



## (Im)mobile Geographies

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**Abstract.** The growing tendency to evaluate – sometimes even “measure” – the “productivity” of academics is seriously affecting what we consider to be relevant geographical output. This tendency is also significantly reshaping the actual geographies of the disciplinary debate, by introducing important debates about the relationship between one English speaking mainstream international literature and the different national schools. However, the related discussion on the Anglo-American hegemony in geography seems to be strongly influenced by the growing request on the part of university management to identify ways of “ranking” good research and how to respond to the increasing internationalization of academic work. This paper will discuss the effects of neoliberal agendas on how geographical work is promoted, produced and circulated in Europe, with different results in different contexts; in some cases originating perverse impacts on the quality of geographical work; in others, creating the opportunity for innovative agendas and for more transparent ways of managing academic careers.

### 1 Introduction

The growing tendency to evaluate and measure the “productivity” of academics is seriously affecting what is considered relevant geographical output in many institutional settings. This tendency is also significantly reshaping the actual geographies of the disciplinary debate, by introducing important questions about the nature of interdisciplinary research, and especially about the putative existence of many, different, national schools, but *only one* mainstream international literature. As a consequence, the by now well-established discussion on the putative Anglo-American hegemony in geography (see, for example, Aalbers and Rossi, 2006; Kitchin, 2006) seems to be somewhat marginalized by the growing pressure to identify adequate ways of “ranking” good research and the increasing internationalization of academic work (Paasi, 2005). In this short paper I will thus discuss how, in this respect, neoliberal agendas in place in many universities are producing different results in different contexts. In addition, I will briefly examine how different national “geographies” have responded to these important trends: in some cases having perverse effects on the quality of geographical work, whilst in others creating the opportunity for innovative agendas and greater transparency in the management of aca-

ademic careers. I will briefly refer to the examples of the UK, the Netherlands and Italy, where I have had the opportunity to work as an academic.

What then, is international geography today? Can we speak of a truly international debate in the field of geography? If so, what are its coordinates, its key sites, its recognized language? These and many other similar questions have been at the core of a lively and rather diversified debate in the discipline, a debate hosted in the past decade or so by “international” journals like *Area*, *Progress in Human Geography*, *Environment and Planning D*, *Social and Cultural Geography* and many others. While there is little doubt about the fact that academia needs to be international in spirit and content, at the same time, the contemporary move towards the hegemony of English speaking geography and the increasing emphasis placed on publications in a specific list of international journals raise a series of concerns regarding questions of power, equal opportunities, cultural diversity and originality (see, among others, Berg, 2004; Dell’Agnese, 2008; Minca, 2003; Simonsen, 2004; Vaiou, 2003, 2004).

While debates on these concerns have generally increased awareness in the discipline about the risk of conflating Anglo-American geography with international geography *tout court*, this remains a clear danger given the recent

trend, common across various European university systems, to “qualify” the productivity of academics and translate it into quantitative parameters. However, in this paper, I will argue that in many ways the discussion about the consequences of adopting English as the lingua franca for the discipline may soon become redundant given the pace of change imposed by the neoliberalization of our universities and the related practice of “measuring” everything, including our research productivity.

Europe is today facing a radical turning point in the way universities are conceived and managed as public institutions and, as a reflection of this, how research, including geographical research, is promoted, produced and circulated. We all know that the mantra of “internationalization” is on the agenda of most universities around the continent, although what this actually means in practical terms differs depending on the country and even within a single institution. This sort of epochal shift in academia clearly affects the ways in which geography is practiced and taught. The increasing move to use English as the sole language of so-called “international debate” (which just over a decade ago still seemed merely a perversion of the publishing industry), and the simultaneous tendency of some of the key sites in the production of geographical knowledge (read: some of the best departments in the US and the UK) to show less and less interest in what happens in different contexts and in different languages, have taken a new meaning in light of the widespread adoption of neoliberal practices in Europe and beyond.

In many European countries, the already existing tension between the relative isolation of what could still be identified as largely national geographical schools and the growing need to recruit both students and academics internationally on the part of the institutions where geographers operate, is now being exacerbated precisely by the set of neoliberal strategies towards internationalization implemented by many universities and governments around the continent. Regrettably, however, this push towards a “global competition” for intellectual capital has not served to re-introduce a multilingual and multicultural debate in geography and the social sciences. On the contrary, it has rapidly accentuated the dominance of the top Anglophone journals, which are increasingly viewed as the only legitimate sites in which international debate may take place and gain recognition.

