

Book review

Thais França y Beatriz Padilla (eds.) *Transnational scientific mobility. Perspectives from the North and from the South*. Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), 2017, 266 pp. (e-book) ISBN: 978-972-8048-16-7

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Transnational scientific mobility. Perspectives from the North and from the South is a collective and multilingual work presenting a comprehensive vision of international scientific mobility that gathers contributions from several researchers coming from different academic and geographical backgrounds.

It goes without saying that issues related to academic mobility are not new, although their repercussions and consequences as a global phenomenon have never been so unknown. Human mobility in general and academic mobility in particular take place in contexts driven by geopolitical and geostrategic factors which structurally affect and pre-determine the achievement of a research career, especially for certain individuals.

The complexity of scientific mobility does necessarily require a holistic approach, thus the texts gathered in this volume focus on a variety of theoretical objects related to academic mobility which entail an excellent instrument to delve into its numerous areas of research. The theoretical and the conceptual frameworks on which the different chapters of the book are set allow us to explore classic questions related to academic mobility from new angles and critical approaches and, in doing so, the various chapters of the book revisit the classic debates on qualified migration. As noted below, it also tackles a large number of unexplored issues within academic mobility that may lead us to pose new questions on the topic. It therefore combines the classic bibliography on the subject with the up-to-the-date one as a suitable framework to set the conceptual and epistemological debate.

The chapters of this book show several historical-geographical contexts in which academic mobility is outlined. The analysis is held in different levels ranging from structural issues that affect the organization of academic mobility to individual aspects, passing through the elements of the social praxis that specially affect the career path of some researchers.

Addressing the content of the chapters, the conceptual debate on brain drain, brain gain, brain circulation, brain exchange has been extensively approached from a wide range of perspectives and critical positions. While these dynamics are regularly presented from the standpoint of the profit and losses generated by the mobility of academics and researchers, these antagonistic debates are proved to be equivocal as they decomplex sub-

sequent analyses. These terms have been established within the study of academic migration as the dominant paradigm by which reality is described, although in this book they are quarantined in the pursuit of alternative analytical horizons that may account for other academic and geographic realities. These alternatives must take note of the experience of other subjects and likewise cover the wide-range of phenomenon that occur between *drain and gain* or *exchange and circulation*. Beyond the literal wording of the term “brain drain”, the text makes us notice that researchers also have bodies and that mobility is, in fact, embodied mobility rather than the abstract circulation of the brain (p. 74). It also demonstrates the tensions between the development of individual-professional projects and the invisibility to which family-personal projects have been demoted highlighting that mobility’s costs are not only economic, but also emotional. The text addresses the fact that scientific policies do not contemplate this other dimension of academic migration while scientific literature on the subject has neglected the negotiations, decisions or strategies that migrating as a couple or a family may involve. It also shows the difficulties that researchers face in terms of family conciliation and the development of a research career especially by women due to gender blindness of the policies. On this particular topic, the low recognition of scientific work and the lack of continuity of policies illustrate a recurrent institutional weakness.

The terminological conceptual debate of this work is completed by another series of terms such as the categories of economic migrants, mobile academics, cosmopolitan expatriates, academic mobility vs. academic migration, knowledge circulation, high skilled migration or transmobility.

Another important topic in the book has to do with a set of issues concerning the organization and capacity of national scientific systems to attract and retain foreign scientists bringing to light the strengths and weaknesses of these systems. At another level, the book addresses the mechanisms that are launched within universities to institutionalize mobility. Institutional cooperation mechanisms are a central element of academic mobility and constitute a concern for the institutionalization of research practices that may shift from parallel to common cooperation agendas.

Academic mobility cannot be successfully examined without investigating, on the one hand, the power relations and asymmetries between the countries in which mobility is occurring and, on the other hand, the role that categories such as citizenship, ethnicity-nationality, culture-language play throughout the scientific career of any researcher. These categories operate as identity markers that reveal not only a necessary diversity among researchers but also inequalities that conflict with the official discourse on cosmopolitanism of scientific mobility. Regarding this idea, it is properly considered in the text how cosmopolitan dispositions can be the underlining conditions for a successful intercultural knowledge transfer and creation.

The book reveals that the values of internationalization and education, as well as the values of multiculturalism and the preparation of students for their integration in society are subsumed to economic and market interests. Higher education could play a role in breaking the socio-economic barriers between countries of the North and the South, although higher education has become an exportable product and an economic asset for some countries. This also implies that scientific mobility is traditionally thought of as an effective mean of channelling and promoting development. Nevertheless, this potential

development is often mistakenly attributed to both the sending and recipients countries of academic migrants or perceived as a neutral and beneficial multidirectional circulation of knowledge.

As proven with this book, the geopolitical and geostrategic elements that underlie academic mobility and the impact that mobility has within the career path of researchers must be examined in depth, since academic mobility is a polyhedral reality and there is still much to investigate. Among these issues that should be explored, the authors point out: the reconsideration of the assumptions on general matters relating academic mobility; its dynamics and implications; the meanings, consequences and patterns of academic mobility; the commodification of knowledge that turn some countries into exporters, while others are consumers; the mechanisms of indirect discrimination involved in academic mobility; the gradual consolidation of a global academic market, inter alia.

I must point out that the book satisfactorily provides the reader with a broad set of different topics noting the complexity of academic mobility and I must also emphasised that one of its great strengths is the transversal proposal to decolonize the knowledge on this subject. On another note, each chapter faces the challenge of covering research gaps on this topic. Hence this book is a valuable input for those who need to go further in the study of qualified mobility and, since it does not claim to exhaust the subject, this text is a starting point to continue examining the different elements that make up the complexity of academic mobility and particularly those “grey areas”, *things we do not know about scientific mobility* (p.71).