

# Theorising the Spaces of Student Migration

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## ABSTRACT

Student migration is a key component of knowledge migration. However, as knowledge becomes a central part of migrant selectivity, labour and family migrants too are involved in knowledge acquisition, both prior to and after migration. At the same time, student migrants are involved in work and family, just like other migrants. What then is distinctive about student migrants? This paper attempts to address this challenge. It begins by reviewing how migration theories have analysed student mobility. It then suggests that migration theorists need to extend existing analyses, which have primarily focused on the spatialities of migration, to take account of the spatialities of knowledge. It is argued that knowledge institutions need to reach out to people in different parts of the world and to produce in prospective students a desire to circulate. This is necessary if the institutions are to obtain a global presence and to maintain their legitimacy as knowledge brokers. An analysis of student migration where the inducements that the Higher Education Institutions offer to prospective students and the subjective responses of such students to these invitations will throw light on how the spatiality of knowledge is achieved and also highlight the distinctiveness of student migration in a knowledgeable migrant world. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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## INTRODUCTION

Between 2000 and 2008, the total number of students migrating internationally increased by 70% (Biene *et al.*, 2011), with students accounting for the fastest growth in migration in several Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. A number of countries recognise the value of students as nascent skilled migrants who offer the benefits of new knowledge to the labour market at relatively low wages (Ziguras and Law, 2006; Khadria, 2009; Hawthorne, 2010). The 'brightest and best' students thus gain competitive advantage in the knowledge economy.

However, skills<sup>1</sup> and knowledge have become desirable qualities amongst all migrants, and as a result, family and labour migrants are also being urged to acquire new skills both prior to and after migration. Knowledgeable migrants are valued both as drivers of economic growth and as more socially integrated migrants. If other categories of migrants too are acquiring skills, then what distinguishes student migration? How can we respond theoretically to the challenge of the dispersion of skills across migrant categories? What avenues does this suggest for theorising student migration?

Just as skills have become proletarianised across the migrant spectrum, so too has mobility for study become part of a wider array of life course mobility amongst student migrants. Students are not only migrating to study but also are engaging in geographical mobility as part of a way of life through familial movement, for work, and so on. Moving to study is thus only one aspect of a life where mobility is pursued more generally (Findlay *et al.*, 2012).

Together, these two aspects fundamentally challenge the distinctiveness of student migration. Findlay *et al.* (2012) respond to this challenge by arguing for a more fine-tuned theorisation of student migration, rather than abandoning the need for theorising student mobility as a distinctive entity. This paper too responds to this challenge, and in doing so, it takes a geographical route.

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Geographers have contributed significantly to empirical, theoretical, and policy research on student migration (see, *inter alia*, Brooks and Waters, 2009; Findlay, 2011). The geographies of student migration have been analysed demographically as stocks and flows (King *et al.*, 2011), institutionally through the role that higher education institutions play in shaping migration and conceptually through the human, social, and cultural capital they require for, as well as acquire through, migration (Baláz and Williams, 2004; Findlay *et al.*, 2006; Waters, 2006; 2009). The effects that this mobility has in sending and receiving areas have also received attention (Xiang and Shen, 2009; Hawthorne, 2010; Waters and Brooks, 2010). However, in reviewing this literature, Findlay (2011) found that most of it focused on student mobility and hence student (and familial) demand for higher education; what is still missing is an analysis of the spatiality of higher education and its relationship to student mobility.

This paper begins by providing an overview of existing theories of student migration and exploring the spatial dimensions of this theorisation. It then suggests that theorising the spatialities of knowledge production alongside those of migration can help in understanding the specificity of student migration. Knowledge stretches out to other places through the circulation of people, codes, books, academics, and students. The reach and stretch of this knowledge, and of governments and institutions that foster, develop, and market these knowledges, are dependent on these circulations. This paper suggests that these inherent and important spatialities of knowledge production should be considered in analyses of student migration.

The term 'knowledge' is used in this paper because it has the ability to situate individual know-how in social settings (Williams and Baláz, 2008). It also offers the possibility of moving beyond an analysis of status (skilled/lesser skilled) towards recognising the productive nature of knowledge. As Williams and Baláz (2008) outline, there are many aspects to knowledge, which has led to knowledge being understood through diverse typologies: explicit/tacit, explicit/implicit/emancipatory, and embrained/embodyed/encultured/embedded/encoded. For the purposes of this paper, all these elements are recognised as significant to students. For instance, students are

expected to acquire knowledge of all the five kinds that Williams and Baláz discuss: embrained knowledges (conceptual and cognitive); embodyed knowledges (important in the case of experiments and where there is practical learning as in the arts); encultured knowledges (shared systems of meaning); embedded knowledges (organisational practices); and encoded knowledges (books, manuals). However, the importance of each varies depending on the demographic characteristics of students (age, gender, race, country of origin), the subjects studied, and so on. In varying combinations, these different types of knowledge cohere as the knowledges whose circulation student mobility is entangled in.<sup>2</sup>

The rest of this paper is divided into four sections. The next section looks at how, although study is implied to be the primary, often exclusive, purview of students, in practice skilling, like work and familial relations, is a criterion that is not exclusive to a single migrant category. It highlights ways in which the acquisition of skills has become a necessary part of the lives of labour and family migrants, just as labour processes and family commitments influence student migrants too. It thus sets up the question, 'what is specific to student migration?' The second section outlines some of the ways in which existing research on student migration is theorised spatially. The third section proposes another route for analysing student migration, one that places the spatialities of knowledge production centre-stage. The concluding section suggests some ways in which this form of analysis contributes to theorising student migration at a time when knowledge and skills are becoming relevant to many other groups of migrants too.

