

## INTRODUCTION

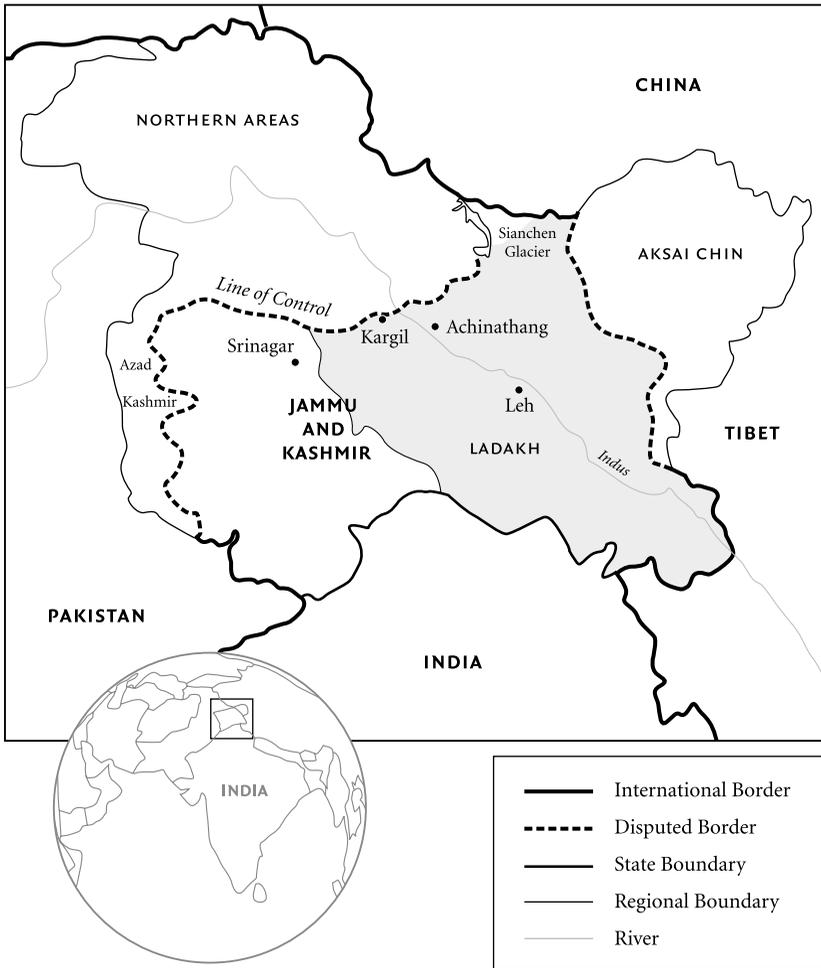
### Borders Performed

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The Line of Control stretches for over 435 miles, separating the deserts, pastures, peaks and valleys that India holds from those controlled by Pakistan. Carved into the Himalayan and Karakoram ranges, it designates most of the western and northwestern boundaries of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, where Ladakh is politically located. Drawn and redrawn by battles and treaties, the line is identifiable by traces of blood, bullets, watchtowers, and ghost settlements left from recurring wars between India and Pakistan. On international maps, it appears as a sequence of ellipses, the breaks in form symbolic of the rupture between the two neighboring nations as well as their troubled but shared histories.

For many of us who were educated in India, the Line of Control was not an obvious spatial marker. On the maps we drew in geography classes, the borders were undisputed and clear. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, we were taught, did the territorial sovereignty of India extend. Kashmir was the popular abbreviation for the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The name of Ladakh, the State's largest region, did not feature anywhere on our maps.

By erasure or inclusion, the Line of Control (LOC) has been materially and ideologically resurrected in systems of education, discourses of development and defense, and strategies for organizing government and managing citizens in the homeland. This book redirects standard plots about the LOC that are transmitted through national imaginaries and state practices by placing cen-



Map of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh.



Road marker on the Leh-Srinagar highway. Courtesy of Christopher S. Wheeler.

ter stage cultural performances and political movements in Ladakh. It shows that borders are far from peripheral to the nation-state, for it is at its borders that the nation is perhaps experienced most intimately; to border India, then, is to constitute the very heart of Indian identity.

