



## Hearts in Australia, Souls in Nepal: Migration and Affective Intergenerational Aspirations

By  
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### Abstract

This article focuses on the intergenerational nature of migrants' aspirations and the emotions that attach to them. Drawing on Ahmed's (2014) notion of "affective economies" that emphasises that emotions circulate and accumulate affective value, I show how aspirations attached to migration or the "mobile aspirations" (Robertson, Cheng, & Yeoh 2018) are affectively experienced by their family. While studies have explored aspirations for permanent residency (PR) in the West, as well as the pathways to PR, less is documented of how parents experience their children's migration aspirations, including for PR abroad. This article addresses this particular gap. Taking the case of Nepali education migrants in Australia and their transnational families, I explore the parents' emotions when their children aspire for PR overseas. I argue that migration aspirations create a different kind of intergenerational affective economy between parents and children. This article is based on a multi-sited ethnography among Nepali education migrants in Sydney, Australia and their families in Nepal.

**Keywords:** migration, aspirations, emotions, affective, intergenerational, Australia, Nepal

Limbu, Amrita: "Hearts in Australia, Souls in Nepal: Migration and Affective Intergenerational Aspirations", *Culture Unbound*, Volume 13, issue 2, 2021: 204-225. Published by Linköping University Electronic Press: <http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se>



### Introduction

Kalpana, now in her mid-50s lives “alone” with her husband on the top floor of their four-storey house in Naya Baneshwor at the heart of Nepal’s capital, Kathmandu. Two of her three children are settled with permanent residency (PR) in Australia and Canada. And her younger daughter, Alina, whom I met in Sydney had migrated about 12 months prior. Like her siblings, Alina also wanted to obtain Australian PR after completing her postgraduate degree. With all the children likely to settle abroad, Kalpana harbours some ambivalence about her and her husband’s future; this is evident when she stresses her preference for her children to return, but also sharing concerns of them not returning, and yet hoping that they do: “Till now, I do have a little hope that they will return, but don’t know ... we still prefer that they come home ... son is there, we are here, every day we are getting older. We worry a bit.” Kalpana’s account reveals how aspirations of migration and permanent settlement abroad raises questions about family togetherness and familial networks in proximity that have traditionally defined the common family arrangement in the Nepali cultural context.

Against the backdrop of education migrants’ aspirations for PR in Australia, this article focuses on the intergenerational nature of migrants’ aspirations and the emotions that attach to them. While studies on migration in Australia have examined the migrants’ aspirations for PR (Robertson 2013, Baas 2010, Neilson 2009) as well as the pathways to PR (Robertson 2019, 2020), an understanding of the parents’ perspective on how they experience the children’s aspirations for PR remains limited. The aim of this article lies in addressing this specific gap. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s (2014) notion of “affective economies” that emphasises that emotions circulate and accumulate affective value, I show how aspirations attached to migration or “mobile aspirations” (Robertson, Cheng, & Yeoh 2018) are not only limited to the migrants’ lives but are affectively experienced by their family. I explore the parents’ emotions associated with a sense of potential loss of future familial and relational networks when their children aspire for PR abroad. The parents’ sense of loss discussed here entails losses connected to a changing “family contract” (Tu 2016) that have traditionally defined intergenerational roles and responsibilities—including loss of proximate connection with their children, reimaginings of care futures, and their own potential mobility to be with their children. By highlighting aspirations as affective and belonging concurrently to different generations, I argue that migration aspirations create a different kind of intergenerational affective economy between parents and children.

This article is based on a multi-sited ethnography conducted among Nepali education migrants in Sydney and their families in Nepal. Data that informs this paper was gathered from observations and 20 in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face with education migrants (students or spouses of students on

dependent partner visas) in Sydney and six families in Nepal (mainly the parents and siblings). The majority of the education migrants were in their 20s, while a few were in their late teens and early 30s, and enrolled mostly in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Most came from middle-class families and belonged to different caste or ethnic groups, mainly Bahun, Chettri, Janjati, and Newar. All spoke fluent English, given their education in private English-medium schools, except one student who had a government school background. In the next section, I provide an overview of aspirations, as used in migration studies, and discuss how I mobilise the concept of aspiration. Then, I discuss education migration from Nepal to Australia and the aspirations for PR in Australia. Following that, I examine the intergenerational affective economies generated by the education migrants' aspirations for PR.

