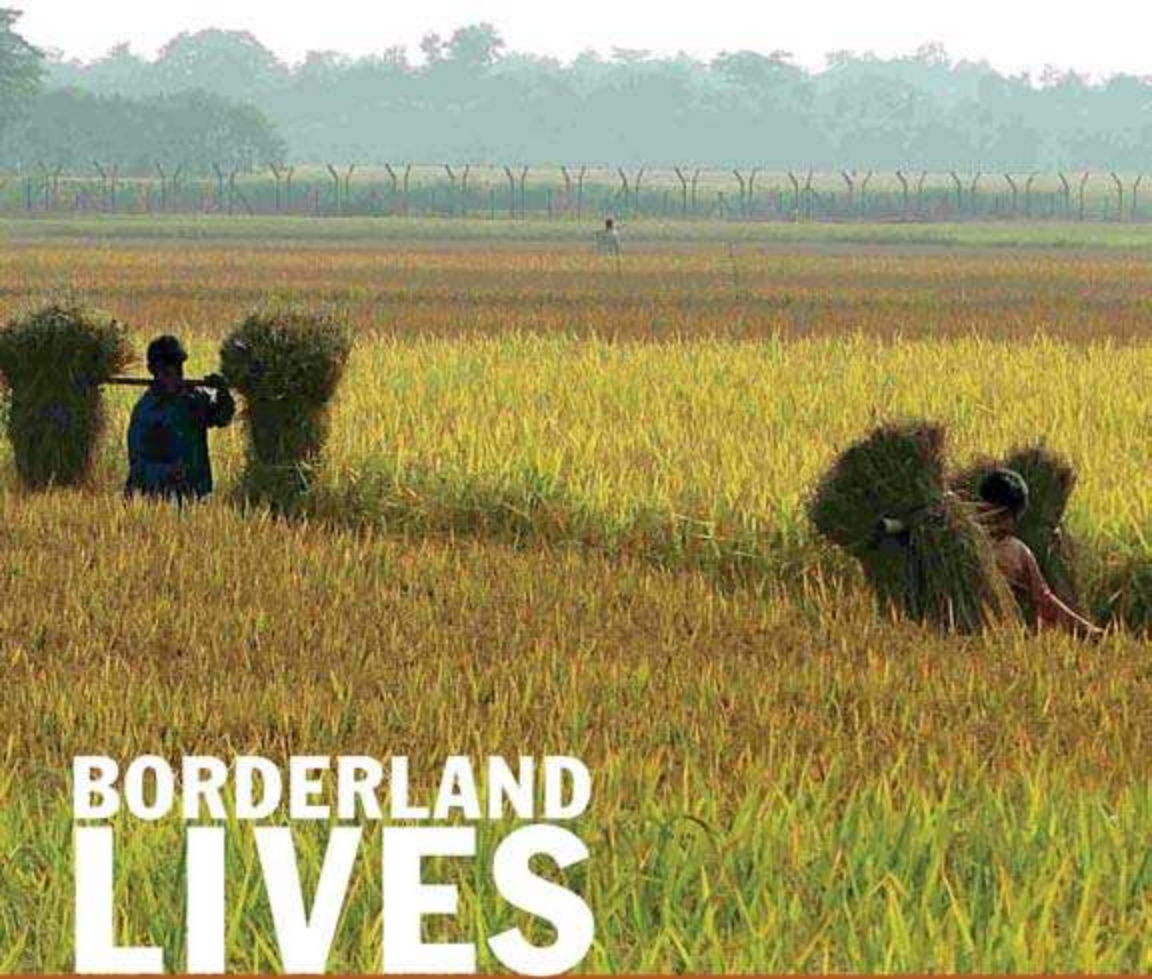

BORDERLAND LIVES

IN NORTHERN SOUTH ASIA

DAVID N. GELLNER, EDITOR

With an afterword by Willem van Schendel

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Borders without Borderlands

On the Social Reproduction of State Demarcation in Rajasthan

*** Attention ***
Before entering the lift, check whether lift is present or not
— Sign in a multistory building in New Delhi

The Idea of the Borderland

Since the latter half of the nineteenth century 'borderlands' have been a popular subject in writings ranging from geographical, ethnological, and travel to spiritualist, horror, and occult.[1] Adopted from its original geographical usage as a descriptor of frontiers of ecosystems or countries, the term has persisted across disciplines, genres, and time. Over the past century and a half no-man's-lands on moors and marshlands, frontiers of empires and civilizations, psychic realms between spirit and matter, and occult spheres dividing this world from the next have each been referred to as 'borderlands.' In all these genres they have been conceived as territorially and socially distinct regions surprisingly like the ecosystems, psychic states, or nation-states at the fringes of which they are found. Both Maud's (1904) Abyssinian borderlands and the ghostly borderlands of Hodgson's (1908) *The House on the Borderland* are spatially and socially separate lands, whether populated by barbarians or by ghouls. In the course of the twentieth century, the concept of the borderland obtained a new lease on life in the historiography of frontiers, particularly in the study of the American Anglo-Spanish, and more recently the

U.S.-Mexico, border regions.[2] Since the 1950s it gained currency in work on other parts of the world, passing over the course of the past decade into South Asian studies.[3] In this vast and rapidly proliferating literature the idea of the borderland has retained the shape it assumed in older genres of writing: the borderland of current historiography is a spatial unit, a sociospatially discrete zone.[4]

Baud and Van Schendel's (1997) account of borderland theory typifies this view.[5] The authors tell us that borderlands are *territorial units* "determined first and foremost by the spatial dimension. Borderlands are geographically defined areas that can be drawn on a map like any other region" (221–22). They further tell us that these areas are home to "borderland societies" with a distinctive sociocultural, linguistic, economic, and political character (227). In fact Baud and Van Schendel argue that the "borderland people" are so different from everyone else that they feel "ethnically and emotionally part of another, nonstate entity" (227, 233). More specifically they claim that these zones are home to a special "triangle of power relations between state, regional elite, and local people"; distinctive political alliances between local elites and the state; hubs of black economies; and "creole" or "synthetic" languages (219, 217, 234).[6] The idea of a distinct entity is further consolidated with the anthropomorphic image: the authors describe the borderland as a geopolitical organism with a distinctive character (that can be "quiet," "unruly," or "rebellious") and a life history that moves through "life-cycles" (from "embryonic" to "infant," "adolescent," "adult," and "declining"; 227–79, 223–24; see also Martínez 1994: 27–28). Though Baud and Van Schendel (1997: 225) themselves recognize this is "not completely satisfactory because of evolutionary and deterministic implications," the metaphor reflects their conception of borderlands as discrete entities with lives of their own.