Ladakh is India's northernmost area, bordering Pakistan on the west and Tibet on the east. As a borderland, it is subjected to the daily dramas of chauvinism that monitor cultural identity and citizenship between the two countries bisected by the LOC and between the social groups within them. Yet it is also a dynamic, interdependent, and liminal locale that invites a grounded look at border cultures beyond the conventional template of security concerns. Moving away from conceptualizations of the LOC as an inviolate or natural space, the chapters that follow show how cultural performances such as national holidays, festivals, rites of passage ceremonies, films, and archery games become sites for nation making and for the composition and enactment of border subjectivity in Ladakh.

## “BORDERING” INDIA

In 1989, the year that I first visited Ladakh, when the world celebrated the reunification of Germany following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the region of Kashmir was also witnessing a demand for dismantling an international border, that of the disputed LOC. But whereas the demolition of the Berlin Wall was interpreted as a realization of the promise of democracy and a step that would pave the way for a “Europe without borders,” the demand for a borderless Kashmir escalated into violent outbreaks and hardened state control over the LOC. Civil unrest gave way to full-scale clashes. Dissidents and minorities were killed or turned into refugees by armed separatists. Torture, rape, and other human rights abuses were inflicted by security forces on civilians suspected of militancy. The conflict became acute, with Pakistan accusing India of suppressing the spontaneous will of the Kashmiris for independence and India blaming Pakistan for sponsoring Kashmiris to fight its “proxy war” against India. A large military force was deployed in the area and a frenzied arms race ensued, giving the LOC an international reputation as a dangerous nuclear flashpoint.

That same year, on July 6, 1989, at the birth anniversary celebration of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, held at the Peace Garden (Zhi-be tshal) on the banks of the river Indus in Ladakh, peace was shattered when a taxi with Muslim spectators was prevented from entering the premises.<sup>1</sup> This incident fueled simmering hostilities between Ladakh’s Buddhist and Muslim communities. The bazaar of Leh, where neo-Buddhists, trekkers, Zen motorcyclists, revelers, ravers, students, and researchers had once gathered in cafés called Dreamland and Friends’ Corner, suddenly turned into an arena of battle. Protestors clashed with police, monks took to oratory, and youths put on fierce and frightening masks. A momentous period referred to as the Agitation had started, which so affected Ladakhi society that when people measured time henceforth, they often spoke of life before or after this period. The Agitation instigated civil disobedience against the State of Jammu and Kashmir and advocated Union Territory status for Ladakh. Ambitious programs to reform rural areas were launched and social boycotts imposed to delimit interaction between Buddhists and Muslims.

What do these events in Ladakh and the Kashmir valley have in common besides their concurrency? A major cause for the two conflicts can be traced to the cartographic imaginings and political strategies that brought about the formation of the modern Indian state and its borders. With the expansion

of Britain's imperial interests in the mid-nineteenth century, the Himalayas, which the British had hitherto perceived as dangerous and unknown frontiers, came to be viewed as natural borders for India (Bishop 1989). Linear boundaries replaced the frontiers of earlier political systems in British India (Embree 1977). According to Ainslee Embree, frontiers had been vast transitional zones, determined by geography and ethnic groups, passages where cultures blended into each other and where the land beyond was open to expansion.<sup>2</sup> The concept of linear boundary, in contrast, separated and fixed the modern state concretely, through posts, fences, and pillars on the ground, and conceptually, through map representations and treaties with sovereign powers. Boundary commissions and institutes like the Trigonometrical Survey of India and the Royal Geographic Society were set up for the project of defining the territorial perimeters of the colonies through maps and scientific surveys (Bishop 1989). The map of India became lined with boundaries, such as the Durand Line separating it from Afghanistan and the McMahon and McCartney/MacDonald Lines separating it from Tibet, cartographic representations that were inevitably shaped by political interests and in turn, directed how India was conceived and administered.<sup>3</sup>

