

Drawing Out Migration

Rural to Urban Transitions and the Re-imagined Futures of Himalayan School Children

Sarah Burack, Geoff Childs,¹ Elizabeth A. Quinn, Jhangchuk Sangmo,
and Jean Hunleth

In an era where globalization frames both parental and institutional aspirations for education, how do children navigate social and educational landscapes in Nepal? How do children adapt when moving from village households to urban institutions for boarding school? What networks do children leave behind, and what new social relations do they create? How do first-generation school children envision life trajectories that will affect future interactions with natal families and villages? In this chapter, we analyse drawings and interview responses from *Drawing Out Migration*, a visual ethnographic research project documenting the experiences of boarding school students in Kathmandu, Nepal. The students we focus on are from Nubri, a culturally Tibetan enclave in the highlands of Gorkha District, Nepal. It takes several days of hard travel to reach Kathmandu from Nubri, a place where agriculture, animal husbandry, and trans-Himalayan trade are the mainstays of the rural economy.

The people of Nubri are no strangers to education. In fact, forms of Buddhist education have long been a core feature of Nubri society. As adherents of the Nyingmapa sect that does not require celibacy, religious life has been dominated by married lamas heading village temples. Nubri's men (and to a much lesser extent, women) have been undertaking religious training at a local level ranging from long-term meditation sojourns to short-term instructions. During the first month of the lunar calendar, many spent several weeks in retreat at a temple complex near their village. By residing with elderly lamas, young men learned to

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read, write, and improve their liturgical skills. Some studied under medical practitioners who taught them how to diagnose and treat a variety of ailments. Others studied under astrologers and learned how to interpret complex charts and compose natal horoscopes. Meanwhile, hereditary members of the lama lineages travelled north across the Himalayas to study under renowned Tibetan clerics prior to China's destruction of the monastic system in Tibet in the early 1960s. As refugee lamas resurrected monasteries in Nepal and India, parents began to send some of their sons to be celibate monks at those institutions. In the mid-1990s educational migrants were still a minority of Nubri's youths, constituting roughly 40 per cent of males and 11 per cent of females aged 10–19. Most of them at that time were housed in monasteries and nunneries (Childs and Choedup 2019).

Whereas Buddhist religious education has a long history in Nubri, the opportunity to attain secular education is recent. The Tibetan government-in-exile opened secular schools in Kathmandu during the 1970s, but these served primarily the children of Tibetan refugees. It was only when a sharp decline in fertility and international migration depleted the Tibetan exile communities that the schools opened their doors in the early 2000s to Nepal's indigenous Tibetan highlanders. The timing coincided with the launching of several secular schools managed by monasteries, thereby giving parents from Nubri educational opportunities for their children that they perceived to be better than local schooling options, which the government of Nepal had utterly failed to develop. Understanding this contemporary engagement with migration and education is important because, as of 2013, nearly three-fourths of girls and boys aged 10–19 from Nubri did not live in their natal villages but in boarding schools and monasteries, with most leaving their villages before the age of 10 (Childs and Choedup 2019).² Secular schooling has therefore added a new dimension to local conceptions of what constitutes an educated person. The scale of outmigration, the addition of secular education as an option, and the implications for children leaving at such young ages render *Drawing Out Migration* a timely case study for exploring the nexus of modernization, urbanization, and intergenerational changes in a mountain community.

This study contributes to educational studies in Nepal and South Asia by highlighting the experiences of children from the Buddhist

highlands who, due to structural inequalities, must migrate to cities to fulfil schooling aspirations.³ It articulates themes in previous scholarship on how education transforms the ways young people in Nepal imagine their opportunities, social relations, and communities (Ahearn 2001; Liechty 2003) as well as studies that speak of transformed identities, childhood agency, and development (Bhattarai 2010; Fujikura 2001; Pigg 1992). While much research has centred on state-initiated secular education as a means to achieve national integration and development (Pigg 1992; Ragsdale 1989; Rappleye 2019), for Nubri's children, educational opportunities come not through the state but via a nexus of Buddhist monasteries, Tibetan exiles, and foreign patrons. Although the schools included in this study follow the national curriculum and teach Nepali, their medium of education is English which provides students with an international orientation (Bhatta and Pherali 2017; Caddell 2006). Furthermore, children are taught a standard dialect of Tibetan, which aligns with a movement to provide more education in indigenous languages (Giri 2009; Phyak 2011; Pradhan 2020) and inculcates them with a pan-Tibetan identity. In a slight departure from most research in Nepal that investigates education and transnational migration (e.g., Sijapati 2009; Valentin 2012, 2017), this study examines internal migration among children, whose voices are generally muted in the existing scholarship, through the medium of narrative drawings by the children themselves. It also provides new insights into how children perceive their participation in a rural to urban migration phenomenon that is arguably a precursor to migration abroad, as described by Sienna Craig's recent work on international migration from a similar highland district, Mustang (2020). The fact that many school graduates from Nubri are now pursuing livelihoods in the United States, France, Germany, Australia, and other wealthy nations demonstrates why internal migration for education is an important topic of research.

This chapter also contributes to the anthropology of education by further integrating it with methodologies and theories from the study of global childhoods. Too often, information on the purposes and experiences of education and educational migration are sourced from parents or from adults who previously migrated for education as children. Accounts from past migrants are retrospectives filtered through time and subsequent experiences that dilute childhood perspectives on the ways

in which migration shapes their lived experiences. Children are not passive recipients of programmes, information, or school lessons. Yet how they actively receive and rework such school programmes and their place within social worlds is often marginalized in academic studies as well as discourse surrounding developmental initiatives that prioritize adult perspectives. This is in part because of dominant ideologies that position children as unreliable research participants and as incomplete in terms of their future economic and social potential, a tendency anthropologists have argued against to assert that it is important to understand children's 'right now' (Galman 2019; Hardman 1973; Schwartzman 2001).

Education as Development

Different stakeholders with varying positions of power shape educational landscapes in Nepal: the national government through its Department of Education, scores of education-focused non-government organizations, school administrators and teachers, parents, and children. Amongst them, there exists a general appeal towards 'forward thinking' and a 'policy of modernization' encompassed by the Nepali term *bikas* (usually translated as development), a concept that 'lays out the future and purpose of each child—to study hard, to become a professional and to contribute towards the development and prosperity of Nepal' (Koirala 2004).⁴ Following the lead of Esteva (1992), Pigg points out that the *bikas* discourse in Nepal is not just about envisioning what people should be but also highlighting what they are not (1993: 46). Development becomes an 'idiom of hierarchy' that places tradition and modernity on different sides of a perceived evolutionary scale on which the village and villagers signify digression or backwardness (Pigg 1992: 491, 1993: 53). Development proclamations emphasize a need to raise awareness, or to recognize that one's state of mind, undernourished by a lack of education, is responsible for impoverishment and a host of other social ills (Fujikura 2001). Ignorance, tradition, and socioeconomic stagnation are typecast as rural conditions that educated individuals have the agency, abilities, and obligation to rectify.