If, on the one hand, the dominance of these journals is arguably radicalizing an already present tendency to homogenize what is normally considered international geography (in line with the argumentative structure, the mainstream topics and the jargon typical of British and American departments), on the other, a growing number of non-Anglophone geographers are being prompted to submit their work in English to those very same top journals in order to get “credits” and build their individual careers by engaging in these “legitimate” international fora. A good example is the increasing number of non-American geographers presenting their work at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geog-

raphers, who by now count for about one third of the participants, a relatively recent trend according to the organizers<sup>1</sup>.

It is not yet clear if an unintended consequence of these new trends might be an internal diversification and enrichment of the geographical debate and indeed the realization, perhaps for the first time, of a truly international geography. However, it is something that, if we are to reflect seriously on “the making of academic geographies in Europe”, should be taken into account. While the risk of intellectual homogenization and standardization remains clear, the growing number of interventions coming from beyond the dominant Anglo-American contexts due to these neoliberal practices may, in the long run, have an important intellectual impact on the discipline. For this reason it is important that European geographers interrogate their own practices in relation to the abovementioned sea changes and consider what the future of the discipline might be if present trends continue to be consolidated.

## 2 A geographical tradition?

When a couple of decades ago I began visiting, as an Italian scholar, several geography departments in North America, I soon realized that the very idea of a shared geographical tradition was a fiction. For example, while reading about regional geography, I noticed that most of the textbooks assigned to the students started with a vague reference to the French tradition, in order to jump immediately into the “new regional geography” literature of the 1990s via the influence of Giddens’ structuration theory. No mention was normally found of the long-standing and extremely rich European traditions on the same subject. As far as human geography textbooks were concerned, the relevant history of the discipline began in the immediate postwar period, often with a critique of the quantitative strand in American geography, followed by hints to the behavioral twist in some geographical research, and often descriptions of the Marxist turn, while the most recent post-structuralist approaches, in both Britain and the North America, were often described in detail.

According to these textbooks, it seemed that American, or perhaps even Anglo-American geography, was born out of nowhere after the second World War. This was of course not the case for many “national” European textbooks including a disciplinary genealogy of sorts, whose narratives, precisely because of a growing English speaking dominance in post-war geography, increasingly took the shape of peripheral accounts of something bigger and more important (of international Geography with a capital G), but at the same time distant, happening elsewhere (see for example Chivallon, 2003; Fall, 2007; Sidaway, 2008). While national geographies in Europe, in France, Italy, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands etc., continued along almost independent trajectories in relative isolation from one another and from Anglo-American

<sup>1</sup>Informal discussion at the 2010 AAG in Washington.

geography, they did import some of its new tendencies, albeit in different ways and to different degrees (see Kitchin, 2006) – creating a certain amount of confusion and indifference – in Italy for example, on what is supposed to be international geography and what is not (see Minca, 2005b, 2012a).

A comprehensive analysis of the relationship between some of the main national geographical traditions in Europe and the dominant Anglo-American paradigm of the post-war period would require several volumes and it is clearly beyond the scope of this article (see, again, Kitchin, 2006). However, the point that I would like to stress with these few brief remarks on a putative post-war “geography of the geographical traditions” is twofold. Firstly, it is very difficult to claim, today, that geography as a discipline identifies with a common past, that is, a clear and widely accepted shared genealogy. While Anglo-American reconstructions seem to have operated on the basis of a radical forgetting of the European traditions of which, in one way or another, were originally tributary, national geographies outside of the English speaking world have become substantially irrelevant beyond their own national borders. The marginality and somewhat inward looking attitude of these national geographies is clearly reflected in their readings of the discipline’s history – normally centered on accounts of their own national tradition, with few, and very often scattered and inconsistent, references to international work (see the critique in Kitchin’s edited volume *Mapping Worlds: International Perspectives on Social and Cultural Geographies* (2007), collecting materials previously published in the form of national “reports” in *Social and Cultural Geography*). Secondly, present day discussions about the problematic nature of a supposed international domain in the discipline are thus seriously compromised by these concomitant strategies of forgetting and isolation. The result of this, in the last decades or so, has been, on the one hand, an international geographical debate more and more dominated by Anglo-American work (something certainly incentivized by the strategies of the globalized publishing industry), and on the other hand, an archipelago of national, mainly European, communities of geographers, often focused on national issues and national debates, using their respective national language, and barely interacting with other national communities, often in an discontinuous and somewhat inconsistent manner (although there are significant differences between countries in terms of relative isolation; see, for example, Chivallon, 2003; Claval and Staszak, 2004; Vaiou, 2004).