The military interests of the empire facilitated the incorporation of independent states such as Ladakh within the realm of the Dogra kingdom of Jammu, bringing together a diverse number of ethnic groups and religions under one ruler. Recent studies by Chitrlekha Zutshi (2003) and Mridu Rai (2004) have brought to light how the colonial handshake between the British and the Dogras resulted in the centralization and bureaucratization of authority and the consolidation of a distinctly Hindu state practice by the Dogras, who used religious sanction to hold on to power against the seemingly secular directives of the British. This religious face of the Dogra state and the nationalist struggles for independence in other parts of India in turn spurred the expression of Kashmiri Muslim subjectivity along religious lines.

With independence from British rule in 1947 and its simultaneous subdivision into the two nations of India and Pakistan, parts of British India were parceled out in accordance with a settlement known as the Radcliffe Agreement. The outcome of settling the destiny of such a culturally diverse landscape on the basis of cartography resulted in the death of half a million people and a staggering displacement of 10 to 12 million refugees as they crossed sides.<sup>4</sup> The violence of this Partition, which is now being recounted in memoirs and analyzed academically after decades of silence, has often been cast as the pas-

sionate and communal response of Indian nationalism to a precise, comprehensive, and decisive system of allocation (Chatterji 1999). As Joya Chatterji and other historians have argued, however, boundary decisions through the Radcliffe Award were not made on the basis of geographic contiguity, religious majority, or economic rationality alone, but political bargaining and the desire for territory influenced Award decisions. Once it came into existence, the border created artificial barriers and radically altered the lives of citizens on both sides.<sup>5</sup>

During the Partition period, rulers of princely states under British India came under tremendous pressure to accede to one of the two dominions, Pakistan or India.<sup>6</sup> Finding himself in the predicament of heading a Muslim majority state but not endorsing Pakistan or being favorably disposed to the Indian Congress, the Dogra maharaja of Kashmir would have preferred to remain independent. In the absence of a real independence option, he offered a Standstill Agreement. While the Agreement was in effect in Pakistan but still under consideration in India, Pathan tribals from Pakistan moved into Kashmir. The maharaja appealed to India for military aid, but armed intervention did not come unconditionally. When Indian troops arrived in Kashmir in October 1947, the maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession, yielding the state to India.<sup>7</sup> Communal riots soon raked Jammu and Kashmir after the Accession, and rebellions against the maharaja's rule led to the occupation and eventual breakup of the state between the two countries. In 1948, India brought the matter before the United Nations, and on January 1, 1949, a United Nations declaration fashioned the Ceasefire Line, which was to be a makeshift boundary along existing frontline positions. Pakistan and India signed an armistice, wherein India promised a plebiscite to honor the will of the people of Kashmir and Pakistan agreed to withdraw its forces from the areas under its control. Neither the plebiscite nor the evacuation occurred; instead, India and Pakistan went to war three more times after 1948, in 1965, 1971, and 1999. With the Simla Accord, signed in 1972, the Ceasefire Line came to be called the Line of Control or Line of Actual Control, dividing what would be classified as Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the Northern Areas of Baltistan and Gilgit in Pakistan from the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>8</sup>

The current Kashmir conflict, often attributed to the “unfinished business of Partition,” to religious fundamentalism, or to imperfect state practices of postcolonial nations, must be weighed against these histories of modernity. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the cold war cannot be seen as an automatic and ultimate fulfillment of a peaceful and borderless global econ-