## DEFINING 'STUDENT MIGRANTS' AND WHY IT MATTERS

The relationship between knowledge and migration has diffused. Conceptually, skills and knowledge acquisition are most easily associated with student migration, but in the last few decades, skills have become important in the selection, admission, and integration of other migrant categories too. The predominance of skills as a criterion for identifying desirable migrants has meant that skilling is an important element of all migrants' lives. At the same time,

student migrants too can engage in both waged labour and familial ties. This results in the blurring of boundaries between different kinds of migrant. In this section, I explore these boundaries to delineate the distinguishing characteristics of student migration.

### **Study – an Overarching Activity for All Migrants**

One noteworthy aspect of recent migration is the extent to which study, in some form, has become an activity encompassing all migrants. Human capital (and the study that underpins this) has become a basis for the selection of migrants in many countries (Williams, 2007). This is most notable in the case of labour migrants. For many years, countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK have used human capital, measured as qualifications, along with other factors, such as age and income, to choose migrants. In the UK, both the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme introduced in 2002 and its successor, the Points-Based System, are based on the premise that the skills that people bring add to the economic growth of a country (Spencer, 2011). A number of European countries too have adopted qualifications as an important criterion for entry into the labour market. The Blue Card scheme in Europe envisages a human capital approach, privileging accredited skills as a primary criterion for identifying desirable migrants. Although in recent years, some countries have shifted their emphasis away from a general focus on skills to schemes where skills are tied to specific labour market requirements, human capital or knowledge continues to play a part in the choice of sectors to which migrants are admitted. Thus, even today, all we see is a filtering of desirable skills not a questioning of skills as a continuing factor in migration.

There has also been an extension of skills as an important basis for right to entry among family migrants. Family migrants are now required to study either before or after migration in many countries. For instance, a recent EU study (PROSINT, WP-4) compares pre-migration policies in four European countries and finds that three of them, the Netherlands (introduced in 2006), Germany (introduced in 2007), and the UK (introduced in 2010) had some form of pre-admission integration policies that required learning the

history, language, and culture of the destination country. The study notes that although pre-entry measures had already been applied selectively to ministers of religion (2004) and highly skilled migrants (November 2006) in the UK, the widespread application of this to other groups is relatively new. Thus, the Dutch, German, and UK pre-entry measures clearly introduced a more comprehensive approach where large groups of newcomers are required to meet specific integration criteria by acquiring knowledge in their countries of origin before being admitted (PROSINT, WP-4). Migration becomes a driver for the acquisition of this knowledge. Moreover, family migrants study in order to migrate and also once they come to destination countries. They attend language classes and citizenship or integration classes. Here, skills acquisition becomes a key method for addressing a disjuncture that King *et al.* (2010) identify – that between a world shaped by the knowledge economy and the role of mobility therein and the ‘reflex action of closure towards foreigners, “others”, suspected terrorists etc., leading to increasing controls over immigration’ (2010: 47). Studying is a way of becoming a desirable (knowledgeable) migrant.

Language is the most common skill asked of migrants. The privileging of language is underlain by the notion that language enables integration<sup>3</sup> particularly socially and culturally. However, language also has wider connotations as linguistic skills facilitate economic integration<sup>4</sup> and this economic contribution that skills enable undoubtedly influences the desire for skills amongst family migrants. Skilling then becomes part of the whole process of migration, of relevance not just for students but for other categories of migrants too. In fact, it is precisely by casting all migrants as students in some form that the requirements of the knowledge economy are to be met.

### **Students and their Multiple Identities**

Just as acquisition of skills has become important for many different categories of migrants (not only students) to become an overarching theme in migration regimes, student migrants, the archetypical seekers of skills, are also not easily categorisable as students alone. Thus, most studies on student migration highlight the extent to which employment is an increasingly important

part of the lives of student migrants (Liu Farrer, 2009). The importance of skills to labour migrants has been matched by growing participation of student migrants in the labour market. For instance, Brett Neilson, theorising the recharting of political spaces during the protests of 'students-migrants-workers' (2009: 425) in Sydney, Australia, in 2008, highlights how the marketisation of education and the drawing of student migrants into this marketised structure in Australia has forced many student migrants into the labour market. Commodification, not only of university structures but also of the whole migration process, means that students have to work to pay for their migration, university tuition fees, and accommodation in receiving countries. This financial burden has led to the multiplication of student subjectivities as they try to fund their education by taking up paid work. Hence, study is only one form of labour that students engage in – others include taxi-driving and working in restaurants and shops, for instance.

Politically, this erosion of the boundary between study and work has been troubling as there has been a vilification of student migrants who are also working. Multiplication of labour (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2008) is precisely the mechanism through which students become categorised as inappropriate migrants. They become, as Neilson (2009) shows us, students in Indian press coverage, taxi drivers in Australia, and irregular everywhere. This multiplication of roles and ensuing unclear identities lies at the heart of new controls over student migration that aims to place and limit students to being primarily students. Controls over how many hours students can work have ensued as the boundaries between labour migrants and student migrants are policed. This has been exemplified most recently by regulatory changes in the UK that have restricted the right to work (and to bring dependants) to certain categories of student migrants. One unfortunate effect of these regulations is that students are not recognised as workers, political activists, or family members. As a result, student migrants 'exist neither inside nor outside the construct of the national labour market and its attendant juridical schemes. Their working lives are carried out in a zone in which internality and externality mix and borders proliferate within the space of the nation-state once imagined as unitary and homogeneous' (Neilson, 2009: 439).