The connection between education and development manifested early via Nepal's first template for a secular education system, *Education*

in Nepal: Report of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission, drafted by the American advisor Hugh Wood in the 1950s. The introduction proclaims:

With the dawn of democracy in Nepal in 1950, there came an awakening of the need for education . . . Nepal has been following a policy of isolation and as such has been kept in total darkness, uncontaminated by the present day civilization . . . the world has advanced so far and we are so backward . . . In order to make democracy a real success we have to educate our people within the shortest possible time. (NEPC 1956: 1; cited in Rappleye 2019: 108).

Although the report promotes Hugh Wood's Americanized vision more than his Nepali counterparts' and thus does not reflect the realities of Nepal, it set the tone for building a secular school system in a country considered at that time by world powers to be a blank slate for educational development (Rappleye 2019) and infused secular education with notions of modernity and socioeconomic development that reflect the nation's development discourses. Globally circulated ideas of education led to, 'an almost blind belief that formal education will guarantee the future of both individuals and the nation', a conviction that veils unequal access to education in a country with a history of social exclusion mapped along caste, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines (Valentin 2011: 100).

The government of Nepal has never devoted enough resources to develop schools adequately in many parts of the country. Although village schools in Nubri offer quality education with support from NGOs, they only go up to the fifth grade, prompting parents to send their children to distant institutions for increased opportunity. When asked why, they see secular education as a means to escape the perceived limitations of their own agropastoral livelihoods. Consequently, they are willing to disrupt past patterns of youth and family development by separating children from their natal cultures (Childs and Choedup 2019).

Most Nubri students attend private institutions that many parents in Nepal deem to be superior to public options. Caddell argues that private schools emphasize English-medium instruction as a means of 'selling dreams' of global mobility to parents and students (2006: 468). Bhatta and Pherali find that private schools in Nepal are 'perceived to be of better

quality than their public counterparts, fulfilling the economic aspirations of families in the global capitalist market' (2017). Private schools and certain courses, such as English, represent both an entryway into global opportunities as well as a 'resource for social mobility, linguistic superiority and educational and economic benefits' (Giri 2009: 39). Many schools attended by Nubri's students have websites that contrast children in worn clothing living in unsanitary villages with squeaky-clean, uniformed, urban students striving to become teachers, doctors, and engineers. In appeals to foreign donors, these schools reflect the stereotypical rural-urban development discourse by positioning themselves as beacons of hope for rural children who are purportedly destined for lives of poverty, ignorance, and pestilence if left in villages. This association between rural communities and 'backwardness' is nothing new in Nepal, as it resembles textbook portrayals of villagers dressed in traditional clothing and engaged in agrarian activities that are distinctly less-than-modern. Pigg observes, 'Childhood defined as work is the childhood of the village labourer; childhood defined as diligent study and carefree play is the childhood of the landowning or professional, largely urban, elite' (1992: 501). Holland and Skinner also identify a contrast in school textbooks that depict village simplicity and urban modernity, conveying the message that rural lifeways are outmoded and could improve dramatically through development and education. Many young Nepalis, they suggest, 'readily appropriated the development rhetoric presented to them in their textbooks and classroom lectures' to fit their own lives and desires (1996: 273, 280–282).

Our study reveals how some children from Nubri draw on development rhetoric to refashion their relationships to home and parents. Theoretically, scholars have employed reciprocity as a lens for studying long-term modes of exchange between family members. In Sahlins' classic definition, generalized reciprocity often characterizes parent-child interactions, involves 'transactions that are putatively altruistic', and can include assistance rendered to children with no specified expectation for return (1972). Researchers have tested, for example, the extent to which parental transfers of time, sentiments, and financial resources to their children are reciprocated with support in old age (Leopold and Raab 2011, 2013; Silverstein et al. 2002). However, these studies are premised on children being raised in the same household with their parents,

a factor that shapes their propensity to reciprocate through emotional, caregiving, and/or financial support. What such research fails to consider is that sending children to distant boarding schools produces very different reciprocity expectations.

In the context of structural educational inequalities between rural and urban areas, Nubri's parents do not send their children to boarding schools out of desperation but rather with the hope that parents and children alike will have better futures. Nubri's educational migration phenomenon resembles fosterage because it involves moving young people out of their natal households with an eye towards providing them with better prospects than are available locally.⁵ There is hope and potential for long-term exchanges under this scenario, where children will provide for their families once grown, bringing to mind Shipton's notion of entrustment. In Shipton's words, entrustment 'implies an obligation, but not necessarily an obligation to repay like with like, as a loan might imply. Whether an entrustment or transfer is returnable in kind or in radically different form—be it economic, political, symbolic, or some mixture of these—is a matter of cultural context and strategy' (2007: 11). As the meanings of being an educated person from Nubri shift with outmigration, the notion of entrustment can be a lens to understand how children envision reciprocity with their parents who made tremendous sacrifices by sending them to school. The concept has been used, for example, by Hunleth (2017) who, shifting away from an adult-centric view of entrustment, examined how school-age children experienced, engaged, and at times resented adults' expectations of future reciprocity. White and Jha further expand this perspective in the context of child fostering in Zambia by showing that children aligned personal and collective interests within political economies of power and community obligations to make choices in webs of exchange, 'in which personal benefit is realized in and through providing for others' (2021: 257).

As our research with young educational migrants will reveal, many educational migrants saw themselves as working hard now to fulfil personal aims as well as expectations influenced by the social, economic, and political responsibilities that surround them. Traditional education historically had value for families and the community at large in Nubri because of what returned; farming skills and labour were exchanged for training in other useful vocations that are embedded within a Buddhist

moral framework, such as healing, astrological calculations, and liturgical practice. In contrast, today's children are drawing on a different template, socioeconomic development, to envision their own contributions to natal families and villages.