omy.<sup>9</sup> In India, as in other parts of the world, globalization, capital domination, and the uncertainties of identification wrought by flows of technologies and bodies were challenged by subnational and transnational uprisings, ethnic violence, and religious movements with differing ideologies fashioned in the wake of empire.<sup>10</sup> Religious, regional, and extraregional causes for Kashmir's insurgency overlapped with political mismanagement of electoral procedures, corruption, and lack of reliable leaders at the State and central levels (Bose 1997). Structural inequalities in economic institutions perpetuated unemployment and resentment among middle-class Muslim youth and poverty in the Muslim-dominated countryside of Kashmir (Ganguly 1997). Cold war politics and the U.S.-backed jihad in Afghanistan spurred the militarization of Islamic groups, and arms and trained guerrillas poured into Pakistan and eventually into the Kashmir valley (Behera 2000, Sikand 2001). Moreover, the rising tide of Hindu nationalism appropriated the ancient frontier myth of an Akhand Bharat expanding beyond the Himalayas and adapted the myth to the ambitions and pressures of standing out as a world player in the global marketplace.<sup>11</sup> Globalization did not make national boundaries obsolete: the state, burdened by what Sankaran Krishna (1996) describes as "cartographic anxiety," reinserted itself in even more menacing ways to crush opposition. It intensified surveillance over modern boundaries such as the LOC, criminalizing civil transactions and social ties across them. It also dissolved the face of the external enemy into the internal one, culminating in a culture of fear against Muslims and other minorities within India.

Positioned in the penumbra of the LOC, Ladakh, too, is part of the discord in Kashmir and is affected by plans for its future. It has escaped the scale of uncertainty and violence that the Kashmir valley deals with daily, making it more accessible for travel and sustained research.<sup>12</sup> Still, when the phrase "the voice of the Kashmiri people" is invoked for seeking resolutions for the Kashmir conflict beyond exclusive negotiations between Pakistani and Indian heads of state, political analysts generally ignore perspectives from Ladakh.<sup>13</sup> When these perspectives are considered, it is to differentiate Buddhist Ladakh and Hindu Jammu from Muslim Kashmir, using religion as the criterion to ascribe a unified voice to the areas. But just as the Kashmir valley is home to diverse cultural groups, the high-altitude region of Ladakh, with its estimated population of 250,000 (about 3 percent of the population of the state), has a demographic composition that comprises Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs.

Administratively, the governance of Ladakh is divided among various offi-

cial bodies at the local, State, and central levels. Ladakh has its own seat in the Lok Sabha (Lower House) of the Indian Parliament. Besides the presence of a central government bureaucracy, the region comes under the jurisdiction of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and is represented in the State legislature by four members elected to the State Legislative Assembly, two members nominated to the State Legislative Council, and a secretary chosen among them for managing Ladakh affairs. Ladakh itself is divided into two districts (Leh and Kargil), which are each in the charge of a district development commissioner, who is responsible for implementing schemes for public works and supervising everyday affairs. Leh and Kargil are further subdivided into five and seven blocks, respectively, each with its own block headquarters. At the local level, there is a network of panchayat committees for rural development that has come into effect only since 1999. Moreover, as a result of the Agitation that began in 1989, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act was passed in 1995, with provisions for assuming decision-making and financial control in virtually every department previously managed by the State government, except law and order and the judiciary, which are still largely part of the State portfolio. The Agitation was a movement initiated by a segment of the Ladakhi leadership for the devolution of political and administrative power from the State government of Jammu and Kashmir, which it considered discriminatory to Ladakh and to Buddhists in particular. It was also set into motion by and bore witness to major shifts in the economy of Ladakh, as village-level agriculture, animal husbandry, and limited trade opportunities were reorganized by a growing tourist industry, which restructured employment, land, and market transactions considerably. Together with the private sector, the state featured as a key actor in economic development through its civil and military wings and accounted for the largest employment of educated labor. Revenues sanctioned by central and State five-year plans were used for building agricultural and service-oriented infrastructural facilities. Additionally, subsidies from border areas programs, funds from defense budgets, and special development packages poured in, giving Ladakh an advantage over rural districts in the plains of India. But the area's vulnerability to war and the misplaced attempts at large-scale development undermined economic planning that was culturally and environmentally suitable and, in some cases, enhanced inequalities between social groups.