### **Migration, Emotions, and Affective Aspirations**

Aspiration is often used synonymously with desire, and even though both terms are commonly used in migration studies, there have been limited attempts to theorise them until recently (Collins 2018, Carling & Collins 2018, Carling & Schewel 2018, Robertson et al. 2018). In this article, I draw on concepts from migration studies and cultural studies, mainly "mobile aspirations" (Robertson et al. 2018) and "affective economies" (Ahmed 2014) to elucidate an understanding of affective aspirations or aspirations as affective. "Mobile aspirations" encapsulate the desires for "making futures" through mobility or are concerned with how individuals create and construct "aspirations for their futures (around education, work, marriage, family or lifestyle)" through mobility (Robertson et al. 2018: 615). Ahmed's (2014: 4) "affective economies" is based on the notion that "emotions circulate between bodies", and affect is produced as an effect of the circulation of emotions. The more emotions circulate, the more affective they become or increase the affective value, or "contain" affect (Ahmed 2014). I take this notion of "affective economies" to analyse the ways and manners in which emotions attached to migrants "mobile aspirations" "circulate" within transnational families and "accumulate" affective value. I use circulation to refer to how, emotions attached to the migrants' experiences are experienced by their families despite the distance, or vice versa.

Aspirations, to borrow from Appadurai (2004: 67) are "never simply individual ... [t]hey are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life." I follow this delineation of aspirations, with its social and collective elements, to examine how the migrants' aspirations are experienced by their families. My use of aspiration also encompasses the emotional and affective subjectivities of migration and transnational family life. I follow Carling and Collins's (2018:

913) analysis of aspirations that incorporates the migrants' subjectivities and their feelings, as well as the circulation of affect. Analysis of future aspirations in this paper, as noted in Kalpana's account in the opening of this article, reveal varied emotions of hope and desire alongside worry, ambivalence, and a sense of potential loss. Pathways to attaining migration aspirations involve negotiating some of these emotions (Wang & Chen 2020). And as I show in this article, these emotions are individual and also constituted within affective family relations. I also draw on Robertson et al. (2018: 617) who suggest aspirations are centred on current social conditions and on the individual's "becomings, imaginings and possibilities". The focus of this article is on the imaginaries and future possibilities to help understand the shaping of the imagined futures as they are being formed (McKay 2014). Whether the aspirations are realised or not, I focus on how the migrants' aspirations shape their parents' present experiences and imaginations of future possibilities.

Most existing studies focus on aspirations more in relation to migrating abroad (Collins 2018, Carling & Collins 2018, Robertson et al. 2018, Carling & Schewel 2018, Wang & Chen 2020). In contrast, I use aspirations in the context of future imaginations and desires of migrants already abroad, including from the parents' perspective. While migrants' aspirations have received some attention, the manner in which migrants construct their imagined future as individuals and as members of families remains relatively understudied (Boccagni 2017). In a way, this article takes up Boccagni's (2017) suggestion for further research on the intergenerational aspirational gap by focusing on the aspirations of migrants and their families.

It must also be noted that there has been much debate about the distinction between emotions and affect. Affect is often associated with forces or intensities—intensity that is embodied in nonconscious autonomic reactions (Massumi 1995). Affect might be best exemplified by bodily sensations, for example, a knot in the stomach or heaviness of the heart (McKay 2005, Massumi 1995). While affect as an intensity is often difficult to interpret, emotion as Massumi (1995: 88) puts it is 'qualified intensity' or the 'subjective content' that describes the intensity. Emotions are thus subjective experience and personal expression that can be interpreted into narratives (Davidson, Bondi, & Smith 2007). In my study, I use emotions to refer to the emotions named and described by my participants, such as "happy", "sad", "regret", "guilt", "loneliness" as well as to their accounts that depict these emotions. And I understand affect as an embodied sensation (McKay 2005). But rather than considering affect as fleeting, I move towards an understanding of affect as accumulative intensities of longer duration as a result of the circulation and accumulation of emotions. Affect as a fleeting, precognitive bodily sensation, makes it an elusive phenomenon, and a challenging object of

research (Watkins 2016). My participants' accounts reveal little about the fleeting intensities as commonly theorised by scholars of affect but nonetheless provided adequate evidence of experiences embodied over a longer duration, or of affective experiences. The theorisation of affect as accumulative intensities has been useful to examine these experiences. Such a theorisation of affect also enables analysis of emotions and affect, separately as well as together, or affect as the accumulation of emotions. However, I argue that emotions and affect are too interconnected in lived experiences to always be readily separated in empirical observations. Because emotions are central to my analysis of both emotions and affect, I also commonly use emotion or emotional in general, rather than specifying emotion and affect distinctly throughout.

An important pretext for bringing in emotions to the study of transnational families lies in the fact that emotions, alongside mobile lives, are also on the move, and are spatially and temporally dynamic (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015). As Boccagni & Baldassar (2015) contend, migration therefore provides a privileged lens to observe emotions. Yet, emotions and affect have not been exclusively problematised, rather they are often subsumed under other aspects of migration, mainly economics. Thus, how emotional and affective experiences constitute and are constitutive of migration experiences is not often considered (Conradson & McKay 2007). As the empirical cases show, an examination of emotions is integral to an understanding of how family lives are lived transnationally. This article thus contributes to the emerging field of scholarship that connects migration studies to studies of emotion and affect (Baldassar 2008, Ryan 2008, Skrbiš 2008, Wise & Velayutham 2017, Svašek 2010, McKay 2005). This paper also contributes a nuanced understanding of how migration is experienced collectively in the family, beyond a focus on individual migrants or the families that do not migrate.