Research Methods

Drawing Out Migration builds on a previous study of educational migration from Nubri (Childs and Choedup 2019) to offer insight into how children experience and respond to processes that they may not fully understand or have control over. Taking our cue from anthropological and sociological studies of childhood, we used the participatory method of drawing, accompanied by interviews with children about their drawings. This is a common technique in research with young people that enables them to lead the conversation and be alternately expressive (Angell et al. 2015; Backett-Milburn and McKie 1999; Hunleth 2011; Johnson et al. 2013; Mitchell 2008; Pridmore and Benelow 1995).

The project involved three field researchers during the summer of 2018, two women from Nubri (JS and a co-researcher) and one American woman (SB). All three visited boarding schools in Kathmandu with large populations of students from Nubri. Researchers asked participating youths to respond to various prompts that included (1) draw how and with whom did you come to this school for the first time, (2) draw your village and what you think your parents are doing right now, and (3) draw what you want to be when you grow up. The researchers provided participants with paper, coloured pencils, and instructions in English, Nepali, and/or Tibetan. There was no time limit to complete the drawings. Researchers then asked each individual their preferred interview language (Tibetan, Nepali, English, or a combination of), and audio recorded brief interviews in which they were asked to explain their drawings. Students were given coloured pencils and erasers to keep as participation incentives. In one of the boarding schools, the researchers invited participants to stay after the initial drawing session for a round table discussion. Although well attended, only a few of the senior students spoke.

As adults and outsider guests, the researchers had the considerable privilege on the ground in the schools. It is worth noting that while JS

and her co-researcher are from Nubri and had themselves migrated for education in Kathmandu (and thus have acquired certain levels of respect as students who have completed their education), SB was likely to be perceived similarly to other foreigners who come to visit schools as a volunteer or as a potential donor. This relational aspect may have influenced how some participating children shaped answers based on what they believed the researchers wanted to hear, despite assertions that any answer or drawing would be ‘correct’.

The drawing methodology aligns with the movement in the interdisciplinary study of childhood since the late 20th century (often characterized as the ‘new childhood studies’) to conduct research ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ children (see Kay et al. 2012), and we have used drawing in our other research to explore issues such as children’s agency in intergenerational relations of care (Hunleth 2017, 2019). As a visual and participatory method, it was particularly suitable for the *Drawing Out Migration* study for several reasons: the children enthusiastically embraced the method, their drawings gave us images of places and events to which we had no previous access, and offered visual representations that helped us initiate conversations with children about distant places, experiences, and abstract concepts. However, as Hunleth (2011) has previously argued, drawing and other participatory methods are not *the answer* to hearing children’s voices, and issues of power and authority remain (see also Lomax 2012). Given this limitation, particularly in a school setting with deeply entrenched hierarchies, we paid careful attention to power dynamics and interaction between the adult researchers and young participants, and among children of different ages who participated in the groups. We built improvisation into the method to address certain dynamics as we identified them.

We acknowledge that child-centred participatory methods are not ‘fool proof technology that—when applied carefully and conscientiously—will enable research involving children to achieve ethical and epistemological validity’ (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008: 512). We recognize this limitation and have integrated our observations during these sessions into our analysis of young people’s uses of drawing. For example, younger and older participants used the drawing activity as an opportunity to help and be helped by others in the session, and this likely influenced the content of the drawings. Another

limitation is that we found the drawings made by the older participants to be easier to interpret and we recognized our bias towards older students' accounts. A longer duration of field study or additional methodology techniques would have been needed to better understand the perspectives of the youngest participants, whose drawings were more difficult to interpret. Also, while not necessarily a flaw in methodology, our local research members suggested the idea to have a drawing contest, basing the 'winner' on one who drew unique stories or presented clearly and articulated well, something that may have been more of an incentive for the older participants. The contest did facilitate greater enthusiasm and excitement among participants, particularly because it relied on presentation skills that are valued in the setting. However, the 'contest' may have discouraged younger and shier participants and those who did not feel that their drawings met the standards set by fellow participants or us.

The total sample of participants included 145 children ages 6–19 at six schools, including two private boarding schools in Kathmandu and four government schools in Nubri. This chapter only considers the boarding school residents in Kathmandu ($n = 59$).⁶ We identified three primary themes in these children's drawings: (1) difficulties encountered when moving out of the village and into boarding schools, including separation from parents and ensuing cultural and linguistic adjustments, (2) the formation of new kin-like relationships in the institutional setting and while being raised away from parents, and (3) a vision of futures rooted in professional achievement that contrasts sharply with perceptions of parents' agropastoral subsistence lifestyles. Together, these sections describe a process of social change that is driven by the association of education with modernity and reflects the perception that village life is mired in socioeconomic stagnation.

Separation

A journey from Nubri to Kathmandu, if one is unable to coordinate a 45-minute helicopter ride, consists of a multi-day trek followed by a day-long bus ride over potholed roads. When asked about their memories of travelling to Kathmandu for the first time, some participants reported



Figure 7.1. Z6, male age 19. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

coming by foot or being carried by a parent. For example, a student drew himself riding piggyback on his father (Figure 7.1, Z6 age 19). Children who came by helicopter often flew without a parent but were met by a relative in Kathmandu who then escorted them to the school. One child said she came alone, ‘but in the airport my sister came to pick me up. She was also studying in this school’ (Z3 age 17). Another depicted himself riding in a bus to the school for the first time and explained that he came with his uncle (Figure 7.2, Z18 age 7).

In their drawings of arriving at the boarding school, some children described themselves as feeling lonely. Several described experiencing a sense of abandonment after being left abruptly by parents who had to make the long trek home because of agricultural schedules. For example, one girl recalled, ‘My mom said, “Stay here while I will go and buy something for you.” She didn’t come back and I cried. My mom didn’t come for a year; I was hurt’ (Figure 7.3, Z31 age 16). Another girl explained,

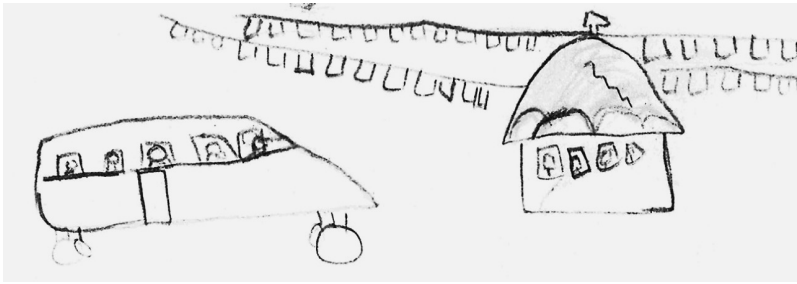


Figure 7.2. Z18, male age 7. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

