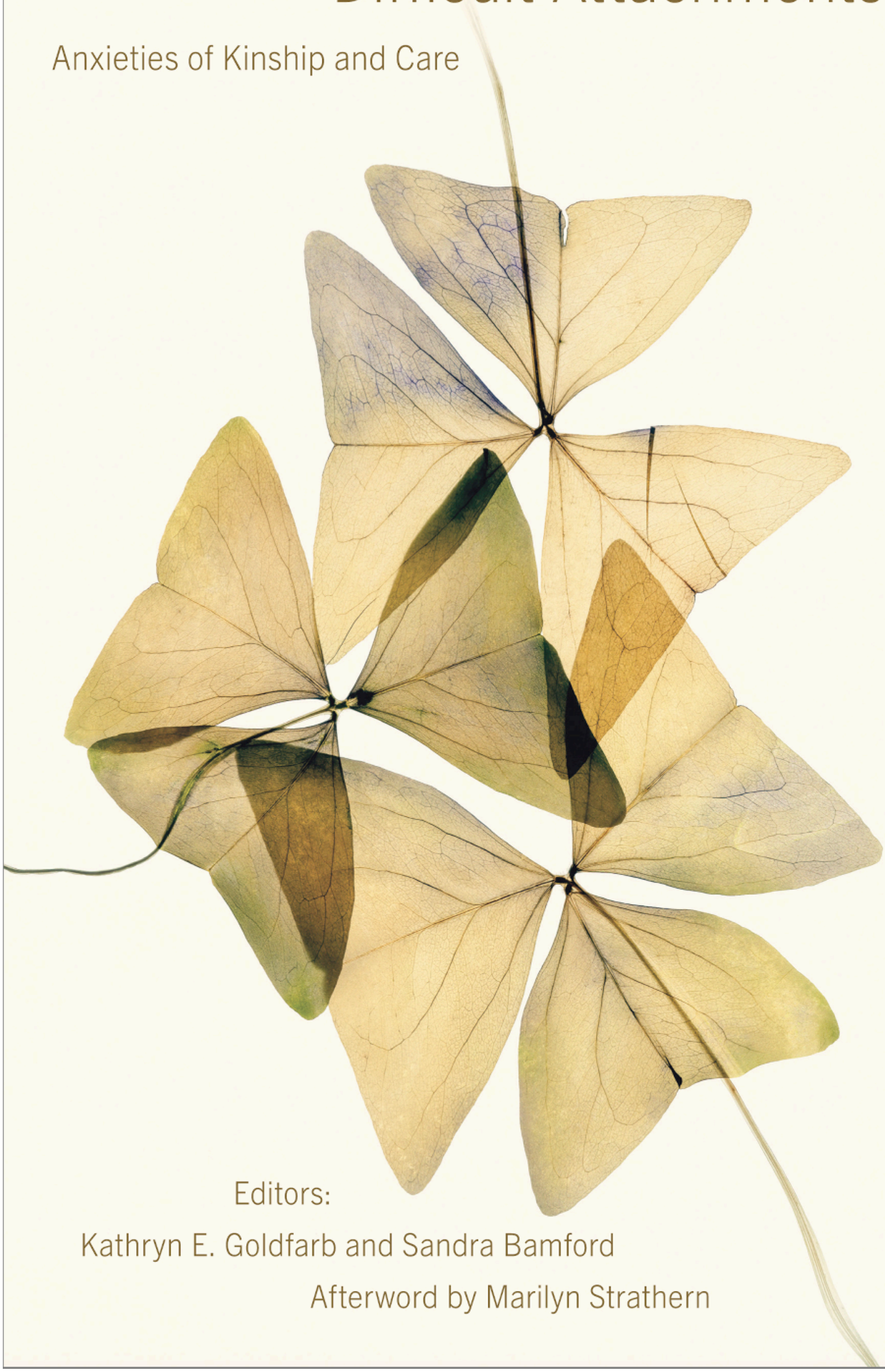
Difficult Attachments

Anxieties of Kinship and Care



Editors:

Kathryn E. Goldfarb and Sandra Bamford

Afterword by Marilyn Strathern

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EDITED BY KATHRYN E. GOLDFARB
AND SANDRA BAMFORD

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Kinship under Colonial Duress

Anticolonial Nationalism Mends Ruptured Tibetan Attachments

DAWA T. LOKYITSANG

How does colonialism shape Tibetan experiences of kinship? China's colonial occupation of Tibet forced Kalden to leave Tibet not once but twice, fracturing and rupturing attachments to families and places of origin in the process.