Emotions arising out of migration are a common theme in Nepal's cultural landscape, both historically, and more prominently in recent times because of the large-scale out-mobility from Nepal. These emotions are well represented in music and films, as well as in Nepali literary writings. And while subjective experiences of migration have been adequately explored, analysis of the emotional and affective experiences of migration remain limited in academic scholarship on Nepal. In examining emotions in notable Nepali literary work based on migration (Hutt 1998) and Nepali language songs of *viraha* or longing and pain of separation (Stirr 2017), Hutt and Stirr illustrate how emotions, or emotion words, are common articulations of migration experiences. Similarly, Onta (1994) highlights how the experiences of *dukha* (that he associates with "bodily pain, mental suffering, extreme hardship and death") remain unexplored in scholarship on *Gurkhas* or the Nepalis who serve(d) in British or foreign military; Onta's work shows the value in exploring the themes of *dukha* to understand the experiences of the war.

Likewise, Shrestha (2015) explores the experiences of Nepalis seeking asylum in the United States (US) and their articulation of suffering (*dukha*) as a collective, moral practice. I draw on and extend these studies by placing emotions at the centre of analysis in the context of the transnational family.

Emotions, however, are not universal (Barrett 2017). The cultural expressions of emotions in Nepali are often differently expressed than in English. While the interviews and informal conversations were generally in Nepali, it was also common to use a mix of both English and Nepali. In my study, some Nepali emotion terms like *dukha* (hardship, sorrow, or suffering), *chinta* (worry), or *khusi* (happy) were commonly used. Some participants used the English emotion words like “proud”, “happy”, “guilt”, or “missing”. In general, emotions expressed by my study participants are not necessarily adequately reflected in English emotion words or their directly translated Nepali equivalent. Many participants, for example, did not specify “shame”, “guilt”, “remorse”, “longing”, or “missing”, rather these emotions were commonly expressed in general terms like *ramro-naramro* (good-bad), *thikai* (fine), *garo* (difficult). Sometimes they would just leave the emotions at *oo* (pronounced u:, meaning that or abstract reference to something). Expressions of emotions also depended on the type of relationships. Some migrant parents were more expressive in stating that they missed their young children but did not state the same for their spouses. And some ageing parents showed concerns for their adult migrant children rather than saying they missed them. Further, most Nepali emotion terms are not a unitary construct and a specific term can be used in reference to a wide array of feelings or experiences (Kohrt & Harper 2008).

While I am unable to play with the wide range of emotion words in this article, I use the terms that reflect the meanings closest to my participants’ accounts and also rely on the English emotion terms for analysis. I also want to point out the interviews and informal conversations were not directed to elicit emotions or emotional content from the participants. Rather, it was during the fieldwork my interest was caught by the emotions and affective moments I witnessed during interviews and observations, and became attentive to the role these emotions and affective moments could play in understanding the lives of individuals in transnational families. The examples presented in this article draw on conversation with parents aimed to understand how they feel about or experience their adult children’s desire for PR in Australia.

### **Nepal–Australia Education Migration and Aspirations for PR**

The relational nature of aspirations and the ways they are socially constructed means that aspirations are part of a “system of ideas” (Appadurai 2004: 67). A

Western education is increasingly associated with cultural prestige and a way to accumulate social and cultural capital (Robertson 2013). And Australia, as one of the largest education migration destinations globally, is highly significant to the “mobile aspirations” of hundreds of thousands of education migrants, mainly from the emerging middle-class across Asia, seeking to “making futures through mobility” (Robertson et al. 2018: 615). An increasing number of international students are enrolled in Australia, totalling to 952 271 in 2019 alone and 882 482 in 2020 (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020). Nepali students comprise the third-largest international student body in Australia, after China and India, with approximately 70 000 enrolled in 2019 and a similar number in 2020 (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020). Nepali government records show Australia as the destination for half of all outgoing students from Nepal (Ministry of Education, Science & Technology 2018).

Beyond the idea of education migration, the possibility of PR makes education migration to Australia much more complex (Castles 2016). Students with the desired skills and qualifications listed in the “skilled occupation list” are eligible to apply for PR through a points-based system after they complete their studies and remain in Australia. Therefore, of late, education migration is often equated to a “two-step” approach to (skilled) migration, oriented towards generating a flexible labour force to fulfil labour demands in Western countries including Australia (Wright & Clibborn 2017). Likewise, the potential to transition from students to skilled workers and permanent residents tie the motivations of many education migrants directly to PR, whether such intentions are strategic or develop over time (Robertson 2013, Baas 2010, Neilson 2009). The prospect of PR, as Peter Mares (2016) notes, is an added incentive for students to choose an Australian university over other Western universities.

