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Keeping Bodies Moving: Hope, Disruption and the Possibilities of Youth Migration

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ABSTRACT
Contemporary youth migrations are invested with hopeful connotations about potential, transformation and the future. For young people, migration is purportedly directed to enhancing life chances through exposure to diverse places, accumulation of social and cultural capital and opportunities for self-reflection. At the same time, however, youth migration occurs within uneven social and economic circumstances, and many young people today are on the move exactly because of present precarity and uncertain futures. Because of this youth migration also involves fraudulent intermediation, oppressive life and work situations and excessive indebtedness. This paper addresses the manner that hope emerges in relation to such disruption by exploring the narratives of young adults holding temporary study and work visas in Auckland, New Zealand. These accounts reveal both specific hopes expressed in migration – education, residency rights – as well as feelings of hopefulness. In many instances, however, hopes and hopefulness emerge specifically in relation to personal difficulties in ways that question the marking of hope as a positive emotion. Through this case, the paper argues that there is a need to re-evaluate hope in youth migration and pay greater attention to its role in generating and sustaining migration that can be both empowering and marginalising.

Youth migration is regularly invested with significant potential; an opportunity to learn about the world, to undertake challenging courses of study, gain independence and to invest in self-development. In short, migration offers hope for young people and their families of other possibilities. This linking of possibility and migration hinges on both the investment of hopefulness in youth and the valuing of migration as an undertaking that leads to affirmative outcomes. Despite the coding of youth migration as desirable, accounts of young people on the move point towards substantial difficulties encountered in migration. Moreover, youth migration often emerges out of inadequate situations at home, and can be characterised by estrangement and exploitation in spaces of migration: housing, public spaces, education and work. What, then, keeps young people moving when they undertake migration? How do people continue to move towards the ambiguous aspirations involved in youth migration despite the difficulties that they encounter?
This paper explores these issues through a focus on the role of hope as an emotional valence that makes possible and shapes migrant mobilities when they are characterised by disruption and difficulty. I focus in particular on the ways in which hope and future possibility surface in migrant lives and aspirations. Hope is used in this paper to refer to a broad sense of the ‘not-yet’ (Anderson 2006), the indeterminate futures that emerge in relation to present actions and interests. Exploring notions of hope in relation to migration is particularly relevant in forms of youth mobility, where specific and less-determinate hopes articulate with wider discourses of youth as a hopeful period of life. The paper draws on interviews and surveys with people on temporary work and study visas in Auckland, New Zealand. As the paper demonstrates, the lives of many people holding temporary visas in Auckland are oriented not only around present concerns but also in relation to the futures they expect will become possible through studying and working in New Zealand. Hope is substantial in orienting migrant lives and mobilities but as the paper demonstrates it also often emerges in the face of disruption, alongside feelings of anxiety and frustration, and can support some of the exploitative dimensions of migration. Hope, then, not only orients us towards particular possibilities but also keeps bodies going in ways that make it possible for individuals to endure the turbulence of migration.

**Hope and Youth Migration**

A focus on hope – whether specific hopes or acts of hoping – draws attention to questions about the place of the future in present lives, of anticipation for things that have not eventuated but might, and to the diverse temporalisations of human lives (Kleist and Jansen 2016). Hope is most readily characterised as referring to the ‘not-yet-become’, a feeling that ‘stands on the horizon of every reality’ but that is also ‘marked by an enduring indeterminacy’ (Anderson 2006: 692–693). The notion of hope, then, has no unitary meaning because it is situated in relation to multiple and heterogeneous past experiences, present occupations and future possibilities (Webb 2007). The consistency of hope relates not to its content or potential but rather its relation to difference. Indeed, ‘hope heralds the possibility that the spatial/temporal here and now may become otherwise’ (Anderson and Fenton 2008: 76). Hope also differs from other futural conceptions such as expectation, anticipation and planning because of its reliance on uncertainty – it is what may rather than what will become.

A focus on hope is germane to discussions of migration, particularly youth migration. The notion that migration leads to forms of personal or familial advancement has long been a key argument within theoretical and empirical accounts (De Haas 2011). Within such perspectives, migration is framed as having the potential to generate different possibilities in migrant lives and orthodox theories set out to account for these in the analysis of decision making. As Mar (2005: 362) notes, however, the framing of migration as varying pushes and pulls is problematic because it excludes the ‘emotional forces’ of migration: ‘Pushing and pulling is experienced by migrants as emotional tensions and ambivalences, particularly where there is no clear and predictable outcome or directionality’. Moreover, as feminist migration scholars have long argued, orthodox approaches reduce migration to rational calculative decisions where emotions and embodied states, as well as the power relations they are imbricated within, are marginalised in the analysis (Silvey 2004).
Orthodox migration analyses are also problematic because they tie migration to predictable futures and rely on ‘choices’ that are made at singular points in time. By contrast, a focus on hope, as well as other emotionally entangled forces such as desire (Collins 2018a), highlights indeterminacy, the ways in which present action can be animated by future possibility without being reduced to its achievement.

