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The representation of mobility regime in research on professional migration in Australia

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Abstract

This article presents some critiques of government commissioned studies on skilled migration in Australia and proposes methodological approaches that attend to skilled migrants' entwinement with the world. According, skilled migration is not theorized as an end point of arrival, but migrants' decisions to migrate are transformed into relocation and aspirations for the future under the effects of their engagement with others in a wide range of social milieus. Skilled migrants arguably develop and maintain transnational ties for social integration in Australia and remaining their roots with those who stay behind in the home societies.

Key words: Australian international education, Australian skilled migration policies, entwinement with the world, mobility regime, transnationalism

1. An overview of Australia's international education and skilled migration policies

Since 1983, Australia has restructured the economy to respond to the challenges of the global market by developing knowledge-intensive production to compete against Asian economies with cheap labour. Therefore, a high quality base of human skills is in demand to develop the new economy (Houghton & Sheehan, 2000, p. 11). While the need for a highly skilled workforce to sustain the knowledge economy has been soaring, the Australian population is aging. In fact, the proportion of the Australian population aged over 65 has been increasing from eight per cent in 1970 to 15 per cent in 2010, and this number is projected to 23 per cent in 2050 (The Treasury, 2010). One of the measures to promptly fill in the skilled labour shortage and solve labour market problems is to increase the number of professional migrants and retain Australia-educated international graduates to work on a permanent basis (Shah & Burke, 2005, p. 5). To attract potential Australia-educated migrants, Australian international education has tended to link to strong immigration incentives since 1998-1999, when Australia's immigration policy was shifted from family migration to skilled migration (Hawthorne, 2005, pp. 681-682).

Prior to 1998, former international students could apply for permanent residency (PR) offshore within a period of three years after graduation from offshore. The then skilled migration policy was employed as the Australian Government's strategy to meet "supply-driven" migration posed from skilled applicants' demand for PR in Australia (Cully, 2011, p. 4). However, since 2001, former international students have been allowed to apply onshore immediately after graduation (Ziguras, 2012, p. 41) with some bonus points

given to their Australia-educated degrees. This selection route is expected to meet Australian employers' demand (Cully, 2011, p. 4). The prospect of migration through international education has given Australia a marketing advantage in recruiting fee-paying overseas students from 187 countries, making its international education the third largest export industry of an $18 billion revenue in 2009-2010 (Adams, Banks, & Olsen, 2011, p. 23).

The link between Australian international education and skilled migration schemes is explicitly manifest in the skilled migration policy sets. The Australian Government expects to recruit skilled migrants who are presumably proficient in English, locally trained, and have adjusted to Australian social and cultural life (Ziguras & Law, 2006, p. 64). Accordingly, Australia-educated applicants are given priority over other skilled foreigners (Koleth, 2010, p. 8). This priority is expressed in the points test - a mechanism used to select skilled migrants who are expected to fill in skilled labour shortages in Australia (DIAC, 2011, p. 1). The Australian Government has employed the points test system with a focus on applicants' academic qualifications and work experience from 1999 to 2009, and plus Australian employer sponsorship since 2009 (Phillips & Spinks, 2012, p 4). Since July 1999, the Australian skilled immigration program has awarded five additional points out of the current pass mark of 65 to applicants who obtain their diploma or degree from an Australian institution. This priority enhances the ability of eligible former and current overseas students to migrate to Australia on a permanent basis. The number of Australia-educated migrants accounted for more than half of the number of skilled migrants during the period from 2001 to 2003 (Koleth, 2010, p. 8) with 283,000 students-turned-migrants from 2001 to 2010 (DIAC, 2010, p. 49).