Australia is, therefore, strongly connected to the desires and imaginations of an increasing population of young adults who envision it as a place where a “good life” is achievable. Australia is tied to economic security as well as social autonomy that is achieved through mobility (Robertson et al. 2018). The “mobile aspirations” for education migration to Australia also reveals the desires of young students to experience life beyond home, their quest for greater autonomy and freedom away from families and relatives (Martin 2018, Gomes et al. 2014). The aspirations of Nepali education migrants align with the same “mobile aspirations.”

Today, in Nepal, like in several other countries across the Global South, going abroad for work or education has become a common practice. Approximately half a million Nepalis, mainly young people, migrate overseas every year, mostly for employment and increasingly for education (Ministry of Education, Science & Technology 2018, Ministry of Labour and Employment 2018). Historically too, migration from Nepal has remained an important economic strategy. A

large body of scholarship on Nepali migration documents the different trends of migration, including—the historical accounts of military (*Gurkha*) migration, migration to neighbouring India, labour migration to the Middle East and parts of Asia, as well as migration to the West. Much of the contemporary migration literature focuses, in particular, on labour migration highlighting precarity and labour exploitation in the Middle East and countries like Malaysia, and a wide array of other socioeconomic themes (Sunam 2020, Seddon, Adhikari, & Gurung 2002, Paoletti et al. 2014, Sijapati & Limbu 2017).

In the past few decades, migration to the West is increasingly through pathways of education. While India has historically remained a significant destination for students from Nepal, larger numbers of Nepali students also went to the US and the United Kingdom (UK) for higher education. The past decade has however seen Australia emerge as the largest destination for students from Nepal. But, despite the increasing migration to Australia, especially among the educated youth from middle-class families in Nepal, studies focused on understanding the experiences of Nepalis in Australia remain limited. A few studies, mainly postgraduate theses, explore gender roles and expectations around household duties or childbirth and parenting. Therefore, despite an increasing literature on education migration in Australia, little is known about the subjective experiences of Nepali education migrants in the country.

Studies on the experiences of Nepali students in other countries are also limited. A significant body of literature is available on Nepali migration to the West across the US, UK, and other European countries (Toffin & Pfaff-Czarnecka 2014, Gellner & Hausner 2018). Scholarship on migration experiences of Nepali students in the West constitutes a small portion of this body of work. These studies highlight various critical aspects of the Nepali students' migration experiences, including work and migration conditions, belonging, assimilation, identity, racial discrimination, and deskilling of professionals into “low-skilled” jobs (Valentin 2015, Adhikari 2010, Sijapati 2010, Hausner 2014). For instance, Valentin (2015) examines how the class-based identities of middle-class Nepali students in Denmark are reinterpreted in the process of their mobility. Adhikari (2010), examining the link between education brokering business and nurse migration from Nepal to the UK, highlights the struggles of Nepali nurses “brokered” to the UK with false hopes and promises as a “dream-trap”. In the study of Nepali students in the US, Sijapati (2010) maps the transnational ties of Nepali transmigrants from the perspective of the migrants. Similarly, Hausner (2014) examines identity and belonging of Nepali nurses across Britain and Nepal. These studies commonly note the desire to migrate to the West via pathways of education, but few deeply consider such aspirations in the context of transnational family or through the lens of emotions and affect, as this paper seeks to do. I draw on and expand on

these studies on student migration to explore the experiences of the families when the adult migrant children aspire for PR overseas.

My study participants were still studying or had recently completed their studies and transitioned to a post-study visa or the “Temporary Graduate visa”, and all the participants harboured some, albeit often less than concrete, desires to pursue PR sometime in the future. Aside from allowing them to reside permanently in Australia, education migrants anticipate PR to leverage their position in being considered for professional employment. Education migrants in my study often consider managing student life—or more specifically managing living costs and tuition fees with “low-skilled” jobs alongside their studies—as a transient period of *dukha* (hardship). They anticipate post-study life as a relatively better period with professional jobs, no tuition fees, and better earnings as they will no longer be restricted to working 20 hours per week. PR thus represents an endpoint of *dukha* of student life and the beginning of a *dukha*-free life; as the opening of opportunities for professional white-collar employment. For the education migrants, PR therefore remains integral to achieving their “mobile aspirations” of securing futures by recouping their investment in their time and struggle during their studies. But the payoff of PR for their *dukha* is both emotional and instrumental. PR is symbolically a sign of success of their migration, and an emotional as well as economic “need”.