This focus on hope is particularly valuable for examinations of youth migration, which often indexes mobility as a symbolic or material resource for young people’s transitions to adulthood and/or socio-economic advantage (Thomson and Taylor 2005). It is the value and valuing of mobility that connects otherwise diverse accounts of young people’s migrations, from rural-urban-international movements in the global south (Juárez et al. 2013) and peripheral regions of the global north (Meyer 2018), through to working holidays (Yoon 2014) and international study (Tran 2016) that are associated with privileged young people. As Robertson et al. (2018) put it, ‘aspirations and imaginaries of transnational mobility […] increasingly shape ideas of transition to adulthood for both mobile and immobile youth that cut across regional and class divides’. In prioritising mobility as a resource, the literature on youth migration also often presents young people as inhabiting open terrains of their lives where career and domestic demands have not been stabilised and there is potential for being and doing differently. Mobility is hence often rendered as an expression of agency, an experiment with different lifestyles, an escape from social restrictions, to gain experience and qualifications, and become independent. Youth migration is heralded as a ‘break or interruption in life’ (Anderson and Fenton 2008); it makes it possible to imagine life beyond present situations that may be characterised by feeling ‘symbolically stuck’ or where young people ‘feel themselves moving “too slowly”’ (Hage and Papadopoulos 2004: 111). Put another way, mobility becomes a vector for hope in relation to possible futures that are more prosperous, exciting and free.

The aspirational qualities of mobility as a resource can at times be over-read in youth migration literature in terms of their capacity to be empowering and agency-directed (Smith et al. 2014). Attending to hope, hopefulness and their interruption can offer a critical lens on these aspirations and their effects. The aim is not to diminish mobility but rather give pause for thought as to how hoping for the ‘not yet become’ ‘enables bodies to [move and] keep going’ (Anderson and Fenton 2008). Grappling with hope in youth migration involves both recognising the power of hopeful feelings while not overlooking the ways in which hope is mobilised intersubjectively as a ‘cluster of promises’ (Berlant 2011) about optimistic futures that are possible but never guaranteed.

In this paper, I approach the question of hope with a focus on ‘how hope is produced and maintained in concrete processes of knowledge formation’ (Miyazaki 2003: 31) and the links this has with acts of hoping. This highlights three points. Firstly, hope is relational and situated in social, geographical and temporal terms (Webb 2007). As such it cannot be understood as existing in atomised reflections on future prospects but rather ‘interacts with intersubjectively shared, and therefore “public” evaluations of possibility’ (Mar 2005: 364). In migration, the nominal hopes of migrants, or the emotional valences associated with hopefulness or hopelessness, need to be examined in terms of the specific ways that they have been generated and shared amongst migrants in interactions with family, community, intermediaries and others. Secondly, focusing on hope draws our attention to the temporal distribution of the forces involved in generating migration. As an orientation towards indeterminate futures, to the not-yet-become, hope cannot be captured in
singular moments of decision or indecision but rather involves the negotiation of the pasts, present occupations and future yearning of migrants (Collins and Shubin 2015). This means that an analysis of hope is not only focused on actions undertaken to achieve future prospects but must also allow for waiting, suspension and interruption (Axelsson et al. 2017). Lastly, I draw attention to the ways in which knowledge and imaginings that generate hope are circulated in order to achieve particular ends (Walters 2012). This attends to the governmentality of migration – seeing even restrictive migration regimes as ‘hope-generating’ (Nuijten 2004) because they circulate possibilities for being otherwise. The generation of hope relates not only to the kinds of migration it makes possible but also its role in constraining mobility, in shaping the position that migrants find themselves in and the willingness to endure suffering and loss (Collins 2018b). Hope, then, is necessarily imbricated in different forms of power – ‘hopes are mobilized and modulated to continue relations of suffering and loss’ but also better ways of being (Anderson and Fenton 2008: 79). The question that centres this discussion, rests less on what hopes are but rather on what the emergence of hope and acts of hoping achieve in the lives of young migrants.