Due to the high demand for PR from international students, since 2003 the Australian Government has required student applicants to complete a minimum two-year stay in Australia to qualify for bonus points in the points test and to be exempted from work experience requirements (DIAC, 2011, p. 5). Again, this requirement reflects the Government's favour given to Australia-educated migrants. In addition, those who do not meet the criteria for a Permanent General Skilled migration visa can apply for Skilled Graduate Temporary visa (Subclass 485). This visa allows international graduates from Australian institutions to remain in Australia for 18 months following graduation to gain work experience and improve their English skills. Those whose first student visas were granted after 5 November 2011 can be allowed to stay on in Australia up to four years after graduation with bridging visas, depending on their qualifications (DIBP, 2014). Knight (2011) proposes that this bridging duration can help graduates obtain "practical experience in Australia" which can make their qualifications "more valuable" (p. viii) in their home countries, another third country, and particularly foster the possibility of PR in Australia. This Knight Report (2011) acknowledges that there is likely an intersection between international education in Australia and prospects of migrating to Australia after graduation, even if it is only the minds of prospective students (p. 6). With the priority given in Australia's skilled migration policies, international students may choose to study in Australia first, and apply for PR after graduation by achieving the passing score in the points test. This process is known as two-step migration.

In short, these changes in the skilled migration policies show the close link between Australian international education and the Government's attempt to meet the labour market demand by favouring Australia-educated professional migrants. Within the growth of international students in Australia,

research has looked into the interplay between Australian international education and skilled migration in several directions, which can be classified in two main streams: migration and transnational mobilities. The rest of this article sketches out the diversity of research strands within each of the main streams, and discusses how these studies conceptualize skilled migrants' mobilities. It describes the research landscape of skilled migration in Australia in several methodological directions: statistical analyses in government reports, explorations of international students' decisions to study and migrate in Australia, impacts of Australia's skilled migration policies on international students' prospects of migration, and analyses of skilled migrants' employment experiences and employers' perspective on skilled migrants' employment in Australia. This classification enables the author of this article to discuss some theoretical and methodological limitations of this research corpus in the another part of this article.

2. Policy-based and government commissioned studies

Policy-based studies and government reports describe patterns and trends of skilled migration (e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2009; DIAC, 2010 & 2011; DIBP, 2014; Nelson, 2003). For the purposes of information archives, as well as informing relevant authorities and the public, government reports provide statistical information on numbers and trends of international students and skilled migrants in Australia with little explanation on how international students may switch their temporary student visas into bridging or PR visas.

In a slight contrast, government commissioned reports (e.g. Birrell, Hawthorne, & Richardson, 2006; Cully, 2011; Hawthorne, 2010; Koleth, 2010; Knight, 2011) admit there is a link between Australian international education and skilled migration, which is manifest through the bonus points given to applicants with Australian degrees in the points test. The primary objective of these studies is to provide practical suggestions to the Australian Government and international education industry. For example, the Knight Report (2011) has proposed that Australia's immigration authority should mitigate risks in the initial visa decisions offshore involving students with "genuine" (p. x) purpose of arriving in Australia for an educational outcome rather than a migration intention. This report also acknowledges that it is hard to judge students' initial intentions and changes in their intentions after they have reached Australia.

In general, most government or government commissioned reports describe quantity increases or decreases of international students and skilled migrants over a period for immigration management services. They consider students-turned-migrants as objects of the migration policies being dictated by the regime of migration governance, without explicating how they respond to the policy regime (see also Koleth, 2010; Knight, 2011).

3. Migration studies

A number of studies in demography, international education, and public policy management (e.g. Birrell & Perry, 2009; Gribble, 2011; Hawthorne, 2005 & 2010; Rizvi, 2005a, b & 2009; Tran & Nyland, 2011; Ziguras & Law, 2006) have shown that Australia's skilled migration policies have significant impact on students-turned-migrants' initial choices of study programs, decisions to migrate, and labour market outcomes. By interpreting the statistics of skilled migration stated in government reports, these studies

associate international education with a precursor to skilled migration, which has enabled the growth of skilled migrants from 35,000 in 1998-1999 to approximately 97,500 in 2005 (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 689). Many international students are found to consider international education as an "investment" or "ticket" for skilled migration (Rizvi, 2005b, p. 177). The large inflows of Asian two-step migrants in Australia are then associated with brain drain in source countries (see also Gribble, 2011; Rizvi 2005a & 2009).