While this picture may certainly be exaggerated to a degree, given that many exceptions can be found to these trends, the fact remains that non-English speaking geographies seem to be almost entirely irrelevant for the work of contemporary English speaking geographers. At the same time, non-Anglophone geographers often struggle today between the difficulties of having access to the sites where mainstream geography is produced (read: the key journals) and the need to remain anchored within national traditions,

which, however, may soon be considered irrelevant and disappear as a result of the neoliberal regimes implemented in higher education in many of these countries. These trends are particularly evident in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, where publishing in English has become an absolute requirement while publishing in the national language is progressively dismissed as unimportant and a sign of parochialism, but are certainly not confined to these countries.

These are thus key issues for anyone interested in exploring “how international today’s international geography” is and/or how English speaking geography can become more international in spirit and practice. While previous generations of European academics, including geographers, were often well versed in several languages and thus capable of intellectual exchange with their peers in other countries, this is too often not the case today. This is especially true in the Anglophone context, where exchange seems to be more and more often driven instead by a neoliberal logic of “academic competition” imposed by a specific metrics of scientific productivity. In light of the overwhelming power of the global “industrial publishing complex” (see Paasi, 2005), and the related conception of academic governance that imposes English as the language of science, a return to a time in which English was simply one out of a number of European languages of academia, considered on a par with at least French and German, is pure fantasy. Nonetheless, I would like to argue that some of the most problematic effects of this perverse mechanism of cultural homogenization could potentially be approached by geographers in ways that may turn them into a potentially useful tool for promoting diversity in the work of international geography. After all, we should not forget that the English speaking social sciences, including geography, have for a long time been the beneficiary of theories and ideas flowing in from other national contexts, including France, Germany, and more recently Italy (for example see Crampton and Elden, 2006; Fall and Rosière, 2008; Minca, 2012b), a trend that has become more marked in recent years. It appears that in order for the machinery dominated by a monolingual culture to successfully reproduce itself, it must import original ideas from somewhere else, from other academic domains and contexts. For example, the recent history of poststructuralism and the contemporary interest in questions around biopolitics would clearly seem to confirm this (Chiesa and Toscano, 2009; see also Esposito, 2010).

French social theorists, German philosophers, and Italian political thinkers, have in fact been at the core of the above-mentioned globalization of academic ideas and materials. If this tendency continues, and all the signs indicate that it will, then there is clearly space for a different role in international debates for non-English speaking geographers who have been working with these ideas for decades in their own countries and who often have direct access to original sources, thanks to their linguistic skills (Dell’Agnese, 2008; Fall and Minca, 2013; Klauser, 2010, 2012).

The first point that I would like to raise, although I am aware I run the risk of oversimplification, is the following: English speaking geography is today internationally dominant and will likely remain so for some time to come. However, in order to reproduce its own practices it has often drawn ideas and concepts from an “outside” that geographers working in other countries may have a stronger command of and be able to better contextualize. The way in which, for example, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and now Giorgio Agamben, Carl Schmitt and Peter Sloterdijk, have been introduced in to mainstream Anglophone geography may teach us a lesson. French, German, or Italian geographers who have long been familiar with these authors are in a potentially privileged position (although as yet largely unused) from which to intervene in, and possibly influence, the geographical debate hosted by mainstream international journals, despite, or rather *because*, this debate is in English (see Fall, 2005, 2006, 2007). The possibility of a truly international dialogue in mainstream geography seems to paradoxically exist there, in the very developments produced by recent neoliberal practices. I will return to this point in my conclusions.

### 3 Internationalization

As noted above, “internationalization” is, along with “excellence”, one of the mantras of the neoliberalization of western universities (see, again, Paasi, 2005; also Berg, 2004, among many others). The new strategies of internationalization implemented by many higher education institutions seem to focus on mobilizing a few, rather standardized “measures”, based on models of research evaluation imported directly from the “hard sciences”, in order to improve their capacity for competing at the different scales. The neoliberal jargon for academia is characterized by a specific set of key words, with which most of us are by now accustomed, since they seem common across the post-industrial world. In many ways, this somewhat perverse standardization has produced an international language of academic governance of sorts, and a set of parameters that are shared by a growing number of academics around the world (Derudder, 2010).