Students traverse other boundaries and categories too, a factor that has been emphasised in much of the literature on student migration. For instance, there is a small body of work that explores how familial decision-making is central to student migrants. This literature extends across generations exploring both the value of student mobility to families (Waters, 2006) and the limits to mobility placed by partnering and children (Ackers, 2008). This usefully augments the literature on student migration by recognising their multiple identities including the importance of family in migration stories. Baas summarises this multiplicity by arguing that overseas students are never just that – they are tourists, settlers, migrants, and 'transnational wannabes' (2010: 20).

Study is also stretched across countries. Although most of the literature on student migration looks at the post-migration experience of students, academic selectivity means that skilling is an essential component of pre-migrant student lives too. Hence, study done prior to migration is necessary to and definitive of the migration process of international students. For instance, in the UK, pre-degree qualifications are being closed to international students. Only qualifications acquired prior to migration are awarded points and are used to select student migrants (Spencer, 2011). Education is not only the reason for travel; it is also a necessary precondition for travelling.

The places, institutions, and content of skilling are, thus, extending across sites and migrant categories. However, they are felt most significantly in the lived experiences of student migrants. Reacting against accusations of student migrants' 'lack of authenticity' or 'not being a proper student', some researchers have responded by highlighting the complexity of student identities and of the necessity of social relations and family life to a migrant student's life (e.g. Collins, 2008; Findlay *et al.*, 2012). Such authors convincingly argue that student migration is not exceptional – it is one part of a lifetime of mobility. Thus, Findlay *et al.* (2012) draw on their research on international student migrants from the UK to note the importance of privilege and wider processes of class distinction of which both migration and education are only parts.<sup>5</sup> They recognise the blurring of boundaries around the student experience but then respond by urging theoretical innovations that take account of this

blurring. How, then, do we define student migrants? What is specific to student migration? These are questions that haunt their analysis too. They suggest a focus on class as one avenue, and here, I suggest another. I suggest that we address these questions by analysing the specificity and importance of knowledge acquisition as a key criterion for student migrants.<sup>6</sup> The role of knowledge as a driver for student migrants has been relatively ignored in research thus far. Knowledge is seen as almost incidental to student migration. Instead, it is almost always the spatialities of migration that are used to theorise student migration, as we will see in the following section. This paper argues for the need to address this lacuna.

#### THE GEOGRAPHIES OF MIGRATION THEORIES – STUDENT MIGRATION

In a recent paper in this journal, Russell King (2012) argues for the importance of recognising migration as an inherently geographical topic, as migration is one expression of spatial connections in an interconnected world. He highlights the crucial role that geographers have played in theorising migration and usefully traces the different conceptual debates that migration research has, as a result, conceived or contributed to. In this section, I take up his arguments to explore how spatial relations are being positioned in some of the theories around student migration.<sup>7</sup> Different definitions of place and ways of conceptualising spatial relations are inherent to these theorisations. For instance, in many of the theoretical frameworks used in understanding student migration, space is conceived as something that is pre-existent, often divided between sending and receiving countries. Others see spaces of flows and connections where the spatial relations between places are activated by migration and the associated flows of goods, capital, and ideas.

These ways of thinking about place and space are important not only for geographers but also have practical effects for conceiving migration in policy terms. Arguably, the politicisation of migration is itself an effect of particular ways of thinking of place, whereby place boundaries are held as immutable and sacrosanct, and migration is seen as an incursion across such boundaries. Every migrant is then an outsider who invades

places. Instead, through the ensuing sub-sections, we move towards thinking of space 'as the sphere of co-existing multiplicity, space as a simultaneity of spaces so-far' (Massey, 2005: 54); and in doing so engage with and extend King's broader discussion of the relationship between geography, migration, and space, applying it in particular to student migration.

#### Linking Distinctive Entities

Arguably, predominant ways of theorising migration are influenced by neoclassical theorists who view individual migration decisions as a result of push-pull factors. Migration is seen as an effect of rational decision-making processes undertaken by individuals (Todaro 1976). Decisions are seen as strategic and as being arrived at by weighing up the costs and benefits (direct and indirect) of moving from one place to another so that comparison between staying and moving becomes the driving force for migration. Although most research on student migration has distanced itself from neoclassical theory, aspects of it – variations of a push-pull analysis, the focus on individuals and a particular spatial imagination – continue to prevail. In the following, I begin by briefly outlining the first two points that have been widely trailed in the broader literature on migration and exemplify how they have been used in research on international student migration too. I then develop the third point – the spatialities that are called into play in such theorisations, a point that has received somewhat less attention in the existing literature.

The benefits of migration for students (which act as pull factors) range from the narrowly defined such as ability to learn English (Baláz and Williams, 2004) to broader aims such as increasing chance of employability or career growth (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008), wage maximisation within their career, (Rosenzweig, 2006) or security of citizenship (Hazen and Alberts, 2006; Neilson, 2009; Baas, 2010). Waters (2006) usefully locates this demand for international education not only in the labour-market imperatives that underlie theories of human capital but also in the social and cultural capital that international education brings. She argues that migrants obtain important transferable skills and knowledges that enhance mobility – social mobility on their return to the

sending country but also geographical mobility within the global economy. Importantly, she also recognises that the desire for the acquisition of these skills is itself underlain by the possession of knowledge about the value of international mobility and the ability to fund such movement. Hence, cultural capital is not acquired but rather is enhanced and developed, through migration.