It was 1991. Kalden (a pseudonym) was six years old when his mother sent him to India to see His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Kalden would be educated at one of the residential schools in India that His Holiness had opened in 1960 for Tibetan refugee children after his successful escape from Tibet to India in 1959. The Chinese military retaliations against the national uprisings by Tibetans on March 10, 1959, had forced up to eighty thousand Tibetans to flee to Nepal and India. Between March and October 1959, the Chinese army reported killing up to eighty-seven thousand members of the Tibetan resistance (Li 2016). The official number of Tibetan deaths from 1959 and mid 1990s is 1.2 million; this is out of the overall Tibetan population of 6 million, according to the Tibetan government in exile (DIIR 1996, 53). The situation produced several generations of orphans and semi-orphans. In response, His Holiness and his administrative government in exile opened schools as an anticolonial effort in which novel forms of kinship and belonging were cultivated. Schools thus became spaces in which the Tibetan leadership reconfigured children's ruptured ties to families and places of origins by cultivating national kinship between Tibetans in exile.

Kalden spent sixteen years growing up and receiving an education at the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV), a residential school in Dharamsala, India, without his biological family. In 2007, after finishing vocational training at TCV's skills training school, Kalden reunited with his mother in Lhasa. However, the return was short lived. In 2008, Tibetans in Lhasa staged a national uprising against China's occupation of Tibet. The protests began initially with monks on March 10 to mark the forty-ninth anniversary of the 1959 national uprisings. Lay residents of Lhasa joined the protest from March 14 onward. News of the protest in Lhasa spread quickly to other Tibetans despite the violent crackdowns under the Chinese military security apparatus. In Amdo and Kham, Tibetans demonstrated against the Chinese government while carrying homemade national flags of Tibet. The 2008 national uprisings by Tibetans is the largest recorded mass protests in Tibet since the 1959 uprisings. It was a dangerous time for returnees from exile, as they became the first targets of the security apparatus. A year after the uprisings, Kalden decided to leave Lhasa and his family for the second time and returned to Dharamsala, India.

Cases of repeated flight into exile are unfortunately not unusual. They are normative across generations of Tibetans living in exile and stem from China's political occupation of Tibet. Kalden's movement between Tibet and India (initially not personally voluntary and the second time more of choice) offers a lens into the ways that Chinese colonial violence and Tibetan creative responses to this violence both rupture and reconfigure attachments to families and places of origin through communities of created kin in exile.

Drawing on the experiences of my father, Tashi Dhondup, who is of the first generation of Tibetan children placed in the Dalai Lama's residential schools in India, and a second generation of "semi-orphans" my own age such as Kalden, I consider what ruptured biological kinship and liminal orphanhood mean in the context of both colonial violence and creative horizontal kin-making efforts between classmates in exile. How might we reconsider what "attachments" mean for our theorization of kinship in colonial times? This chapter explores these considerations through an ethnographic and historical exploration of former students of the Tibetan school system in India.

Residential Schools: An Anticolonial Response during Colonial Invasion

In 1960 an orphaned group of children whose parents had been killed due to an avalanche at a road construction site in Jammu were brought under the care of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India (Dalai Lama

1991). His Holiness rented a building that started out as a nursery and was later transformed into a residential school so that orphans could receive long-term care and education. When the school first opened, the Dalai Lama charged his older sister, Tsering Dolma Takla, with the responsibility of running the school and caring for orphaned children. Tsering Dolma Takla had her own biological children, but when she became head of the nursery, she became a parent to all.

When parents heard that the Dalai Lama was taking children under his care and providing them with an education, they brought their children. My grandfather decided to travel to Dharamsala from Bhutan to see the Dalai Lama and receive his blessings. He was also there to deposit my father, Tashi Dhondup, his firstborn, at the Dalai Lama's school. My father was about nine at the time. Traditionally, parents offering their children to a monastic figure at a monastic intuition was a cultural norm, a privilege, and a way for a child to opt out of worldly concerns in order to pursue a life of Buddhist scholasticism and to be in the service of others. Education (in this case, a Buddhist education) has long been viewed by Tibetan societies to be a privileged and altruistic endeavor. The political circumstances of Tibet's invasion and Tibetan exile forced this practice to become more prevalent. It also brought a political dimension to what was previously a religious and cultural norm.