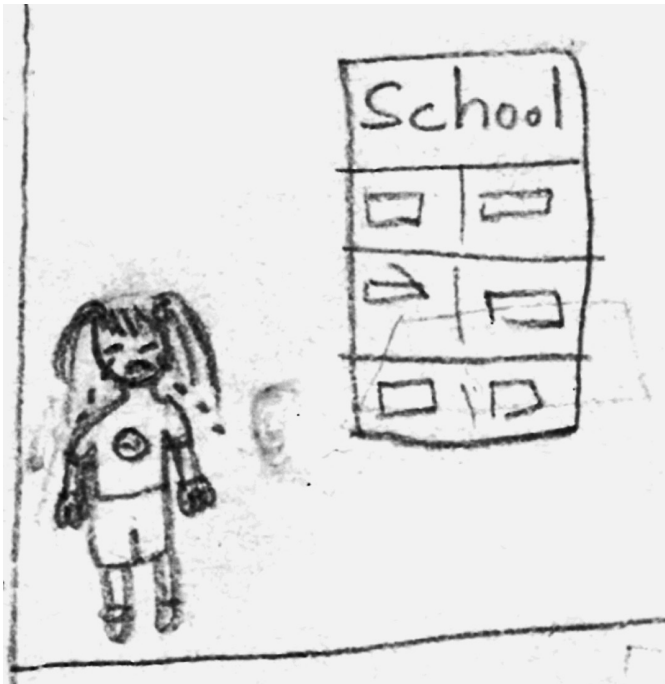


Figure 7.3. Z31, female age 16. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*

I came here with my mother when I was six years old. When I was very young my father and mother had already got divorced so that's why only my mother comes. Then my older brother was already in a monastery as a monk and the other brother was in this school. I was the

youngest one and in the village. When I was six, I got a sponsor and my mother and I came here. My mother took me to the school and she said, 'You stay in the gate, I'll go to buy momos (meat dumplings) and come back'. When everyone is small they love momos. My mom went and didn't come back and I was waiting. (Figure 7.4, Z33 age 15).

The girl said that she then cried, and her mother did not return for a year. In both examples, parents used errands as a ruse to avoid direct goodbyes. While on the surface, this appears cold, we have found that parents suffer tremendously when parting from their migrant children. Furthermore, because attachment is seen by Nubri's Buddhist residents as a core cause of suffering, a show of stoicism rather than overt emotions is a culturally appropriate response to separation and even death. This separation of family happens in the context of development discourses that urge education as a means to achieve a prosperous future for the

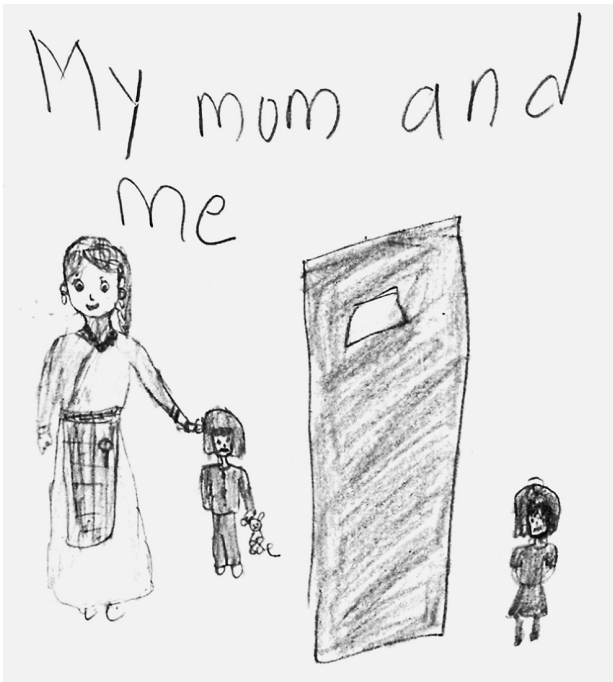


Figure 7.4. Z33, female age 15. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

community, family, and individual. The structural inequalities plaguing the adults, as described in the introduction, further situate a generational motivation for this separation. Parents express a desire to visit children more often, but are hampered by their lack of money, responsibilities in the village including livestock, and the disrepair of trails and roads that make travel strenuous and time consuming. The perspectives of children on these separations have been absent from many previous studies and thus represent a unique contribution of this project to the current understanding of children's migration experiences.

Other students mention longing for parents who are back in the village and think about what their lives must be like without any children in the home. For example, one boy drew a picture of the school. When asked, who are the people in the background, he replied, 'Father, mother'. When asked what his parents were doing now and whether anyone else was at home assisting them, he explained, 'They are working in the field. All of them [siblings] are in school and monasteries. My younger sister is with me in this school, my older brother is in a monastery and sometimes comes to visit' (Figure 7.5, Y14 age 11). When asked what he does when thinking about parents, he responded, 'I used to draw them and I wish they come and visit'.

A girl with three siblings, all who live outside of the village, depicted herself reading a book and thinking about her parents. She commented:

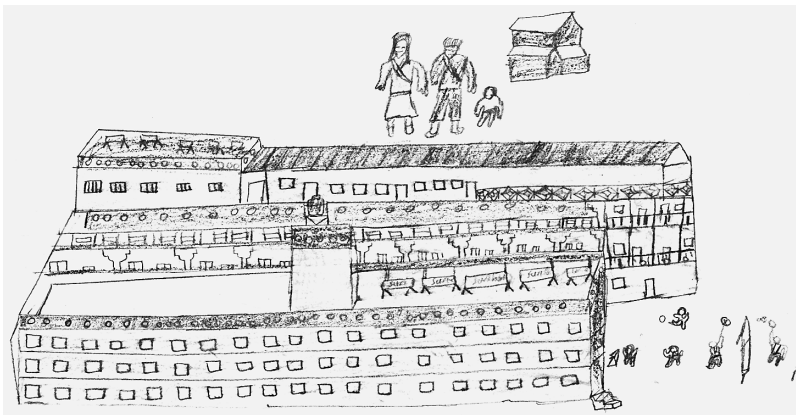


Figure 7.5. Y14, male age 11. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

Sometimes we read books but still our mind goes to the village and becomes worried about how my parents are doing. I feel worried and I don't know what they're doing. It's very hard because my mom and dad have lots of work to do and no kids to help them. They have to work in two villages, migrating between the two and doing the work themselves.⁷ I think they are facing a very hard time there. (Figure 7.6, Z11 age 16)



Figure 7.6. Z11, female age 16. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

This story offers insight into an issue evident in both education literature and anthropology of childhood: tension between child labour and education. In an effort to offer equitable prospects (education perceived as having value over the labour children can provide in the village), international actors and parents who respond to sponsorship opportunities generate potential new hardships for adults and the children remaining in Nubri. From the drawings, we can discern that some children feel the emotional weight of knowing that their parent's situation may be more difficult because they are in school instead of helping in the village. Through the pursuit of what Giri terms a 'resource for social mobility' (2009: 39), parents relinquish the labour of their children in exchange for future possibilities attainable through education. Nevertheless, the child is not a passive 'resource'.