The increasing concentration of the global publishing market in the hands of a few multinational agglomerates, in combination with a growing fetish for sharp measurements of research productivity on the part of many university managers, has served to create a climate inclined to evaluate almost exclusively the work published and ranked by the very same publishing global industry. This is also true for the evaluation of the work of geographers and of what is considered to be their internationally valuable impact (Derudder, 2010).

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), famously implemented in the UK, has opened the way to this machinery of research evaluation. However, while the often criticized RAE has had enormous impact on the publishing strategies of British geographers in at least the last two decades, it is im-

portant to recall that it was not based on metrics, but rather on a system of peer reviews. The RAE has also had some important and valuable effects on British geography, including the rejuvenation and diversification of a traditionally white and male-dominated discipline, together with the speeding up of carriers for some of its most talented and ambitious scholars (see Richards et al., 2008; Viles, 2002).

While, I realize, this may be a controversial statement, it is undeniable that the RAE has created a particular momentum for British dominated geographical journals (for example, *Transactions* and *Progress in Human Geography*) and has increased the number and the impact of journal articles, partially in contrast to the United States where a similar system has never been implemented and monographs have remained very important for individual careers. Among the most problematic effects of the RAE, however, was a clear shift in the conception of international geography, since the dominance of articles and especially topics central to British academia, but often irrelevant for other national contexts, has certainly affected the possibility of an international dialogue between different traditions, and especially between different linguistic contexts. What is more, the model of governance of academic research privileged by the RAE – which placed an implicit but very real emphasis on peer reviewed journal articles rather than other forms of academic output – was gradually imported into the university systems of other countries, especially in the last 10 yr, during which time many other European countries have implemented a system of evaluation broadly inspired by that British experiment.

Leaving aside the fact that Britain has now abandoned the RAE in favor of a new system, still to be fully implemented, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) – apparently even more focused on top journal publications and grant money than the RAE – what is relevant for my argument here is that in the past few years most European geographers have been asked by their universities to improve their international publication record and to submit their output to some sort of metrics. In some cases, geographers are also measured by the H index, a parameter that is now very popular among hard core scientists and is entirely based on the number of citations received and noted by a specific web search engine, at times representing a real disadvantage for geography in the competition with other disciplines – for example when Scopus or the Web of Science are used – since only citations in a selected number of journals (and no books) are taken into account. The result is that some of the most prominent and influential geographers whose books have been widely read and cited internationally for decades by now, may end up scoring a very low H index! (see Derudder, 2010; Schuermans et al., 2011; Meeus et al., 2011).

The implementation of a tenure track system into the structure of the academic career of many countries has increased the relevance of these metrics even more, while introducing many geographers at a national and also local level to an entirely new academic political economy. Geographers

working in departments with scientists, for example, are often asked to submit their publications to systems that recognize only a few (or no) geographical journals, with the result of making it appear as though their production is internationally irrelevant or impossible to “measure”.

The point here is that the strict identification of what is “international” and what is not, which is imposed by these new set of rules, is forcing many geographers, and especially those in the early stages of their career, to engage with these new conditions. This may lead some to reject the entire logic behind these changes and highlight the risks involved in such a narrow understanding of the nature of academic work – something that many of us simply cannot afford to do, due to their institutional working conditions. Others, however, are trying to imagine ways in which this new trend may help, perhaps in unexpected ways, to introduce an international intellectual exchange into geography that has been missing for too long. Indeed, while the incumbent globalization of academia, and with it of academic geography, presents the clear risk of standardization and threatens to impoverish an already modest international dialogue, the fact that virtually everyone today, in geography and elsewhere, is forced to engage to a certain degree with the “internationalization” of academia, may in fact allow certain “peripheries”, silent for too long, to provide new sources of inspiration and present new intellectual challenges to the dominant paradigms of a geography until now governed by the cultural hegemony of Anglophone departments. The question is then: faced, as we are, with the consequences of neoliberal academic production, is English speaking international geography necessarily destined to become more “Anglo-American”, or rather, might these new trends paradoxically create the conditions for a proliferation of (perhaps unintended) dialogues among geographers from different backgrounds and traditions?