On closer inspection, however, borderlands have proven resistant to being "drawn on a map like any other region" (Baud and Van Schendel 1997: 221), forcing Baud and Van Schendel to resort to subdividing them into the "border heartland," the "intermediate borderland," and the "outer borderland" on the basis of their spatial proximity to national borders and the extent to which these regions "feel the influence of the border" (222). The edges of these subzones and the relations between them have proven just as difficult to establish, prompting the authors to use a simile in place of a definition: "There is the *outer borderland*, which . . . is affected by the existence of the border in the same way that land protected by an embankment is affected by the sea.

In daily life the border hardly plays a role at all, but there is always a hint of suspense, a slight tinge of uncertainty. Just as a tidal wave may sweep far into the interior, so a political storm may suddenly engulf this zone and involve it directly in border dynamics" (222, italics in original).

In their description the parameters of borderlands blur even further with the admission that "borderlands may at times, though briefly, stretch to embrace entire countries" (222). Of course, when stretched to encompass an entire country, the category of borderland loses all of its heuristic force. And unless we assume linguistic and cultural homogeneity within states, the creole or synthetic language and culture (234) staked as a distinctive marker of "borderland societies" will appear no different from life most anywhere else. Neither are the "socio-political networks" characteristic of borderlands. Baud and Van Schendel's observation that historically in South Asia "borderland elites [such as *zamindars*] were well integrated into networks of state power" so as to "become important allies of the state in its efforts to control borderland society" (217) is equally true of contexts throughout the territories of South Asian states.[7] Collusion between state officials and local elites, flagged by Baud and Van Schendel as a special feature of borderlands, is another general quality of the political landscape in South Asia (e.g., Brass 1984, 1997). "Gangster rule" (Van Schendel 1993, 2002b) is likewise a trademark of politics *throughout* the territories of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, not just on their peripheries (e.g., Hansen 2001; Berenschot 2008; Michelutti 2008; Ruud and Price 2010). Policy and administrative differences within nation-states often affect economic processes no less than differences between them, so that an excise tax differential between two districts may generate "borderland economies" within nation-states as much as on their margins. Neither is smuggling, described as a quintessential borderland enterprise, confined to trade across national limits: smuggling hubs are often located in the heartlands of states rather than on their peripheries. While state rhetoric, as Baud and Van Schendel (1997: 231) themselves point out, "gives the entire border economy an air of stealth and subterfuge," smugglers know all too well that national border crossing is only one part of business whose impulse lies beyond border regions (de Wilde 2009).

The difficulties faced by borderland theorists in defining the object of their analysis are not merely a matter of empirical imprecision, but are an important clue to the nature of the problem at hand. In their preoccupation with defining the limits of borderlands as substantive entities—as territorially,

socially, linguistically, and politically discrete zones—borderland theorists tend to forget about borders, which in their case really are the root analytical objects. Borders are meant to enclose and divide. And sometimes they do just that, producing a great variety of border scenarios, not all of which produce frontier-like situations or "borderlands." While some borders may function as frontiers populated by distinct communities of border-crossers (Hausner and Sharma, chapter 4, this volume), others are tightly sealed boundaries that create distinct populations on either side. (The Berlin Wall did not generate a borderland, however menacingly it may have affirmed its idea.) Borders are also conceptual objects that have different meanings in different circumstances; they can be perceived as fringes, frontiers, or national heartlands. While people on the U.S.-Mexico border may feel that they are on the outskirts of both states and part of a frontier, nonstate society, Kargilians living next to the symbolically significant India-Pakistan border think of themselves as residents of the Indian heartland (Gupta, chapter 2, this volume). The sense of border life may also permeate entire states; as Turner ([1893] 1920), the historian who gave us the concept of a frontier society, argued some time ago, life throughout the territory of the United States has been animated by the frontier spirit from the country's beginnings. The effect of national borders on local life often differs neither in kind nor necessarily in degree from the effect of other types of state demarcations on societies throughout the territories of modern states.

In this paper I argue against the claim that national borders everywhere are surrounded by borderlands imagined to be substantive, freestanding places. Borders are entities of a fundamentally different sort. They are not like the spaces they encircle and divide, and the moment they become spaces they cease to be borders. Borders enclose, separate, and bring spaces into relation. They are relational rather than substantive objects, which generate different sorts of relations within and between communities around them. To say that borders are relational rather than substantive entities is not to present them as any less 'real' or decisive. Indeed the border is the primary tool of the modern state and of modernity at large (Abrams 1988; Mitchell 1991; Scott 1998). And as we shall see in the ethnography that follows, the people in my study live and breathe borders. My ethnography further undermines the blanket application of the concept of borderland to regions around national borders by showing that various features posited by borderland theorists as distinctive markers of borderlands are just as present in the territorial heartland of the

Indian state. It shows that the effect of borders is not confined to the fringes of national states but that it spans their territories. In my case borders do not provoke their crossing but function as boundaries that in fact enclose and divide communities. They shape local lives no less thoroughly than borders between Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico or between Bangladesh and India, but they do so in quite different ways from those ascribed to many borderland scenarios.

The Setting

My ethnography focuses on an Indian community, the Kanjar, a caste that practices thieving (cattle rustling, household burglary, roadside burglary, opium theft) as a hereditary, caste-based occupation. The success of Kanjars' burgling business relies substantially on patronage by the police, with whom Kanjars have intimate and very regular dealings. Through this relationship, official demarcations—territorial and otherwise—have become not only a prominent feature of Kanjars' everyday lives but indeed a central structuring force within the community.[8] More specifically my study demonstrates how official policing parameters configure matters ranging from marriage alliances to professional relations, considerations of rank, and the nature of authority in the community.[9] Focusing on two key parameters of policing—the territorial layout of police jurisdictions and the divisions of rank among the staff of police stations—I show how the structural demarcation of the state, including but not confined to spatial boundaries, is projected onto and reproduced within the Kanjar community. With this order of administrative divisions at the heart of Kanjars' everyday lives and social organization, we can think of the community as a sort of "borderland society," but one that has little to do with the physical periphery of the Indian state: they live in rural Rajasthan, more than six hundred kilometers from the nearest national border. On a broader analytical level, my study suggests that the administrative structuring of the state and local social life occurs simultaneously, making the conceptual separation of "state" and "society" not only analytically problematic but also empirically inaccurate.

