

1. Community and Public Culture

1

Despite the considerable attention paid to the construction of nations, until recently there has been a relative lack of attention given to the constructedness of *regions* in South Asia. Much historical and anthropological scholarship on India can be characterized by the way that its practitioners have tended to become "regional specialists," producing monographs on one region or another. ¹ This has led, in many cases, to an unintended scholarly emphasis on the community of people who share a name with the region: the Rajputs of Rajputana/Rajasthan, the Bengalis of Bengal, the Maharashtrians of Maharashtra, the Biharis of Bihar, and the Tamils of Tamil Nadu. Places like Uttar Pradesh (UP), however, lack an exact community-referent; its inhabitants, for lack of a better qualifying term, are often jokingly called UP-walas.

There have, of course, been some good practical reasons for these regional divisions as practiced in scholarship. Differences between regional languages have indeed posed real difficulties for scholars who have specialized and been highly trained in one regional language. Yet the trend of focusing on a single region has had the effect of eclipsing other objects of study. In particular, I am referring to the numerous internal diasporas that exist all over India: the Gujaratis in Bombay, the Tamils of Calcutta, the Punjabis in Delhi, to name just a few. In order to study the Marwaris, a transregional group whose identity did not preexist in any one place of origin but came to be formed through the processes of migration within India since the seventeenth century, we need to disturb the borderlines of regionalized Indian history. The Marwaris have performed claims on an identity that crosses over—and is in fact dependent on crossing over—a wide expanse of territory. By engaging with materials in Hindi and Bengali as well as English, I will not only examine how the colonial state may have tried to orchestrate such developments, but will also look at Marwari self-description in Hindi and consider various Bengali responses. Thus this study, I hope, will form part of a new trend of studying India in such a way that relationships *between* regions come into focus.

Performing Community and Public Culture

My use of the term "public culture" draws on two different applications of the term in South Asian Studies: first, in reference to the production of available arenas, avenues, and discourses of political action; second, in reference to migration, cosmopolitanism, and global flows. I have been particularly influenced by the work of Sandria Freitag and Douglas Haynes. Freitag examines how local systems of communication opened up new spaces for the articulation of identity under colonial rule. By looking at collective activities in public spaces, including processions, festivals, and riots, Freitag shows how urban groups have renegotiated social relations, and ultimately constructed separate Hindu and Muslim communities. ² Haynes examines how merchants

and elites in colonial Surat adopted European idioms of participatory politics in an attempt to forge a modern polity capable of self-rule. In Haynes's work, "public culture" refers to the way the Surat elites themselves defined the realm of the public, expressed in the development of a form of hybrid democratic culture. ³

The second use of the term "public culture," most clearly associated with the journal *Public Culture*, founded by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, is related to but slightly different from the first. ⁴ For Appadurai and Breckenridge, public culture is a form of cosmopolitanism that has developed through the circulation of people, goods, ideas, and capital, creating post-Cold War transnational spaces of cultural production. An analysis of these internationalized spaces, Appadurai and Breckenridge contend, reflects the heterogeneous cosmopolitan realities of late twentieth century capitalism more accurately than traditional anthropological models positing either an opposition between popular and high cultures or the identification of various "customs" with specific regions of the world. Much of the work in this area is contemporary, engaging with insights from the field of cultural studies, and tends to focus on the transmission of messages through technologies of popular tourism and travel along with media, television, and film. ⁵ My own project of understanding the transmission of messages about the public identity of an internal diasporic community in India explores how we might productively extend this framework—of the production of locality and ethnic identity through migratory flows—back into the past. This approach would seek to untie "cultures" from "regions"—and would question, for instance, the idea that Bengal is mostly about Bengali culture—within the field called "Indian history."

5

Community is constituted by a set of practices, a series of "performances," through which claims are made about collective and inter-subjective identities. ⁶ These claims can be contradictory, produced through relationships of power, and are open to resistance and contest. Community divisions and identity politics based on the social separation of groups, promoted by both the colonial state and the postcolonial nationalist state, constitute the historical and social backdrop of these performances. Colonial knowledge of ethnographic description and demographic enumeration, such as the census, was frequently taken up by Indian authors as evidence of a particular community's progress or backwardness *vis-à-vis* their "outsiders." ⁷ These characteristics of community give rise to a kind of "public culture," in which distinctions between the public and private are asserted, shared, blurred, contested, and straddled by performed relations of community.