Mobility also offers students opportunities to experience new places and the excitement and adventure that this may entail. As Waters *et al.* (2011) argue, fun, excitement, and escape from the familiar are important reasons for student mobility. Hence, the tropes that characterise tourism have become meaningful in explaining student migration.

It is not only the benefits to individual students that have been analysed but also the benefits of student mobility to institutions (Chen, 2007). These too act as pull factors shaping student migration. Who gains in the receiving countries and how is the stuff of journalism (Neilson, 2009), policy documents (Mulley and Sachrajda, 2011) as well as more academic theorisations (Findlay, 2011). For instance, Findlay argues that institutions that award international credentials have an opportunity not only to raise significant financial capital in the process but also to profit from the embodied cultural capital that students bring with them from their countries of origin (2011: 164; also Hall, 2011). This demand to recognise the role that receiving countries, their governments with their own ideologies, politics and policies, and their institutions play in migration is refreshing. It is also central to positing those who are in receiving countries as active agents who are shaping migration. However, this 'supply-side analysis' is less well researched than that of demand (Findlay, 2011).

Push factors, such as inability to access equivalent higher education opportunities in the home country, have also come to be increasingly recognised (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008; Brooks and Waters, 2009). In this form of analysis, students are 'engaged in the strategic and conscious pursuit of "advantage"' (Waters and Brooks, 2010: 218), where 'advantage' is measured through comparison between places.

For long, student migration was analysed as part of individual decision-making, in line with the emphasis on individuals as bearers of human capital. Decision-making around migration too was seen to be made by individuals, rather than

within wider social units, so that the relations between the reproduction of the family and knowledge gain were only weakly developed. However, there has been a shift away from methodological individualism (Boswell, 2008) to encapsulate families as drivers and beneficiaries of student migration (Waters, 2006). Both familial investments and the benefits to families of international student mobility have added considerably to our understanding of student migration.

Significantly, these accounts are embedded within a particular kind of spatial imagination. Places are, in this formulation, perceived as independent entities, marked by individuality and distinction. For example, the educational opportunities in one country and the career openings it offers are compared with those in another, and the student decides to move in response. Migration is therefore conceptualised as linking distinctive places; migrants respond to the differences between these places through calculation and movement. The vectors of difference between 'here' and 'there' become the causative factors for migration, and the differences between places are summarised by the hyphen as in rural-urban (Ghosh, 1993), South-North (Lee and Tan, 1984) and East-West (Baas, 2010). In many cases, the precise direction of travel is not framed through these geographical referents, but the underlying ethos, the modernising imperative, and its associated directions of travel are implicit in the terms on either side of the hyphen.

In this form of analysis, comparison is the primary analytical mode for theorising place. Student migrants are analysed as engaging in comparison between places when deciding whether to migrate and the hyphen in terms such as South-North, in effect, becomes the comparative gesture between these different places. The results of the comparisons that prospective migrants make between sending and receiving countries are that people migrate, but in doing so, the impact of their presence is also largely moved from one context to the other (Rosenzweig, 2006; Winters, 2011), sometimes with drastic effects on sending areas (Bach 2004). Conversely, smart cities, centres with a high stock of human capital, 'measured as the share of the adult population with a college degree' (Winters, 2011: 253), attract student migrants and propel economic growth. In both analyses, the distinctiveness of individual places is privileged.

Although the nation state is still the implicit spatial framework for research on student migration, many of the explicit comparisons that students engage in appear to be in relation to places. For instance, students often compare between cities. Some are drawn to global cities (Gillies, 2010), others to smaller towns (Florinskaia and Roschina, 2006). In fact, increasingly sophisticated analyses abound, which bring spatial units in different parts of the world together (Waters, 2007; Shen, 2009). Thus, Li and Bray (2007) offer a comparative analysis of student destination choices. However, in this form of analysis, the comparison is only shifted along – from nations to cities.

Comparativism of this nature requires several moves. It is based on a sense of incommensurability between the two places – sending and receiving – as two places marked primarily by difference. Comparisons are never neutral; they hierarchise places along particular axes – job availability, wages, corruption, and so on – and it is through comparison between these places that the imperative for migration is secured. In discussing comparison as an epistemological manoeuvre, Radhakrishnan (2009) suggests that it 'is only within the restlessness that characterizes the spaces that lie between the way things are and the way they should be' that learning occurs within comparison. It is this same restlessness of comparison that sparks migration.

Comparativism also 'supposes a homogenous ground where like can be compared with like' (Spivak, 2009). It involves reifying particular aspects of places so that they can become comparable, forgetting what is lost in that process of comparison. For instance, the value of internationalism and of global mobility may be the primary axes for comparison between institutions when students make choices about migrant destinations, but other highly relevant and meaningful values, such as quality of life or the friends they have in the country, may be minimalised. They adopt particular 'grids, prisms and tropes' (Shohat and Stam, 2009: 474–475) through which to conduct comparisons.

Finally, this comparison is ultimately based on the individuation of places, where each place is analysed as separate and distinctive. As a result, the linkages between places can sometimes be under-theorised in comparative work. The constitutive gesture that migrants make, that

is, how migrants refine and define places, is sometimes overlooked in this form of analysis. For instance, the role of students in changing places is often underplayed (but see, for instance, Smith, 2008). Even when the importance of students to place does gain attention, the localities to which students migrants go are seen as individual recipients of migration (Walton-Roberts, 2012). How international student migrants effectively act as 'live links' between places is less well studied (but see Shen, 2009). Competition is the main mode for linking places so that each place becomes positioned as part of a tier of desirable (to which migrants go) or less desirable places (from which people leave), rather than constituted through dense linkages *between* places.

