and those who move back and forth, not to mention those who hail from other countries and establish themselves in Australia. These times are characterised by growing sensitivity to cultural, social and political issues in the region and globe. Internationally mobile researchers in the social sciences and humanities are centrally involved in contributing to Australia's image abroad through their research on economics, society, culture, politics and human behaviour. Crucially, such researchers are also involved in interpreting the rest of the world to Australia. Researchers' interpretations are mediated through the cross border and cross sector connections they foster.

The effects of their mobility on them, on the knowledge they produce and distribute, the connections they sustain, and the ways these connections operate are of interest to a wide range of communities within Australia and internationally. These interests coalesce in the research policies Australia adopts. The Australian government needs to be well informed about researcher mobility issues around the world, and, given its geopolitical location, at the forefront of researcher mobility policy inventiveness in the global context.

Policy Considerations

We now turn our attention to the issues discussed and debated at the invitational conference we held in July 2008 in Melbourne, called *Moving Ideas and Research Policies: Australian Intellectuals in the Global Context*. Here we explored the diverse benefits and difficulties of the international mobility of researchers and how research related policies, networks and institutions could best support and harness the benefits. Conference participants, eminent mobile intellectuals in the social sciences and humanities with connections to Australia, raised a number of considerations for policy and for mobile researchers themselves³. Detailed below is a collation of selected policy considerations that emerged from the conference and some of the thinking that lay behind them. We have chosen only those that relate to the themes above. Included are our own considerations and selected comments from other conference participants⁴.

Mobile Researchers

Acknowledge that as international mobility increases, mobile researchers with various links to Australia do not necessarily see themselves as Australian researchers. Policy makers might recognise this and explore benefits of having mobile scholars associated with Australia.

Speaking at the conference, Ien Ang said: “let me clarify the difference between a travelling Australian researcher and a migrant scholar who happens to work in Australia. For the former, Australia is the stable point of departure, from where international travel is envisaged as going abroad or overseas, away from (and back to) the national home. For the migrant scholar however, mobility is a way of life, in spirit if not necessarily in physical reality, because there is no such thing as coming home. So, although I work *in* Australia, I don’t consider myself as *of* Australia. This isn’t because I am of or from a specific place elsewhere, but because my circulation through a number of places has made me define myself through a relatively autonomous stand towards place as such”.

Use mobility programs to contribute to Australia’s role as a global citizen. The notions of brain drain-gain, mobility and diaspora are simply not adequate for

contemporary conditions where so many problems are manifest globally as well as regionally and cannot be addressed within the restricted logics of national interest. Singer's and Gregg's (2004, p. 15) discussion of the nation as a global citizen is particularly critical of narrow notions of the national interest and urges Australia to "take a broader and long term view" that fosters "an ethical framework for international relations and global cooperation". This suggests a role for mobile researchers outside of universities themselves.

There is the potential for overseas and highly mobile researchers in the social sciences and humanities to play a state-sponsored advisory role to Australian governments. They would advise in their areas of competence particularly when it comes to such big global issues of the day as the environment, war and violence, poverty and refugees. Many are well placed to translate overseas cultural, social and political perspectives about such matters for Australians. If national reputation and being a good global citizen are important, then surely interpreting the rest of the world to Australia is crucial. Not being immersed in the everyday of Australian politics, such people may not feel constrained about speaking critically of current Australian policies and practices.

Generate more South-South research dialogues by encouraging regional researcher remits and mobilities. From the perspectives of the brain drain-gain, brain mobility and diaspora discourses, the consequences of high skills mobility for nation-states or regions are understood largely in terms of narrow national economic self-interest. They are not usually considered in terms of the interests of other nation-states, regions, the global public good; nor, indeed, other configurations of sociality such as the global power relationships between capital and labour, the global elite and their Others, the mobile and the immobile. This is not to say that all wealthy nation-states and regional blocs ignore the issue of brain drain or diaspora from the point of view of those nations or regions that suffer most from the loss of high skills and talent. Such losses do evoke expressions of concern.