There are three specific claims about the anthropological idea of community that I would like to establish. The first argument is that community is a relational concept. The Marwaris, to put it simply, needed somebody to be

Marwari at. Community in itself has no primordial core and is always historically and socially constructed in relation to other such enacted groups. The public identification of a community often comes in the form of an outside label—an ethnic tag used by others—to describe a particular set of social practices that demarcate one group from another. This is an issue of how outsiders address the perceived community. By examining the emergence of Marwari communal identity *vis-à-vis* their local counterparts in Calcutta, the Bengalis, and in reference to their Rajput "others" in Rajasthan, we can explore the ways in which cultural difference has been relationally defined among Indian social groups, with a particular focus on the processes whereby the naturally porous boundaries of community are created, maintained, and/or contested. [8](#)

Second, the production of community entails performances of marking the symbolic boundaries of community in order to produce an internal space of community (such as domesticity) in need of reform and refinement. This space does not exist before the reforms; rather, debates and conflict over reforms constitute this space. The community, in their words, represents no consensus. Political structures of colonial governments and economies create the conditions in which communities may come into being in the process of fabricating "public life." Thus, the performance of the internal space of the community is, rather ironically, essentially public.

Third, the processes of creating gender identities are critical to the reformative performances that enact intercommunal boundaries in shared public spaces and constructions of public life. I am especially interested here to see how particular ethnicized audiences become either excluded or included in this process.

In performing a sense of community—and thus making a claim on public culture and political rights—the Marwaris have relied on family and lineage genealogies to form wider social ties. Focusing on the extendibility of a strong sense of kinship to the formation of wider relationships in the public realm helps illuminate not only how Marwaris have related to others and made sense of their wider social world, but also how Indian concepts of sociability have enabled, and at the same time appropriated, a convergence of Western values of public political life with local senses of identity and difference, albeit under the aegis of both the colonial and postcolonial states.

10

Many public performances of Marwari identity draw on and deploy primordialized symbols of kinship, lineage, and family. Although communities draw on sentiments that are viewed by scholars as primordial, it is not a given that the idioms themselves are necessarily primordial. Nor does the performance of kinship imply that community is necessarily, or even simply, kinship writ large. It is necessary to view these particular kinds of identity

claims in historical perspective. The performance of community in India has happened within a legacy of British colonialism, which denied self-rule on the pretext of the inability and unpreparedness of Indians to govern themselves. As a result, the possibility of political reform depended very heavily on social reform. The Indian family became a measure of "civilization" and an object of reform, thus bifurcating the public and private realms. As communities such as the Marwaris began deploying signs of kinship in an attempt to gain political recognition, community identity acquired a new visibility under the gaze of the colonial state. [9](#)

Revisiting the "Invention of Tradition" and "Imagined Community"

The notions of the invention of tradition and the imagination of community are probably the most widely cited theories today about community formation in the disciplines of anthropology and history. To understand a general term like "community," it would be easy simply to borrow from this literature to assert that the community is something that is either invented, imagined, or a combination of the two. But it is important to trouble the idea of identity, so that we do not think of identity as something that people simply "have" either through invention or imagination. Instead, we must be cognizant of how identities are contingent and emergent in particular types of social practice.

First, the invention of tradition. [10](#) Some of the basic assumptions of Hobsbawm and Ranger's original project warrant both brief recapitulation and examination. Their basic argument is that the so-called traditions of modern societies are actually quite new and were, in fact, invented. Hobsbawm and Ranger make a distinction between custom and invented tradition. Custom, on the one hand, is a genuinely changing set of social practices, and hence flexible enough to survive through the ages. Invented traditions, on the other hand, are defined by the claim that practices that are actually recent have existed throughout the centuries from their origins in the mists of time. Thus, invented traditions create claims of authoritative legitimacy on the part of some power-seeking social group, be it either a community or a state. Hobsbawm and Ranger point out that the essential character of modernity, with its stress on the ever-changing new, precludes a predominance of invented traditions in social life. However, the sphere of public and civic life, which depends for its vitality on such necessary legitimizing fictions, is, according to this theory, replete with invented traditions. This claim about the invention of community in civil society is what makes Hobsbawm and Ranger's ideas suggestive for my own inquiry.

The "invention of tradition" theory has the advantage of showing how groups may use the past in attempting to acquire social hegemony and in staking their claims to political power. Yet a considerable weakness in the theory, as Stephen Vlastos contends, is its tendency to fall into a trap of claiming that only modern societies with a sense of history can invent traditions. [11](#) The

question of what happens in the case of contemporary societies that are not classically modern—the so-called tribal societies, for instance—remains anomalous in terms of this theory. The distinction between flexible customs and fixed invented traditions reverses the old anthropological opposition between primitive societies as static and modern societies as always being in motion and change. The invention of tradition does not really get around what Johannes Fabian has aptly described as the denial of "coevalness," namely, that while the ethnographer's representation appears to be fixed in time, the society goes on changing. [12](#)

