The Ethnographic Approach to Social Mobility

Divya Vaid

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Ethnography

- Ethnography as a complex of methods
  - Method (e.g. participant observation, long term fieldwork, genealogies)
  - Mode of writing and description
- To explore societies and cultures in the context and flow of everyday life
- Aims to locate larger socio-economic processes in the lives of human beings and societies with detailed descriptions

Defining Mobility

- Mobility through migration/spatial mobility intertwining with social mobility in contrast with sociology/economics where a particular language of inter-generational transfer is used.

- Most anthropology largely focuses on particular strands that may work together to provide a picture of mobility (e.g. some have looked at caste, some at class etc.)

- Components of mobility – all that influences peoples lived experience of mobility - e.g. labour, class, caste, race, status, religion, space, gender – and that which influences opportunities of mobility – e.g. education, capital etc. – and that which reproduces inequalities – e.g. the family

Social construction of mobility

Construction of social mobility as "Ideas" of social mobility

- Aspirations

- Religion

- Family

- Education and networks as possible drivers in construction of ideas of mobility

- Anxieties of possibilities of downward mobility or retaining status

The field of social mobility

Where the practice of social mobility takes place – in enabling or in denying it

- Labour and Class
- Caste
- Race
- Family
- Spatial Movement
- Actual experience (anxiety) of downward movement

Field and Ideas intersect

- For instance with regard to migration – spatial mobility
  - Travel to improve lives – might improve, might not (classed or de-classed)
- Claims to class- but, in actual indicators one is not middle class or socially mobile
- Considering local definitions of mobility

Methods and Critique

- Subjectivity? Understanding meaning

- Returns and revisits

- Tools such as genealogies and life histories to build narratives of movement and social change