Distinctive and intersecting struggles of religion, class, caste, gender, and ethnicity have taken place in Ladakh since the Agitation of 1989. The Kashmir conflict and corresponding national expectations have exerted a large

influence on these struggles, more directly in some cases and tangentially in others. Here, I examine how cultural boundaries were constituted on the Ladakhi frontier; how they were constrained by the directives of the colonial and postcolonial state; how they were contoured into a social movement that was legitimized through discourses of purity, patriotism, and political and economic development; how they were executed, performed, resisted, and accommodated; and the implications they had for a place that modernity had scripted as India's ultimate border.

#### IMAGINED FRONTIERS

The image of the border manifests itself in popular representations of Ladakh that tend to portray it as a remote land located at the edge of modernity. Ladakh is described in binary terms, either as a self-sustaining and unique paradise open for adventure, sport, and tranquil spiritual self-discovery, a surviving remnant of the glory and mysticism of an unsalvageable Tibet, or else as a backward border on the fringes of India, a stark, hazard-filled wilderness where men of courage battle nature and enemies.<sup>14</sup> Government directives, academic writings, and travel literature have all spawned images that add to the region's marginalization.

When official travel restrictions were relaxed during the 1970s and transport facilities subsequently developed, waves of European tourists initially interested in Tibetan culture, which had become less approachable after the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, found their way into Ladakh. Ladakh gained renown in international circles with the publication of Helena Norberg-Hodge's *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh* in 1991, a book that hailed it as a haven of sustainable development and the last frontier in the war against modernity's "development hoax," with its malaise of environmental degradation, fragmented social relations, and loss of self-sufficiency.<sup>15</sup> Such descriptions, together with Ladakh's topography and cultural landscape, captured the imagination of travelers interested in alternative tourism. Inspired by the harmonious balance between environment and humanity prescribed in Buddhist teachings, students from the West poured in to earn school credit or work experience from volunteering in one of the several nongovernmental organizations that mushroomed there.

Until the 1990s, anthropological studies mirrored popular perceptions of Ladakh as a proto-Tibetan Buddhist culture. Seldom did texts concern themselves with the other half of its population that practices Islam.<sup>16</sup> Disturbed

at the lopsided leanings of Himalayan studies toward some religions, writers such as Gerard Rovillé (1991, 113) urge scholars to refrain from partisan politics “bloqueés dans leurs horizons par la ligne de cessez-faire.” Ladakhologists such as Patrick Kaplanian (1985) and John Bray (1991) propose the expansion of Ladakh studies in the direction of exploring the area’s links with Central and South Asia. As an offshoot of the Silk Route, Ladakh’s association with the Central Asian trade was vital to its economy.<sup>17</sup> British wars with Afghanistan and the significance that Central Asia assumed during the “Great Game” transformed the political status of Ladakh (Keay 1979; Huttenback 1995). In terms of religion, too, Bon and Buddhist customs that had prevailed in the Central Asian region influenced later forms of Tibetan Buddhism (Kvaerne 1985), and Iraq and Iran figured prominently both in the early spread of Islam in Ladakh and in the practice of Islam in the latter part of the twentieth century (Grist 1998; Pinnault 1999a).

The attention paid to Ladakh’s relations with Tibet has certainly proven valuable for challenging ready identifications made in accordance with national borders. Ladakh’s affinity with Tibet is a historical phenomenon, traceable to a common monarchic lineage, a shared language family (Denwood 1995), commercial networks (Bray 1995), and systems of religious learning (Shakspo 1988). In recent times, notwithstanding the difficulty of actual contact, political decisions, militarization, migration of refugees, smuggling, and other economic transactions on the Ladakhi-Tibetan border affect the lifestyles of Ladakhis (Bray 1995), especially the nomads in its Changthang block.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Sino-Indian war of 1961–62 fought on this border was as important a stimulant as the LOC in shaping national attitudes and defense policies.<sup>19</sup> Despite its relevance to Ladakh studies, however, the Tibetan model alone is not adequate for addressing the social and political realities of modern Ladakh or comprehending the specificity of its political history, religion, culture, and language. Instead, situating Ladakh in a broader Himalayan context, which includes Tibet, provides a transnational perspective and erodes the boundaries of conventional area studies approaches that sharply cleave the study of East Asia from the study of South Asia.