The problem of timelessness in the theory of the invention of tradition can perhaps be most clearly seen in the first essay in Hobsbawm and Ranger's collection. Writing on the Scottish Highland tradition of kilts and bagpipes, author Hugh Trevor-Roper states that, "even in the Highlands, even in that vestigial form, [the kilt] was relatively new; it was not the original, or the distinguishing badge of Highland society." [13](#) Trevor-Roper's comment suggests that while anti-English sentiment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created English-hating Scots eager to define themselves by invented traditions of wearing kilts whose patterns represent distinct family lineages, the plaids do not represent the true or essential "badge" of Highlander life. Such an argument, therefore, is limited in the way that it presupposes some unchanging essence to the natives in question. The theory then adds injury to insult by claiming that by coming up with the invented traditions of the plaid kilts, the natives simply got their essence wrong. In this model the historian, it appears, is the only legitimate bearer of truth.

15

Despite its limitations, Hobsbawm and Ranger's theory has been especially inspirational in revolutionizing the idea of the constructed nature of traditions, especially those traditions involved in establishing community and national identities. The theory has opened up new approaches to the study of a variety of social institutions. Nationalism is a case in point: if traditions are invented, it follows that the identities of nations that rely on those traditions are invented as well. Hobsbawm and Ranger's argument thus partially inspired the possibilities for a critique of the naturalness of nationalism from a variety of disciplinary angles. Following Hobsbawm and Ranger's lead, scholars such as Benedict Anderson have popularized the idea of the nation as an imagined community. Through the dissemination of print capitalism, which produced an essentially monoglot population (Anderson's well-known argument states), people were able to imagine themselves as part of wider national communities. [14](#)

Anderson's important point about the work required of the imagination in helping people form a consciousness of belonging to a group of people all of whom they would never meet is not in question here. After all, even social institutions such as kinship also depend on imagining relatives whom one might never meet. However, Anderson's argument points to a very state-

centered understanding of a necessarily *national* community, and does not quite consider the formation of communities that do not have the military-economic-political backing of a bona-fide state. One can challenge Anderson's state-centered view of community from at least three additional perspectives. Prasenjit Duara has aptly questioned the widespread historiographical practice of writing about nation as the "subject of History," emphasizing that there has been a reified history of "a self-same, national subject evolving through time." ¹⁵ Second, the theoretical reliance on print capitalism as the mobilizing force of national imaginings raises questions about the effectiveness of print in overwhelmingly nonliterate nations such as are found in South Asia. For example, the emergence of Bengali nationalism, culminating in the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, was indeed founded upon a language movement, but one that grew out of an understanding of language politics on the part of nonliterate urban masses and a nonliterate peasantry, and not on print culture per se. Third, there are many other kinds of non-national communities that differ substantially from the referent of Anderson's own "imagined community," which is, of course, the community of nation.

As a result of Hobsbawm and Ranger's work, and especially inspired by Anderson's contributions, social scientists have set out to demonstrate how the nation has been historically constructed, and to illustrate the ways that the "imaginary" of the nation has served to shape productively, and not merely reflect, the imagined community of a national population. Yet recent rethinking of the nation as both a political entity and a unit of study has taken priority over a re-examination of smaller-sized communities in light of postcolonial and globalization theory. As Aletta Norval points out, even Benedict Anderson's otherwise compelling account is limited to communities whose boundaries are formed by the borders of the nation-state. Anderson's theoretical framework remains circumscribed by the imagined community of the nation and does not adequately examine how communities define themselves in relation to others. ¹⁶ My study of the Marwari community is an attempt to examine the construction of a smaller social body, without appealing to either "invention" or "imagination" as the primary explanatory device.

Without either invention or imagination in our toolbox anymore, we must seek an alternative way of understanding how communities make identity claims. The rubric I use for these processes is "performance." I am aware that this is already a very loaded term. I do not, for instance, use the term broadly, as Milton Singer does when he defines "cultural performances," such as the "cultural media" of songs, dance, music, verbal texts, dramas and so forth. ¹⁷ Instead, I use performance to refer to observable strategic acts and techniques available in the public sphere: the statements, debates, actions, and behaviors that help people make public claims on any number of identity markers. Thus, unlike theories of invention or imagination, my ethnography of Marwari performance does not depend on the development of a sense of

interiority, and makes space for a wide range of strategic intents, and even ambivalence, which may attend any given performance of identity. Unlike invention or imagination, therefore, this theory of performance makes no claims about what may actually be going on inside peoples' heads.