#### 4 Anglo-American hegemony

In 1999, after organizing an international conference in Venice on Postmodern Geographical Praxis, I was asked to write a brief editorial for *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. That short piece entitled “Venetian Geographical Praxis” (Minca, 2000) was written in a moment in which the critical debate about Anglo-American hegemony in international geography was gaining momentum and was followed by numerous interventions on the same topic, mostly written by non-Anglophone geographers (see, among others, Samers and Sidaway, 2000). Despite all the good intentions shown by many journal editors – so the argument of the critiques ran – the growing gap in accessibility to international debates between English speaking and non-English speaking geographers has continued to grow, if anything, as the result of the increasing pressure to publish in peer reviewed journals and the consequent competition for the limited space available in the best journals.

The discussion on how to adequately respond to this growing monolingual and monocultural dominance has been articulate and varied, and in many ways it has given an opportunity for many non-English speaking geographers, including myself, to make their voice heard and to introduce alternative and intellectually diverse perspectives (see Aalbers and Rossi, 2006; Chivallon, 2003; Claval and Staszak, 2004; Fall, 2006, 2007; Fall and Rosière, 2008; Garcia-Ramon, 2003, 2004; Kitchin, 2006; Minca, 2005a; Samers, 2005; Sidaway, 2008; Simonsen, 2004; Tímar, 2004; Tolia-Kelly, 2010; Vaiou, 2004). Many of these authors, however, present well-argued cases for going beyond simple binaries between Anglo and non-Anglo geographies, and suggesting that there *are* very different ways of doing geography in different places, often interacting in complicated ways (Fall and Minca, 2013). Despite these very stimulating debates that emerged in the last decade or so, these discussions seem to be somewhat running in circles, as the recent exchange of views on the role of the *Web of Science* appeared in *Area* between Schuermans et al. (2010), Derudder (2010) and Meeus et al. (2011) somehow reveals. Furthermore, at times, ironically, being involved in debates of this nature, may end up turning into a privileged route to access those very journals criticized for their role as gatekeepers (see Fall and Minca, 2013). However, while that debate is now losing steam and runs the risk of becoming circular, for the sake of my main argument, it may be helpful to recall some of its key elements.

The first form of criticism concerns the fact that, unlike the hard sciences, the social sciences and the humanities do not always translate well between different cultural and linguistic contexts; in other words, Italian or French geographers may not always find the jargon and the methods considered legitimate and acceptable in top English speaking geographical journal apt to communicate their research findings. This difficulty has to do with the fact that in expressing concepts and analytics in another language an article or a project can appear substantially different. Not only do non-English speaking scholars master the lingua franca to different degrees but, since concepts and theoretical perspectives are always context bound, they may suffer significantly, or even sometimes appear incomprehensible, when translated according to the “rules” of the journal in case.

In addition, the use of academic jargon, the argumentative structure and the very selection of the topics considered relevant are all factors limiting the possibilities for geographers working outside the discipline’s core sites of production to enter mainstream international discourse. This unbalanced situation is to a certain extent confirmed by the fact that, until recently, most of the journals with the highest impact were characterized by having one editor based in North America and another in Britain. Something that, quite interestingly, has begun to change of late.

The feeling that this configuration implicitly dictates the topics considered relevant and the writing style deemed acceptable was then voiced by several commentaries coming

from what were, by default, perceived as marginal peripheries compared to the “hubs” where the discipline’s mainstream discourse is normally formulated and communicated to the rest of the world. This situation also gives rise to several other consequences: often authors coming from these “peripheries” do not find adequate expertise on the part of the referees who assess their work, and are too often asked to comply with the standard key literature (in English), with the consequence that literatures in different languages are implicitly marginalized or even ignored; it is also argued that fashionable work, relevant for British or American geography, is often more likely to be published in those key journals.

Another reason for concern is the fact that the discipline’s gatekeepers are often selective (in their own terms) about which foreign sources are legitimate and which are not, in this way disciplining the nature and scope of discussion in certain areas of geographical scholarship. Forced to quote a specific literature in order to have a paper accepted, some “European” geographers have raised the concern that even the entire rhetoric of “inclusion” and “difference” is in practice highly selective and exclusionary, often privileging non-European cultural contexts, especially those with a colonial legacy, while being somehow implicitly resistant to work produced by geographers in “continental” Europe.