However, an Australian PR does not come easy. There are large financial as well as emotional investments to be made. Shanthi Robertson (2013, 2019, 2020), in particular, highlights the struggles of “middling” migrants’ and the “staggered” pathways to PR, often over several years, while managing ambiguity, uncertainty, transience, and being diverted from their anticipated pathway as they aspire to fulfil migration goals and career aspirations in a rapidly changing policy scenario. As Mares (2016: 4, 5) notes, many become “the settlers who remain unsettled”, unable to transition from a temporary migrant to a permanent resident despite living in Australia for several years, feeling a sense of belonging, and investing their “money, sweat and hope in an Australian future”. However, here, I do not delve into the journey to PR. Rather, I am interested in how the families, mainly parents, experience their migrant’s aspirations for PR and to stay on in Australia, a theme that has been less documented.

Studies on migration in Australia, mainly on “transnational caring”, report the emotional experiences of the ageing parents when their children settle abroad. In particular, Loretta Baldassar’s (2008) work among Italian migrants in Australia and their families back home explores longing and missing felt by the parents whose children settled in Australia. King et al. (2014) similarly report loneliness and other challenges faced by Albanian parents whether they remain behind or migrate to be with their children. Studies in Nepal similarly highlight the challenges, mainly

the lack of practical and emotional support, faced by aged parents living alone following (internal or external) migration of the children (Khanal, Rai, & Chalise 2018). In this paper, my focus is the imaginings of futures among parents of recent migrants, as opposed to “well-settled” or long-term migrants, rather than as an ongoing practice.

In Nepali cultural context, as well as across many countries in Asia, intergenerational filial responsibility is traditionally performed in proximity. But migration of the adult children and the unlikelihood of their return disrupts this traditional practice and raises questions about the “family contract” (Tu 2016). A “family contract”, in general, encompasses the notion of filial piety that traditionally defines the intergenerational responsibilities and obligations between parents and children (Tu 2016). In examining intergenerational filial piety among Chinese one-child migrants in the UK and their parents in China, Tu (2016: 9) highlights the ambivalence of intergenerational reciprocity towards a “new family contract” as parents and the migrant children sought the latter’s “success” in the West over return. I expand this line of analysis on intergenerational reciprocity and a “family contract in transition” towards an examination of affective aspirations.

### **Affective Intergenerational Aspirations**

While the education migrants in my study had unwavering aspirations for PR, the same aspirations also affected their families in Nepal. Meeting the parents and understanding their future aspirations revealed ambivalence about their futures amidst a “family contract in transition” (Tu 2016). I draw on two empirical cases—of education migrants in Australia with differently formed “mobile aspirations”, and the resultant questions on the future on their parents in Nepal. I begin with the case of Maya and her parents Umesh and Janaki.

#### *“We probably won’t have that luxury”: Potential Loss of Familial Networks in Proximity*

Thirty-three-year-old Maya was towards the end of her postgraduate studies in Sydney when I met her. She had migrated to Australia, along with her husband. Despite her master’s degree from the UK and her seemingly “privileged” status, Maya had struggled to begin her career in Nepal, in terms of landing professional employment or starting her own business venture. As such, her parents had encouraged her to migrate to Australia and settle down with PR, to make her and her children’s futures. But her qualification in a social science course was not among those listed in the eligible “skilled occupation list” to apply for PR. Thus, without a direct pathway to PR, Maya was contemplating undertaking another course in a “regional” area that would provide her with sufficient “points” and

a pathway to become eligible to apply for PR. Unlike Maya, some participants in their late twenties and early thirties had significant work experience; others in their early twenties had migrated straight after their 10+2 (higher secondary) or bachelor's degree without any kind of work experience. But, like Maya, they shared similar aspirations for PR in Australia and securing futures. However, migrants can spend extended periods in Australia, even decades, in pursuit of PR, frequently re-routing life, education, and career goals around changing migration policies (Robertson 2020, 2019). Although Maya's journey to PR in Australia was clearly "staggered" (Robertson 2019), she remained devoted to fulfilling her "mobile aspirations" including PR. Her brother was settled with PR in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, Australia with his nuclear family, leaving her parents Umesh and Janaki by themselves in Kathmandu.

Maya's father, Umesh had also been an education migrant to Hong Kong and returned to Nepal with a doctorate degree. Maya believed that her father harboured guilt about returning to Nepal instead of staying abroad for his "children's future". When I met Umesh in Kathmandu and asked what motivated him to encourage his daughter to migrate to Australia, he shared that it had become unlikely that Maya and her husband would be able to make their futures in Nepal, without a "technical degree such as in medicine, engineering, or IT". Intergenerational aspirations are often formed in different periods, in relation to different life chances, and are thus likely to differ (Bourdieu 1993). Maya and her parents however shared similar aspirations—for her to gain PR in Australia to "secure futures".

Amidst decades of political instability and slow economic growth, most of my study participants expressed disenchantment with the socio-political situation in Nepal and loss of hope in making futures by staying in the country. Under such circumstances, the future aspirations of education migrants were strongly tied to desires for PR to secure futures for oneself and their future generation. As in Maya's case, there was a sense of being stuck or what Hage (2009: 2) refers to as "stuckedness" in staying in Nepal, while mobility enabled a sense of "going somewhere as opposed to nowhere". However, for the recent migrants in my study, permanent residence in Australia was often not the end-goal, with many expressing strong desires to eventually return to Nepal after achieving their "mobile aspirations". Whether the education migrants do return, or return remains a myth, such aspirations meanwhile are affectively embodied by their parents.