Toward a Familial Cosmopolitanism

We prefer our community men as partners or helpers in business. Even if they cheat us, there is one consolation that the money will remain within the community. Even today, this type of feeling is persisting. Besides, we have more contacts with our community men, which makes them more familiar to us, thus (there are) more chances of knowing their weak and strong points. – Prabhat Jain ¹⁸

20

Caste communities, as many historians of Indian communities have shown, are made up of a large number of familial lineages, through which births, adoptions, and marriages form indelible community links. Some well-known examples of scholarship on caste communities include the work of Frank Conlin, Karen Leonard, and Robert Hardgrave. ¹⁹ To a large extent these studies are extensions of the Rudolphs' innovative claim in 1967 that caste associations enabled Indians to develop a bourgeois democracy through pre-existing social structures. ²⁰ Although my work engages similar issues, I am not arguing that the Indian public necessarily came to be based on values of bourgeois individualism. Instead, I am working from a point that both Partha Chatterjee and Veena Das have argued, which is that in colonial India there was no clear distinction between civil society and the state. Civil society was characterized not by individual rights based on competence, but by communities asserting their rights—as communities—in order to partake of the largesse of the state. ²¹ This process has the effect of preserving such communities whose boundaries are already established.

The development of the ideas of "caste" and community out of various conglomerations of trading lineages and networks is an outgrowth of the way that colonialism created knowledge about caste. In colonial ethnography, the study of family genealogies was a fundamental part of learning about the social and political structures of India. The early study of lineage and kinship, especially among colonial ethnographers, was actually a handmaiden to the establishment and legitimation of colonial rule. For the British in India, interest in kinship and lineage directly facilitated the colonial government's knowledge of ruling families. This is aptly illustrated in the case of Rajasthan, on which dozens of publications were issued discussing the lineages of royal families, ruling chiefs, and local rulers. ²² In these so-called primitive societies that colonial anthropologists found around the globe, kinship was seen as the fundamental organizing principle of both political and social life. Whereas the colonizing powers had modern institutions like the workplace and the modern state that formed the basic building blocks of social

structure and civilization, the core of colonized nations supposedly consisted of the bonds of kinship.

In recent decades, studies that emphasize the connections between community, caste, and kinship have gone in separate directions. There has been extensive debate over the institution of caste and its importance in Indian society, from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. ²³ There is a coterminous and rich literature on the question of women's roles and the colonial public. ²⁴ Despite the enormous literature produced on the "women's question" in colonial and nationalist thought, and a burgeoning literature on family and kinship, there have been relatively few attempts to acknowledge the historical contingency of kinship as a marker of political identity. ²⁵

The few studies that address kinship and political subjectivity have looked specifically at how kinship both enabled and constrained women in public life. Kamala Visweswaran has addressed how women freedom fighters helped refigure Indian nationalism even though they were "described as political subjects in relationship to their families," and as such their agency arguably accommodated both resistance and consent. ²⁶ Minault's work has discussed the extendibility of kinship as enabling women's political participation and forays into public life, and yet her characterization of Indian women as being either "commodities of exchange" or "individuals" who could never fully act in public life assumes a limited and binary subject position for women, and also assumes that there already was a "pure" bourgeois public life available for the participation of Indian men. ²⁷ Visweswaran takes issue with Minault's point that women "did not themselves act in the public realm, but served as symbols," arguing that this approach confines women's subjectivity to the home and thus effectively silences their public agency. ²⁸

Idioms of gender and kinship are fundamental to the discourse of community and affect the ways that Calcutta Marwaris have both experienced and reproduced public life. One sees this most prominently in frequently articulated public discourses, in nearly every Indian community, over the status of "our women." Specifically, I am interested in the ways that representations of Marwari family life and ideals of domesticity have become reflected in the assertion of identity in the public sphere. Thus, I will be exploring the importance and centrality of the family lineage, known in Hindi as the *kul*, as it becomes reflected in modern public Marwari institutions. The Marwari promotion of domesticity and conservative domestic values in the public sphere often makes them the target of criticism by other groups, who disagree with the ways in which the Marwaris have traditionally formed their very public self-representations. I argue that their unique orientation to the past—as expressed through relationships of kin and lineage—creates new possibilities in how communities, as unified collective actors, create alternatives to European or bourgeois models of political participation.

As a migratory group, added to daily by new arrivals from Rajasthan, the Calcutta Marwaris represent a flow of persons rather than a fixed and static group. Recent literature on globalization adds to Barth's pioneering observation about the continuity of identity despite the comings and goings of concrete individuals. ²⁹ My work draws on recent globalization theory that attempts to see how region and community are both constituted by flows of people. Globalization theory offers distinct advantages in helping anthropologists and historians shift their gaze from fixed groups and regions to look at global flows of people, commodities, and capital. However, there is a tendency in globalization theory to eclipse from view the role of traditionally "primordialized" sites of analysis such as community or kinship in constituting performances of community life.