However, there are few studies examining the return of Australia skilled migrants to their home countries or acknowledging possible confluences of socio-economic conditions, as well as community and migrants' family circumstances in home societies. In general, research with the focus on exploring the impacts of skilled migration policies on international students' study choices is unable to explicate how decisions to migrate are shaped by influences of other people at scales other than the skilled migration policy. Studies in this direction conceptualize decisions to migrate as being influenced solely by Australian institutions without considering possible confluences of socio-economic conditions, as well as community and family circumstances. How migrants' decisions to migrate are transformed into relocation is also paid little attention to in these studies.

By postulating that education-related migration is one of the outcomes of Australian internationalization of higher education, some researchers and policy-makers propose recommendations to the Australian international education industry by examining the link between international education and migration. For example, Nelson's (2003) ministerial statement on Australian international education has stressed the importance of diversifying the range of academic disciplines to reduce the concentration on business and IT degrees, which attract international students for PR purposes after graduation. Birrell and Perry (2009) suggest an increase in intake of domestic students in accounting, and simultaneously providing technical and language skills for international students to deal with Australian employers' complaints of Australia-educated migrants' lack of professional knowledge and communication skills. Similarly, by conducting a qualitative study with a large number of Vocational Education and Training (VET) students and teachers, administrators and executives at 25 VET providers in Australia, Tran and Nyland (2011) have revealed that a number of international VET students in Australia perceive themselves as "PR hunters" (p. 8). Their aspirations for PR are shaped and re-shaped by the "social world" (p. 8) including the migration prospects enabled by VET diplomas and learning environment. Tran and Nyland have argued that despite the migration aspirations, international VET students should engage in a high quality learning practice. These researchers call for VET providers to focus on providing high quality education for international students who "act on their dreams for the future and are motivated by multiple, differing and shifting aims" (p. 28). The call for VET industry to focus on quality training programs is similarly found in Birrell and Perry's (2009) work, which reveals that the changes in Australia's migration policy affect students' choices of study programs in health, information technology (IT), engineering, accountancy, and some other vocational practices including hairdressing and cooking. International students' motivations to take VET programs may be shaped by migration prospects as well as professional development. By taking one step beyond government-commissioned reports and policy-based studies which separate skilled migrants from the surrounding world, these studies in this direction collectively suggest that decisions to migrate are not only made by international students themselves. Instead, these researchers initially recognize migrants'

interactions with the "social world" which includes teachers and local people in Australia. However, possible influences of those who are relatively immobile in home and host societies are left unattended in exploring students-turned-migrants' decisions to migrate and/or invest in future professions.

Based on policy-driven and government (commissioned) studies and considering skilled migrants as active agents in responding to the policy mechanism, another body of research addresses issues of skilled migrants' integration into Australian society through employment and further education, as well as Australian employers' responses to skilled migrants' professional performance. For example, a number of studies examine skilled migrants' employment outcomes and further education in Australia (e.g. Birrell & Hawthorne, 2006; Birrell & Healy, 2008; Birrell, Healy, & Kinnaird, 2009; Cobb-Clark, Connolly, & Worswick, 2005; Shah & Burke, 2005). Some studies (e.g. Hawthorne, 2005 & 2007) discuss labour market outcomes of skilled migrants in Australia, but they tend to analyse available statistics on a macro-level without probing in migrants' actual experiences of relocation and employment. Other studies (e.g. Rizvi, 2005a, 2005b, & 2009) look into skilled migrants' actual work performances, and find that some migrants can find jobs that are relevant to their expertise obtained in Australia, whereas others accept to do low-paid and manual jobs, or become unemployed due to lack of English language fluency and work experience. Other studies, including some government commissioned reports, employ large-scale surveys to examine the influence of the non-English speaking background of migrants on employment search (e.g. McDonald & Worswick, 1999; Shah & Burke, 2005). These studies portray skilled migrants as disruptive subjects to Australian labour market due to their limited English language ability and work experience, even though they obtain higher qualifications than the Australians on average, causing a wastage of skills in Australia (see also Shah & Burke, 2005).