There are approximately 200,000 Kanjars living in South Asia today. Most of them can be found in the northern Indian State of Uttar Pradesh, and nearly forty thousand live in Rajasthan, where I conducted most of my field research (Census Commissioner of India 2011). Kanjars constitute one of several South Asian communities of professional thieves (Piliavsky 2011a). Professional

raiding and thievery has long been and continues to be a standard political and governmental practice on the subcontinent, and communities of professional thieves continue to be employed as agents of protection, intimidation, resource extraction, intelligence provision, and dispute negotiation.[10] Under British colonial law such groups were persecuted, along with nomadic and otherwise "inconvenient" communities under the rubric of Criminal Tribe. Those who were designated as Criminal Tribesmen were subjected to a regime of special surveillance, "reclamation," and penal measures.[11] By 1952, when the Indian Criminal Tribes Act was repealed, ties between such communities and patrons among aristocrats and village communities were largely severed, and the former Criminal Tribesmen became increasingly dependent on patronage by police, with whom they had already become intimately acquainted in the days of the Raj. Today, while Kanjar thieves continue to find employment with local landholders, their most significant attachments are to the police, who offer them protection (or minimize predation) in exchange for intelligence, provision of muscle force, and a share of their spoils.

I conducted most of my field research in southeastern Rajasthan in a Kanjar settlement, which I will call Lakshmipura, in 2005 and again in 2007–8 (see map 1.1). For much of this time I lived in the home of a gang leader and a village chief on the rise. My discussion focuses on Lakshmipura and on the circle of its in-caste relations, which its residents refer to as their 'brotherhood' (*biradari*).[12] All settlements in the Lakshmipura brotherhood are located in Rajasthan, and most are in the southeastern district of Chittaurgarh. Their distribution, which is now all but confined to a section of a single administrative district, is a fraction of the former territorial span of the community, whose relations once stretched from Rajasthan to Punjab, Gujarat, and Pakistan. Reflecting on the recent history of Lakshmipura and its brotherhood, I describe the ways in which some basic features of the community—the extent of matrimonial and professional ties as well as the nature of communal authority—have been shaped along the lines that structure the work of the police in particular and the order of the state at large.

Loss of Guts

The Kanjars of Lakshmipura often lament the loss of *jigar* in their community. *Jigar* literally means "liver" but refers metonymically to "guts," a metaphor akin to our own. According to a local adage, "a man is only as big as his circle

of relations,"[13] and a person who lacks bonds with brothers, patrons, and friends is not just isolated but effectively socially absent. The concept of jigar expresses this idea of a person who is not simply a part of but is essentially constituted by a circle of relations, the reduction of which amounts to a person's social hollowing or "gutting": the loss of jigar.[14] A man with no relations is no more than a dot on a social map.

Among Kanjars the lament of "lost guts" refers to some important recent changes in the structure of the community. Prior to independence the Kanjars in Lakshmipura (much as in other places) practiced a variety of itinerant trades, including genealogy, prostitution, and thieving. They often traveled across great distances and engaged a wide and varied circle of relations with patrons, relatives, colleagues, and friends. Although now most Kanjars in Rajasthan live sedentary lives, members of one community in the south of the province have remained itinerant genealogists and, as such, provide a present-day example of a former way of life among Kanjars. The extent of this community's travels and connections is comparable to that once engaged in by the Lakshmipura brotherhood, to whose currently narrow circle of relations it can be contrasted in its breadth. Every year these Kanjar bards travel as far as Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Bombay to record and perform genealogies for their patrons.[15] Each year they traverse the distance of more than two thousand kilometers and visit up to three hundred villages, settlements, and city neighborhoods on their way, usually staying in one place for no more than a night (see map 1.2).[16] En route they forge and maintain relations of patronage, friendship, and marriage, all of which are constitutive of their fraternity or "society" (*samaj*), as they call it. Although formally settled, Kanjar bards still exchange wives with communities in Bombay and Pune, retain patrons near Delhi, and visit cousins in Gujarat. They speak a number of languages and regional dialects and form marriage alliances with at least fifteen different Kanjar patriclans, whose members are involved in businesses ranging from alcohol distillation to the sale of watches and toys. The extent of their brotherhood is measured not simply in terms of the distance traveled but in the number and variety of persons to whom they relate. Patrons, acquaintances, and merchants with whom they trade on the way and families they marry along the route form a linguistically, economically, and occupationally heterogeneous—and socially rich—circle. As one Kanjar bard put it, the community's "wealth" (*daulat*), material as well as social, "is in [its] relations." "Our community travels far and has connections with all sorts of people and that is why it has respect (*izzat*)."

MAP 1.1. Location of field research sites in Rajasthan. (Lakshmipura is marked with a black square.) Drawn by the Cartographic Unit of the Dept of Geography, University of Cambridge. Reproduced with permission.

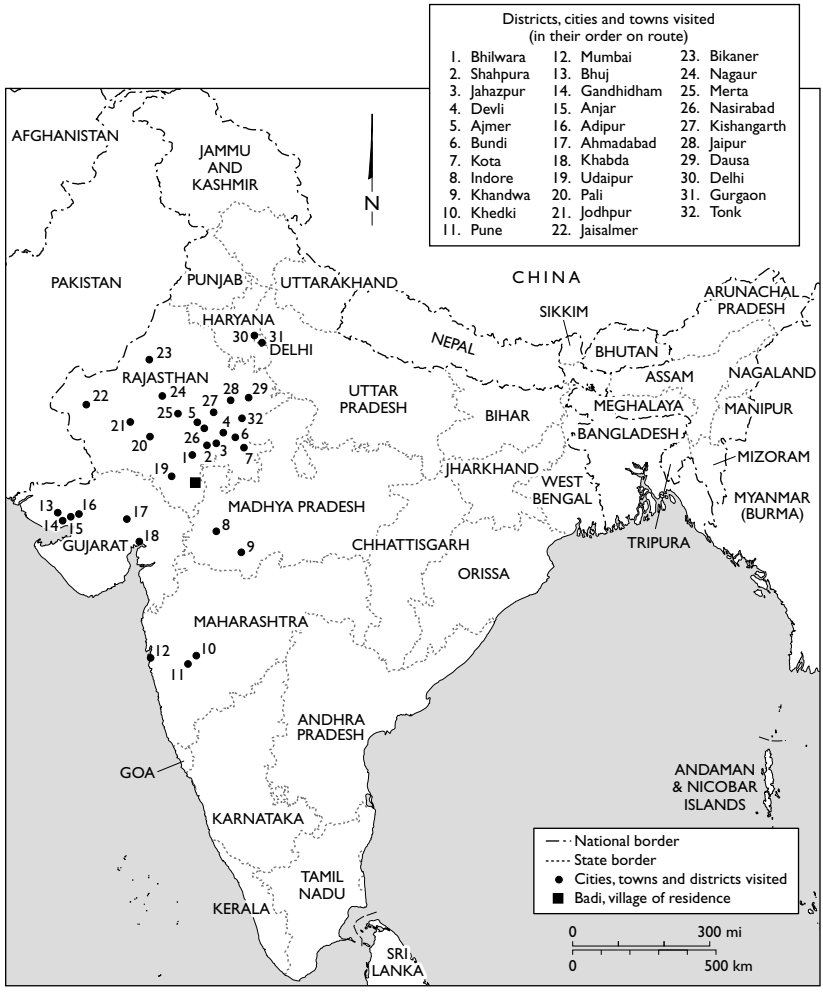
The reach of the Kanjar bard brotherhood stands in striking contrast to that of the Kanjars of Lakshmipura. Over the past four generations, the Lakshmipura biradari dwindled from a scale comparable to the Kanjar bards' to a community comprising a handful of neighboring villages within a forty-kilometer radius. The business of thieving and protection, in which most residents of Lakshmipura are nowadays engaged, has likewise become limited to a few neighboring villages and the jurisdictions of two police stations (*thanas*),

on whose protection the success of the thieving business relies. In contrast to the Kanjar bards' biradari, relations within the sedentary Lakshmipura brotherhood are now restricted to a handful of villages and a few local patrons, most of whom are officers in the local police.