For instance, Arjun Appadurai has argued that ethnicity does not depend upon "the extension of primordial sentiments to larger and larger units in some sort of unidirectional process, nor does it make the mistake of supposing that larger social units simply draw on the sentiments of family and kinship to give emotional force to large-scale group identities." ³⁰

Though we need to appreciate Appadurai's point that one should no longer think of societies always being constituted by a very localized production of kinship or family sentiment writ large, globalization theory as it stands has little means of accounting for the importance of kinship and family life even within life-worlds of prominent and powerful communities like the Marwaris. The Marwaris, after all, are a group who have been created by globalizing influences of flows of people and capital, and yet for whom the language of kinship plays a major role.

As Partha Chatterjee has recently argued, explanations of community that ignore the "ascribed" ties of human life cannot explain why people have been prepared to make incredible sacrifices or even die for their family, kin, ethnic group, or nation. The interpretive problem lies, according to Chatterjee, in the assumptions of theorists who do not consider all communities to be equally "worthy of approval in modern political life." He further argues that, "in particular, attachments that seem to emphasize the inherited, the primordial, the parochial or the traditional are regarded by most theorists as smacking of conservative and intolerant practices and hence as inimical to the values of modern citizenship." ³¹ Appadurai, by attempting to move beyond primordialist explanations for community formation, has implicitly accepted the Western critique that ascribed ties are fundamentally conservative and are in fact anti-modern. There is little space for even theorizing metaphors of family, lineage, or kinship in his model. Instead of attempting to recast the role of ascription in understanding the building blocks of group formation, family ties are relegated to primordialism and backwardness, instead of being regarded as productive conduits in identity articulation.

To argue that narratives of lineage and kinship are creatively deployed as performances of the modern community does not necessarily mean that one must subscribe to the theory of primordialism. Thus, my focus is on the deployment of the language of kinship and not on the internal workings, dynamics, or diagrams of kinship itself. Instead of dropping the idea of kinship altogether, it is more productive to look at how idioms of kinship and lineage, as invoked through public performances of community, become important techniques for the mobilization of community identity in modern Indian politics. The politics of community identity for Marwaris seems to depend on peculiar and fascinating constructions of tradition and lineage that have the effect of making lineage and family the basis of identity claims. Recognizing the ways that emergent communities employ structures of kinship in the process of turning their groups into viable political actors acknowledges the importance of family and kinship without necessarily naturalizing or universalizing them. Even the growth of nationalism in India was articulated through tropes of kinship, adding auspiciousness to Western political forms; the idea of "mother India" is a case in point.

One way of thinking about the problem of community and kinship in light of theories of migration and globalization is to consider these flows of people as a type of "familial cosmopolitanism." In a lecture entitled "Eastern Humanism," Sylvain Levi (the premiere French Indologist of the 1920s and 1930s) asserted that kinship provides the base for an Indian person's orientation to the world:

30

Even if we speak of a man who pretends to keep himself above national, social, religious prejudices, we still denote him as a 'citizen of the world,' cosmopolites, from kosmos, the world, and 'polites,' a citizen. How typical is the difference if you compare the words of Bhartrhari as quoted above: vasudhaiva kutumbakam. For a Hindu, the family-house, kutumbaka, is the primary cell around which the whole world, as great as you may fancy it, centres; kinship is the only real bond you can not get rid of, but the best of men can extend it to the whole world. [32](#)

Despite obvious objections that Levi can be read as essentializing kinship as a permanent and unchanging form of social structure, it would be wrong to dismiss his formulation, because it offers us an important formulation of how humans can orient themselves to the world that contrasts with western political theory. [33](#)

In India, Levi argues, individuals can be cosmopolitan in the sense that they can view the world as part of their own family. This is a different sort of

orientation to the world from a Western notion of bourgeois cosmopolitanism, in which a subject may be cosmopolitan in the way that he or she acts autonomously and comfortably in international realms. Maintaining the importance of family, quasi-family, and genealogical ties, Levi argues, is actually the bedrock of community. This is not at odds with my essential argument that community is constituted by a series of performances of identity claims in public life, creating connections and linkages, which constitute India's communal public culture. The idea of performance, after all, focuses our attention on how we strategically orient ourselves to the world. In India, or for that matter anywhere else in the world, cosmopolitanism has never excluded strong family ties, especially in its most public representations, and may in fact actually be dependent on them. Thus, idioms of kinship connections become an important part of many performances of community as public culture.