Several students highlighted the social and linguistic challenges they faced in adapting to a new environment. Their village dialects are quite distinct from the standardized Tibetan spoken by teachers and administrators, Nepali, which is in another language family altogether (Indo-European vs. Tibeto-Burman), and many were unaccustomed to English, the medium of instruction. When asked how he felt after his father left him at school, one student reflected, 'I'm feeling very unhappy. I am thinking about who is in the school, no friends here, no one can understand me, it was very hard for me. I can speak local [Nubri] language, but they can't understand my language and I couldn't speak Nepali' (Z35 age 12). When asked whether he finds studying Nepali language difficult, he replied, 'Our land is in Nepal but it's so different. I came from the Himalayas so it's difficult for me studying Nepali'. Another student explained his drawing in the following terms, 'There is a picture, this is the first time I came to school. It was very difficult for me. At that time so unhappy because there were no friends. After one year I made new friends. After that I am very happy here'. When asked why he was unhappy at first, he explained, 'Because of language. It is very difficult to talk with people because of language' (Figure 7.7, Z17 age 15).

In these descriptions, we can see ways in which language—and the inability to communicate with others in the school—proved to be a second form of loss to children and acted as a barrier to accessing the community within the school. In the presence of shared experiences of sacrifice and struggle, a new identity of an educational migrant begins to emerge.



Figure 7.7. Z17, male age 15. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

However, the worry of parents and lost labour lingers, suggesting that there is not a complete break from agrarian identities and obligations to families. Children remain in webs of entrustment despite the physical distance from those they feel reciprocal exchange is due.

Although many children referred to difficulties experienced in adjusting to life in a new environment, to separation from parents, to sleeping in shared dorm rooms and eating in a communal dining hall,

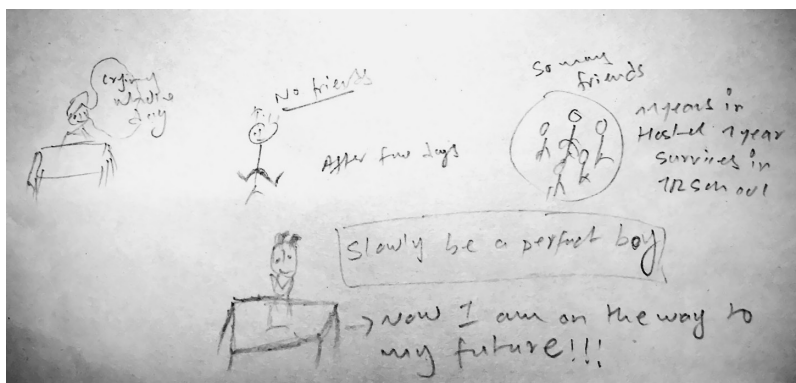


Figure 7.8. Z27, male age 18. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

and to new faces and new languages, most adapted successfully. Their stories show that they found other ways to connect to their identity stemming from Nubri, and reflect the resiliency of students who were more interested in showing the positives of their current opportunities and have, in retrospect, accepted the challenges of their younger years as an unchangeable and perhaps necessary sacrifice. One student even illustrated his transition from unhappiness and loneliness to friendships, confidence, and ambition (Figure 7.8, Z27 age 18). Children and young people's dreaming and hopefulness are notably lacking in development discourse and educational anthropology. This chapter, by inviting children into the dialogue, reveals a more optimistic outlook. In the next section, we explore how older students who had experienced these anxieties assisted their younger peers through the adjustment period.

Adaptation

Most Nubri parents try to enrol a child in a boarding school where they have some connection with a family member who not only assists with admission but also provides a safety net (Childs and Choedup 2019). For example, one boy reported staying with a city-residing aunt and attending school as a day scholar for three years until transitioning to a boarding student (Z6 age 19). Another was brought to school by his uncle

and spent holidays with his grandfather who lives in the city (Z18 age 7). In some cases, a child has an elder sibling enrolled in the same school, or at a nearby monastery, who can assist with the transition. A few students were asked whether they felt like they had a ‘second parent’, meaning someone who assumed parental duties in the absence of birth parents who lived far away. One girl responded, ‘My older brother feels like my second parent. He also studied in this school, finished grade 10, and right now is in Finland. My father left me [at school] and the only person to look after me was my brother. So, that’s why my second parent is my older brother’ (Z30 age 15). Another referred to the lama who runs the school as her second parent (Z29 age 18), while others said it was the entire school. One boy stated, ‘For me my second parent is this whole school because when I came to this school, I was eight or nine years old. Before then I stayed with my father and mother, but the following 10–11 years I spend my life here in this school. So that’s why the school is my second parent’ (Z27 age 18). Another explained, ‘The whole school is my family. Only sometimes in holiday we used to go [out]. Most of the time we spend here. So [this school] is the house for us’ (Z30 age 15). Similarly, a girl said, ‘What I really like about school is that everyone lives together as a family. We don’t fight. Our school is like no other, everyone helps each other. If anyone has a problem, we help solve them. That is what I really like about it’ (Z33 age 15). The notion of the school as a second parent implies that children also engage in a kin-like entrustment with the school, evidenced by the fact that several participants in our study remained in school housing or volunteered as teachers in Nubri after graduation to complete a ‘service year’. Doing so could open further opportunities, including studying abroad at an international high school.