### **Theorising Places Simultaneously**

Since the mid-1970s, analyses that theorise places as distinctive and separate have been accompanied, sometimes trumped, by modes of theorising which conceive places in a more interlinked way. In the 1970s, this mode of theorising was led by Marxist political economists, dependency theorists, and world systems theorists (Castles and Kosack, 1973; Phizacklea and Miles, 1980; Meillassoux, 1981) for whom migration resulted from structural interdependencies between places. At the heart of these historicised political economy accounts was a focus on the unequal distribution of economic and political power on a world-wide basis and the way in which migration was (and remains) a mechanism for mobilising cheap labour for capital. Thus, migration was a result of structural interdependence between places that were positioned unequally within a global economic system, and both rural-urban migration and migration from the global South to the North could be seen as influenced by the same processes of class distinction. In sum, as an advancement of push-pull theories, places were seen as necessarily interlinked, and it was the nature of the linkages that drove migration.

This version of political economy was widely used when analysing student migration as brain drain through the 1960s and 1970s (Bhagwati 1976). Here, students are seen as incipient skilled migrants whose movements have impacts

greater than that warranted by the number of people involved in such migration. What is also noteworthy about this approach is that both places are theorised simultaneously and under the same analytical framework. The structural inequities that drive migration tie up the sending and receiving places, so that the two are organically linked (Kell and Vogl, 2008a). These inequalities extend back to and draw upon historical formations, particularly of empire, as students from ex-colonies are drawn to countries that were their imperial centres, perpetuating inequalities set in motion during the colonial period. Thus, Kell and Vogl argue that '(f)ormer colonial powers have used their connections to source international students and preserve a hegemonic and new dependency of former colonies. Many of the students who select France as their study destination come from the Francophone nations of the former French colonies in Africa' (2008b: xii).

In this form of analysis, solutions often involve return or some form of circulation (of people, institutions, or knowledge) whereby the gains of one nation are not necessarily accompanied by losses for another (Gribble, 2008). Moreover, in an adaptation of the Wallersteinian interventions into the dependency theories on which some of the brain drain analysis draws, the impact of 'middle places' on brokering mobility along the chain could also be analysed. For instance, Australia may act as an initial destination for international students who then move on to the United States. Australia becomes part of a world system of mobility, rather than a final destination and thus brokers the relationship between core and periphery (or receiving and sending countries). Similarly, Li and Bray (2007) highlight the role of Hong Kong and Macau as both final destinations and as stepping-stones in the international migration strategies of mainland Chinese students. However, such theorisations fail to overcome the divide between sending and receiving countries, although they do emphasise the linkages between places. In particular, they offer a narrative of causal connection.

More recently, the framework of transnationalism has offered a way of theorising connections between places without an overarching sense of linearity or a necessary structural relation (Basch *et al.*, 1994; Guarnizo, 2002). Instead, the framework adopts a more phenomenological approach to the connection between places, seeing them as

enactments of the attachments that migrants form to multiple places. It opens up all people, institutions, and nations to transnational practices and also locates this simultaneity as a lived experience in everyday lives (Faist *et al.*, 2010). Research adopting a transnational perspective focuses on how the links between two places are maintained and emphasises the agency of migrants who maintain these relations across space (Vertovec 2002; Jackson *et al.*, 2004). It thus overcomes some of the criticisms of earlier structural analyses that link places (Glick-Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Vertovec, 2003): such analyses' unilinearity, inability to recognise migrant agency, and downplaying of the social and cultural lives of migrants. Transnationalism also offers us a way of thinking about migration at scales other than that of the nation-state, a concept further emphasised through the term 'translocalism' (Brickell and Datta, 2011).

For geographers, the transnational turn has been significant in that it offers the potential to recognise the importance of place in migration. King (2012) puts this aptly: 'Beyond the need to reinscribe place and locality within studies of transnational migration, geographers have been effective in teasing out the "transnational tensions" of "stability within movement" and "mobility and emplacement".'

The transnationalism of student mobility has been analysed in particular contexts. Perhaps, some of the earliest manifestations of student transnationalism arose in the now familiar literature on transnational families where one member of the family moved to another country to enhance the educational opportunities of children, whereas other members stayed behind in countries of origin (Skeldon, 1994). Income for the family was thus generated in one country, whereas much of it was spent in another. This separation of production from reproduction in transnational families became an increasingly significant trend through the 1990s (Waters, 2005) and still continues to be important today (Ho and Bedford, 2008). However, in this analysis, education was itself not really transnational. It did not span borders; rather, it was the family that was stretched across countries, although the purpose was clearly to facilitate education.<sup>8</sup>

Most research on student transnationalism continues to focus on the family as the primary institution that is stretched across space. For

instance, Collins (2009) discusses how students use ICT to influence activities at home and connect between 'here' and home. Although he extends this to explore political and cultural activities, it is not the educational experience that is transnational but the social space, including that of the family, which is stretched out. Weiss and Ford (2011) extend these debates beyond social space to explore student agency and activism. Most usefully, some recent studies have tried to show how international student mobility connects places over time, whether through the activities of different agents of migration (Collins, 2008), lived corporeal practices (Collins, 2010), or through implied association of immigration with ethnicity (Collins, 2006). Waters and Brooks (2012) argue that international students continue to move between sending and receiving countries even after they complete their study, whereas others suggest that student mobility is itself a result of an embedding in these longer processes of transnational connection (Madge *et al.*, 2009; Perkins and Neumayer, 2011). These examples are drawn from a limited number of forays into transnational student behaviour because, as Bilecen (2009) argues, the placing of student migration literature in transnational social space is still underdeveloped (Gargano, 2009).