**Temporary Migration in New Zealand**

This exploration of hope in youth migration is centred in a context of considerable shifts in the configurations of migration in New Zealand. Aligning with an arc of policy changes in Australia and Canada (Rajkumar et al. 2012; Robertson and Runganaikaloo 2014) there has been a marked shift in New Zealand away from migration regimes that presume a direct path between arrival, settlement and residence rights towards a focus on the management of multiple streams of populations holding varying temporary status (Collins 2018b). In the two decades since 1997, for example, the number of work visas approved annually in New Zealand has grown from 32,006 to 209,178 while approvals for permanent residence have fluctuated between 40 and 50,000. The majority of these work visa holders, as well as others such as international students, can apply to change status or gain residence rights but this is never guaranteed and many people are now experiencing protracted temporary status.

A key dimension of this migration regime has been the increasing reliance on ‘migration pathways’ to manage migrant eligibility and outcomes (Spoonley and Bedford 2012). Rather than arriving as either already permanent residents or only time-limited temporary workers or students, most recent migrants to New Zealand occupy a status that is technically temporary but is positioned in relation to potential longer-term settlement through the permanent residence. Under the logic of ‘migration pathways’, temporary migrants need to demonstrate their value through the accumulation of education and work experience in order to qualify for permanent residence. Pathways of this kind have manifested in the specific technologies of visa categories that allow individuals to see their current visa as a stepping-stone to other kinds of visas with elevated status and eventually to permanent residence. In their promotional material, for example, Immigration New Zealand describes temporary visas as ‘a step towards gaining residence and settling here permanently’, describe how on an essential skills work visa ‘you may be able to support visa applications for your partner and dependent children’ and promote the work to residence visa as ‘a great way to “upgrade” from a
temporary work visa to a residence visa. These messages signal connections between
different categories, constructing the imaginary of a regulatory pathway that migrants
might follow, while never indicating any certainty of that movement. In doing so they
establish a future orientation within the current governmentality of temporary migration
as a stepping-stone to the recruitment of desirable permanent settlers.

As Robertson and Runganaikaloo (2014) observe in Australia, the pathways approach
can lead to people living 'lives in limbo' as they wait to accumulate experience to achieve
the next status. International students completing qualifications can receive job search
visas, followed by one or more work visas and an eventual application for permanent resi-
dence. For other temporary workers, visas rely on employer support and progression to
more elevated status requires increases in salary. In all cases, there are significant gradients
in eligibility that correlate with education, nationality, age, gender and family status. The
effect of these arrangements is to position present migrant lives in relation to potential
future outcomes that must remain fundamentally uncertain; not all temporary visas
holders will become eligible for residency or even subsequent visas.

These arrangements are linked to increases in the exploitation of people holding tem-
porary study and work visas. The highest-profile case involved the Masala chain of Indian
restaurants where for five years employers significantly underpaid employees on the
promise support for visa renewals (Cowlishaw 2015). International students have been
exposed to fraudulent agent activities, where false finance and educational information
have been provided so that individuals are accepted into courses or where unfulfilled
promises are made about the certainty of jobs, work visas and residence after study
(Migrant Workers Association 2016). For activists, the actions of agents, employers and
educators are tantamount to 'education trafficking', enticing young people to migrate
through student visas in order to gain employment and residence leveraged through
family savings or substantial debt (Blundell 2016). Hope is a critical component of
these forms of exploitation because it makes it possible for individuals to work towards
futures that are fundamentally uncertain.

The research discussed in this paper set out to capture the conditions of migrant lives in
Auckland and the ways in which the regulation of migration shaped individual experi-
ences and patterns of urban incorporation. The study had two empirical components.
Firstly, a survey targeting people holding temporary study and work visas was carried
out with respondents recruited through online advertisements and face-to-face recruit-
ment. The survey included questions about the current activities of respondents, their
financial, employment, living and family situations and plans for the future. A total of
891 people responded to the survey, including 457 student, 170 working-holiday and
151 work visa holders; 448 women and 423 men; nationalities including, India = 186,
China = 124, Philippines = 78, South Korea = 67 and France = 64. Most participants
were aged 20–29 (n = 617) and 30–39 years (n = 156). Survey responses were analysed
descriptively to provide support for qualitative analysis.