Aspirations for Australian PR, even though shared between Maya and her parents, embodies a potential loss. Umesh's encouragement of his daughter's migration to Australia shows that parents seemingly compromise physical presence in proximity for the children's "success" in a high-income country (Tu 2016). This became evident when I asked Umesh and Janaki if they had given any thought to

their future with both children abroad. They highlighted the emotional outlook towards their future without the “luxury” of having their children in proximity.

Umesh: It will be a bit tough ... financially we do not have any problem, but the main thing is loneliness. When one falls ill sometimes, what happens when there is no one to take care? Now, my brother and sister are nearby ... brother is in *Hetauda* [city to the south of Kathmandu]. That’s why—now our mother is there but if anything happens, we three siblings take care [of her]. For example, in case of surgery etc., we bring her here and care for her. We probably won’t have that luxury. We might not have it. But there are other options too. But one thing is, we haven’t thought about it too. Another thing is we have to maintain our health strategically.

Janaki: In Nepal, we still don’t have the social [security] and all like abroad, that’s why—

Umesh: No, we don’t have that here. But one thing is, we haven’t thought of it too, may be gradually.

Both Umesh and Janaki were in their late fifties, and Umesh was still in his job in an international organisation in Nepal; as such, it was plausible that they had not given much thought to their future yet. Nonetheless, their accounts reveal emotions associated with the anticipated loss of future familial and relational network with their children and future generation. While Umesh and Janaki are explicit that finances are not the issue about their future, the possibility of not having children nearby in the future was clearly affective. Umesh points to loneliness that might befall them with their children staying abroad. And, contrasting the situation of his mother surrounded by her three children living close by, he notes the possibility of him and Janaki being by themselves without the “luxury” of having their children nearby. He identifies both the emotional and practical care his mother can avail from her children if necessary, such as during illness. Noting the limited social security provisions in Nepal compared to the West, Janaki also suggests the reliance on children for practical support when necessary. Had the children lived in Nepal, even regular or frequent visits could function as care (Baldassar 2007). But Umesh and Janaki are unlikely to benefit from such traditional notions of intergenerational filial piety commonly practiced in Nepali culture and Asia broadly, unless they migrate to be with their children; an opportunity that is again, dictated by visas and migration policies. It is evident that migration aspirations, including for PR in Australia, affects those who leave and also disrupts the normative futures of the parents who remain at home.

Even when parents desire for their children to potentially settle abroad, such aspirations create different kinds of intergenerational affective economies in transnational families. Umesh and Janaki are compelled to manage their emotions or undertake a level of “emotion work” (Hochschild 1979) to ensure their children have a shot at realising their “mobile aspirations”. Despite wanting them close by, they encouraged Maya to migrate and settle abroad, even when they were aware of the disruption to the “family contract” and their own futures without children in proximity. Like Umesh and Janaki, the parents I met in Nepal shared their children’s aspirations to secure futures in Australia, but most wanted their children to eventually return. The parents as well as most education migrants shared their desires for family togetherness—to live together or in proximity rather than transnationally but were unsure of the future of the family. The parents were thus unsettled by the possibility of their children’s non-return and permanent settlement in Australia. This was particularly so for those with a sole male child, as in general, sons traditionally face greater pressure to fulfil filial piety in Nepal, as well as across South Asia (Singh 2016, Khanal et al. 2018). In this case, Umesh was still working, and the realities of a changing “family contract” were still in the future. The disruption of education migrants’ aspirations for PR to the lives of aged or retired parents was more evident when I met Mohan and Tara whose adult children were all abroad.

### *“Samaya le doryaune racha” (time directs us): Intergenerational Aspirations*

Mohan and Tara were retired after teaching and running a college in Nepal for several years. With all their children living abroad in Australia and the US, they lived “alone” in Nepal, travelling occasionally to Australia. When they came to Australia it was mainly to provide hands-on care of their grandchildren, a common practice of transnational care by grandparents. When I met their daughter Ayusha in Sydney, she had recently completed her postgraduate studies and was in the process of applying for PR. Their other daughter was already settled in Australia with PR, and their son was settled in the US.

Thirty-four-year-old Ayusha had left her stable position in a non-government organisation working in the health sector in Nepal to take up nursing and potentially settle in Australia. She had been keen to experience a Western education, however her migration aspiration was also motivated by being “left alone” with her parents in Nepal alongside her desire for a change in her professional life. Her siblings, as well as many of her close relatives, were settled abroad. Ayusha’s nursing degree, unlike Maya’s, gave her a direct pathway to PR as nursing is listed in the “skilled occupation list” for PR application. This, combined with better job prospects, provided Ayusha with a relatively straightforward path to achieving her “mobile

aspirations”. Her siblings had been keen for her to obtain PR so that their parents, Mohan and Tara, could also migrate permanently to Australia.