Summing Up: Community and Public Culture

I have proposed that the Marwari community was created through trading and capitalist alliances; Marwari trading networks themselves created the very possibility of a public community. New Marwari arrivals in Calcutta depended upon their linkages with others to get started in trade and business, seeking out fellow community members for shelter, food, and guidance. Whether or not these trading circles were necessarily made up of blood relatives, they were performed as such, and maintained high levels of internal secrecy. Whereas a bourgeois public brings together unrelated individuals in an experience in exteriority, Marwari traders relied on credit and networks of trust. For Marwari traders, these powerful and close-knit trading networks extended across Rajasthan, North India, and Bengal. Because they were not only limited to kinship and private relationships, they became general, and thus mirrored the personality of the public. Kinship and marriage did not in themselves generate this "public;" rather, it depended on capitalism and on the Marwaris' trading connections.

Thus, there are many important points of intersection between the generation of community through trading and the emergence of the Marwari community as a political actor *vis-à-vis* the colonial state. As I have previously noted, there are much longer histories of associations and linkages of each of the many lineages of the Marwari subcastes (Oswal, Agarwal, and Maheswari), which are later appropriated, incorporated, and contested under the multivalent tag of "Marwari." By the turn of the twentieth century, older modes of community linkage continued and were substantially altered by the rise of various Marwari voluntary associations that overlapped with older models. ³⁴ The word "overlap," however, does not mean that the two were not mutually constituted. ³⁵

I do not deny the transformative power of voluntary associations in civil society, but I argue that for the Marwaris the public is also a domain of

trading networks composed of business and kinship connections. There is a big difference between the individualist bourgeois public model and the widely extended kinship model that connects large numbers of people. This means that the public realm itself can be constituted through the performance of familial idioms, or as I put it, a "familial cosmopolitanism." Thus it seems to me that one obvious point of "overlap" between the two publics is found when Marwaris make representations and performances of themselves as kinship or lineage-oriented people.

Neither the bourgeois public nor the familial cosmopolitan public has a static formulation, unaffected by historical contingencies. There have been different and changing networking needs for Marwari traders, especially for the relatively new industrialists, who have been more receptive to breaks with tradition and more eager to promote social reform through voluntary associations. One could argue that this is related to how the commercial nature of trading differs from industrialization. Industrialists require large amounts of capital, a small but trustworthy family to run the operation, and a lineage to build an industrial empire. Industrialists may not depend as much as traders do on the existence of a familial public. Traders, however, need to create linkages over vast expanses of territory and are more invested in maintaining a familial cosmopolitanism than are industrialists, who could sell their products to anyone. Armed with this distinction, I find that casting these linkages among traders as familial cosmopolitanism captures transregional and agentive qualities of community formation that are neither state-centered nor static, and avoids reproducing popular stereotypes of traders as being "clannish" and old-fashioned.

As Marwaris and other *baniya* trading groups continue to dominate in business, and are an ever-larger presence in various sites of cultural production, it is not surprising that more positive images of *baniyas* are reflected in popular culture, images that demonstrate the ways in which kinship metaphors are brought into the very modernity of public life. One good recent example of what I call "familial cosmopolitanism" can be found in the wildly popular blockbuster Hindi film, "*Ham Apke Hain Kon*" ("Who Am I To You?") of 1994, which broke all previous ticket sales records and inspired many repeat viewings. The film marked a turning point in Hindi films from violence- and sex-packed adventure thrillers to family-oriented, good clean fun. It has been described by some critics as being "one long marriage video," incorporating no less than fourteen song-and-dance sequences. The story is about two sisters who fall in love with two brothers. One pair marries but the other relationship is secret. When the older sister dies in childbirth, the younger sister is customarily expected to marry the widower and raise the child. The strategies she uses to avoid marrying the brother of her lover are a reflection of the public negotiations of gender roles within a business family. Some of the valuation of kinship rhetoric is obvious and punchy: the hero's car is scrawled with graffiti saying "I Love My Family." This film, perhaps not so coincidentally, was produced by the Marwari director Sooraj Barjatia, who makes films exclusively for his family's production company,

Rajshri.

A note on my terms of analysis for India & the conceits of ethnosociology

My use of terms like "community" and "public culture" to describe Indian society may appear to some readers to beg the question of whether or not these terms of analysis derive from within the society itself. To a certain degree, this very question arises from a concern with ethnosociology, itself a product of Eurocentric thinking, which assumes the existence of pristine (and wholly uncolonized) cultures untouched by European influences and forms of political structure. ³⁶ We can avoid the conceit of ethnosociology by recognizing that European forms of political organization were themselves grafted onto Indian society. Rather than questioning whether the set of terms in English is functionally equivalent to some set of translations into Hindi (or vice versa), we should focus on the historical relationships whereby the experience of European political domination has altered the meanings of these sets of terms. "Community" in the Indian context therefore refers to a political form that is constituted by Indian ideas about networks and groups as well as by colonial ideology. The resultant political forms are a mixture of both Western and Indian structures and influences. For that matter, even our "native informants" may use the same English words.