Such truncation of the fraternity is tied, via relations with the police, to the territorial demarcation of colonial India and its heir-republic.[17] The Kanjars of Lakshmipura were first settled in the area by the chief (*rawat*) of local nobility, who employed them in the early 1920s as a marauding force to aid in the suppression of a peasant uprising.[18] By 1930 the chief had lost the control of his fiefdom (*thikana*), and his Kanjar clients became subject to Criminal Tribe administration, which then assumed control over the newly declared Criminal Tribes in the area. Lakshmipura was converted into a settlement for Criminal Tribes and its residents were subjected to special surveillance and penal measures: regular roll call and irregular raids, a system of absentee passes, and preemptive or warrant-free incarceration. Between 1930 and 1956, when the Criminal Tribes legislation was at work in the area, the inspector in charge of the settlement left some of the community members alone in exchange for intelligence and a share of their spoils. A few Kanjar gangs were thus let loose onto the territory within the jurisdiction of the police station. After independence, police patronage carried on along similar lines, with thieves enjoying protection in the territories of their police stations.

Thus over time, the spatial limits of the biradari shrunk, eventually becoming effectively coextensive with the territorial limits of local police jurisdictions. Although the Lakshmipura Kanjars have occasional dealings with Kanjars in neighboring police jurisdictions, they now effectively imagine their community as territorially confined to the land under the jurisdiction of the local station. The continuous withering of ties with Kanjar communities elsewhere, which I discuss below, suggests that the identification of the spatial limits of the biradari with the police territory is not merely imagined. The official territorial markers now organize the Kanjar community no less than they organize the police.

Relations with the police have led not only to the establishment of a rigidly territorial system of thieving beats (with much hostility arising from the jealous guarding of their boundaries) but also to a significant reformatting of their network of marriage relations. The increasing concentration of the biradari within the jurisdiction of a single police station is reproduced in the decline of marriage ties with Kanjars in other police territories. More than half of the marriages that now take place in the biradari are confined to the



MAP 1.2. Locations visited annually by the Kanjar bards of Chittaurgarh district. Drawn by the Cartographic Unit of the Dept of Geography, University of Cambridge. Reproduced with permission.

jurisdiction of a single station (see map 1.3). The recent shriveling of the territorial stretch of marriage alliances follows a clear trajectory. Four generations ago Lakshmipura exchanged four women in marriage with villages in the nearby district of Bhilwara, four marriages were formed three generations ago (this time in a more populous village), one marriage alliance was forged two generations ago, and none was secured during the most recent nuptial round. Thus alliances with villages outside of the Lakshmipura police territory have dwindled from 24 percent and 17 percent of total marriage exchanges four

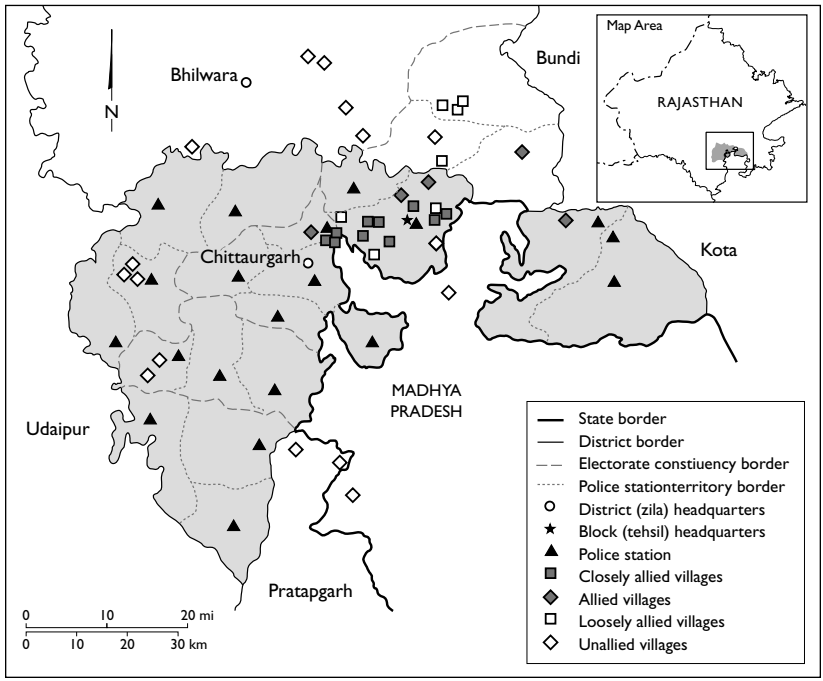
generations ago to 4 percent and none today. The same trajectory can be observed throughout the State, where in some cases marriages are now all but confined to a single village.

'Closely allied' villages, as shown in map 1.3, are connected by more than ten marriages (over the past four generations) and are marked by frequent contact and professional collaboration;[19] 'allied' villages are connected by five to ten marriages and regular contact; and 'loosely allied' villages are connected by fewer than five marriages and occasional exchange. 'Unallied' villages maintain no regular contacts with the biradari.

The effects of territorial truncation of the biradari on the community go beyond the limits of marriage possibilities; they impact deeply its social organization.[20] The structural organization of the Kanjar caste (*jat*) hinges on the opposition between two exogamous, complementary, and mutually defining moieties.[21] This is important for the everyday workings of the community. The system of marital exchange between the two moieties creates a structure of complementary difference with alliances between villages, supported by the convention of cross-cousin marriage.[22] The moiety opposition is foundational to relatedness in the community: it forms the basis for most significant types of relations. Women and bridewealth, information, resources, and professional contacts flow primarily across the moiety divide. The truncated brotherhood, which now effectively comprises only four patriclans, of which three belong to one moiety, lacks appropriate marital partners in the opposing moiety. This deficit threatens the maintenance of cross-moiety marriage exchange and moiety opposition more broadly, which Kanjars deem basic to communal integrity. While the Lakshmipura Kanjars are still managing to find marriage partners in the opposing moiety, some of the neighboring biradaris, some of which are confined to a single village, started marrying within their own moieties and even within patriclans, committing incest, about which the Lakshmipura Kanjars whisper in tones of moral horror.