According to Australian migration policies, parents are eligible to apply for PR if “at least half” their children are settled in Australia permanently (Department of Home Affairs 2020). For Mohan and Tara, two out of their three children were in Australia, and with Ayusha’s PR, they would become eligible to apply for PR themselves, or, as Mohan states, to “buy” PR in 50 lakh rupees (approximately AUD 62 500), referring to the Australian PR visa cost. Based on the visa cost, it is possible that Mohan was referring to the “Contributory Parent visa (Subclass 143)” that costs AUD 47 755 as of 2020 for parents to apply for PR (Department of Home Affairs 2020). Another “Parent visa (Subclass 103)” stream costs AUD 6 415 but it has a waiting period of up to thirty years, which is often longer than the life expectancy of many parent applicants. Once Mohan gets PR, Tara’s dependant family visa will be attached to his PR. As Mohan and Tara had been travelling back and forth between Australia and Nepal and it appeared they might settle down in Australia after getting PR, I asked them if they had imagined their lives like this.

Mohan: Rather than think about it, *samaya le doryaune racha* (time directs us). It’s not like I can now make a vision and work towards it, I did that in age but now I feel I want to spend my time with my children.

Tara: That is only to say but it is better to stay in Nepal [laughs].

I: Why is that aunty?

Tara: Why, because in Nepal, you have people around you, you have your land and property. [*Chora chori tya cha, maan ta tya cha haina, basna maan ta wa lagiracha, tara pani hamilai chai, hamro bhitri atma le Nepal nai khojdo racha, Nepal nai ruchaudo racha.*] Children are there [in Australia] so [our] heart is there, [we] want to live there, but still, for us, our inner souls search for Nepal, prefers Nepal. Here, if we are not capable, we can hire people to do our work, but there is no way can we hire people to work for us there. We have to labour ourselves. Everyone goes to work. The one who stays home has to work ... No matter what anyone says, Nepal is dear when it comes to living.

Mohan: ... Why do I want to stay in Australia now? To be frank, all my family is there, two daughters ... I will pay for PR, I will buy it in 50 lakh rupees.

Mohan and Tara's accounts show how differing aspirations belong to different generations. They also reveal their ambivalence about their desires and aspirations for their future—individually and collectively between each other. They did not necessarily share their children's aspirations for PR and settlement in Australia for themselves at this time of their lives. They were nevertheless compelled to be mobile and possibly settle in Australia to be near family. Mohan and Tara's accounts also show that emotions attach to different things in different places. Pointing to their land and property in Nepal, Tara indicates their "home" that they had worked to make for themselves. This is where she desires to live. Yet while their "souls" seek for Nepal, their "hearts" are in Australia with their children. It is clear that the parents' emotional attachments to "home" are in tension with the emotional desire to be with their children who aspire to stay abroad. Mohan and Tara's somewhat conflicting view of where they want to spend their lives suggests they have little or no control over their mobility or immobility instead emphasising how "time" dictates their life. Mohan's remark "*samaya le doryaune racha*" (time directs us) carries an undertone of sadness and a sense of loss of control.

Ahmed (2014: 209) notes "emotions do things" and "to be affected by something is an orientation or direction toward that thing". For Mohan and Tara, the emotional attachment to their children is likely to see them follow them to Australia in the long term, despite their deep-rooted attachment to Nepal. They look forward to their PR not necessarily out of their own desires to live in Australia but rather to be near their children. In a study of Indian students in Australia, Singh (2016) similarly reports how parents are often torn between living with their children in Australia and in the comfort of their own homes and kin. Noble (2013) also reports this sense of ambivalence among Lebanese migrants in Australia, who despite the material comforts of their life, feel disoriented—unfamiliar and estranged. Mohan and Tara's account similarly shows the complex intersections and contradictions of desire, emotions, and mobility. Like in Umesh and Janaki's case, a level of "emotion work" (Hochschild 1979) is evident in Mohan and Tara's account as they do not prioritise their own desire over their children's. Their account also reveals the "family contract in transition", whereby, in this case, the aged parents migrate to live with their children in order to ensure familial relations are maintained in proximity rather than transnationally. Finances or practical care are not the primary factors in Tara and Mohan's impending migration, for as Tara notes, care can be paid for in Nepal. Rather it is the emotional care that can be ensured through familial networks that has taken precedence in their decision to follow their children to Australia.

Tara was also experiencing a care burden as a transnational grandparent. She had made multiple trips, lasting a few months to about a year each time, to care for her grandchildren, sometimes with her husband and other times alternately.