Because of these historical conjunctures, exact translations are impossible. In North Indian languages, there is no one fixed word for "community." Instead there are a smattering of words, such as *jati* and *samaj*, which have a broad and flexible range of meanings. These meanings vary widely from context to context. Partha Chatterjee has recently described that *jati* has had a broad range of meanings in Bengal deployed both inside and outside colonial discourse. *Jati* has ranged in meaning from "origin" and "birth," to a "class . . . of living species," a clan, a class, or even the more colonial definition of a "human collectivity bound by loyalty to a state or organized around the natural and cultural characteristics of a country or province." ³⁷ Though colonialist discourse sought to determine more clearly the boundaries of collectivities, *jati* had a much more flexible and relativistic usage. As Chatterjee notes, "One could, obviously and without any contradiction, belong to several *jati*, not simultaneously but contextually, invoking in each context a collectivity in which membership is not a matter of self-interested individual choice or contractual agreement but an immediate inclusion, originally, as it is by birth." ³⁸

Yet the negative aspect of the very flexibility of the term *jati* is that it could not be used in public life to denote a community that would be "fixed enough" to meet the needs of the political state. While Indian historians wrote genealogical histories of *jati* groups like the Marwaris, such as Balchand Modi's *Desh ke Itihas mein Marwari Jati ka Stan* [*The place of the Marwaris in the life of the nation*], *jati* was rarely used in naming official-sounding

40

political organizations. ³⁹ A community needed a more transcendent marker of identity, such as *samaj* [association], which would justify the demand for certain political concessions. *Jati* could be flexible enough to designate "a people," but I have not seen it deployed as an official name for institutions in colonial civil society.

The second North Indian term for describing community, which came into more widespread use in the early nineteenth century, was the more official-sounding *samaj* or *sammelon*. Although *samaj* was used by Rammohan Roy in the early nineteenth century to designate a sense of membership within his reformed religion, the Brahmo Samaj, the term is used much like the English term "society," and is deployed in descriptions of civil society. *Samaj* can be defined as "a society, association; a meeting, gathering; society, a particular community; or things pertaining to an event, preparations." The adjectival form of the word *samajik* has been defined in R. S. McGreggor's *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* as "having to do with society, social; being a member of an audience." ⁴⁰ The word was later used to describe other formally organized religious groups in North India, such as the Arya Samaj. *Sammelon*, as in the Marwari Sammelon, is somewhat like the English word "congress," which is used for both a "meeting" and an organization.

Thus, using an English term like "community" to encapsulate the terms of *samaj*, *jati*, and *sammelon*, is not merely a Eurocentric imposition onto (wholly) Indian realities. My very deliberate use of the English word "community" in the following pages seeks to acknowledge the ways that European political terminology has historically influenced the ways that Indians think of their own social and political structure. ⁴¹ But I will also try to show how these terms acquire new and unpredictable meanings as their semantic fields stretch to include practices not originally covered by them. The next chapter addresses this problem by examining the interplay of different senses of geographical space.

Notes:

Note 1: The "Bengal Studies Conference," the "Rajasthani Studies Group," and the "Maharashtra Group" are well-known entities in South Asian professional circles, thus helping to reify and reinforce the strong sense of regionalism in historical, anthropological, and religious studies of India. [Back.](#)

Note 2: Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). [Back.](#)

Note 3: Douglas Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), and "From Avoidance to Confrontation?" in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, eds. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991): 239–289.[Back.](#)

Note 4: I am referring to essays entitled "Editors' Comments" and "Why Public Culture" by Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge in *Public Culture* (Fall 1988): 5-9. ; See also *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).[Back.](#)

Note 5: See, for instance, Arvind Rajagopal, "Uses of the Past: The Televisual Broadcast of an Ancient Epic and Its Reception in Indian Society"(Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, May 1992).[Back.](#)

Note 6: The influence of Victor Turner's work on cultural performance will be obvious here. See the posthumous collection, Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1987). Identity can be defined as "a subject position produced by representations in relation to other representations" (Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7).[Back.](#)

Note 7: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Modernity and Ethnicity in India," in *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity*, ed. David Bennett (London: Routledge, 1998): 91-110.[Back.](#)

Note 8: See Frederick Barth's introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. F. Barth (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969): 9–38; Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Tavistock, 1985).[Back.](#)

Note 9: Since I am not making an argument about primordialism, I am not concerned with ethnosociological theories about the biological transfer of substances associated with lineage, kinship, and family ties. The fact that so many prominent Marwari individuals, like nationalist Jamnalal Bajaj, have been adopted, further discredits the transfer of substance argument in the construction of lineage or *kul*.[Back.](#)