More cognisant of the transnational or indeed global elements of education is a whole body of literature on the internationalisation of education (Altbach, 2007). However, most of this literature on internationalisation focuses on the use of franchises (Armstrong, 2007), branch campuses (Miller-Idriss and Hanauer, 2011), and other forms of governance of education (Sidhu, 2007) as they become stretched across space (Lim, 2009). It has only weakly connected to that on international student migration (but see Institute of International Education, 2011; also Waters and Leung, this issue). Although this approach to instigating and shaping students' international migration is also increasingly important, this aspect is less well recognised.

Each of these ways of theorising the spaces of student migration has contributed significantly to our understanding of the migration phenomenon. However, these theorisations have prioritised, or even borrowed their spatial imaginations from, particular empirical imperatives. Thus, neo-classical theories were geared towards analyses of labour migration, whereas transnational

theories attempted to analyse empirically observed familial relations in the migration context. The questions this leaves us with are what is specific to student migration and what spatialities should drive theorisation of their mobility. The next section suggests that one way of addressing this is to think through the specificity of knowledge and the spatialities that it requires.

## SPATIALISING KNOWLEDGE

Despite clear evidence that students have multiple reasons for migrating, what makes student migration distinctive is the significance of knowledge acquisition as one (but not the only) driver of migration. In this section, I therefore focus on how knowledge is spatially mobilised to garner student migration. This more constitutive set of spatial relations is envisaged by other writers who focus on the spatialities of knowledge alongside those of migration. For instance, a more networked analysis of academic mobility, informed by Latour's actor network theory, is offered by Heike Jöns in her research. She highlights the spatial relations of different research practices, which help, in turn, to understand typical cultures of academic mobility and collaboration (2007), thereby firmly positing knowledge within a set of spatial practices around which mobility is organised.<sup>9</sup> In particular, she stresses the importance of circulation for knowledge production and thus the constitutive nature of mobility for knowledge.

A more relational view of education is also adopted by Susan Robertson (2010) who suggests, in the UK context, that analyses of globalisation of education need to 'take a relational view of "horizons of action" to reveal the (albeit uneven) inward and outward flows of projects and programmes and their materialisation and institutionalisation' (2010: 8).

These approaches, although driven by different imperatives – a Latourian actor network theory for Jöns and a more political economy analysis in the case of Robertson – offer useful entry points for another form of analysis. They do two important things for spatialising the spaces of student migration. First, knowledge is itself seen as an effect or outcome of a set of spatial relations. For example, the Latourian approach adapted by Jöns conceptualises education as produced at the

interphase of a variety of relationships that are cross-cutting each other globally. Here, knowledge does not stand still, temporally or spatially. Secondly, the direction of travel of students is seen as reflective of broader processes within the globalisation of education, and not only of individual student choices, or the activities of the agents of migration. The spaces of education are acted upon and produced through mobility. Thus, for Robertson, the importance of wider global political forces in shaping the mobility of students should not be underestimated. She outlines what exactly is gained or lost for education as a set of institutional practices through these new forms of engagement with the global economy and its pressures to produce students primarily as economic subjects. Robertson's work thus brings together some of the insights from the literature on international student mobility with work on internationalisation of migration more generally. Both these approaches thus begin to move the analysis of international student mobility away from either the students, or indeed their families, to networks of knowledge production and their role in the global political economy.

However, the rich spatial insights offered by these two theorisations have not been adequately brought together. Although recognition of how space is relational and connected and how knowledge is produced at the intersection of multiple spatialities helps to unseat knowledge as a pre-given entity without spatial moorings or investments, the processes through which knowledge is spatially enacted to draw in migrants are as yet under-theorised.

Spatial analysis of knowledge production that draws together migrants and the agents who shape migration is still sparse. Existing analysis has largely adopted a Foucauldian approach. For instance, Sidhu (2007) provides a thorough-going analysis of the role of General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in shaping student mobility. She highlights how 'particular understandings of "becoming global" are constructed, legitimised, and used to govern education' (2007: 220). Similarly, Lewis (2005) outlines the ways in which globalisation as a discursive regime enables, indeed requires, the establishment of certain visible forms of technes and epistemes of government. As students circulate in a world where destination countries compete for position as global education

providers, institutions have adopted codes of practice to develop, mark, and display 'quality'. These instruments reduce uncertainty and ensure quality for 'student consumers'. The codes of practice need to have a global reach if they are to be used by institutions to achieve their global ambitions. They have to be adopted worldwide as a benchmarking system to gain credibility. They need spatial stretch to have any validity.

In this analysis, we see the instruments and actions around which the governance of student mobility can be enacted. The choices that students make and the role of governments and multilateral organisations in shaping these choices are brought together through particular practices and institutions. The instruments thus become the objects through which the subject is governed. Mitchell Dean (1999: 11) summarises the process of government, in this instance, as 'the more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques, forms of knowledge that seek to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes'. In many ways, these instruments regulate (but do not discipline) the supply-side mechanisms that Findlay (2011) argues are essential for shaping student migration.

