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***“Global human mobility and knowledge transfer: a case study of highly skilled return migrants in Ethiopia”***

Alice Lam and Huaichuan Rui

Royal Holloway University of London

Human mobility plays a critical role in the transfer of advanced knowledge across national borders. In the postwar decades, the migration of highly skilled individuals from developing to advanced economies was viewed as a ‘brain drain’ that exacerbated global inequality by enriching the already wealthy countries at the expense of the less developed countries. However, recent evidence suggests that the global migration of skilled workers has been shifting from a one-way ‘brain drain’ to a two-way ‘brain circulation’. Since the early 1990s, growing numbers of foreign-educated technical and professional workers from developing economies have been returning to their home countries. These highly skilled return migrants are often seen as ‘new developers’ or ‘agents of economic transformation’ in their home countries. Much of the literature has focussed on the success stories of emerging economies such as China, Taiwan and India. It stresses the transnational positional and knowledge advantage of returnees and the ways in which they use their knowledge advantage through entrepreneurship. This paper challenges these assumptions by looking at the experience of highly skilled return migrants from the US, Europe and Japan to Ethiopia - one of the world’s poorest and least developed countries which has sought to redress the problem of brain drain through active diaspora policies in recent years. It examines the challenges of knowledge re-contextualization and the cultural/institutional obstacles that these returnees have faced in translating their migrant experience and cutting edge professional knowledge into useful or relevant knowledge in the host context. The analysis shows how variation in home and host-country embeddedness influences returnees’ ability to assume their roles as ‘agents of change’ or ‘new developers’. The empirical evidence is based on in-depth individual interviews with 24 highly-educated return migrants across a range of professional fields in the public and private sectors.