But, the concerns of such bodies as the European Union about the brain drain from the South to the North have an aura of *noblesse oblige*. Their methods of responding usually gesture feebly to the problems associated with the global asymmetries of knowledge and power between and within the North and the South. Meanwhile as Tanner (2005, p. 4) indicates, brain drain threatens "the stability of entire countries". It restricts the wellbeing and growth of many developing nations, and their ability to sustain themselves as well as to compete with (over) developed nations. Such gestural concern can be read as self interested in global geopolitical terms. It can be seen as associated with the privileged receiving nation-states' or regions' concern about counteracting the bad press of brain drain, about a concern for their reputation and

security in a context of global instability and hostility. No nation-state benefits from being regarded as globally selfish. And it might be argued that peripheral but rich countries such as Australia need to be particularly concerned about their reputations in this regard and that they might do well to seriously consider the links between mobile researchers and national generosity towards those places from which they attract and keep research talent. But what might this entail?

As Raewyn Connell (2007) has argued in her book *Southern Theory*, Australia needs to start to understand itself much more as part of the global South and to consider what this means intellectually. South-South research dialogues are crucial. This points to the need to specifically encourage regional researcher remits and mobilities both of Australian researchers to Asia and of Asian researchers to Australia. Further, those Australian researchers who live and work in Asia and those who regularly travel to Asia for research purposes are well placed to help to generate such dialogues and to help interpret parts of Asia for Australian researchers and vice versa. But it also requires an acknowledgement that many countries in the global South do suffer a brain drain and that South-South dialogues would need to acknowledge this in very practical ways.

Better integrate resident Australian researchers into international research communities through the work of mobile scholars. Opinions vary on this but overall it seems Australian-based researchers would benefit from more integration but not assimilation in various international research circles. They would also benefit from gaining a better sense of how Australian research is regarded abroad. Equally it is important to illustrate to other countries around the world the possible research advantages of being on global peripheries of knowledge/power. It is possible that such positioning means that knowledge is either weighed down by the force of the powerful centres of knowledge or is regarded as irrelevant to them. However, it is equally possible that standpoints from the edge may also have their own edginess – a fresh and energetic quality that arises from their distance.

A possible role for Australia's overseas researchers in the social sciences and humanities might be to help to deepen the conversations and connections between those Australian researchers who continue to live in Australia and their international epistemological communities. An associated role might be to feed back to such Australian-based researchers international views of research in Australia. Currently these roles tend to be undertaken on an informal one-to-one basis. The people we interviewed for the *Moving Ideas* project understood well the complex contours of ways of thinking in Australia and were similarly insightful with regard to the parts of the world they are currently living in. Australian research communities can always benefit from insider-outside perspectives. Their important role as intellectual mediators and translators could be made more systematic. But this potential is not tapped as much as it might be. Several of those we

interviewed indicated their surprise that they have not been drawn upon more and also their willingness to be so. It is possible that a database of expertise could be developed of Australian researchers living overseas. From here, there are many possible ways of tapping their role as intellectual mediators and translators including return-visiting roles.

Encourage those researchers who were originally from Australia but who now work in “the global metropolitan poles” to address questions associated with the unfair geopolitics of knowledge. Some questions are as follows: (Note: The questions and comments included below were posed/made by respective participants in the *Moving Ideas* project and conference. These participants include: Susan Robertson, Dennis Altman, Paul James, Simon Marginson and McKenzie Wark).

How might a diasporic elite, or for that matter any dislocated individual or group, use their very dislocation to think about, and think into, peripheral spaces from the metropole in ways that avoid the current hegemony of talent wars or the baggage of past cosmopolitanism, and reveal, instead, the geopolitics of knowledges?

How might our distant past places of location, and the inevitable dislocations that come with new places, reshape the way we think about and contribute to, the worlds where we are, and the worlds through which we have travelled?

Is it possible to develop an ethic of place that is not reducible to nationalism, not susceptible to patriotism, not romanced as undivided global or local community, and not leveraged as “talent”? (Susan Robertson)

Networks and collaboration

Question assumptions about what “counts” as academic research and collaboration and find ways to encourage researchers to work more with communities and social movements.

Working with communities and social movements, doing politics, not just writing about politics from a distance, is a legitimate research activity that has no place in current evaluations of academic outputs. Academics have the luxury and resources to work with ideas, to read articles and books, to access a whole range of possibilities that most people in community organisations or development organisations don’t have, and that gives us a reciprocal obligation. There is a whole set of new possibilities, that cut across national boundaries, across disciplines, across all the assumptions about what it is that academic research is about. There are new ways in which we can think about the sort of work we do and the contributions that we as academics can make to understanding and practice. (Dennis Altman)

Redefine, support and encourage substantial collaboration and networks.