However, what is less clear in existing research on these forms of governmentality as it relates to international education is the extent to which space is central to the production of governmentality (Barnett 2001) and the variety of institutions involved in this regulation of education. In the rest of this section, I therefore outline some ways in which spaces of knowledge production are implicated in student migration. I then highlight the implications of this multiplicity of sites and institutions for conceptualising the spatiality of knowledge production.

There are at least three ways in which spatial governmentality is implicated in producing international student migrants.<sup>10</sup> First, *the global* is itself mobilised as the scale at which knowledge is validated, as knowledge becomes a global commodity. More and more countries aim to market their universities as global centres of knowledge, and thus, to obtain increasing market shares of the global higher education business. The use of forms of global governance, codes

of practice, and so on also contributes to the construction of the knowledge community as global. Moreover, this globality also validates knowledge. This is not to deny the variegated ways in which knowledge is produced or the diversity of knowledge producers or their instruments and ways of knowing. However, connections and dispersal are indispensable in a world of competing knowledges, as achieving a spatial stretch is necessary for knowledge to be validated. For Knorr-Cetina (2007), this is the epistemology of knowledge production today.

Second, this spatial stretch is also significant for the *centres of knowledge*. People act on and make real this spatiality through a variety of practices such as circulation, academic mobility, and migration. Hence, for instance, the US academics who migrate to Cairo to teach at the American University there make possible the spatial stretch of US ways of conceiving knowledge. Not all this stretch is achieved through contact – the globality of knowledge is also ‘shaped by different actors’ capacities to project authority and influence over distance by enacting different modalities of spatial reach’ (Barnett and Scott, 2007: 291). This may involve many forms of power, beyond those of domination and resistance that are used in more political economy approaches, to include seduction and other gentler registers of power (Allen, 2010). ‘Power, as a distanced networked relationship, is a provisional achievement’ (Allen, 2010: 2908) in this form of analysis. Circulation and networking are ways of stabilising this power, even if temporarily.

Moreover, this stretch is implicated in other forms of power, not merely in the production of knowledge. For instance, Kramer (2009) argues that the history of foreign student migration was integral to US history as it was an important part of foreign relations policy, especially during the Cold War era. The spatial stretch of US power was facilitated through student exchanges. He suggests that, to ‘the extent that international students participated in the diffusion and adaptation of social, economic, and technical models they encountered in the United States, such studies would contribute to the historiography of “modernization,” “Americanization” and “development”.’ (2009: 776). This pattern is not just restricted to the United States. For instance, Figueroa (2010) suggests that ‘Europe exerts a kind of pedagogic “soft power”, endeavouring

to “teach” foreign powers how to conduct themselves in world politics through several models which are characterised by the absence of physical force in the imposition of norms or rules’. He shows how the Bologna process has been used not only to envelope and set standards within Europe but also to extend this model to other countries (Figueroa, 2008). As Mexico and Chile are, so to speak, in the US’s back yard, it would also be interesting to understand the geopolitical dynamics of student migration across different regimes. What does this mean for analysing not just student mobility but also education and its relation to global power?

Finally, *individuals* are acted on through these forms of power. The circulation of knowledge is produced through the ‘microphysics of power/knowledge relations that allow certain things to happen, to be legitimate and to appear as desirable’ (Nerland, 2010: 185). Nerland cites Foucault thus, ‘In thinking of the mechanisms of power; I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives’ (Foucault, 1980: 39).

To be effective ‘and influential, however, the discourses depend on individuals who embrace the subject positions offered and enact them in creative and locally relevant ways’ (Nerland, 2008: 193). Institutions need to recruit students, to engage them and to persuade them of the benefits of partaking in the global circulation of knowledge. Students need to see the effects of and be affected by the institutional reach of education providers. They need to identify with knowledge institutions, their ability to enhance the students’ status and employability and to recognise the institutions as key players in global knowledge. In the case of student mobility, therefore, knowledge is part of the discourse through which individuals’ mobility is produced. This stretch and reach across space is inherent to the spatialities of knowledge. An analysis that takes account of how the spaces of knowledge are produced and how they envelop both educational providers and student migrants has the capacity to add significantly to theorisations of student migration.

However, this stretch and reach have to be analysed across a range of institutions that

are involved in producing the spatialities of knowledge because the reach of the spatialities of knowledge sits alongside (and sometimes against) the grain of other forms of desire that steer (but do not control) migrants. It acts upon students who are, after all, active subjects. As Barnett *et al.* (2008) argue, subjects also construct themselves through a variety of other positionings, individually and together. They anticipate, interpret, perform and subvert the positions available to them as students alongside those as friends, family members and mobile subjects, and they do this through a range of communicative practices – sharing information, ideas of what student life should be like, what makes good educational institutions and so on.

This analysis suggests several future areas for research. First, it argues for a mode of understanding where the producers of the spatialities of knowledge are seen as central to student mobility – where different providers jostle together and compete to offer courses as part of their own institutional agendas, and where these agendas are part of, and necessary for, producing student migrants. It does not suggest a seamless operation of power by these institutions but rather contingent arrangements which shape students' subjectivities. Secondly, the mobility of institutions – of their codes, regulatory practices, academics, and so on – are also seen as central to understandings of student mobility. Students, then, do not become the only substantive subjects in analyses of student migration. Finally, it opens up a range of questions, as follows: How does encoded knowledge acquire global circulation and validity? What are the networks through which knowledge producers try to reach out and influence students who are at a distance? What happens to those who do not achieve that stretch; how do students perceive the significance of these globalising imperatives? What are the kinds of encultured knowledges that are circulating in higher educational institutions and how do students enable this process? How do students, individually and together, share information about educational opportunities and in doing so shape institutional marketing practices? How do they themselves contribute to knowledge production both about and within these institutions? What forms of embodied knowledge do students bring when they travel and how are these selectively incorporated or

dismissed by educational institutions? These questions mesh together the mobilities of students, knowledge and knowledge institutions.