The Himalayas occupy a special place in Indian folklore and popular culture as sacred spaces replete with meditating hermits or as impenetrable barriers that have withstood invaders. But until recently, the name of Ladakh rarely evoked any sentiment of national pride despite its strategic importance and participation in all of India’s major wars post-Independence. As Agehanda Bharati (1978) alleges, for most Indians, the Himalayas tended to be

“ascriptive rather than actual mountains,” and its people were seen as strange mountain folk with peculiar social habits. Development-oriented measures implemented by the Indian government were also premised on this conception of Ladakh as backward and undeveloped. Correspondingly, when I mentioned my work in Ladakh, a question I was invariably asked was what tribe I was observing there. The characterization of anthropology as a discipline that studies tribes is rooted in colonial systems of knowledge. Classifying border residents as tribal marks them as primitive and mired in odd beliefs and rituals. Given that Ladakh did not fit into schemes of political or economic organization usually considered tribal, my first reaction to these queries was to respond that I was not studying tribal culture. Ladakhis had become “tribal,” however, not through some fixed and traditional identity, but after lengthy petitions and political negotiations, when eight groups in Ladakh took Scheduled Tribes status in 1989 to avail themselves of the economic and political provisions for affirmative action in the Indian Constitution that are permissible through the limited and established categories of caste and tribe.

Besides this “tribal” label, and perhaps closely linked to it, is the category of “race,” by which Ladakhis are frequently differentiated, even though classifications of tribe and caste are officially used in India instead of race. As a result of my involvement with Ladakh, I learned to notice differential patterns of treatment in situations that I had taken for granted in the past. For example, I had my first experience of being turned away from a discotheque in India in a five-star hotel in Delhi when I was accompanied by Ladakhi friends. Smiling patiently at my consternation, my friends pointed out that “chinkies” were not exactly welcome in such establishments. The term “chinky” is a racial epithet with a diverse range of associations. I had mostly heard this word in urban contexts, often in school or university settings, to refer to those of Chinese nationality or to those ethnic groups who are supposed to look like East Asians. Ladakhi students studying in Delhi and Chandigarh used the term to include Nagas, Manipuris, Mizos, Sikkimese, and other communities from India’s northeastern areas, as well as Japanese, Chinese, and other East Asian nationals. This label enabled them to articulate their racial difference from other Indians and to describe the social and voluntary associations they had developed with other students from the northeast or for models of beauty that they admired, such as Japanese pinup girls and Chinese martial arts heroes, whose pictures were almost as popular as those of Bollywood film stars.

At another time, as I was walking on a crowded Delhi street with Ladakhi friends, a man in a passing car yelled out “Hato, Gorkhe” (Move over,

Gorkhas). “Gorkha” is a commonly used generic designation in India for all Nepalis. Gorkhas were seen as an aggressive but simple “martial” race by the British, and the high recruitment from this particular ethnic community in India’s colonial and postcolonial armies has resulted in the persistence of this kind of imagery in postcolonial times (see L. Kaplan 1997). The attribution of Gorkha identity extends to Ladakhi women, who are subjected to sexual harassment or to insinuations that they are sex workers, conceptions produced by the trafficking of women from the countryside of Nepal to red-light districts of metropolitan cities in India.

As a consequence of these misconceptions, Ladakhi youth often confessed to me that they feel like outsiders in most Indian cities. In an interview about this subject, I was told, “Look, Ravina, I will tell you one thing. India is such a big country. We have different kinds of people. There are so many Indians, your people, who still don’t know that there are so many Mongolian people in this country. And earlier they used to look at us as a Gorkha, an inferior race. And that’s how in India we suffer, you know. I did suffer a complex of being a chinky earlier, you know, which I no more suffer because of friends like you. Still, when it comes to marriage, maybe you would have not married me.”