Becoming refugees in Nepal and India meant not having legal personhood. This precarity was exacerbated by the destitute conditions of the refugee camps. By charging the Dalai Lama with the care of their children, parents sought to mitigate some of the dangers that were prevalent for newly refuged Tibetans in exile. In addition to being motivated by safety concerns, parents also had nationalist reasons for deciding to offer their children to the Dalai Lama. According to my father, my grandfather told him that he had sent him and later his other siblings to the Dalai Lama's school because of his faith in the Dalai Lama and belief in his vision of the future: a future in which educated Tibetans in exile led anti-colonial national efforts on behalf of Tibet against China's imperial and settler colonial developments. By enrolling my father and his siblings into the Dalai Lama's school, my grandfather saw himself as contributing to these nationalist and anticolonial future objectives. This sentiment is important. It clarifies how parents made the difficult decision to separate from their children and leave them under the guidance of the Dalai Lama because it generated hope in the face of developing colonialism in Tibet.

Tibetan boarding schools contrast with the experiences of Indigenous children at residential boarding schools in North America (see Finestone, chapter 7). In North America, residential schools were created under settler colonial governance of the United States and Canada as a means for eradicating Indigenous identity. Children were taken forcibly from their natal families to be placed at boarding schools that aimed to "kill the Indian, save the man." It was how settler colonial states destabilized Indigenous communities and communal sovereignty for generations. While residential boarding schools became the grounds for implementing colonial violence against Indigenous youth in North America, this was not the case for Tibetan children at Tibetan residential schools in India. Tibetan schools in India were created by the Dalai Lama and his government in collaboration with the Indian government as a response to violent colonial developments in Tibet under China. Tibetan parents willingly sent their children to Tibetan schools in India as an anticolonial effort. Parents felt a sense of agency when they sent their children to be educated under the Dalai Lama's guidance, as this was an important pathway for sustaining Tibetan spiritual, cultural, and political identity as Tibetans and ensuring a national future for and on behalf of Tibet. Caring after and educating the next generation of Tibetans was conceptualized as an important national, spiritual, and cultural preservation effort that intervened against China's political efforts to erase Tibetan identity in Tibet. Preserving and educating the future became the anticolonial basis for how Tibetan parents and the leadership met the challenge of and *refused* Chinese colonialism (Simpson 2014).

Pedagogies of Belonging: National Kinship at School

In terms of design, educational facilities and residential homes were constructed in close geographic proximity. While children aged fifteen and over were placed in gender-specific hostels, children under that age were placed in a co-ed residential home that was managed by adult caregivers who performed the role of the parent. From dusk until dawn, children spent the majority of their time socializing and learning within the compound of their residential schools. Children's schedules revolved around classes, afterschool activities, chores, and/or attending social gatherings and functions on school grounds or in auditoriums. Because children spent most of their childhoods being raised and educated at these residential schools, many refer to the schools as their childhood homes. In boarding school, which doubled as their home, children from the 1960s onward made memories together and initiated forms of relatedness with one another that lasted into their adult lives.

From the beginning, school administration promoted an open policy toward family. School curriculum, as well as everyday discourses, school staff and administrators engaged in and emphasized a shared national history of Tibet to inform students of their identity as Tibetans. The curriculum also forged solidarity and belonging by emphasizing Tibet's civilizational and Buddhist history—including the Dharma Kings of Tibet and the founding of the Tibetan empire, the patronage of Tibetan kings in the development of Buddhism in Tibet, and the emergence of a standardized Tibetan writing script for the translation and propagation of Buddhism—as well as the more recent history of China's invasion and occupation. This was a shared history of Tibet's distant pasts as well as recent presents that became the basis for imagining hopeful anticolonial sovereign futures.

These teachings helped form political subjectivities and a shared sense of national identity among students. Stressing a common history as well as a shared struggle for freedom, kinship was reconfigured along national lines: Tibetans in exile, across the diaspora, and in Tibet were more than what Benedict Anderson (2006) would call an "imagined community." Instead, they became a family. Such pedagogies of belonging emphasized national belonging and shared loss rather than blood relations. This worldview contributed to how students understood themselves, those around them, and their connection to Tibet and emphasized what they had in common rather than what made them different.