Within the research direction in skilled migrants' employment in Australia, some studies examine employers' perspectives. For example, by analysing the impacts of Australian employers on skilled migrants' job performance to inform Australia's skilled migration policies, McDonald and Worswick (1999) explore Australian employers' motivations in sponsoring skilled migrants, and Shah and Burke (2005) examine reasons for some skilled temporary migrants to apply for PR in Australia. Studies with foci on skilled migrants' employment and employers' motivations in sponsoring skilled migrants collectively recognize migrants and employers as active agents in responding to the skilled migration policy regime in terms of shaping decisions to migrate and efforts to relocate. However, they tend to consider skilled migration as an end process after international education, and largely neglect influences of other people in migrants' home countries as well as those in Australia such as friends, relatives, or colleagues.

Although studies on skilled migration in Australia are powerful in explicating the link between Australia's skilled migration policies and international education through different perspectives of stakeholders, they implicitly conceptualize skilled migration as a fixed point of arrival after international education, and largely neglect influences of other people in home societies, as well as the social and transnational networks migrants establish and sustain in Australia. How migrants' decisions to migrate are transformed into relocation and aspirations for the future is also paid little attention to in these studies. In addition, because of the focus on viewing migration as a fixed point of arrival in Australia, extant migration studies

implicitly view the relocation of skilled immigrants through an assimilationist perspective. Influenced by this perspective, they tend to examine skilled migrants' efforts in seeking employment and integration in Australia without examining how migrants negotiate identities and national belonging in the new society. Further, because of seeing migration as an arrival in the destination country, these studies pay little attention to how migrants enact and sustain further mobilities, through corporeal movements and/or virtual communication across borders. Yet, as I will show later in this article, migrants may develop and use transnational relationships and practices to incorporate in the host society while maintaining their connections to the home country rather than attempting to assimilate entirely in Australia. Migration seems not to cut them off relationships with those who stay behind. In contrast, transnational practices such as business activities, communication, or religious practices are found influential to the ways migrants negotiate their mobilities through decisions to migrate, relocation, or return (see also Baas, 2010; Biao, 2007), possibly enhancing further mobilities. Migrations involves complex trajectories shaped by migrants' interactions with social structures and other people in home and host societies. The perspective on seeing migration as an ongoing process has influenced a research stream on transnational mobilities. Instead of solely investigating skilled migration with economic impacts upon Australia and home societies, this research stream looks at multiple influences across social scales on migrants' mobilities. As Baas (2010) has argued, while migration can be seen as the initiation which is possibly enabled, sustained and developed by transnational practices, mobilities happen through migration and transnationalism.

4. The influences of transnational mobilities on the mobility regime

Despite a humble quantity, a more recent strand of research using transnationalism lens has unpacked how skilled and two-step migrants in Australia make sense of transnational mobilities under the influences of their transnational practices and ties across borders. This research strand is part of the growing body of both theoretical and empirical works on transnationalism since the 1990s. By looking into the ways Caribbean, Haiti, and Filipino migrants in the US in the 1990s sustained cross-border practices and relationships with their home societies, Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton (1996) have defined such practices and experiences as transnationalism in which migrants forge and sustain "multi-stranded social relations that [link] their societies of origin and settlement" (p. ix). Transnationalism perspectives acknowledge that migration is a lasting process in which migration is initiated, sustained, supported, and perhaps constrained by migrants' participation in transnational social fields. In line with transnationalism, mobilities are treated as an element that links migration as a fixed point of arrival to an ongoing process with migrants' transnational practices and ties.