Policing and Raiding the Same Beats

The current shape of the biradari reflects the recent development of the 'special relationship' between the residents of Lakshmipura and the police.[23] In 1991 the Lakshmipura "Village Crime Note Book" on file in the thana reported an abrupt drop in property-related crime in the village, a change that



MAP 1.3. Villages of the Lakshmipura *biradari* and other neighboring Kanjar villages. Drawn by the Cartographic Unit of the Dept of Geography, University of Cambridge. Reproduced with permission.

coincided with a reported upsurge in thieving in a neighboring Kanjar village. One constable, who has been posted in the station for almost three decades, explained this reported shift. Rather than reflecting an actual decline in the thieving activities of the Lakshmipura Kanjars, the record indicates a transformation in the nature of the relationship between policemen and the Lakshmipura Kanjars from hostile to cooperative. This change was prompted by a large-scale pogrom that ravaged Lakshmipura in the summer of 1990 and the scale of which attracted much media attention, not only to the incident itself but also to the 'Kanjar problem'—including police predation—in the area. As a result of the 'incident' the police station staff, who stood by watching Kanjars get murdered and their houses blasted with dynamite, became subject to monitoring 'from above.' 'Coercive measures'—the filing of false cases, unwarranted arrests, beatings, and other forms of intimidation—previously

exercised on the village residents (many of whom were therefore constantly on the run), had to be abandoned.[24]

These were replaced with milder measures, and Lakshmipura was 'adopted' (inf. *god lena*) by the police. 'Adoption' is a widespread Indian institution of patronizing criminals by the police; in Rajasthan it spread particularly rapidly after the passing of the Human Rights Act in the State in 1985. By 2008, of the sixteen Kanjar settlements in the local administrative block, twelve had been 'adopted.' Such an arrangement is typically initiated by senior house officers (SHOs), who establish connections with village leaders, usually heads of thieving gangs (or 'parties'), who become both informers (*mukhbar*) and mediators between the village and the police. In exchange for intelligence and a share of their loot, SHOs turn a blind eye to their informers' activities, avoid filing false cases against them, and 'write off' arrest warrants for a moderate fee.[25] By now the adoption process has been standardized to the point of bureaucratization. It is expected, for instance, that the SHOs will 'pass down' to their successors their informers, along with lists of reliable and unreliable informers, descriptions of their gangs and thieving beats, and other details noted in secret files of the police. It is expected that upon arrival in post the SHOs will pay a visit to each of their inherited informers and villages to confirm the continuity of the relationship. If faithfully nurtured, relationships between Kanjars and SHOs can outlast a given officer's tenure in post, with the result that the more sophisticated gang leaders can develop far-reaching and durable patronage bonds with officers beyond the limits of their block or even district.

As a result of police patronage, the more resourceful thieves become virtually immune to policing and prosecution in the *territory of a given station*, where their exploits are ignored, and indeed are often commissioned, by the police. The alignment of thieving beats with police jurisdictions spatially inverts the old convention of patronizing thieves, which assumed that the robbers employed by landlords and village communities would plunder *outside* of their employers' domains. Under police protection, robbers conversely run their business *within* the territory of their patrons' station. As a result, the neighbors of 'adopted' Kanjars are subjected to constant and frequent predation; after the adoption of Lakshmipura, for instance, attacks on the four immediately neighboring villages increased to a weekly average of four. The victims, naturally, retaliate by regularly beating, periodically murdering, and occasionally staging pogroms against their neighbors. Over the past twenty

years twenty-four Kanjars were killed in the administrative block alone, and ten were murdered in the 1990 Lakshmipura pogrom.

Police patronage has further consequences for the structure of rank in the community. One of the results has been a growing class stratification among Kanjars. Adopted villages, families, gangs, and individual informers have come to form a wealthier and more educated class that increasingly refuses to mingle, marry, or even drink and eat with their lowlier caste-mates, whom they deride as 'orphans' (*anath*) or 'masterless men'.[26] This is not to say that the new conditions of police patronage have upset a prior state of harmony in the community, which has always been fractious (Piliavsky 2011b: ch. 2). Kanjar clans regularly bifurcate, villages split up, sons routinely leave their father's gangs, and brothers often quarrel.[27] The fragmentation prompted by current police patronage, however, is quite different. Whereas previously sections of the community would move away, today they remain in the same village, where they are separated only by mutual silence or violent and at times fatal conflict.

Such changes are inseparable from the territorial parameters of local policing practice. Today, as in the 1860s, when modern policing was being consolidated in colonial India, the distribution of police authority, the apprehension and prosecution of offenders, and the recovery of property are territorially structured (see figure 1.1). And the boundaries of police station jurisdictions are so jealously guarded as to be virtually impermeable to officers from other stations.[28] If an officer observes a crime just beyond the limit of his own jurisdiction, he is neither held responsible for nor indeed permitted to pursue it. This rigidly territorial system operates equally among Kanjars; their beats coincide with the territories of the stations, so that one can say that gangsters and the police operate within a shared territorial grid. Just like the officers, Kanjars avoid operations in unprotected territories, which are guarded as much by the police as by local Kanjars. Gangs do cross over into each other's territories, but they do so at the risk of being prosecuted and of initiating a gang war. The police hold local Kanjars accountable for thefts committed within their jurisdiction and lay claim to a share of the proceeds. When local gangs are thus forced to pay for the actions of others, they retaliate by raiding their neighbor's beat, which can in turn set off a cycle of cross-beat raiding, a chaotic and dangerous state of affairs that many would rather avoid.

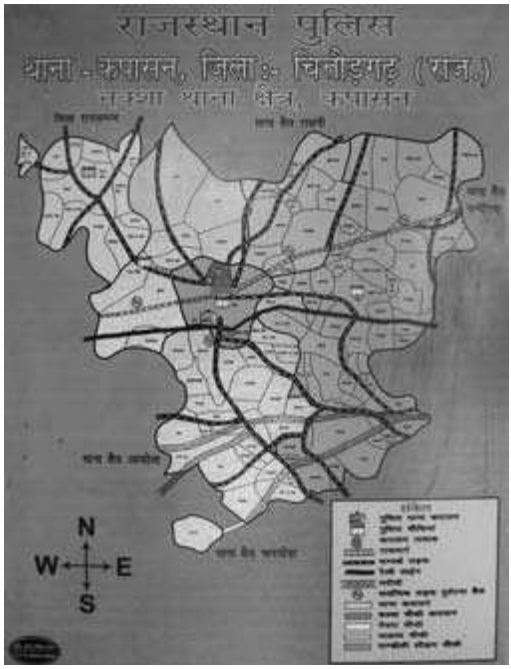


FIGURE 1.1. Police map in Rajasthan, 2008, showing the jurisdiction of a police station in southern Rajasthan and its territorial subdivisions (the boundary lines correspond to outpost jurisdictions and villages within them); such maps are usually displayed in police stations. Photo courtesy of A. Piliavsky.