The quasi-parenting role older students play in the lives of younger students became evident during the drawing sessions. Older students sat close to the younger students, encouraging them to speak, ruffling their hair playfully, or listening with their full attention. We noted this respect, companionship, and teasing behaviours amongst the participants and asked if we could conduct a roundtable discussion to learn more about intra-school relationships and kin networks. The sense of responsibility students felt for one another became clear. One girl stated bluntly, ‘When new students come, the older ones should take care of them’ (Z30 age 15). Another girl said:

When new kids come here, due to environment change, they have rashes on their body. In our school there is a small clinic. We can take them there and they can get vaccinations, and we help them like that. We senior students wonder, how can we care for them? We go to them and try to understand their problem, and we try to find a solution for them. And we also help them bathe from time to time. We take care of them like it's our own younger sister. (Z14 age 17)

This admission of caretaking speaks to the resiliency of these children and shows the school as a place of care and health monitoring. The older students' care goes beyond physical and into psychological. Recall that language differences contributed to new students' feelings of alienation in the school. Some senior students recognized that speaking a shared mother tongue can increase comfort, belonging, and feelings of safety that are associated with home. One girl commented:

They come at a very small age, so they forget their language very quickly. What I feel is that let them not forget their mother tongue. My solution is talking with them in their mother tongue, Nubri language ... When they first come to school and we speak our language, they feel so happy. So, what I think is if we speak our language, they will also feel good and that they can adapt to this environment. (Z30 age 15)

Elder students have lived through the experience of moving to a new environment, often in the absence of immediate family support. Their empathy translates into support for new arrivals by speaking a familiar vernacular and assisting with daily health and well-being activities. These relationships contribute to the construction of a shared identity as Nubri educational migrants and help explain how many come to see the school as a second parent that supports and nurtures within the new community and physical environment. Although educational migration transfers many childrearing responsibilities from parents to the school, it is older peers and not just teachers and administrators who assume parent-like responsibilities. This may seem to be a new development, yet it resonates with village customs whereby elder siblings, and even cousins, are expected to care for younger siblings so that parents can complete other responsibilities.

The group interview unveiled other examples of social management beyond assistance and new forms of guardianship. When asked about how students navigate disagreements and fights amongst themselves, one girl responded:

For us, when we quarrel with each other, my two friends are fighting, we would go and ask them why they are fighting, what happened. Then we will know the reason. As far as possible we try to make them get along, and we go to them and say you should realize it's your mistake or her mistake, like it happens with me, and then I think to myself and I realize it's my mistake or hers. If I think it's mine I go and ask for forgiveness. And if it is her mistake and she didn't come talk to me, then slowly we will talk with each other. And there are different assignments we have to work together, sometimes the teacher asks us to work with them. And how can we tell the teacher I'm not talking to her? So we have to talk. Even if we're fighting, there is no one who can stay a long time without talking. (Z31 age 16)

The student further explained how she talks about school experiences to her parents, saying, 'All the parents, they say like study hard. So, we don't tell them about fighting with friends.' Her statements illustrate how a need to live together and collaborate on schoolwork provides an incentive for students to conceal and manage conflicts within peer groups rather than seeking adult intervention, similar to Bhattarai's findings of interpersonal conflict regulation in children's clubs (Bhattarai 2010). Succeeding in school as the reason they must get along nods to the development narrative that education is a shared value and responsibility amongst students, and suggests that children are not excluded from understanding and navigating expectations of modernization and success as illustrated by efforts to mitigate conflicts and veil uncomfortable truths from parents.

Interpersonal conflicts are not the only aspect of school life students conceal from their parents. Several confessed to hiding poor test scores. For example, one girl explained, 'What we don't tell to our parents is when we fail our class. Because our father and mother in village see the fail as a very big thing. If our neighbourhood knows, then they will say your daughter failed' (Z30 age 15). Her statement indicates that school shortcomings reflect poorly on not just the student but on the entire

family, and indicates how students must navigate different expectations of what constitutes an educated person with implications for their web of relationships.

In the next section, we explore how educational migration is leading to an intergenerational divide between children and their parents by comparing what students think their parents are doing now with what they want to do themselves after completing school, in other words, how they imagine their own life trajectories will differ from their parents.

Reintegration?

When children were asked what they thought their parents were doing right now, most responded by drawing them farming, herding, doing domestic chores, and other tasks associated with rural life. Students tended to portray women sowing seeds, harvesting grain, carrying firewood, and cooking which are primarily female chores, and men plowing, constructing houses, and herding yaks which are primarily male chores. For example, one depicted her father plowing while her mother followed behind dropping seeds into the ground (Figure 7.9, Z2 age 13). Another girl commented, 'My dad is building the house. My mom is doing field work'. In this case, the mother is harvesting grain while the father is doing masonry work on the house (Figure 7.10, Z11 age 15). In one of the more elaborate drawings a boy depicts his elder brother, a monk in a rural monastery, performing a ritual. Meanwhile, his father is herding yaks and his mother is spinning wool inside the house. She sits to the left of the hearth, which is where women usually sit in Nubri homes because that is where cooking implements are kept (Figure 7.11, Z6 age 19).

In contrast, when students were asked to draw their future aim, or what they hope to do in the future after completing school, none responded 'farming' nor drew themselves as farmers, presumably because of the association of agriculture with a lack of education and poverty. The majority expressed an interest in becoming healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses, dentists), engineers, social workers, or teachers. A few envisioned themselves as athletes, photographers, or lawyers. The impressive range of potential occupations is evidence that the students are



Figure 7.9. Z2, female age 13. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.



Figure 7.10. Z11, female age 15. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.



Figure 7.11. Z6, male age 19. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

exposed to multiple career paths when in school, although accessibility and ease of success in any of these careers are less clear.

Many students coupled their future career ambition with a desire to help people in the village, an aim which dovetails their school's emphasis on community service and encouragement to make positive contributions to the villages where they were born. Here is how one student explained her vision, 'The last picture is my aim, to work in the health sector. And then my aim is to go to my own village and make a health post and open a clinic and help the villagers'. The caption of her drawing



Figure 7.12. Z12, female age 18. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

reads, 'Want to be Nurse and help in village' (Figure 7.12, Z12 age 18). A boy responded, '[I want to] become engineer and give free food to the villagers and constructing a school' (Z28 age 12). A girl stated her passion for helping those in need by saying, 'My aim is to help those who are disabled and open a school for orphans. I also want to become a social worker because for us we have everything and always want more. So when we see [disabled] people, we like to help them' (Figure 7.13, Z29 age 18). A girl stated, 'My aim is to become a dentist ... Whatever