Elsewhere, Marshall Sahlins has called such mutual forms of recognition "mutuality of being" (2011a). Mutuality of being involved "the transpersonal practices of coexistence from sharing to mourning" (14) and encouraged the idea that "kinsmen are persons who belong to one another, who are members of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent" (11). Mutuality of being contributed to enduring solidarity. For my father, school administrative promotion of mutuality of being as the pedagogical basis for shaping students' sense of self in relation to others seemed to have paid off: "We saw each other as equal," recalled my father, "we were all refugees." This new sense of mutuality was political and relied on the commonality of their national and personal loss. Schoolteachers, staff, and administrators engaged in this sense of mutuality of being to motivate children to become capable adults so that they might contribute to the collective good of the larger Tibetan community and their political cause for freedom in Tibet.

In addition to the promotion of such school-mandated mutuality that taught children how to relate to one another and to the Tibetan state, former students across generations told me about the many ways children engaged in creative social kinning practices constructed by students themselves. During my father's childhood at his residential school in the 1960s, he recalled a kinning practice that became popular among his peers. It was considered entirely normal for children who spent so much time together in the same spaces to have crushes on one another. Friend, sibling, and/or romantic crushes were common at Tibetan schools.

To initiate social relations of chosen kinship, children wrote letters seeking permission from the person from whom they desired such relations. These letter-writers were usually not biologically related to the letter-receiver. If the person wrote back in confirmation, social relations of kinship had been established, and from then on, they would begin to refer to and treat one another as real brothers or sisters. While such relations were commonly formed between people who had established friendships, the practice was also popular among people who did not necessarily know one another but knew of each other.

It was considered normal for a young girl to send letters to an older female student, asking permission to officially acknowledge her as her older sister. If the older female replied yes, the two would carry on a relation of sisterhood. In other instances, girls engaged in the popular Indian practices of *raksha bandhan* with boys to initiate sibling/friendship relations. Popularized by Bollywood movies to celebrate biological and nonbiological kin-making, the practice comes from the Hindu tradition and is practiced once a year in India. During *raksha bandhan*, sisters tie a talisman or amulet called the Rakhi around the wrists of their brothers. The Rakhi symbolically protects the brother. The practice invests the brothers with a shared sense of responsibility toward their sisters. Whether such relations lasted into adulthood depends largely on the individuals; however, they did succeed for many in forming lasting relations of friendships and even siblingships.

Such kinning exercises, recalls a friend, were still practiced during his childhood at school in the 1990s. Although the practice had declined in frequency, the continuation of the practice from its 1960s beginnings indicates its social utility in producing kin relations for children who continued to desire such connections. These kinning exercises demonstrate how children engaged in choosing their own kin. Like Kath Westen's gay interlocutors, the phenomenon of Tibetan students engaging in practices of chosen kin at residential schools in exile also coincides within the context of broader social and personal upheavals (1995, 93). However, unlike Westen's gay subjects, whose biological families had cast them out due to their sexual orientation, the political circumstances of Tibet's invasion and exodus to exile forced many to become orphaned. For Tibetans, such circumstances became the basis for how students engaged in practices of chosen families "as more enduring than blood or romantic relations" (1995, 95).

For many former students, these relations endured well beyond school. While some maintained these relations of siblinghood in their adult lives, others transformed friendships initiated at schools into affinal ties by marrying one another. These people gave birth to a new generation of Tibetans in exile, all the while becoming the next generation of professionals (teachers, nurses, doctors, civil servants, seamstresses, cooks, etc.) who would populate the Tibetan community and sustain the next phase of exile. This generation would become essential in guiding developments in exile that coincided with a second period of exodus of Tibetans escaping from Tibet.

The Violence of Cultural Revolution: The Second Exodus, Semi-Orphans from Tibet

The death of Mao in 1976 signaled the end of the Cultural Revolution in China. Deng Xiaoping, Mao's successor, began a period of liberalization during which travel restrictions between Tibet and India were briefly lifted, allowing many to reunite with family in exile and see the Dalai Lama. They brought with them stories of the widespread death and destruction that had taken place in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution. Tibetan exiles in India also returned to Tibet, but their stories more often told of hope and renewal. They brought news of the

Dalai Lama's government, of monasteries that had been demolished in Tibet being reconstructed in India, and of the success of Tibetan schools. Such stories made life in exile seem exciting and hopeful.