Reproducing Divisions of Rank

Territorial divisions are not the only boundaries that shape the life of the community. The hierarchy of police ranks has likewise become a shaping force in Kanjar villages and gangs. Like the 'borderland peoples,' whose lives are inexorably linked to border administration, the Kanjar biradari has been deeply structured by the police ordering of rank.[29] The territorial arrangement of thieving beats in its own right reflects the hierarchical ordering of the staff of police stations. While the activities of Kanjar brotherhoods normally spread across the jurisdictions of one or two stations, the work of individual gangs relies on their patronage by individual officers. Just as the jurisdictions of police stations are subdivided into plots, each assigned to the care of one officer, the biradaris' territories are split up into beats belonging to individual gangs. The stability of police protection inside individual beats depends on the duration of officers' tenure in post. The lowest ranking officers—constables, head constables, and assistant subinspectors (collectively known as *sipahi*s [sepoys, foot soldiers] among Kanjars)—usually enjoy the longest tenure. While senior officers (inspectors and subinspectors) are frequently transferred, sipahis often

remain in the same posting for many years, if not for the duration of their career.[30] This allows them to develop long-lasting relationships with local Kanjars. In fact because employment in particular positions (in the police as in other government services) is often inherited, the patronage of Kanjars by sipahi families can be maintained across several generations and even acquire the status of 'traditional' (*paramparik*) bonds.[31] Ties to individual officers further confine gangs to small patches of land allocated to those officers.[32] Kanjars protected by senior officers ('in-charge sahibs') have less stability, but their protection can be more effective and can extend to a wider territory.

Senior officers also patronize Kanjars, but the reasons for their patronage differ from those of their inferiors. While for subaltern policemen Kanjar exploits are primarily a source of immediate income, for senior officers Kanjars are most useful as agents of intelligence that boost their statistics, which aids their careers.[33] While junior officers encourage more thieving among Kanjars, senior officers promote informer activity. The roles of thief and approver are often at odds: informers for superior officers are often either kept uninformed or altogether excluded from gang activity by those allied with junior officers. Relationships between Kanjars and their sipahi patrons are often so intimate that the latter come to be thought of by Kanjars as members of their own gangs. Kanjars refer to their patron officers as gang 'chiefs' (*mukhya* or *sardar*) and call officers who betray them to rank seniors as 'informers' (*mukhbar*). For their part, constables refer to their Kanjar informers by first names and call them 'friends' (*dost*) or 'our men' (*apane admi*). The result is two classes: low-ranking officers and their Kanjar clients on the one hand and senior policemen and their informers on the other. The line of difference between the two is drawn both in the police stations and in the Kanjar settlements. It does not divide thieves from the police, but low-class of Kanjars and sipahis from the high-ranking officers and their Kanjar clients. This line is often marked by antagonisms that reverberate equally through Kanjar settlements and police stations. Senior officers protect their informers at the expense of junior colleagues' clients, and in turn junior officers compromise their superiors' informers. While constables bemoan the fact that their superiors 'spoil their work' (*kam bigarte*), SHOs complain that their cultivation of reliable sources of intelligence is constantly undermined by subordinates.

Police patronage also precipitates changes in the nature of communal authority among Kanjars. Although patronage by senior officers is commonly less stable than alliances with sipahis, it often entails more substantial privileges.

Kanjars under the tutelage of senior officers are much better positioned to have an arrest warrant written off, to settle a better deal when the need to pay off the police arises, or to have kith and kin released on bail. Resourceful Kanjars, who manage to maintain relationships with SHOs beyond the term of their local tenure can secure protection in other jurisdictions in the state and thus extend their beats and acquire greater political weight in the community. One of the outcomes is that the old system of elected community elders (*patels*) who acted as dispute arbiters is now being displaced by the new rule of *sardars* (bosses, gang leaders), who wield increasing weight in decision-making and resolution of disputes in the community. Successful clients of senior officers are not only immune to police harassment, they can also employ their connections to intimidate caste mates. While appeals by Kanjars (and other poor villagers) are typically ignored by the police, the sardars' complaints are taken seriously and occasionally even pursued. The growing presence of sardars in community councils (*jat panchayats*) also means that disputes are increasingly referred to the police, a change that signals not only a displacement of elders by gang leaders but a broader transfer of the community's legal apparatus to institutions of the state, on which the emergent class of sardars relies. Just as the Kanjars' thieving terrains replicate the territorial parameters of police jurisdictions, so does the rank order within the community replicate the hierarchies in police stations. Both police and Kanjar communities are now subject to a common order of rank, which equally operates in the populations of police stations and Kanjar settlements.

Borders without Borderlands

I share the borderland theorists' suspicion of 'state-centrism' in social science —the tendency to treat national states as undisputed entities and borders as their natural barriers (Baud and Van Schendel 1997: 235; Van Schendel and Abraham 2005). Yet it is precisely this suspicion that makes me uneasy with borderland theory, for I am not convinced that stretching borderlines into borderlands helps to dispel the delusions of state ideology. True, analyses of modern statehood cannot be conducted in the terms provided by the state itself, and we cannot treat national borders simply as given. Yet what borderland theory fails to recognize is the fact that the border is the key structuring mechanism of the state and, as such, should stand at the base of its analysis. This oversight leads to a paradox: instead of blurring borderlines, borderland theorists end up with their reification, drawing them on maps with thicker felt

pens over and over again. As territorial entities with a distinctive political, economic, and sociocultural life, borderlands appear like replicas of the nation-states they circumscribe. Thus the implied proposition that everywhere national borders are flanked by distinct sociopolitical zones sharpens instead of blurring the official geopolitical picture. In this picture, where national borders have been extended into border zones, the global grid of national states retains its shape. While the statist narrative tells us that borders are substantive, freestanding things—on maps and on land—ethnography suggests that borders are a mechanism in the set of categorical distinctions we call the state. Borders are structural entities and as such can generate different effects in different circumstances. They can enclose as well as relate; they can form barriers as much as frontiers; they can facilitate their crossing as well as enclose and divide, functioning equally well both as limits and prompts for movement. On closer inspection it turns out that national borders generate different sets of circumstances, and some are not surrounded by socially, linguistically, or politically distinct zones that straddle them on both sides. Locally borders can be understood as limits, heartlands, or peripheries. Whether dotted with gunmen and lined with barbed wire or physically unmarked (as in the Kanjar case I have discussed), borders do not necessarily generate cross-border bonds but often produce differences, whether between Indian and Pakistani citizens or between gangs. As I hope to have shown, processes observed around national borders are also present deep inside the territories of states. In other words, there is no difference of kind (and often not even of degree) between national borders and the boundaries of provinces, administrative blocs, police jurisdictions, or other administrative divisions. Aspects of 'borderlands' are as vividly present deep within the territories of national states as on their peripheries. We may say that today we live in a world where the state is a borderland. In conclusion I would like to suggest that in our study of border situations we shift analytical weight from the imagined territorial entity of the borderland to the structural phenomenon of the border, lest we find ourselves—as the sign warns—in the wrong lift or, more disconcertingly, in thin air.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