Global forums, conferences and networks are good for meeting people and having great discussions in exotic places. And it should be said that sometimes, deeper research collaborations can come out of such networking. However, the effect of serial-superficial networking becoming the dominant form of global engagement and increasingly framing conferences and forums is that globalised networking tends no longer to ground research in face-to-face collaboration, any more than it might be done via the Internet or reading other people's work online. In this context, networking and constantly moving between various global forums can become another version of fetishised mediated *interaction* and scholarly tourism rather than substantial *integration* with your fellow researchers in other places. In other words, globalising forums can be good, but only if they are conceived as developing something beyond networking for its own sake.

The ARC places a great emphasis on networking and it has put grants procedures in place to support this activity. To the extent that we, as academics, are bound up with the status orientation of networking, travelling the global circuit becomes empty. Networking should be a background platform for doing something substantial and on the ground. We thus need a deepening of our processes of collaboration that cross spatial distance but also are sustained across time. We need to get beyond one-to-one self-oriented collaboration. This is not to argue against strong personal connections, but it is to suggest, using Meaghan Morris' expression, that "seriously deep relations" need to be institutionalised and grounded, beyond one-to-one or self-projecting collaboration. (Paul James)

Help build knowledge capacity in emerging nations and institutions.

Australian universities could form long-term capacity building partnerships with research universities in neighbouring countries, e.g. Indonesia, the world's fourth largest nation with 220 million people, whose universities fall largely outside the fecund potentials of open source knowledge flows. (Simon Marginson)

Develop mobility schemes that are more flexible.

There are numerous schemes that seem designed to get people to come back permanently – or at least semi-permanently, the schemes usually only last for four or five years. In the humanities at least it seems more fruitful to look for a more flexible approach, bringing people back for

one to three months per year. The most valuable thing might be an ongoing network that can sponsor both people and ideas as they move in both directions, rather than head hunting certain big names whose heads might adorn the walls of Australian universities. (McKenzie Wark)

Mobile and Territorial Responsibilities

The statements above consider the obligations of academic mobility. In a globally mobile landscape, what claims can nation-states make on their researchers? In concluding, we need to ascertain the kinds of territorial loyalties and responsibilities that can be expected from constantly mobile researchers whether this is on a national scale (as in the case of Australia) or on a regional scale (as in the case of Europe). Furthermore, if we characterise mobile researchers as global citizens, then we also need to think about the ways in which loyalties and responsibilities are enacted as a kind of ethical cosmopolitanism.

Clearly, in terms of global geographies of knowledge/power, when speaking about mobile researchers who are moving from one wealthy nation or region to another, different ethical questions need to be considered from those that arise in discussions about academic mobility from less wealthy to more wealthy nation-states. In this context, do the constantly mobile develop any territorial responsibilities or do they just float free of these? Indeed, are we to assume that they more easily disencumbered from these territorial responsibilities than researchers from less wealthy nation-states, and if so, what are the ethical implications of this?

Perhaps we are suggesting that in the globally mobile world of researchers an ethics of mobility has yet to catch up with mobile researchers and academic mobility policies. In other words, when thinking about academic mobility, surely it is becoming increasingly pressing that we begin to consider both the ethics of mobility and the ethics of place.

Endnotes

- ¹ Some of the ideas we discuss here which relate to globalising the research imagination were first published in Kenway & Fahey (2009).
- ² Here, Jacobs' ideas frame our discussion, as she was a participant in the *Moving Ideas* project. We also acknowledge that Connell discusses the relationship between the metropole and the periphery in *Southern Theory* (2007). This is a valuable argument; however, it is our contention that there are also geographical nuances to these relationships, as demonstrated by Australia's "awkward global position".

- ³ Diverse stakeholders and commentators were brought together at the conference: university researchers from various disciplines and levels of seniority, representatives from the Australian Learned Academies, the Australian Research Council and state and commonwealth governments.
- ⁴ These policy considerations were first published in a report based on the conference called *Brain Drain or Mind-shift? Reconsidering Policies on Researcher Mobility* (2009).

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