Note 10: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). [Back.](#)

Note 11: Stephen Vlastos, ed., *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).[Back.](#)

Note 12: Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).[Back.](#)

Note 13: Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland

Tradition of Scotland," in Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, 15.[Back.](#)

Note 14: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).[Back.](#)

Note 15: Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 4.[Back.](#)

Note 16: Aletta J. Norval, "Thinking Identities: Against a Theory of Ethnicity," in *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, ed. Edwin N. Wilmsen and Patrick McAllister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 64.[Back.](#)

Note 17: Milton Singer, ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959), xiii.[Back.](#)

Note 18: Quoted in Jain, *Ethnicity in Plural Societies*, 173.[Back.](#)

Note 19: Frank Conlin, *A Caste in a Changing World: The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins, 1700—1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Karen Leonard, *Social History of an Indian Caste: The Kayasths of Hyderabad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).[Back.](#)

Note 20: Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). [Back.](#)

Note 21: Partha Chatterjee, "Modes of Civil Society," *Public Culture* 3 (Fall 1990); Veena Das, *Critical Events* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).[Back.](#)

Note 22: *Chiefs and Leading Families in Rajputana*, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, Rajputana Agency, 1912); *The Ruling Princes, Chiefs and Leading Personages in Rajputana and Ajmer*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1924); Lokanatha Ghosh, *The Modern History of the Indian Chiefs, Rajas, Zamindars &c.* (Calcutta: J. N. Ghose, 1881).[Back.](#)

Note 23: For a summary of this debate, see Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*; Arjun Appadurai, "Is Homo Hierarchicus?" *American Ethnologist* 13 (1986): 745—61.[Back.](#)

Note 24: One of the major studies is Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989).[Back.](#)

Note 25: Much compelling work on South Asian kinship in recent years has come from feminist ethnography. In these studies, scholars no longer see kinship as a separate domain of analysis, but rather engage with combining

kinship with other forms of social life. Margaret Trawick, *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Rajni Palriwala and Carla Risseuw, eds., *Shifting Circles of Support: Contextualizing Kinship and Gender in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa* (New Delhi: Alta Mira Press, 1996). [Back.](#)

Note 26: Kamala Visweswaran, "Family Subjects: An Ethnography of the 'Women's Question' in Indian Nationalism" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1990). [Back.](#)

Note 27: Gail Minault, "The Extended Family as Metaphor and the Expansion of Women's Realm," in *The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan* (South Asia Books, 1981). [Back.](#)

Note 28: Visweswaran, "Family Subjects," 12. My work builds upon Minault and Visweswaran's observations on the connectedness of kinship metaphors and public life, but I do not specifically address how women and men might have differed in their roles as political subjects. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Barth, "Introduction"; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997). [Back.](#)

Note 30: Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 14. [Back.](#)

Note 31: Partha Chatterjee, "Community in the East," (Paper presented at the 17th World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Seoul, 17–21 August 1997), 4. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Sylvain Levi, "Eastern Humanism: An Address Delivered in the University of Dacca on 4 February 1922," *Dacca University Bulletin* 4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 9–10. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Levi's lecture explores how it is possible for a deeply western concept, humanism, to exist in India. Levi interprets western humanism to be an "intellectual catholicity.... the will to do away with local and national creeds and to build up a community which would embrace the whole extent of the world." *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 34: The Jalan lineage goddess Rani Sati, for instance, who became a goddess for the modern Marwari community, will be discussed in chapter six. [Back.](#)

Note 35: I place greater emphasis on how the state actually did affect local structures and networks than does, for example, C. A. Bayly's recent discussion of the rise of the Indian "information order" from 1780–1870. C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social*

Communication in India 1780—1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Bayly presents an empirically rich study of communication and the circulation of knowledge among various linkages—trade, agents, religion, kinship, and marriage—and yet maintains a rather artificial separation between local knowledge and state knowledge that ends up denying the transformative effects of colonial rule.[Back.](#)

Note 36: Daniel makes a good critique of this problem in *Fluid Signs*.[Back.](#)

Note 37: Jnanendramohan Das, *Bangala bhasar abhidhan*, second ed., (1937), quoted in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 221. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 222.[Back.](#)

Note 39: Balchand Modi, *Desh ke Itihas mein Marwari Jati ka Stan* (Calcutta: Raghunathaprasada Simhaniya, 1940).[Back.](#)

Note 40: R. S. McGreggor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1007.[Back.](#)

Note 41: Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) is a good model for this type of research. See also Louis Dumont's essay, "Nationalism and Communalism," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (March 1964):30-70.[Back.](#)

[Community and Public Culture: The Marwaris in Calcutta 1897-1997](#)