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1. In its earliest usage in the early nineteenth century, the term described moors and wastelands, particularly between England and Scotland (*OED*), later coming to be used interchangeably with 'frontiers' of the empire, such as the North-West Frontier (Holdich 1901; Maud 1904; Ethnographical Survey of India 1909). In fin de siècle literature across genres and subjects the 'borderland' was as widely invoked in descriptions of frontiers of the British Empire as in spiritualist periodicals (D. Jones 2009). Stead's *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index of Psychic Phenomena*, for instance, enjoyed very wide readership in the years of its existence between 1893 and 1897 (Baylen 1969). A wasteland populated by aliens, ghosts, and ghouls, the borderland became a prominent feature of fantasy literature, where it still retains currency: consider such diverse uses as Hodgson's (1908) horror novel *The House on the Borderland*, Boyd's (1922) *Borderland Experiences; Or, Do the Dead Return?*, Windling's (1986) urban fantasy novel series entitled *Borderland* (set in a dystopian metropolis Bordertown on the frontier between Elflands and the World), or a 2004 *Star Trek* episode by the same title.

2. This literature took its inspiration from the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner's essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," published in 1893, in which he advanced his famous thesis of the centrality of the frontier to American history.

3. See, for instance, Asiwaju and Adenyi 1989; Berdahl 1999; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Rösler and Wendl 1999; Van Schendel and Abraham 2005. On South Asia, see Samaddar 1999; Van Schendel 2002b, 2005a, 2005b.

4. This usage of 'borderland' draws on Bolton's ([1921] 1996) seminal *The Spanish Borderlands*, in which he defined the Spanish borderlands, the northern periphery of New Spain (stretching from modern-day Florida to California), as culturally and geographically distinct regions with a distinctive mixture of native and European population. The monograph set out an analytical paradigm for generations of historians to follow (Weber 1986; Sandos 1994), with 'borderland studies' developing into a field with its own professional associations, conferences and journals since then (e.g., Gutiérrez-Witt 1990: 123; *Frontera* 1976–84; *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 1986–present; *Borderlands* 2002–present). The sheer volume of such writing is reflected in the number of books written on the subject on the 500th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America: the three-volume *Columbian Consequences* (Thomas 1989–91) and the twenty-seven-volume set of *Spanish Borderlands Source Books* (Thomas 1991). For overviews of this literature, see Stoddard et al. 1983; Valk and Cobos 1988;

Adelman and Aron 1999; Segura and Zavella 2007; Wood 2009. For some examples, see House 1982; Gibson and Renteria 1985; McKinsey and Konrad 1989; Martínez 1994.

5. Although varying in detail, Baud and Van Schendel's (1997) model does not substantially depart from the maxims of borderland scholarship. Thus my comments apply to the borderland theory at large, examples of which are too numerous to be discussed individually here.

6. The idea of a culturally and linguistically mixed society goes back to Bolton's ([1921] 1996) definition of Spanish borderlands and has remained a staple of borderland studies. Herzog (1990: 135), for instance, refers to such mixing as the "transboundary social formation." For further examples, see Nalven, ed., "Border Perspectives on the U.S./Mexico Relationship," special issue of *New Scholar* 9 (1–2), 1984.

7. Historians of colonial India have written extensively about the relationship between local landed elites and the colonial state. See, for instance, Stokes 1978; Singh 1988.

8. I describe the given Kanjar community as 'professional thieves' not simply because theft is the main source of their livelihood or because the planning and execution of raids, the negotiation of spoils, and dealings with law enforcement authorities are the main preoccupation of most men in the community. I do so no less because being a thief locates Kanjars within the larger society. They are thieves in popular and official rhetoric as much as in their own self-understanding. While being thieves makes for common assumptions of their guilt among neighboring farmers, court officials, and the police, the designation also gives Kanjars an important role within local society. It is precisely their reputation as thieves that gets them employed as watchmen (according to the local maxim of 'set a thief to catch a thief'), police informers, or 'raiders' by local communities (whether these be families, villages, or business partnerships).

9. The ethnography is based on eighteen months of fieldwork conducted in increments between January 2005 and January 2009.

10. For historical writing on the politics of raiding, see Wink 1986; Kolff 1990; Gordon 1994; Guha 1999; Skaria 1999; Mayaram 2003.

11. For more on the history of special surveillance and policing measures used under the auspices of Criminal Tribes legislature, see Nigam 1990; Radhakrishna 1992, 2001; Singha 1998.

12. The Kanjars of the brotherhood think of themselves as a distinct 'society' (*samaj*) and accordingly avoid marriage and even commensal relations with other Kanjars. On a daily basis, the conceptual integrity of this brotherhood is reified through the exchange of women, cattle, and information, through professional cooperation and its spoils, as well as by means of mutualities of lending, borrowing, and bail.

13. *Jitna badha rista, itna badha admi.* A common expression, *ek-jan*, *ek-jigar* (same birth, same guts), denotes "same caste, race, family, or sort; co-religionist; of the same parents" (Platts 1884).

14. Among Kanjars this metaphor carries quite literal significance as (goat or sheep)

entrails are basic to the structuring of Kanjar society. Each major rite, whether postpartum, marriage, or mortuary, is sealed with the exchange and sharing of sheep and goat meat, where entrails are given central attention. The consumption of different parts of the viscera expresses the binary division of the society into moieties. The moieties are distinguished on the basis of their customary consumption of gall bladder (*almoda*), and one of the moiety patron goddesses is actually called Almodi Mata, literally 'Gallbladder Mother.'

15. In Rajasthan only five Kanjar villages continue to make their living through bardic activities. However, at one time most Kanjars worked as genealogists. Some old men can still align Kanjar clans with erstwhile patron castes, and fewer have preserved 'copper letters' (*tamba pattars*) inscribed with genealogies of their patron communities, once used as proof of their relationship to their *jajman*s. The withering of bardic trade and its falling into disrepute is connected to the recent dwindling of patronage ties between genealogists and their patrons. The production of family histories, which once played a central role in the 'Rajputization' of hill communities such as the Minas, Kolis, Gujars, and Bhils in the nineteenth century (Sinha 1962; Parry 1979: 118–23; Kolff 1990: 110; Guha 1999: 114), has now lost much of its currency as a mechanism of social mobility.