Secondly, 60 biographical interviews were undertaken with three groups: 'student-
workers' who held student visas and were working; 'graduate job seekers' who had com-
pleted New Zealand qualifications and were now working; and 'work visa holders' who
had not studied in New Zealand. This sampling strategy sought to capture individuals
inhabiting different positions in the current pathways approach to migration. A total of
85 respondents volunteered for the interviews through a question at the end of the
survey, which allowed for a diverse sample reflecting gender, nationality, age and occupation. The interviews focused on migration journeys, everyday lives, experiences in work, study and social life and future plans. Interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to inductive thematic analysis. Drawing on this analysis the discussion that follows addresses three themes – possibilities for migration, difficulties and disruption and being hopeful – that speak to the varying ways in which hope enters into and sustains migration.

**Possibilities of Migration**

Migration often appears oriented towards the future and potential outcomes. This doesn’t mean that migration always results from intensive planning, it may also emerge through opportunity and fancy, but it does highlight how moving in the world is connected to future possibilities. Indeed, as migration necessarily involves some kind of disruption and loss it is also often connected to ideas or feelings that present circumstances can be improved, that migration offers hope for the future (Esson 2015). The hopeful connotations of migration were apparent for all participants in this research; migration was undertaken in order to alter current situations, to find opportunities, to move away from undesirable lives or even to take a ‘gamble’. Participants ‘hoped’ for outcomes including gaining educational qualifications, work experience, exploring the world, becoming independent, and finding peace and stability.

Julie (Taiwan, Female, 30, Work) had been working for several years as an industrial engineer in Taiwan after graduating from university. She was successful and her parents were pleased with her achievements. Julie, however, felt increasingly alienated, frustrated with the endless drive for productivity:

> At first, I quite liked my job but industrial [work] is changing so [the aim] in the production is to push people […] management changed, everything changed I think in our factory in Taiwan, the production line and we just, a long story, our factory in China, we have to make it more efficiently but quality as well. So, I tried to find some peace.

Migration, to ‘Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, British, Irish’ through a working holiday appeared like an opportunity to alter her situation. As a one-year visa, working holidays guarantee very little in terms of future outcomes, it provides a short window of time where young people experience new places (Yoon 2014). This rather open-ended form of hope seems to oscillate around Julie’s claim of being out of place in her current occupation and reveals a desire to seek something else, ‘find[ing] some peace’. Transformation, in such instances, is arguably valued for its own sake because it offers the possibility of living differently.

In other instances, articulations of open-ended hope also related to more critical concerns, the avoidance of negative futures (Webb 2007). Brendon (South Korea, Male, 22, Student), came to New Zealand with his mother when he was 11 years old at the bidding of his father who remained in Korea and saw this undertaking as a way to change individual and family fortunes:

> My dad comes from like no real background as in good school or he comes from like a poor family or whatever. He made it on his own. He got into [a large corporate] which is a big deal kind of. [But], he was kind of ostracised because he wasn’t like the, you know, he didn’t have that kind of background. And he felt that the two biggest things that has always held him
back from being really successful was his lack of ability to speak English and going to a good university. […] My [dad’s] senior had planned to send his kids to American university […]. My dad sees that and is like that’s a really good idea and sends me to New Zealand so I can learn English and then move on to the States for university and that all happened within six months.

Two points emerge as significant here. First, hope is couched in relation to avoiding the limitations of socio-economic background – looking towards futures that might enhance success. Secondly, Brendon’s account also points to the intersubjective character of hope, which in this case manifests in his father’s intergenerational hope for his son’s future. Youth, as Kraftl (2008: 82) argues ‘is often socially constructed as a repository of hope’ and Brendon appears to embody a hope for his father that rests on a family project wherein educational mobility is understood to carry value and as such offers a rationale for migration and family separation (Tran 2016).

While participants offered narratives couched in these broad open-ended terms, migration to New Zealand was also often articulated in relation to ‘goal oriented’ hopes (Webb 2007) centred on specific outcomes. The most widely articulated ‘goal’ in interviews and the survey was gaining permanent residence in New Zealand. In the survey, 44.2 per cent of respondents intended to apply for residence with 25.9 per cent indicating that they were considering applying. This was more common amongst work visa holders (69.7 per cent definite, 16.1 per cent unsure) but student visa holders also had high levels of intention to apply for permanent residence (46.6 per cent definite, 28.2 per cent unsure). Figure 1 illustrates some of the significant variations by nationality.