A lot of research has been conducted on transnational mobilities of international students (e.g. Rizvi, 2005a &b; Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012) than on skilled migrants in Australia (e.g. Baas, 2010; Biao, 2007; Robertson, 2008). Among the scarcity of research on transnational mobilities of Australian skilled migrants could be Robertson's (2008) doctoral thesis and Biao's (2007) work on the "global body shopping industry". By examining how students-turned-migrants make sense of citizenships and belonging as well as corporeal and virtual mobilities in Australia, Robertson has revealed that their choices and experiences of memberships and mobilities are shaped by macro-level influences such as migration policies, global regimes of mobility, and the media. In addition to macro-political influences, research in

other settings have shown that international students and migrants' mobilities are also shaped by their interactions with others including migration brokers, communities, families, and friends (see also Baas, 2010; Biao, 2005 & 2007; Collins, 2009; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014; Waters, 2006; Yeoh et al., 2013). By looking at how Indian migrants negotiate transnational mobilities with the migration governance regime in terms of policies for migration and international education, Biao (2007) articulates the embeddedness of skilled migrants within the web of influences from global labour recruitment agents, constraints from intra-national migration policies, social and communal practices and imaginations of mobilities, as well as desires for personal pursuits through migration.

Aiming to understand how Indian students experience the process of migration, Baas (2010) begins his inquiry by examining their imaginations of transnational mobility before migration which are shaped by family and community quests for mobilities. Through international education in Australia, which enables these students to realize the possibility of PR that can compensate the constraint of their Indian passports on mobilities. These students consider acquiring PR in Australia after graduation as a way to achieve their imaginations of transnational mobilities. However, due to social, academic, and financial constraints, some of these students perceive that they have not arrived in the destination yet, even though they have already departed India. In this vein, these students experience a confluence of constraints: from political limit of the Indian passport on mobilities to family and personal constraints, as well as the opening of possibilities in their encounter with constraints. Their migration seems to be an unfinished journey.

In examining migrants' interactions with others in the social world, some research in Australian context has engaged with migrants' everyday activities to make sense of mobilities. Baas (2010) shows that migrants share the world with other migrants and objects within a social world including places such as ethnic castes and virtual places constructed on electronic devices. It is a world which is both emplaced and given order through migrants' dwelling-mobility.

However, skilled permanent migrants may have different responses to the surrounding world. For example, by exploring influences of transnational practices involving intermediaries in the migration industry, Biao's (2005 & 2007) research on the Indian "body shopping" industry shows that some Indian IT graduates use Indian labour brokers to gain entry to work in Australia. In addition to going through the recruitment and arrangement of these brokers, some migrants further utilize the cultural practice of dowries from families with daughters wanting to marry them to increase the likelihood of migration. Some of these migrants choose to take IT degree programs overseas and ask for dowries to support their international education journeys, while others' international education journeys are willingly and fully funded by the girls' families prior to their weddings. In this vein, these Indian skilled migrants experience the influence of migration brokers in relation to their "ethnicization" (Biao, 2007, p. 9) and cultural norms. Also taking the role of kinship into account, Biao (2007) reveals that Indian skilled migrants tend to construct and make use of transnational networks along kinship lines through offshore arranged marriages and chain migration processes.

Migration is experienced as an ongoing journey in which space matters through migrants' interactions with the surrounding world. For example, in crossing the ocean, some Asian students may feel homesick

and lonely in Australia. By attempting to confront a "not-at-home" feeling, some are determined to make new friends, transforming the new home into a space of lived experience with the "practicalities" of the study programs and interactions with other local people. Space is not their individual construction but a social formation (Singh, Robertson, & Cabraal, 2012). While there is still a dearth of research on skilled migrants' sense-making of transnational spaces, we can assume that skilled migrants construct space as a social formation across borders.

In short, the current research profile on transnational mobilities of skilled migrants in Australia has mentioned the confluences of the mobility regimes including migration policies, cultural norms, friends and families in host and home societies, as well as (global) migration brokers. These studies have examined both opportunities and challenges that migrants face in attempting to make sense of their transnational mobilities from the initiation of migration to relocation. The limited body of research on transnational mobilities of skilled migrants in Australia shows some concerns for me to take into account in this study. First, as Portes (2001) has argued about influences of others living across borders, migrants tend not to make decisions to migrate and relocate by themselves. The need to attend to confluences of macro-contextual influences such as migration policies, socio-economic and political conditions, social and communal practices, as well as those in home and host societies is important in understanding how migrants share the social world with others. Second, under confluences of others and things at different social scales, migrants may experience a transformation of their decisions to migrate to possibilities and constraints through the journeys. Some may achieve what they have set out before migration, whereas others fail to do so, but realize other possibilities opened up. In this vein, migration entails more than just migrants' imaginations of migration before departure, but also arrival experiences and possibly feelings of in-betweenness during relocation. Third, migrants use various tools and relationships to initiate migration and make sense of relocation. These tools may include education credentials, English language capital, working experiences, and ethnic relationships that they sustain in transnational social spaces. These current studies have shown that these tools are not used in isolation, but migrants seem to use a particular tool in relation to others. Finally, through transnational practices, current research on transnationalism has suggested the influences of moorings on mobilities. In this vein, the meaning of space is experienced in close relation to migrants' interactions with other people in home and host societies. Such an understanding of space through migrants' interactions with others across borders shifts the conventional perception of migration one-way movements to a complex and lasting process.