## CONCLUSIONS

Knowledge has become a hallmark of the desirable migrant subject as knowledgeable migrants have come to be seen as economically, socially, and culturally integrable. As a result, the boundaries between student migrants – the quintessential knowledge-seeking migrant – and other categories of migrants seem to be blurring. Moreover, as much of the literature on international student migration suggests, students also have multiple identities, as workers (present or nascent), family members, political actors, and so on. These insights take us some distance towards addressing the ongoing criticism and targeting of the complexities ensuing from students' multiple identities. However, they also urge us to ask 'what then is distinctive about student migration'? As a growing empirical phenomenon, with its own visa category and regulatory mechanism, I suggest that an analysis of the specificity of student migration is still worth pursuing. This paper suggests the need to retain a distinctive space for analyses of student migrants in the panoply of research on migration. It suggests that unpicking skill acquisition as a general process of significance to all migrants from the specificity of skills acquisition amongst student migration allows us to recognise how students are specifically imbricated in sustaining the spatial stretch of knowledge-producing institutions.

This definitional issue is not only conceptually important, it is also politically crucial because students are often blamed for working too many hours, bringing in their families, engaging in political activity, and so on. Each of these activities seems to question the authenticity of students as pure knowledge-seeking migrants. Defining and limiting these other activities that students engage in has, therefore, become part of the strategy for managing student migration and of disciplining student migrants. Theorising knowledge and how students become enrolled into studying gains particular relevance in this context.

Other categories of migrants – labour and family, for instance – may be involved in knowledge acquisition, but knowledge does not provide

the motivating rationale for migration among these groups. On the other hand, the spatialities of knowledge are a key driver of student migration. As a result, knowledge and its spatialities need to be analysed as a central category for understanding student mobility.

Focusing on knowledge highlights how mobility and circulation are essential to producing the reach, and hence the validity, of knowledge institutions. Student migrants become agents in configuring the constitution, power and sustainability of knowledge and knowledge institutions. The spatiality of knowledge influences the activities not only of students but also those of varied agents within educational institutions and international and national regulatory bodies. And crucially, this spatiality is achieved through the activities of all these agents together – in combination, competition, and through myriad other relationships.

Conceptually, this approach is advantageous as focusing on the spatialities of knowledge brings all the different agents of student migration and their analytics into the same explanatory frame. Arguably, it also opens up a way of moving beyond some of the analytical binaries such as here–there, supply–demand, student–institution, and so on that have been the hallmark of much migration thinking. It also adds a causative understanding of migration to other approaches that already transcend this binary, such as transnational theories of migration. The spatial relations of knowledge come to be understood as constitutive of, and therefore definitive for, student migration.<sup>11</sup> In this paper, I have therefore tried to activate knowledge as the basis for analysing the spatialities of student migration, and thus, perhaps, offering a route to spatialising migration theory more generally.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. In this paper, I have not engaged with a critique of the term ‘skills’ and have used the term interchangeably with knowledge. However, see Williams (2007) for a discussion.
2. For reasons of space, it is not possible to discuss this typology and their different spatialities more fully here. However, Williams and Baláz (2008) offer some interesting insights suggesting how certain knowledges such as encultured knowledges have a much more restricted spatial stretch – they are local – whereas others, such as encoded knowledges, are more global.
3. The term integration has been widely critiqued both generally and as it relates to particular sectors of the labour market (Niessen and Schibel, 2004; Penninx, 2005). This paper recognises those critiques but does not engage with them here.
4. Arguably, this bringing together of economic and social and cultural benefits of knowledge is also captured in the recent shift to the language of talent and the interchangeable use of the term talent with skills (Brown and Tannock, 2009; Skeldon, 2009; Yeoh and Huang, 2010).
5. However, not all student migrants have class privilege. For instance, Anthias’s (2008) analysis of Bangladeshi migrants to the UK suggests that it is students from less advantaged backgrounds, who have been unable to meet the academic quality thresholds for entry into higher education within their own country, who migrate.
6. For Butcher (2004), one option is to denote migrants whose primary motivation is study as educational migrants. However, the term can be a misnomer as it does not recognise the complexities of student migrants. In recognition of this complexity, most research on student migration has focused on the many different aspects that influence student migrants’ lives.
7. This section does not offer a comprehensive overview of all existing migration theories, only an indicative analysis of some of the key ones.
8. Analysis of the transnational effects of student migration, especially in terms of class formation, offers an interesting twist to existing research (Xiang and Shen, 2009).
9. Although driven by postcolonial spatial imperatives rather than a Latourian perspective, David Livingstone (2003) makes a similar move with regard to spatialising knowledge. He highlights the importance of circulation as a modality through which knowledge is produced.
10. I draw here on Nerland’s (2010) work on the production of computer engineers as global professionals but extend it and apply it to the study of international student migration.

11. Arguably, it also has the potential for complicating another key binary in migration theory – that between structural analyses and those which privilege agency (Bakewell, 2010). Notions of spatial stretch and reach adopted in this paper allow us to recognise the agency of institutions in activating student migrants' agency and so how both are structurally dependent on each other.

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