As a specific hoped-for outcome of migration, permanent residence is significant for what it makes possible in people’s lives. Alison (Philippines, Female, 31, Student), for example, was a registered nurse in the Philippines and had worked as a nurse in the Middle East for several years. For her, New Zealand emerged because of the promise of residence for nurses and the possibility of supporting her mother and bringing her child to live with her:

All of my family are living in the Middle East like my mother is in Qatar, so before moving to New Zealand […] I got the idea like I am thinking long term plans, like in Middle East there is no residency. So, my mother is ageing and I want to save and I want to prepare everything for my mum. […] But the thing is there is no residency there. Like I can stay there for maybe

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**Figure 1.** Intention to apply for New Zealand permanent residence by nationality.
up to 60 or 65 as long as I can work but after that I have to go back to my country, which is, you know, you can see but of course when you are old enough and I cannot work how can I sustain my needs and my future family’s needs. So, I am thinking if I go to New Zealand it would be maybe be hard along the road but after the end of it then I can reap the fruits of all my sacrifices.

Hope connects to sacrifice in important ways here, with Alison figuring short-term struggles in relation to long-term possibilities to reunite family and live in a stable way. The hinge between sacrifice and hope is the belief that she can gain permanent residence as well as her own image of what that hoped-for future would be like (reunited family, settled domesticity). Specific hopes, then, must also be infused with meaning and believability (Webb 2007) and Alison as well as many other participants connected the hope for residence to ideas that are publically circulated about migration to New Zealand. Alison talked about how her ideas about migration and residence were triggered by advertising that ‘popped up’ on Facebook. She was ‘attracted with the way the advertisement, it offers high salaries, that you can take your family and I also read online about New Zealand’.

This crafting of migration as desirable by other actors, particularly migration promotion undertaken by agents, was common amongst participants. Several students and graduates, for example, noted how they were informed through agents about the ‘pathway’ to residence status through study and work visas:

If you don’t know anything you go to the consultancy and see, seriously. That is what happens in India. The consultancy people won’t tell you the truth, what’s happening there. They tell you that if you do a course for one year and you’ll get a job, you will get your PR and all, that’s what they tell people but I know [now] obviously that is not the case, that is not that easy.

Adil (India, Male, 27, Graduate)

These reflections reveal how the possibilities of migration are produced not only through individual reflection and planning but also through the imaginative constructions of migration as a desirable undertaking (Collins 2018a). While only some participants used agents, many more spoke about encountering official information about New Zealand, such as the messaging around visas introduced in the previous section that identifies what appear to be achievable pathways for migration and permanent residence. Others identified popular culture renderings of New Zealand as an idyllic place that have been circulated through films or mundane tourist materials like calendars and photography. The circulation of such materials provides imaginative substance to the not-yet-become (Anderson 2006) of hope as well as offering information that makes the future achievement of specific goals believable (Webb 2007).

Encountering Difficulty and Disruption

The above accounts reveal the forms of ‘temporal reasoning’ (Kleist and Jansen 2016) that young people deploy in relation to mobility. They highlight the connections between future and present actions and the ways in which migration is seen to open up new ways of living. Interviews also revealed considerable indeterminacy in terms of how hopes might be achieved or indeed when they will be achieved. In the process of navigating
towards these uncertain futures participants also spoke in different ways about how their plans or expectations had become disrupted. Despite its future orientation, migration is also cut through by experiences of the ‘uncanny present’ (Bryant 2016: 20), ‘moments when the present that I usually do not perceive as such becomes anxiously visceral to us as a moment caught between past and future’. For participants, these uncanny moments emerged in three particular ways, unanticipated life changes, unexpected events, and experiences of marginalisation that had not formed part of their imaginings of migration.

One example came from Brendon whose father’s well-made and widely valorised plans for ‘early study abroad’ (Shin and Park 2016) were disrupted when personal circumstances do not meet aspirational goals:

Except it didn’t work out that way because I am a slow learner and it was just a mess because we didn’t really know what was going to happen, just had an idea of when things should happen but nothing was really planned, so it was a big mess and I kind of stayed here, didn’t go to an American university.[…] I don’t know why we stayed. I don’t actually know to be honest. I think it was because we weren’t really sure about what was going to happen in the future.

As this excerpt illustrates, the uncanny present of educational experiences and learning difficulties can rupture even clearly laid plans that lead towards well-scripted futures. Being a ‘slow learner’ makes those pathways difficult to maintain, particularly in terms of their pace – ‘when things should happen’ – which then leads to a re-evaluation of future possibility and a lost sense of direction, ‘I don’t know why we stayed’. Past, present and future are shown to be radically contingent (Cwerner 2001).