16. The Kanjar community to which I refer here is one of three remaining Kanjar bard communities in southern Rajasthan and the only one practicing such trade in the Chittaurgarh district.

17. An entire generation of colonial historiography has dealt with the significance of territorial demarcation in the making of the colonial Indian state. Studies are too numerous to be listed or summarized in a footnote.

18. The use of such communities as thieving parties and 'intelligence agents' (as one Rajput patron put it) was (and to some extent still is) common practice among local Rajputs, so that most local Kanjars were originally settled by their Rajput patrons.

19. The nearby cluster of 'closely allied' villages is within the territory of an adjacent thana, which became a separate jurisdiction only in 1997.

20. One consequence of such shrinking is a narrowing of employment opportunities and hence the near-disappearance of the possibility of finding sources of livelihood other than theft. Young men with some schooling who are keen to abandon their fathers' thieving trade are hard-pressed to find a job, their reputation as thieves preventing their local employment as anything but watchmen or hired thieves; besides, the confinement of their spheres of acquaintance to a few nearby villages makes factory work in a town fifty kilometers away appear unthinkable.

21. Moieties are unified in their common relationship to the tutelary goddesses Almodi Mata and Ashapal Mata and the distinctive rites associated with these.

22. Such village alliances are virilocally arranged settlements often composed of members of a single clan or *got*. In marriage conventions, the structure of moiety opposition is expressed in the isogamous cross-cousin marriage arrangement. This does

not, however, mean that all spouses are actual first, or 'womb' (*saga*), or even traceable cross-cousins. In Lakshmipura marriages with womb cross-cousins (with mother's brother's daughters and father's sister's daughters) constitute 17 percent (11 of a total 65 marriages) and marriages with secondary cross-cousins constitute 32 percent (21 of a total 65 marriages) of existing alliances. Prescriptions of alliance with persons involved in such exchange (between maternal uncles, paternal aunts, and cross-cousins in other moieties) classify all persons of the other moiety, so that parents-in-law (*sasur* and *sas*), for instance, are commonly referred to as *mama* (mother's brother) and *dado* (father's sister), as are older men and women of the opposing moiety at large.

23. I have discussed elsewhere the intimate link between the establishment of the police and the criminalization of 'protection communities' in colonial India (Piliavsky 2013). Beginning in the early 1860s a number of policing measures (including the formation of penal colonies to systems of roll call and recruitment of informers) were applied to these communities, establishing connections of patronage between the Criminal Tribes and the police (Chatterji 1981; Freitag 1991; Singha 1993).

24. Between 1956 and 1991 the relations between the police and the Lakshmipura Kanjars were interrupted, the community no longer protected by the inspector of the Criminal Tribe colony and not yet taken under the wing of the new Indian police. 'Coercive measures' were halted after the Human Rights Act passed in Rajasthan in 1985.

25. Whereas unprotected thieves may get away after paying 100 to 200 percent of the value of stolen (or presumably stolen) goods in order to be cleared of the charge, protected thieves are normally expected to submit no more than 25 to 50 percent.

26. According to the Rajasthan Police Rules, a person can be listed as a 'history sheeter' when his or her criminal record reaches or exceeds thirty offenses. History sheeters are liable to random warrant-free searches and other otherwise illegitimate policing measures. Indian Penal Code Sections 109 and 110 are commonly applied, both prescribing preemptive penalties for supposed abetment of criminal activity. The process of forming a new class after adoption can be traced to the colonial period. In reformatory Criminal Tribes colonies headmen chosen from among inmates by overseers to help in the policing of the community received more land, were spared police predation, and often capitalized on the bureaucratic procedures with which they were entrusted (e.g., by selling absentee passes).

27. By established convention, boys between the ages of five and thirteen (before they begin married lives) 'abscond' (*bhag jate*) to their mother's natal villages, where they join a thieving party and learn the tricks of the trade. After returning to their home village, they maintain close professional ties to gangs in this village, whether they operate together with its gangs or establish their own.

28. According to the Rajasthan Police Rules, even if in hot pursuit, officers must obtain permission for the pursuit from the local police station, making tracking down offenders across the boundaries of police jurisdictions effectively impossible.

29. While such intimate involvement with the police is specific to the Kanjar

community, the lives of others in the area are no less (if less constantly) affected by differences in judicial, taxation, or other policy differences between states, districts, administrative blocks, police districts, or areas under judicial jurisdiction. For instance, because a trade tax does not apply in the neighboring State of Madhya Pradesh, the cash crops grown in the bordering districts in Rajasthan (making for the bulk of the local economy) are transported for sale to the Madhya Pradesh markets. Such transportation is often lengthy and costly. The goods may be sidetracked or fail to be sold, resulting in losses. The tax differential, however, has established a convention of sale, so that notwithstanding the risk (or even likelihood) of loss, farmers insist on selling their crops in Madhya Pradesh.

30. This system inverts official prescription. Although the Rajasthan Police Rules prescribe a maximum term of two years for these ranks, most commonly remain in their posting for many decades, if not for life. The stringently competitive system of promotions paired with virtually no financial incentives makes for virtually no movement between ranks on this level. Moreover while Police Rules prescribe posting outside one's native Judicial Circle, the vast majority of low-ranking officers are posted in their home villages. These days such administrative favors on the part of the posting authorities are considered simply part of the deal in the routine purchase of such positions.

31. In Rajasthan this trend of inheritance is particularly prominent in the Rajput and Mina communities. In 2008, out of the sixteen sipahi—the constables, head constables, and assistant subinspectors—in the local police station, twelve had been acquainted with the local Kanjars for more than ten years, and four had multigenerational relationships (two of these going back three generations) with them.

32. The strength of such alliances, however durable it may be at times, is rarely guaranteed; the protection of gangs and their beats can often be volatile. If expectations are not met, officers can betray their clients, and, as allegiances are not always seamlessly transferred, the transfer of SHOs often means a shift in the parameters of a beat, so that the layout of beats does alter periodically.

33. While locals often blame policemen for their greed (*bhuk*, literally 'hunger') and international observers are quick to describe such activity as 'corrupt,' the dire underpayment of such officers makes such collusion virtually inevitable. For the first five years in service, constables earn a monthly wage of 3,005 rupees. This is less than half of an average government schoolteacher's salary of 8,000 rupees. Senior officers do not work in 'the field' but are preoccupied with administrative work. Their promotion relies more heavily on their satisfaction of target quotas, or the percentage of reported cases investigated and resolved and offenders apprehended.

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