Enticed by the prospect of renewal, many parents—like Kalden's mother—made the difficult decision to send their children to India. When Kalden arrived at TCV school in Dharamsala, the nursery the Dalai Lama had begun had become the main branch of TCV, with additional branches in other Tibetan refugee settlements, and was officially called Upper TCV (UTCV). By this time, the Dalai Lama's younger sister, Jetsun Pema, was in charge after the death of their older sister, Tsering Dolma Takla, in 1964.

From the 1980s onward, a steady stream of children—numbering between three and five thousand annually—arrived from Tibet to India in pursuit of education. Initially, the children who arrived in the 1980s were mostly teen- and college-aged boys. Later, children as young as four or six began arriving in Dharamsala. Their parents' backgrounds ranged from well-off government employees of the Chinese government in urban Tibetan areas to poor families in rural towns or children of nomads from rural parts of Tibet. While many initially came from historic Tibetan cities such as Lhasa, children from peripheral areas on the Tsang borders of Nepal and India began arriving as well. Reasons why parents sent their children vary. Chinese government schools in places such as Lhasa in the early 1980s were available. However, Tibetan parents did not enjoy the overt propagandist nature of these schools and the relegation of Tibetan culture and religion as backward. For children in rural areas, schools either did not exist or were located too far from home. Among the people I interviewed who arrived from Tibet during this period, almost all told me that their parents had sent them primarily because of the Dalai Lama and the type of education that was offered at the schools in exile. Tibetan schools in exile teach a curriculum that includes both modern and Tibetan subjects. The prospect of their children being in close geographic proximity to the Dalai Lama, studying at a school with a curriculum that included Tibetan while the child is cared for full time by the residential school free of charge, made education in exile attractive.

While Tibetan children born to refugee Tibetan parents in exile paid school fees that varied based on family income, children from Tibet went to school free of charge. Students from this era recall a large influx of children from Tibet. "At that time, children from Tibet made up the majority of students at various TCV schools," remembers one friend who had been a student at the time. The spike in the number of children arriving from Tibet strained the resources of existing schools. Students at TCV from that time recall not having enough beds, which had to be shared between two to three children.

Around the same time, the Dalai Lama, who had begun traveling worldwide to globalize the issue of Tibet to generate favorable diplomatic outcomes, had become internationally recognized. His international fame brought much interest in Tibet, and aid soon followed. Much of the aid was allocated to meet the challenges of the growing number of children arriving to India from Tibet. In addition to improving welfare programs and facilities for children at existing schools, new schools were built. Adult schools were also established for those from Tibet who had never received primary education. More vocational and skills training schools soon followed.

Children from Tibet were called *semi-orphans*, an official term used by the school. The terminology emphasizes their status as children who grew up in the exile school system without their parents, although they were not technically orphans. The concept of "semi-orphans" is a product of Chinese colonization of Tibet. Kalden, too, was categorized as a semi-orphan.

The number of children arriving from Tibet began to drop slowly after Kalden's generation. Though children continue to come from Tibet, numbers declined further after the 2008 national uprisings in Tibet. This drop coincides with China's "Go West" policy, launched in 2000 as an economic development plan aimed at quickening modernization efforts in Tibet to bolster China's growing national economy. This new policy brought massive infrastructural developments in roads, mines, railways, and more recently, hydropower dams in Tibet. It also brought a strong security presence of the state overall and on the Tibetan border. The heightened danger caused the number of Tibetans crossing into Nepal to drop. The drop is a direct consequence of China's economic and security developments in Tibet.

Attachments in the Era of Intensifying Chinese Colonialism

Meanwhile, in Dharamsala, semi-orphans who arrived as children from Tibet in the 1990s are now adults. They no longer live under the care of the educational facilities that took them in. Most have not returned to Tibet. Those who grew up in Dharamsala under occasional care from uncles, aunts, or other relatives, have fared much better than those who grew up without any biological family. While some have been adopted by families of close friends, others fell through the cracks. In conversations with semi-orphaned friends, they often credit school as the place where they enjoyed their happiest moments, reflecting on such times as "carefree" compared to the lives they currently lead. "At least I didn't have to worry about paying rent or feeding myself in boarding school," lamented Sonam, during one of our evening conversations. I would continue hearing different versions of this comment stated as a joke and other times as serious confessions in conversations between friends who were of semi-orphan backgrounds.