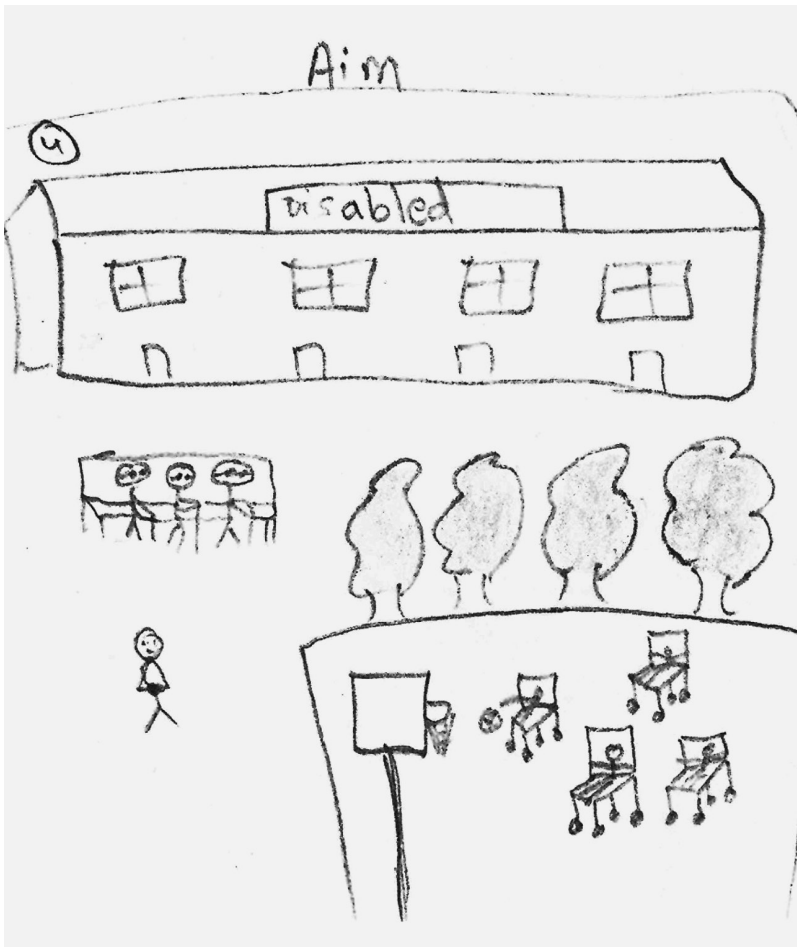


Figure 7.13. Z29, female age 18. Source: *Drawing Out Migration*.

I become in the future I will help my village by teaching the kids of the village or helping the villagers in some work' (Z33 age 15). A boy said, 'My future plan is [to become a] social worker. I am going to help the society in the village. In the future I'm going to open a school and a clinic in the village' (Z35 age 12). Even those envisioning careers outside of the medical and teaching fields connected their ambitions with community service. A boy who wants to become a professional football player saw this as a route to helping village children. He explained, 'I want to be a professional football player and earn money and help the Himalayan children and sponsor them' (Z20 age 14). Another who said he wanted to be a writer and Olympic athlete proclaimed, 'My aim is to get future bright. Nowadays my parents sacrificed for me, giving me an opportunity to study. So I am going to pay them back' (Z21 age 12). A girl stated, 'I want to be a good photographer and I will visit our village. Our village is so beautiful, and I'll take photos. Now our village is not that famous, but I will take photos and make it famous, make the village known to other people' (Z30 age 15). These aims are examples of efforts to align personal and collective interests, to maintain reciprocity of relationships with kin, the village, and the school.

Despite dreams of future contributions to kin and village, some students hinted at an emerging inter-generational schism. The situation is complicated by the fact that, after coming to Kathmandu, students rarely have opportunities to experience life in Nubri first-hand,⁸ for example, they emphasized opening clinics or schools in villages when most villages have a nurse staffed health post and a primary school. In the last few years, there has been a significant expansion of clinics in the villages, something not reflected in the children's descriptions of their natal communities. A widening gap between the generations is also evident in some older students' recollections of returning to the village during holidays. One girl reflected, 'When I go to the village, my mother doesn't understand my language and I don't understand her language. And we laugh. Time passes like that' (Z29 age 18). This same student disagreed with social distinctions in the village that she did not practice at school. She explained, 'When I went to the village before, there was one friend's house. I told my mom about how we eat together. But in our village, everyone is not the higher caste, some are low. In our school, we don't care. We eat together, but in the village, they said its bad' (Z29 age 18). Another student viewed

village life as undisciplined because, in her eyes, it lacked clear routines and rules. She said,

We [are] students so we have to be disciplined and respect others, and at the school as a student our hair cut should be smart, dress properly ... We should go with timetable whenever the bell rings we should go with that ... In my home, there is no bell, so that's why there is no timetable. At house, there won't be food at right time. If you want to eat, you can eat if you don't want to eat, no eat and feel laziness. In the house there are no rules so because there are no rules, I feel nice and lazy. And when we are in school, everything should go according to rules. So we have to do everything timely. And that's why its disciplined. But at home, no rules and regulations so I feel so lazy. (Z14 age 17)

Another student differentiates the village from the school not only with respect to laziness and punctuality but with health. She said,

Here even we eat and play with kids and friends and become healthy. But in the village, just not we eat and again after sometime, eat, and again eat. And again stay for a while. And neighbor calls me to come eat and again eat. So that's why you become fat like that. (Z29 age 18)

The students' reflections speak to an identity that associates the aesthetic and regimented uniformity of school life with respect, proper behaviour, and good health. Their contrasting portrayal of undisciplined and idle village life reflects the ingrained discourses from textbooks, the Nepali government, and international actors that education creates a pathway to modern and efficient ways of living. As pointed out by one of the co-authors [JS], the interviews and drawings indicate a quandary whereby students long to be in the Himalayas when in the city, but when in their natal villages, they express feelings of boredom and longing to be back in Kathmandu. The predicament may reflect an unresolved conflict among children who never had an opportunity to fully experience village life while forming identities that are influenced by discourses of development and education.

The contrast between how the youths see their parents' occupations, lifestyles, and daily habits versus their own is striking but not surprising.

After all, many of these children are the first generation from their families to attend secular schools. Although religious education has a long history in Nubri, most men who received training in the past either by acting as a lama's attendant during the annual winter retreat or by becoming a short-term resident of a monastery returned to the agropastoral subsistence strategy because they had few other options. With secular education, which is equally available to boys and girls, Nubri's youths are now envisioning white-collar occupations—career ambitions that will most likely lead them away from the village.

Conclusions

A culture of migration now exists in Nubri. Under the driving forces of a national discourse on development through education and parents' desires to achieve non-agrarian futures for their offspring, sending children to distant institutions has become normative and even expected. Nubri children living in Kathmandu are adapting to a cultural milieu far removed from their natal communities, resulting in newly negotiated social networks that shape how they experience education and imagine prospective career paths that diverge from their parents' lifestyles.

