Imagined mobility: migration and transnationalism among Indian students in Australia

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On the night of Tuesday on Wednesday the 12th of May 2009 one of my informants, Rohit, got married to his Indian girlfriend whom he had met in Melbourne in 2005. They had fallen in love while living in the same student house in Melbourne, studying at the same university. They were now both proud PR (permanent residency) holders and Rohit’s wife was even planning to apply for Australian citizenship soon. Watching Rohit wait for the priest to finish a particular ritual I joked that he was in fact marrying an Australian girl. It amused Rohit, though earlier that evening he had already mentioned that they had no intention of settling in Australia. As a newly married and soon to be Indian-Australian couple they would move in with his parents and find jobs in Delhi. The struggle for Australian permanent residency had been a stressful one, and the friends who were also attending the wedding talked about little else. They had all come to Australia as international students and almost all had ended up getting a permanent residency (PR) as well. One of Rohit’s friends had recently married her boyfriend from Melbourne. She was now living with his family in Mumbai while he was setting up his mining business in Australia. Soon she would join him there though. They had all attended a wedding of another friend from Melbourne in Delhi a couple of months earlier, and less than a month from now they would all be heading for Tamil Nadu in the South of India for a similar wedding. Their conversations were layered with references to people in other countries, while issues with the Australian migration authorities seemed still fresh on their minds. Surat (West India), where the wedding took place, seemed far removed from the years in Australia they now had behind them. Yet although many were now – more or less – settled back in India, what happened in Australia or was going to happen (one day) seemed inseparable from where they were finding themselves now. They were starting the kind of transnational lives they had once fantasized and talked about before coming to Australia. This dissertation is about the lives of these students Down Under on their way to an (imagined) transnational existence. It is also because of this that I owe them my gratitude first and foremost. Without their help, trust and faith this project would never have become what it is now. Unfortunately I am not able to name anyone in particular since ethical rules and requirements do not permit me to do so. Yet let me stress that never before have I met such a cheerful, friendly and welcoming group of people, many of whom are now close friends of mine. Their determination and resilience has been an inspiration throughout.

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