During my stays in Dharamsala over the last decade, I began to learn that most of the people struggling with substance abuse in town were of semi-orphaned backgrounds. China's colonial occupation had caused a legacy of interrupted relationships that sometimes manifested as addiction and trauma. We cannot claim that these people abuse substances because they are semi-orphans. Tibetans born and raised in Dharamsala with families, some from economically well-off backgrounds, *also* struggled with substances. However, in comparison to the men with families, semi-orphaned men tend to struggle longer with their addictions and lack the familial support that might help them recover. Additionally, in Delhi, I often encountered Tibetan women my age or younger who were known in the Tibetan refugee camp as sex workers. Again, this is not to say all Tibetan sex workers are semi-orphans. However, the majority of the sex workers I came in contact with and learned about were semi-orphans, and ended up in such situations due to the lack of familial and financial support.

Some semi-orphaned children grew up to be well-adjusted adults, but in my observation this depended on the level of support and care they received from others. For instance, Tendhar (a pseudonym) had also left Lhasa at a young age. However, unlike most semi-orphaned kids, he received a lot of care from close family friends in Dharamsala. He also received significant financial support from his parents in Tibet since they were economically well off. He emphasized that his parents' decision to send him to exile was political rather than socioeconomic. Thanks to his network of support, he finished high school, continued on to college, studied further and specialized in design. He runs his own business in Dharamsala and has lived a fairly comfortable life due to the financial support his family in Lhasa and in Dharamsala provided. Unlike other semi-orphans, whose difficulties in life revolved around the lack of financial support, Tendhar fared much better. However, one night over drinks, I overheard him tell our mutual friend, who is also a semi-orphan, that he has difficulty forming attachments. "It's not just with people," he said, "but with everything. I can't even commit myself to my projects, I lose interest fast."

Kalden describes growing up without familial support in exile as difficult, so when his family told him to come back home, he obliged. He was twenty-one at the time of his return, but several months after the 2008 uprising in Lhasa, Kalden left Lhasa and his family for the second time to return to Dharamsala. I asked if he left because of the Chinese military restrictions that befell Lhasa and larger Tibet after the uprisings. "To be honest," said Kalden, with a look tinged with guilt, "I left because I didn't know how to deal. . . . Having a family, having to tell them where I was at all times, they constantly worried over me, I wasn't used to that." He said things got worse after the 2008 national uprising. Kalden and others who had returned to Lhasa after spending most of their childhood in India or Nepal had to be especially careful because they were being closely watched by Lhasa's security apparatus. As returnees from exile, they were considered prime suspects in instigating the national protests against the colonial state.

Although Kalden was not involved and had not participated in any of the protests, he said his mother worried constantly because of his returnee status and how his status exposed him to higher levels of surveillance. She checked on him obsessively. He admitted he was not used to being worried about like that and found his mother's constant worry uncomfortable. Growing up without any adult family members in exile meant no one had ever really worried after Kalden, and, ironically, he never had to worry about anyone worrying over him—a type of freedom (see Goldfarb, chapter 12). Kalden was very much aware and appreciative of how much his family cared for him, but this care was something he was also not "used to" and he found the attention uncomfortable. Not knowing how to respond to such familial care made him feel both guilt and discomfort.

It seems Kalden, like Tendhar, had difficulties in forming attachments. China's ongoing colonial occupation of Tibet had destabilized attachments to people, places, and commitments, creating a process of slow violence. Yet, Kalden had chosen to return to Dharamsala, where he had spent his formative years. His Holiness lived there, so did friends from school to whom he had gotten accustomed and attached. Like Kalden, Tendhar had also chosen to move back to Dharamsala after his studies and make it his home.

In Dharamsala, both Tendhar and Kalden had created a community with a group of guys they have known since childhood in Dharamsala. I hung out with this group between 2014 and 2015 in Dharamsala. With the exception of a handful of members who were exile-born, they all had in common the history of being semi-orphans who arrived from Tibet to attend the exile schools in India during the 1990s. These people had grown up without biological family at TCV together and tried to watch out for one another. Most of them had been friends since childhood, while other friendships were more recent. Many had flunked out of either high school or college. Most of them had trouble holding down a regular job. A few of them were struggling with substance abuse, while others had broken the habit some years earlier. One of them opened a store in Dharamsala that did well with tourists. The store also operated as a space for their gatherings.

