CHAPTER NINE

REWITING SHANGRI-LA

Through these stories of Tibetan youth living in McLeod Ganj, I have attempted to paint a picture of the different ways that migration has affected their lives. Even among those who have never migrated themselves, migration in this community—even if only vicariously—reaches far into the everyday lives of everyone in this village. For many youth migration is not only part of their past but is part of their present and possible futures.

Among the many youth I worked with, a large proportion have left McLeod Ganj and so migration continues to be part of their lives. For instance, Tenzin Dolma, whose parents entrusted her to one of the many Tibetan boarding schools when she was only five years old, at the end of my dissertation research took a teaching job in a remote region of Kashmir. In my last interview with her, she told me that the school was only accessible during the summer and solely by airplane. She also said that she would be the only Tibetan at school but that was okay because in her words she “liked a challenge.” At about the same time, Lopsang, the New Arrival whose coworkers tried to teach me Amdo, married an American woman only to find himself in the United States and divorced after a few years. He had, however, achieved the dream of many Tibetan exiles. He became an American citizen and thus was able to get a passport. For many Tibetans, a passport from the United States or other developed country makes it easy for them to return to Tibet to visit family and friends. In the summer of 2010, Lopsang, for the first time in almost ten years, returned to Tibet and visited his parents and siblings. And finally, Dikyi, whose cigarette list we analyzed in chapter one, after many years of being courted by a young Italian man both over the phone and on several of his visits to see her, left McLeod Ganj and has been living with him in Italy for the past several years.

Thus, migration is a theme that continues to play out in these young people’s lives. Throughout the book I have highlighted the intersections between migration and shapshu, kyamkyam, family, and friends that figure

---

1 See Hess (2009) for a discussion of Tibetan exiles and citizenship.
prominently in the divisions and unities among youth living in McLeod. These new migrations that some of the youth in this book are now experiencing will certainly influence these and other spheres of their lives.

In examining these intersections between migration and their everyday lives I have attempted to present the complexities of life in McLeod Ganj. I have drawn from educational textbooks, historical sources, and, of course, the everyday writings that have been examined throughout this book. Unlike many other studies of the social life of literacy, I allowed my participants to tell me through their respective collections what writings were important to them. Like my reliance on various sources, I hoped to gain a broader picture of these youths’ lives. Had I focused only on poetry or on text messages, I doubt I would have been able to see the different configurations of boundary making and remaking occurring in these communities.

More than just learning from their written pieces, my more than ten years of fieldwork in McLeod Ganj has allowed me to get to know many of these youth well and has significantly contributed to creating what I hope is a multifaceted account. And while many youth have left McLeod Ganj, I remain in touch with some of them through social media and e-mail. Several others continue to live in McLeod Ganj. During my frequent visits, we often catch up over tea or just chat in the street in the main market. As I’ve watched them grow into adults, develop careers, and/or have children, I see the importance of long-term involvements with communities or groups of participants. Over these years, several of these youth have become good friends. I can only hope to have done their stories justice here. For in my view their lives are not only good stories about everyday people, but in their sheer everydayness they are important stories, too.

**Migration and Diasporic Literacies**

In this ethnography, I have examined many different genres of everyday written language from poetry to text messages to personal journals and lists. By examining these diverse everyday writings it was my aim to work across boundaries to both question the utility of distinctions, such as schooled and non-schooled literacies, and demonstrate the category or genre in which a given writing can be placed is, at times, secondary to the social setting of its production and circulation. For more than producing a written piece for school or one’s everyday life, it is the when and where as well as the histories of education and migration that inform the written pieces I have examined here. As we have seen throughout this