The students' drawings and interviews suggest that educational migration is a source of distress for children, especially during the transitional stage from village to boarding school. Several participants expressed feelings of physical, emotional, and cultural distance from home through their narratives of traveling to Kathmandu, absence from and longing for parents, unfamiliarity with new languages, and an inability to talk to parents in their native vernacular during visits home. Yet the data also reveals how children unite through the shared experience of adapting to their new environment by forming relationships that replicate and, in some ways, replace the caretaking responsibilities of the natal families they left behind. Elder students help new arrivals with basic health and hygiene while making them feel comfortable by speaking the village dialect. Several reflect on how they have come to view an elder sibling, the school itself, or a prominent administrator as a 'second parent'. The new kin-like network and experiences of entrustment with the school at large provide students a sense of security that helps ease the process of

adapting to their new surroundings, although the long-term effects this will have on traditional understandings of kinship are unclear. What will kin and community be like once the students have graduated and, most likely, pursue careers away from the village?

The drawings and interviews also suggest that migration for education is effectively dichotomizing rural and urban life along generational lines. Nubri's children are grateful for the future opportunities that schooling opens, which is evident in their drawings; Nubri's parents view education as a means for their children to avoid the hard toil of agrarian life, as encapsulated in the common refrain, 'better a pen in hand than a rope across the forehead' (Childs and Choedup 2019). However, the students' drawings and statements show they worry for parents left at home without children to help with the workload. The loss of labour is a material sacrifice, and its significance is not lost on the migrant children. The orientations expressed by both generations offer a local expression of Shipton's (2007) notion of entrustment whereby children align their own future aims within parents' hopes to spare them from the precarity of local livelihoods. The dissonance in relationships due to migration (between urban/rural lifestyles or colloquial language choice, for example) is exchanged for a good education and future opportunities, which the children imagine repaying in alignment with their own aspirations. Whereas parents often mention remittances as a potential future benefit, the children's drawings suggest a different pathway, development, to reciprocate their parents' sacrifices. The obligation to repay is framed by students describing villages as places of idleness lacking in disciplined routines, and by depicting parents as timeless subsistence farmers. This reflects Holland and Skinner's point that schooling is a form of symbolic capital people use to distinguish relative positions within society (1996: 274), and Pigg's argument that villagers are regarded in development discourses as people in need of 'pedagogic intervention' (1992: 507). A further manifestation of this ideological turn regards sponsorships. Most students are aware that acquiring a foreign sponsor was the impetus for beginning school in Kathmandu, and several said that they hope to have enough money to sponsor children in the future. Their aspirations reflect a mental and emotional integration of the structures in place for education—rural to urban migration facilitated by sponsorships—and show how development discourse shapes children's expectations.

Students' desires to sponsor future Nubri students represent a shift in agency where their anticipated influence as donors intersects with their identity as educational migrants. The notion of entrustment in this situation, with sponsoring fiscal capabilities, can be expressed as more than a general loyalty to Nubri and its future inhabitants, but a purposeful choice children hope to make that combines communal obligations with personal aspirations. Education is thereby shaping a new cultural context of intergenerational entrustment by providing children with the foundation to dream of agency that they envision will initiate transformations in village life that fall under the rubric of 'development' (e.g., healthcare, education, and infrastructure). Students seek to repay sacrifices made by parents by making them, and future generations of children, targets for development interventions.

But will the students be able to act as agents for change? Several scholars of education in Nepal argue that schooling provides false hopes and aspirations, especially for children from villages or marginalized social groups, because the education system simultaneously promises upward mobility while erecting barriers to achievement (Carney and Rappleye 2011; Mikesell 2006; Valentin 2011). This is possibly happening with Nubri's students, especially in the context of the more aspirational jobs some desire, such as doctor or engineer. After graduation, many struggle to find gainful employment in the private sector, making migration to North America, Europe, or wealthier Asian countries such as Japan or Malaysia attractive options. Fujikura reminds us that modernity may open new possibilities, but it also forecloses previously available life choices and involves 'irremediable losses' (2001: 297). Some students from Nubri do see returning to the village as an option, but as agents of change armed with modern education rather than as householders who till the soil. Yet jobs for educated individuals in Nubri are sparse and cannot employ more than a fraction of those who aspire to return. While several of the earliest educational migrants (including the study author JS) have returned to their natal communities for long stretches of time, in her case as a researcher working with foreign scholars and NGOs, migration trends thus far suggest that only a minority of students attending boarding schools in Kathmandu will return as full-time residents and householders. The inability to pursue lifelong residence in the very place where ancestors have dwelled for centuries is an irremediable casualty of

modern education. The mounting evidence therefore suggests a need to challenge the ways in which development discourses frame the benefits of educational migration, and the assertion that education in and of itself provides an uncomplicated set of advantages for both individuals and communities.

Notes

1. Corresponding authors.
2. Data were collected for Drawing Out Migration in 2018. In 2020 during the COVID-19 global pandemic, students that were residing in Kathmandu returned to their home villages, often for longer than any previous holiday break. Observations of participating school's social media posts indicate relevant examples of identity negotiation, generational relations, and the role education plays in Nubri. Notably, this perspective is filtered through the school's curated storytelling on social media and may not reflect priorities or comprehensive experiences of the children. This chapter offers a pre-pandemic glimpse into these topics from the perspective of children. Because many implications of outmigration arise from physical distance and separation, there are sure to have been remarkable changes in 2020 in the lives of many who participated in this study.
3. For the sake of brevity, we refer to study participants in this chapter as 'children' rather than 'children and adolescents'. The latter is the more accurate term because the age range of participants was 6 to 19 (mean = 12.7), which covers both children and adolescents according to conventional definitions used by organizations such as WHO (<https://www.who.int/southeastasia/health-topics/adolescent-health>).
4. It is worth noting the role and power that foreign thinkers (including authors on this paper) had/have in the discussion of development in Nepal and the relative lack of not only children perspectives, but Nepali perspective in forming agendas and dialogue (Des Chenes 2007; see also the editors' introduction to this volume).
5. Here we expand the literature on fostering, which has focused more fully on the processes of sending rural children to live with urban-dwelling relatives who can facilitate opportunities like education (e.g., Alber et al. 2013; Bledsoe 1990; Goody 1982; Isiugo-Abanihe 1985; Leinaweaver 2008).
6. The mean time that participants reported being enrolled in their current school was 5.5 years (range = 2 months to 13 years, 3 reported they do not know). Data was not captured to distinguish boarding students from day scholars, but both identifications imply residence in Kathmandu.
7. Residents of some villages have two houses at different altitudes to exploit farming and herding niches.
8. See footnote 2. Some students have since spent months in their natal villages in 2020.

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