At the store, they would recall shared memories of childhood together at TCV. In their nostalgia, TCV operated as a home in which they "shared understandings, bodily practices, and memories" (Carsten 2004, 37). This nostalgia was not that different from the 1960s cohort, who also enjoyed recalling childhood memories with one another at school. Such practices in recollecting the past together in many ways reinforced and affirmed their relationship with one another in the present. Their relationships operate much in the way Nozawa describes *phaticity* (2015). "It signals a feeling of relatedness-as-such," writes Nozawa, "while the nature, cause, history, or future of this relationality is apprehended in surprise or in ignorance" (Nozawa 2015, 392). The guys that gathered at the store never planned their gatherings. They just showed up, socialized with one another, and dispersed. Such gatherings were also not meant to be productive of any specific long-term goal or future. Instead they just touched base with one another and fantasized about their past at school together—to recall a happier past and lament a less-happy present. Yet these fleeting and spontaneous gatherings were "productive of a fantasy of sociality" (Nozawa 2015, 377), keeping most of the group coming back to each other at different times over the course of their adulthood.

While reflecting on these relations, semi-orphans would often emphasize how they realize now that these friends were like family. They had one family in Tibet and this expanded network of kin in exile. By mobilizing idioms of kinship in this way, they reinforced the enduring quality and closeness of these relationships (Carsten 2019b). Yet this was not about replacing family with friends but instead represented a way of adapting to the realities of being separated from kin in the face of continuing colonialism. China's colonialism in Tibet reshaped the sorts of attachments that were both possible and desirable. Instead, Tibetan schools created powerful horizontal ties between cohort members that Kalden depended on.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines how China's colonial invasion of Tibet caused the literal deaths of kin for Tibetans who experienced and survived the invasion. It caused the massive exodus of Tibetans to Nepal and India, where they became refugees. In the camps, Tibetans continued to experience the loss of kin, leaving many orphaned. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama and his government in exile established schools in India to safeguard the lives of his subjects from further erosion. Tibetan parents responded to the exacerbated conditions of violence and precarity caused by the Chinese invasion by sending their children to the Dalai Lama's school. Such responses, as I have shown, are anticolonial. The Tibetan leadership and parents exercised agency in refusing China's colonial occupation of Tibet through their insistence on survival but also met the challenge of colonial violence with their own interventions. In addition to keeping children alive, Tibetan schools in India also became pedagogical grounds for created communities of national kin.

Cases such as my father's, Kalden's, or Tendhar's show the ways in which exile is a concept that needs to be understood not only in terms of space and displacement but also time and relationships. Colonial violence shapes relations and decisions, including escaping to exile not once but twice. Although without biological family, Dharamsala was home to Kalden even with all its vulnerabilities. It offered him attachments and freedoms to which he had grown accustomed. But I want to be clear: this is not about "friendship as kinship" saving the day but about the violence of China's occupation and how it produces the liminal lives of semi-orphans. I have shown that they are agentive yet vulnerable refugees living under conditions of colonial violence but are able to create moments of attachments even in the midst of hardship in communities of created kin encouraged and inspired by Tibetan schools.

When Tibetan refugee schools in India were being constructed, one of the ways in which administrators decided to approach the challenge of care was to implement networks of kinship based on national and spiritual belonging. Such networks relied on the notion of the nation as family and drew from existing cultural approaches to kinship that were not reliant on blood. For former students, such kin-making practices endured beyond school and into their adult lives. For instance, when Kalden returned to Dharamsala from Lhasa, he moved in with a group of friends he had known since childhood. They were friends he grew up with at UTCV. This group of friends supported and helped one another just in ways that were normative of family.

When I think of Kalden, many questions come to mind. What does it mean to grow up without your biological family? How does one explain the unfamiliarity of care from your own biological mother? What does friendship mean to close-knit circles of semi-orphans? How might we theorize Kalden's decision to return to a vulnerable yet free exile for a second time? These are questions I do not have clear answers for yet. However, colonial violence remains an important reason that Tibetans choose exile. Choosing exile offered people such as my father, Kalden, Tendhar, and Tibetan parents new sets of freedoms and attachments to people and places. Exile has become a space in which ruptured relations to Indigenous homeland and biological family are reconfigured through creative horizontal kin-making efforts between classmates in schools that the Dalai Lama built to counteract the violence of Chinese colonialism. In so doing, these stories force us to reconsider what "attachments" mean for our theorization of kinship in colonial times.