Overall, after a decade of debate, the preoccupation with who might determine what international geography is, and where, and particularly how its “borders” and “entry points” might be defined, has remained intact. As noted above, various laudable experiments on the part of several international journals have shown awareness that this situation risks impoverishing the discipline (see for example the inclusive policy adopted by the electronic journal *ACME*). However, their attempts to become more inclusive have had only limited impact on a situation strongly shaped by the pressures coming from the new measures of evaluation imposed on most geographers around Europe. Once someone’s career is determined by one key publication in the right journal, then competition becomes fierce and the ISI ranking regime imposed on many of us, internationally, makes some of the above considerations simply redundant, although not irrelevant.

## 5 Neoliberalism in context

In conclusion, I would like to briefly comment on the impact of the new regimes implemented to measure geographers’ productivity in three countries in which I have worked in the past decade, and, in two cases, where I am presently acting as “research assessor”: the UK, the Netherlands and Italy.

As mentioned above, the implementation of the RAE had enormous effects on British geography, something that has been discussed in endless interventions in key journals (Richards et al., 2008; Viles, 2002). The main principle of the RAE was that only “excellent” research deserved to be

recognized and funded outside and beyond the conventional grant system. The highly complex, and sometimes even obscure, process was based on the peer review of an individual’s best “products” during a specific period of time. At the same time the process was clearly driven by a jargon that emphasized the international impact and relevance of the work of British geographers. Categories like “world leading”, or “internationally excellent” or “recognized nationally” (or internationally) were used to define the parameters according to which individual “points” were assigned to each submitted publication, and as a consequence, to each individual geographer, and, cumulatively, to each department.

Notably, the definition of “world leading research” was notoriously biased in favor of single author articles published in top journals, or at least this was the way in which many departments tried to stir the publication strategies of their “RAEable staff”. By and large, only internationally leading work could bring reputation, high scores and a significant financial return for the departments. The result of these processes was twofold: on the one hand, the “autonomy” of individual geographers to publish their work where they preferred was significantly influenced; on the other, the focus on peer reviewed articles placed the top international journals at the core of the assessment and the career development of many geographers.

The by-product of this intensification of peer reviewing was a considerable increase in the number of submissions to key journals, with articles entering into long queues and facing a higher chance of being declined. Further, this focus on a few key journals potentially narrowed the spaces available for cultural diversity, and for non-Anglophone literature, although, as we shall see, this has happened only in part and in a selective manner. At the same time, in the recent decades, British geography has witnessed a clear “rejuvenation” of its research active staff, and an extraordinary speeding up of some individual careers, driven as they were by an RAE regime. Scholars would move between departments with their “package” of internationally relevant publications and would obtain rewards in the forms of promotions, retention (and related salary increases) and sometimes even special arrangements in terms of teaching and administrative load. This was particularly true for some top departments, whose budgets were significantly reliant on RAE based funding. Another interesting aspect of this process was the increased value assigned in those same top departments to output with highly theoretical content, or focused on some trendy topics, both crucial elements in getting work published.

Finally, I would like to make one last comment on the effects of such an intensive evaluation process. While geography departments would promote their position in the RAE (if strong), on their websites and elsewhere, and while this may have determined their role in their respective institutions, at the same time, the speeding up of academic careers and the new emphasis placed on top international research

has opened the path to an increased importance being given to work characterized by a critical approach to things geographical, if anything because of its highly theoretical content and its deep connection with what was happening in other fields. The outcome of this has been that in the last decade or so all mainstream British geography could potentially be defined as “critical”, with very little space left for more traditional and conservative approaches, at least in the best departments. At the same time, British geography has increased its status in the social sciences, with the relevance of its “production” recognized by other fields and top scholars hired from other disciplines by some of the best geography departments.

This internal diversification and enrichment of the discipline was also made possible by a progressive opening up of positions, including but not confined to PhD positions, to international scholars, mainly from the English speaking world, but also from continental Europe. Perhaps paradoxically, whilst the RAE process focused on a very British-centric understanding of what could be considered internationally relevant work, complicating certain aspects of the publication process, it did create opportunities for fast career development based on clear merit – at least in relation to the categories considered by the RAE coding – and a degree of genuine internationalization of British geography.