For other participants, unexpected events unfolded more quickly and led to immediate crises. This occurred not least when expectations for study, work and finances did not align with experiences. Sahira (India, Female, 22, Student), for example, was undertaking a university postgraduate degree but failed two courses, meaning she had to pay an additional sum of money and extend her visa:

I was struggling to learn this course.[…] Whatever I had submitted I got bad marks. And then two exams I failed badly […] So March 31 is when [my visa] expires. But I have to apply for a student visa before it expires so that I can enrol for another student visa to do my two courses. And this is another problem because they were asking me to show $9,000 in my account [for living costs], which I don’t have 9,000 fricking bucks. I am paying 8,000 already. When I went to uni to talk about student visa they said you have to pay for your courses which is $8,000 and show $9,000 in your account. I said okay can I ask somebody to transfer this. They said no, that’s not happening. You have to show it for the last six months. I said I don’t have a penny in my account.

Unexpected events such as failing courses disrupt the planning and finances that individuals anticipate as necessary to work towards particular outcomes, completing a qualification or getting the next visa. The question of costs was a common theme in this research. Indeed, many participants had spent considerable sums of money to study and/or work in New Zealand, through personal and family savings as well as debt. In the survey, 27.6 per cent of student visa holders and 22.5 per cent of work visa holders had incurred debt, with particularly high rates for the Philippines (42.3 per cent) and India (40.1 per cent). In such contexts, debt repayment is a key pressure point, and part-time work for students was often used to pay back debt and in some instances to send remittances home to
support parents. As O’Connell-Davidson (2013) has argued, debt can serve to constrain even legally sanctioned migration and question the seeming freedoms and voluntariness associated with mobility.

These questions of costs and debt also articulated with wider experiences of marginalisation, particularly in the labour market where realities of underemployment disrupted expectations. In the survey, more than 50 per cent of students were working, mostly in part-time and casual work. There was evidence of occupational niches with respondents disproportionately employed in accommodation and food services, community and personal services, sales (retail) and as labourers, and healthcare for respondents from the Philippines. Reflecting these patterns was evidence of poor pay and conditions, with two-thirds of respondents earning below the median wage and around 20 per cent earning below the legal minimum wage, a finding backed up in recent research on the exploitation of temporary visa holders (Stringer 2016).

Student participants spoke about employment and its importance as part of daily survival. A particularly evocative example came from Alison who spoke about the multiple pressures she has in terms of employment: paying rent, sending money back to family members caring for her daughter, and preparing for a visa application.

I am working as a caregiver in health care as well, so that is where I get my income to sustain my needs here, my rent, my bills, my food. [...] When I was starting as a caregiver I was thinking oh my God, why am I here, why am I doing this job? It’s really difficult, like it is different job from what I did [as a nurse]. But I have no choice. If I don’t do caregiving where will I get my income, how can I survive?

Like Alison, many participants in this research found themselves having ‘no choice’ but to undertake work that was either undesirable or outright exploitative simply in order to get by – to ‘survive’. In this case, employment has involved deskilling since Alison has worked several years as a nurse but is now in a more menial care worker role. She was paid the minimum wage and she noted the anxiety generated by her flexible work contract.

Some participants also provided more direct evidence of exploitation:

They don’t pay me according to hours I working but actually I, my work load is quite heavy and also I have to work very long time, yeah it’s like double my working hours [...] I feel the company yeah they shouldn’t treat me like that but from my side I just want to gain experience and I can write down something for my resume later.

Sarah (China, Female, 30, Graduate)

As this and other accounts suggested, even amongst those who acknowledge being exploited, these arrangements were described as a normal part of being on a temporary visa – paying bills and gaining experience. This also intersects with earlier points about the linkages between sacrifice and hope, revealing an acceptance of current exploitative circumstances on the basis that they enhance future prospects. Other participants echoed these sentiments, recognising the rejection they faced in other jobs:

Like I said I’ve been working for good nine years so when I came here [...] for the first three months I was applying for jobs left, right and centre and I was getting a rejection saying you are over qualified, you are over-educated, you don’t have a kiwi experience, what do you mean by a kiwi experience, what is this kiwi experience?

Mona (India, 35, Student)
These accounts speak to the marginalisation of people on temporary visas. They also highlight how taking undesirable jobs, being exploited, or being rejected because of visa status shifts from becoming a disruption to what was expected to a normal element of migrant lives. These experiences were widely shared amongst people on temporary visas. These accounts and the unexpected events experienced by Brendon and Sahira also reveal how disruptions or ‘crises turn ordinary daily routine inside out and expose the seams of temporality to view’ (Knight and Steward 2016: 3). Far from the pathway and opportunities indexed in the promotion of migration, migrants encounter difficulty and disruption. This raises the question of how people keep going in these circumstances, especially when the outcomes of migration seem so tenuous. As the next section suggests, it is in these moments that hope emerges as an emotional valence that keeps bodies going towards futures that cannot be fully grasped.

