

Research note

Waiting: Social Meanings of Immobility in Kathmandu, Nepal

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Summary

This research note looks closely at transnational mobility as a lived experience in the city of Kathmandu, Nepal. It sheds light on the lives of aspirant migrants to show how uncertainties around mobility shape their everyday lives in the city, whereby immobility is not juxtaposed against mobility but is rather interwoven with it. Here, waiting for news about vacancies from the local agent, waiting to get selected for an interview, waiting to bid farewell to their families and waiting to return to them conditions the ebbs and flows of their mobile, working lives. It shows that waiting, as experienced by the migrants, can have different subjective tonalities. While it may be experienced in an emotionally neutral manner, as periods of inactivity around which their everyday routine is designed, it could also be perceived as a failure to meet gendered and familial expectations. Disturbing the productivist association of waiting with inactivity, many migrants also view their period of employment abroad (activity) as an extended period of waiting, around which their life course is outlined. These differing perceptions of waiting provide interesting ethnographic insights into our conceptualization of mobility, immobility and perceptions of time.

Keywords: Waiting, aspirations, mediation, brokerage, migrant subjectivities

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