The longer term effects of the recent shift to the new REF system, even more British-centric and even more focused on top publications, remain to be evaluated, especially in light of the financial restrictions implemented in the wake of the financial crunch. However, by emphasizing certain aspects of geographers’ productivity instead of others – for example, the increased importance given to large grants at a time of significantly reduced resources, or to students’ evaluations instead of publishing records – some of the RAE’s results may soon be a memory of the past.

Although in the Netherlands (where I presently work) there is no such thing as the RAE, the emphasis placed on internationally relevant publications is perhaps even stronger in some of the best Dutch universities. Geography, occupying a far less important position as a discipline compared to the UK (for a critical overview see, for example, Musterd and de Pater, 2003) is thus evaluated differently in each institution, normally by an external international panel. In addition, several top Dutch universities have in place systems that constantly monitor and evaluate the output of their academics. This has become particularly important in those cases where a tenure track system has been implemented for early career scholars. In many of these evaluations, especially where geography is located in a context driven by the publication logic of the hard sciences entirely based on metrics, the ISI ranking and the measures provided by systems like Scopus have become increasingly relevant, for both individuals and departments.

The Dutch case, however, is of particular relevance for our reflection on the internationalization of geography for sev-

eral reasons. English is in fact very often the lingua franca for teaching at the Master’s level, but, more importantly, it is the lingua franca for all research plans and evaluations, including the documents produced by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In addition, although neoliberal practices are diffuse and implemented with great effort by the university management teams, they often prompt resistance and conflict, frequently based on the claim, especially on the part of the older generations, that such practices put Dutch scholars at a clear disadvantage compared to international staff who are often trained in English speaking countries. As a consequence of this radical shift towards internationalization, however, most Dutch universities have, in the past few years, significantly improved their international ranking, with as many as 7 in the top 100, and 12 out of 14 in the top 200 in 2012–2013 according to the Times Higher Education ranking<sup>2</sup>. Their intake of international students is also growing, most recently also in relation to the change of fee regime and new regulation on visas in the UK. This is having only marginal impact on geography, a social science seen to have mainly national relevance and often twinned with planning (Olson, 2010), but the most recent recruitment of senior academics from the UK may be a sign of change. The question is may this become a model for other national university systems in continental Europe as well?

If we look at Italy, for example, the situation is dramatically different. The Ministry of Research and Education has most recently establishment a new Agency for the Evaluation of Research (ANVUR – of which the author is a member) that has been given the task of assessing the quality and the international impact of the work done by all Italian academics in the period 2004–2010. This is the first process of this kind ever implemented in Italy. Leaving aside the negative (but not only) reaction of many established academics, sparked by the way in which the assessment criteria of ANVUR were defined and implemented – something even discussed in the national press – what is of particular interest for our argument here is the “place” of geography within this framework. In the mapping of Italian academic research, geography – all geography – has been located in the humanities together with disciplines like history and philosophy. The main characteristic of this grouping is the absence of all forms of bibliometrics. The result is that all work submitted to evaluation must be peer reviewed anew, nationally and internationally. The other difficulty comes from the ranking of the relevant journals and, in particular, the relationship between international and national publications. By and large, what has emerged from the discussions (both those internal to the ANVUR and those involving external disciplinary associations) on how to evaluate the international impact of the work of geographers is a dilemma regarding the role of English as a lingua franca. This is an issue that may soon take the form of a dramatic generational divide.

<sup>2</sup>See: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk>.

What can be learned from this first experiment in the evaluation of Italian academic research in the humanities? It seems that, although neoliberal practices are being implemented in Italy much later than in other countries, the humanities are either reluctant or partly unprepared to engage with this new challenge. This is in part due to a long-standing tradition of publishing in Italian and a very reduced propensity to submit their work to an international readership. At the same time, assessment models derived from the hard science (including different forms of metrics) are becoming dominant in many Italian universities where internal research funds are distributed according to the impact of publications, and where in many cases, geography has been losing ground precisely because of the difficulty in proposing alternative models of (self)evaluation. The main point here is that in a rather conservative academic environment, unfamiliar with the culture of evaluation common to other national contexts, it seems that in order for the humanities, including geography, to counterbalance the overall tendency to include everything within the logic of bibliometrics and the fetishism around H indexes, they must be able to propose different models for assessing their impact. However, to succeed, these alternative forms of evaluation must be capable of addressing the specificities of each discipline and provide constructive ways to tackle the complicated relationship between outputs directed at a national readership and those aiming to impact international debates. Above all they must be rigorous, transparent, and credible in their capacity of awarding excellence and academic scholarship. Only within such a model of evaluation can geography survive the competition between disciplines (sometimes fierce at the local institutional level) in order to get recognition and funding.