While the transnational mobility of grandparents for caregiving is relatively recent in the context of Nepal, the practice has been quite common in other migration corridors. Mainly due to the high cost of paid child-care in the West, “international flying grannies” often travel to family in the diaspora to provide “child minding services” (Plaza 2000: 97, King et al. 2014). Likewise, enabling both her daughters and son-in-law to continue working, the care of grandchildren and household work had mostly become Tara’s responsibility. While Tara did not explicitly state that the care she provided was a burden, her account suggests the workload was a burden, as evident in her comment, “the one who stays home has to work”. There was seemingly a difference in how she considered the care she provided and how she actually experienced it. Noting that carers can be affordably hired in Nepal, Tara’s care burden in Australia was intensified by having to manage the children and household when others in the family went to work, as she added, “There, it has been so difficult to raise the two [grandchildren]; it is not enough to explain, despite there being so many people in the house.” While Mohan had also actively contributed to caring for their grandchildren, Tara shouldered the everyday household responsibility of cooking and cleaning in addition to childcare. Thus, Tara’s experiences of caregiving were also gendered.

While Mohan and Tara were somewhat clear about their future pathways, migration of the children and uncertainty of their return means traditional forms of family arrangements where children, mainly sons, are expected to live with or near parents and fulfil filial piety, remain in flux. Mohan and Tara’s emotions resonate with the experiences of a large section of families in Nepal whose adult children aspire for PR abroad. Whether or not, the families are eligible to apply for the parents’ PR or afford the parents’ PR visa cost like Mohan, hundreds of parents now spend their time between Australia and Nepal, on temporary visas. Even though Maya and Ayusha’s mobile aspirations discussed here were formed under different conditions—with Ayusha leaving a stable career and Maya seeking to begin one in Australia—both sought a “secure future” in a high-income Western country. Their cases show how children’s mobile aspirations, including for PR, disrupt the traditional notions of “family contracts” including familial relations and the care futures of aged parents. Migrants’ aspirations are thereby individual and simultaneously embodied across transnational social spaces, and hence collectively experienced by families. As depicted here, the ways in which aspirations are affectively embodied by parents show how emotions attached to “mobile aspirations” work as an “affective economy” in transnational families.

### Conclusion

Focusing on the intergenerational nature of migrants' aspirations, in this article, I have examined how the aspiration of education migrants for PR and to stay on in Australia are sites of emotions for their parents in Nepal—emotions associated with potential loss of future familial networks. Aspirations for PR disrupts the traditional notion of “family contract” (Tu 2016), where children live with or near parents and fulfil filial duty. While finances or even hands-on care that can affordably be paid for in Nepal are not areas of concern for this more “privileged” family cohort discussed in this article, the parents are unsettled by the possibility of not having children close by. For these relatively wealthy families, the parents own mobility also become a possibility. However, when it came to living abroad, the parents do not necessarily share the aspirations of their children. This intensified the emotional tensions as they desired to live at “home” in Nepal, but also to be with their children and grandchildren in Australia. My empirical cases thus show aspirations as affective and as belonging to different generations. They also show how the parents' emotions are continually negotiated as they support their children's desire for PR and settlement abroad. Further, the migrant children's aspirations of PR highlight how filial piety is likely to see role reversals; if the migrants' parents migrate to live in Australia, they are bound to take over the role of carers of the grandchildren rather than being “cared for”, at least in the short-term. The increasing trend of education migration from Nepal suggests that the parents' experiences discussed here, while quite common today, are likely to become more prevalent in the near future.

As Ahmed (2014) argues, emotions “do” things, and in this article, I have examined what emotions attached to migrants' desires for securing future through mobility and more specifically PR “do” in transnational families. Beyond the common idea of financial security, the lens of emotion and affect on aspirations makes visible the worry, tensions, concerns, and ambivalence about the disruption to common family arrangements across generations. While the dominant focus of aspirations literature in migration has focused on the migrants and their aspirations for migration, in this paper, I have also taken the perspective of the parents in the home country and shown how aspirations are collectively experienced in transnational families. The case of Nepali transnational families and education mobility from Nepal to Australia and the changing family context illustrated in this article also finds parallels across many countries in the Global South. The affective nature of intergenerational aspirations illustrated in this article also reveal how affect is embodied across transnational social spaces, thus highlighting the significance of examining emotions and affect to understand the nuances of transnational family life, and at the same time, the significance of considering the impacts of migration on the family, as opposed to only individuals.

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### Acknowledgement

I am grateful to my participants for sharing your personal journeys with me. Thank you for your time and generosity. I also want to thank Associate Professor Shanthi Robertson, Western Sydney University (WSU) for your comments and feedback in preparing this article, and the Institute for Culture and Society, WSU for supporting this publication. I would like to acknowledge the editors and two anonymous reviewers who provided valuable feedback to make this paper stronger. The doctoral research project this article is based on is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. Research for the project was supported in part by Open Society Foundations (OSF). The opinions expressed herein are the author's own and do not necessarily express the views of any third party.

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