5. Migrants' entwinement with the world

Apart from government reports and commissioned studies which describe a world of policies as neutral, most research on Australian professional migration and transnationalism has attempted to understand who migrants are and what they want to become ontologically, and how they make sense of mobilities through interactions with the social structures. The mobility regime is assumed to consist of socio-political transformations, migration policies, diaspora strategies, intermediary agents, as well as communal and familial practices. Current studies on mobilities tend to recognize that:

> Mobilities create an integrated system, which can be observed at a range of scales: family/household, community, national, and the constellation of countries linked by migration flows (King & Skeldon, 2010, p. 1640).

The global, national, and social influences are reflected a notion of hegemony with migrants' struggles and enact mobilities in various ways. Their enactment of mobilities is shaped through a regime of mobility:

> Regimes of mobility […] call attention to the role of both individual states and of changing international regulatory and surveillance administrations that affect mobility (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 189).

This regime shapes mobilities as a process rather than a product of migration, and influences migrants' stretching of social relations across space which is facilitated by uses of communications and transportation technologies. Current studies in both migration and transnationalism have specified the influences of the mobility regime on migrants' mobilities in at least three main ways:

(1) examining how various social, political, cultural conditions, as well as familial circumstances influence migrants' social relations across spaces, forming their "life-worlds";

(2) examining how migrants' "life-worlds" are created by their responses to social structures;

(3) and describing migrants as those who know and understand things as they are with taken-for-granted meanings, then constructing their "life-worlds".

In some instances, they describe the mobility regime as existing there naturally, and then migrants interact with parts of this regime to make sense of mobilities. This "life-worlds" concept represents the "social worlds that span more than one place" (Vertovec, 2004, p. 219). Their ontological approach assumes that the mobility regime exists separately from migrants. When migrants attempt to migrate and/or relocate, they are connected to this regime through their interactions with things and others. That means these studies tend to describe influences of the mobility regime on migrants' negotiations of mobilities through their interactions with others and things across space, often depicting the ways they face with constraints posed from these interactions.

However, migrants are always already immersed in the world with others and things through various intersecting ways of being before migration, during relocation, and plans. While migrants are embedded in the mobility regime, their intersecting ways of being arising from their entwinement with the world influence the ways they negotiate mobilities. Their engagement with the regime of mobility is just part of their entwinement with the world. Migrants' interactions with others and things in the world present constraints while opening up possibilities that influence their transnational mobilities. Then to understand mobilities is to explore their entwinement with the world first, and then explore how their mobilities are enmeshed in the entwinement.

6. Conclusion

The scarcity of research on the link between Australian international education and skilled migration can be enriched by innovative frameworks that attend to migrants' entwinement with the world. The new methodological approaches can conceptualize transnational mobilities as being affected by the mobility regime of macro-, mezzo-, and micro-confluences. Migrants' embeddedness in this regime is part of their entwinement with the world, in which their various intersecting ways of being may shape their mobilities.

Compliance of research and publication ethics

I, as the Corresponding Author, declare and undertake that in the study titled as "The representation of mobility regime in research on professional migration in Australia", scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed; Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry Journal Editorial Board has no responsibility for all ethical violations to be encountered, that all responsibility belongs to the author/s and that this study has not been sent to any other academic publication platform for evaluation.

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