The bizarre idea that there may be no need for a system of evaluation of academic work is clearly something of the past, even in the Italian context. While the mantra of internationalization reproduces in Italy practices that are already well established in other countries, albeit in modified ways, the recently introduced changes, if adapted to the specificities of the discipline, may indeed represent an important opportunity to reinvigorate the discipline and its scientific profile, particularly in relation to other cognate fields, while making room for newer generations of scholars. This is particularly important during a time of severe financial constraint, when recruitment has become extremely competitive and clear rules are required in order to award the best scholars on the basis of merit and actual impact of the work.

## 6 Conclusions

By way of conclusion I would like to make a few brief remarks in the light of the above considerations. Neoliberal practices are dramatically changing the terms according to which we might define international geography. The battles over, and the resistance to, the internationalization of the dif-

ferent national geographies, especially in relation to the governance of our universities, will change – and in many cases, already has changed – the way in which we write and teach geography. English is firmly established as the lingua franca of academia, including the social sciences, where geography is usually located in most countries, and this situation is unlikely to change any time soon, especially given the increasing international dominance of “scientific” parameters to assess academic work. By and large, the internationalization of research, including geographical research, is something that needs to be supported in a time of serious financial pressure and when the globalization of intellectual and scientific exchange and competition is intensifying. This of course, depends very much on how the globalization of academia is conceived and on how its related strategies are implemented. However, merely national, never mind local, understandings of the nature of academic work are rapidly becoming untenable, and their advocates tend to appear as the gatekeepers of the status quo and of established hierarchies that are now being radically challenged by the implementation of neoliberal regimes.

At a time when the pressure to publish in English and to imagine a globalized community of peers is growing everywhere, can we hope that these trends, despite all their flaws and the difficulties they may produce, might also open new spaces for voices from non-Anglophone academic environments to be heard? Is the growing importance of fashionable non-Anglophone theory – in geography and elsewhere – potentially offering new opportunities for those working in the “peripheries” and opening the mainstream of the discipline to a greater degree of cultural diversity? Might these recent trends significantly modify the geographies of power within the discipline internationally? For example, is it imaginable that the pressure to publish internationally and in English might actually establish new “hubs” of geographical thought outside the canons of what is normally referred to as Anglo-America? And finally, a key question for many contemporary “continental” geographers: how to balance an adequate response to the demands accompanying the internationalization strategies implemented by many universities, whilst, at the same time, safeguarding the intellectual specificities and particular disciplinary trajectories of their respective national contexts, in ways that do not fall into the traps of national parochialism – too often bound up with attempts to simply maintain the hierarchical status quo? We are all aware how difficult it may be for early career geographers to find an adequate “positioning” between the demands of their respective national and the international communities of peers: something that not only requires publishing with continuity in two languages, but also engaging with the difficulties implied in the fact that all too often empirical work coming from outside Anglo-America is considered case specific, while, for example, British cases are frequently considered almost inherently of theoretical relevance. In addition, as noted by many authors, highly theoretical interventions



in international debates have their geographies of power as well. However, while these difficulties are there to remain, and neoliberal rankings of productivity seem to increase their impact on individuals struggling to secure an academic career, at the same time, neoliberal practices linked to the mantras of competition and internationalization may indeed also represent an opportunity for non-Anglophone geographers to claim new spaces in those very debates. This opportunity needs to be taken in consideration strategically, perhaps offering to the international readership perspectives and contextualizations to “non-Anglophone” theories and scholars that otherwise would be either treated more superficially or dismissed too earlier or even ignored.

All these factors and questions should be taken into account when reflecting on the future of *Les Fabrique de Geographies* in Europe, especially where the evaluation of the international impact of geographers’ work is concerned. This is why geography, like the other humanities and social sciences, urgently ought to identify and adopt rigorous, credible and transparent models of (self)-evaluation, specifically suited to the discipline’s needs, if the powerful trend towards assessing all work in the standardized language of metrics is to be contained or counterbalanced.

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