**Keeping Bodies Going**

It is in relation to disruption that expressions of hope become particularly apparent. Indeed, hope emerged across this research as a means to ‘keep going’ (Anderson and Fenton 2008), to remain oriented to uncertain futures even as they became tenuous. Hope, then, was not only a positive emotion but was also articulated in relation to anxiety, frustration and doubt. As Ahmed (2013: 185) argues, hope is a prerequisite for the future becoming possible – ‘bodies would not reach for [the future]’ without hope – but hope also emerges a desired outcome is uncertain: ‘Being hopeful may be necessary for something to stay possible, but it is not sufficient grounds for the determination of the future’; no one hopes for something they could simply make happen.

In participants’ accounts, hope and its negation in fear and anxiety emerged as plans broke down. This was the case for Adil (India, Male, 27, Graduate) who discovered his police certificate had expired just before he required this documentation to apply for visa renewal. This disruption generated significant anxiety and fear about status and future, but also ‘a bit of hope’ that things would work out:

> Scared, anxious, everything. It was like, I was scared obviously because I didn’t want to go back at least at this point in time and I had my exam coming up, I had to write the exam as well and I am not sure whether they would let me stay here or not. Everything was running in my mind how to go back to India, what I have to do there. Because I thought everything is gone now. I searched the internet about the section 61 [applications from people not holding valid visas]. There were some statements from lawyers and all that. It’s not so bad. It’s something which you did unintentionally so you might get the visa. So, it was a bit of hope for me but like I felt scared a lot.

Hope is expressed here not in relation to what we expect will happen but rather as a more tenuous notion of insecure future possibilities (Mar 2005). It keeps bodies going despite the difficulties associated with maintaining legal status. As noted earlier, such disruptions occurred for many participants – unexpected encounters with difficulties, that threw plans into jeopardy and revealed the indeterminacy of future possibilities. Sahira (India, Female, 22, Student), who was faced with financial difficulties after failing courses, found herself living in the present, focused on survival. While she eventually borrowed money to resolve her crisis, her subsequent outlook revealed a tenuous but hopeful orientation:
I am living the moment because it’s so not predictable for me at the moment. Everything is so topsy-turvy. I didn’t expect me to fail two subjects. Now this has made everything so random and haphazard. What I had planned already now it’s gone […] so I just want to give it like decide month per month. […] I will still complete my postgrad by June hopefully and apply for work visa. Of course, I can do that, I think. I will try my best.

Sahira’s crisis revealed the unpredictability of future plans but it also shows how hope emerges in relation to the doubtfulness of achieving outcomes. Rather than allow the future to become completely impossible, hoping retains the possibilities of present action as potentially moving towards something else; the presumed completion of education becomes something that is now achieved ‘hopefully’, something ‘I think’ will happen and that will require me to ‘try my best’.

In the context of the migration discussed here, such doubts emerged most apparently in relation to applications for subsequent visas or permanent residence. While many participants ‘plan’ to apply for permanent residence, most also recognise that this is by no means guaranteed.

Actually, I already fell in love with the country. I love the tranquillity and the serenity this place offers me. I’m planning to stay here as long as I can, as long as my visa would permit me to, because I don’t want to be deported back in the Philippines so, yeah, I see myself, I would really want to stay here as long as I can, probably if given a chance a permanent resident or a citizen I’d definitely grab that.

Ariel (Philippines, Male, 23, Work)

Here permanent residence is a future hope but one that remains uncertain, something that ‘given a chance’ he will take but not something that can be secured. Ariel’s focus on taking this chance reflects the force of current migration policy in New Zealand and other settler societies where the provisional status of this kind and the hopes that support it have become protracted (Robertson and Runganaikaloo 2014). In addition to these general assertions about future uncertainty, other participants spoke about not understanding government regulation and it’s constant changes:

I was worried a lot, because I didn’t think about this before I came here, but after I came here I feel like, I already spent a lot in my study and I working here and I feel life is more, they treat you fair, I feel like if I can stay, so now yes now I’m thinking to apply the PR but I still worry about because the, I didn’t very understand the law, the immigration condition, so I still a little bit worried could I apply PR or not.

Jenny (Taiwan, Female, 30, Graduate)

Many participants described worrying about future visa applications because they weren’t sure whether their employer would support or immigration authorities approve their application.

Hopefully next year if next year I can find a skilled job, then immediately I will apply for residency. Our time is limited we only have a year, so at least if I can apply before the visa expires then there’s hope that we can stay. It’s, I feel worried, […] I can renew my work visa if the employer still wants me, I have a permanent contract but then the final say would come from the immigration.

Jasmine, (Philippines, Female 29, Graduate)
Hope is an ambiguous force in these excerpts, and perhaps more generally in its relation to present approaches to governing migration. As both Jenny and Jasmine suggest, they do not determine their fates, they are rather subject to the will of employers to sponsor visas or the complex regulations of the migration regime. Returning to Alison, who was paying for a diploma in healthcare to get an opportunity for work as a nurse and apply for residence, we see that hope is something that keeps individuals focused on outcomes:

It is a bit of anxious but of course if you really have the courage and I have the courage, so I want to stay, I want to work hard so I can send money, I can live here, so I really worked hard for it. So it’s an anxious sort of time but I have to fight that anxiety or I won’t survive. […] Back-up plan? There is no back-up plan because of course I already borrowed money. I don’t want to borrow more. I don’t have a back-up plan but I should. […] So I really have only one plan, that’s the plan, look for a job. I am focussed on that goal. I have to have a job.

Having ‘courage’ and not having a ‘back-up plan’ reveal the power of hope in migration. They also reveal how hope serves as a foundation for some of the problematic, if not exploitative dimensions of the current approach to migration in New Zealand. In this case, Alison has borrowed large sums of money, paid exorbitant international tuition fees for courses that teach her skills she already knows and has undertaken deskill work on the hope that this will lead to a future where residency rights and family reunification are possible. This is a hope that, as we saw earlier, was buffeted by the promotion of migration by the government and intermediary agents. Whether or not residence is achieved in Alison’s case it is clear that this hope plays a fundamental role in facilitating the exploitative relationships migrants can have with the state, migrant agents, educational institutions and employers (Stringer 2016). Hope keeps migration going but in doing so might also sustain migrant lives that in their very hopefulness are vulnerable to suffering and loss.

Conclusion

Hope serves as a powerful tool in shaping migration because it references future possibilities that appear beneficial. Such futures, however, as this paper has revealed are uncertain and prone to disruption. Hope, then, interacts with present predicaments and the disruptions that individuals feel in everyday life. The narratives presented here demonstrate the ways in which hope keeps bodies going, it makes it possible for people to keep reaching for the future. This is particularly because individuals have invested emotionally, socially and financially in these futures – hope supports those investments and ongoing efforts at achieving those futures. In accounting for hope this paper offers three wider contributions to understanding the aspirational and emotional dimensions of youth migration.

Firstly, this research suggests that there is a need for more careful examination of the aspirational dimensions of youth migration in relation to hope and other emotional forces. The emphasis on aspiration has been useful for thinking through how individuals direct their own mobility and in doing so curate transitions to adulthood (Robertson et al. 2018). What this paper reminds us is that such aspirations are not only thought and acted upon but rather also simultaneously felt and embodied. Recognising this should provide pause for thought as researchers consider the significance of time and future in youth migration. These cannot be taken as linear and certain but rather produced through feelings and experiences that young people have in the present, about their past and in promises made about the future.
Secondly, the paper points toward the importance of examining the regimes that promote and govern youth migration in terms of their role in creating, circulating and modulating hope. A key theme here is that the recent shift away from settlement-oriented migration towards provisional migration regimes has pivoted on a reconfiguration of the expectations of migration. Rather than offering immigration rights, current regimes offer the possibility of becoming a long-term resident, at once broadening the number of individuals permitted into national space while heightening the regulation of their pathways to residence. The emotional and hope-generating dimensions of these regimes reach well beyond the state, taking shape in the work of social media advertisements, migration agents, education providers, employers and banks and other providers of debt. As the findings above have shown, these actors are not benign enablers but rather play a role in the crafting of mobility as a valued resource, the ideas and feelings that people have about what is possible in the future through migration.

Lastly, then, the paper points to the complexity of hope as an emotion and its sometimes-problematic role in youth migration. While youth is often framed as a repository of hope (Kraftl 2008), and hope itself often has positive meanings and affects (Andrews 2018), the findings here show that it can also be intertwined with both negative feelings of doubt, anxiety and frustration as well as being a site for bringing about marginalisation. In the context of contemporary concerns about the exploitation of young migrants in Auckland, it would appear that hope for uncertain futures through migration are fundamentally involved in opening individuals up to substandard labour conditions, over-investment in educational credentials and a constant struggle for rights of residence. For the study of youth migration, and indeed migration more generally, this finding suggests a greater need to connect the emotions that initiate and sustain migration to some of its more problematic outcomes.

Note


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