Forms of racial distinction in postcolonial India have received very little attention in South Asian studies, where the discourse around race has been concentrated on colonial racism or racism faced by populations of the Indian diaspora in the West.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, in conversations and meetings, Ladakhi historians and scholars speak of themselves as belonging to the “Mongolian race,” which they distinguish from the “Aryan” heritage of Indians like me. They see my objections to these problematic classifications as a failure to recognize the realities that border inhabitants live in. Such self-identifications and distinctions are internalizations of racial hierarchies that reflect the outcome of colonial history, but they are also expressions of an identity that has allowed Ladakhis to distinguish themselves positively and make visible submerged practices of institutional racism in contemporary India.

Lately, a burgeoning cosmopolitanism in India has generated an attraction for trips to locales that are out of the ordinary and sparked an interest in cultural tourism in Ladakh. Its Hemis festival, for instance, is widely advertised and listed as one of the major tourist destinations in Government of India publications on tourism. Such portrayals have dispelled negative stereotypes of Ladakh to some extent. Yet, following the curfews and crackdowns that have accompanied the separatist struggle in Kashmir and the agitation for Union Territory status, Ladakh receives considerable publicity worldwide

as a region of conflict. State departments of several countries routinely issue travel advisories cautioning their citizens about visiting the region. Friends and relatives worry for my safety each time they read reports about gruesome deaths in Kashmir, shelling episodes in Kargil, or pronouncements such as the one made in March 2000 by U.S. President Bill Clinton, that the LOC is “the most dangerous place in the world today” (Press Trust of India 2000).

An in-depth ethnographic engagement with the region’s cultural history reveals how Ladakh is constituted by its residents both as a border zone and as a social and political center. To combat images that single out their homeland as a zone of discord, Ladakhis compare its low rates of crime to routine inner-city violence and security breaches elsewhere. They defend disparities in their society by pointing to gender, class, and caste hierarchies in other parts of India. They contrast their culture with that of the rGyagarpa (“Indians”), characterizing themselves as simple, spiritual, and egalitarian, and Indians from the plains as complicated, worldly, and class-ridden. At other times, they fiercely claim Indian identity, not only by resisting or accommodating centralized ideologies, but by seeing themselves as central to the national project. One politician told me, “It was we who fought in both the wars, lost our lives, cattle, and property. We are more Indian than the Indians.” Reinforced by consistent “low-level” shelling across the LOC, instances of escalated war, and economic policies that are motivated by security affairs, Ladakh’s border location looms large in its self-imagination and in its strategies for political and cultural identification.

To someone raised in the metropolitan city of Bombay, Ladakh defied my conventionalized ideas of Indianness but also embodied Indianness with an immediacy that was alien to me. I was confounded by the daily sight of army barracks and the degree of intimacy that people had with government bureaucracy. The following example illustrates this intimacy.

When I was making arrangements to visit the village of Achinathang, I was informed that I would need an Inner Line permit, which could be obtained from the DC’s [district commissioner’s] office. If he wasn’t in, I was to submit my petition to the AC [assistant commissioner]. Once the permit was granted, the office may submit a copy to the GOC [general officer in command] or the SP [superintendent of police]. I was never to take a *Shaktiman* or a one-tonne [army truck] going that way. If I was fortunate, it might be time for a scheduled tour in a Gypsy by the CMO [chief medical officer] or BEO [block education officer], or even LEDEG [Ladakh Ecological Development Group], which was building a hydroelectric project there.<sup>21</sup> If none of these options

were available, as a last resort I could take the Service that ran on alternate days, which meant that I would have to identify myself at the three police checkpoints en route. After I had reached my destination, I might encounter BSF [Border Security Force] but not Scouts [Ladakh Scouts]. The ITBF [Indo-Tibetan Border Force], ITBP [Indo-Tibetan Border Police], or RAW [Research and Analysis Wing] might conduct routine inquiries, but they were generally polite. It should be relatively uncomplicated, but if I had any complaints, I could address them to the ZEO [zonal education office] in Khalatse.

This counsel in Ladakhi and Urdu (the official language of the State of Jammu and Kashmir), with English thrown in for the acronyms, was given in a bureaucratized incomprehensible to me then but decodable by most nonliterate Ladakhis, indicative of their complex linguistic and political universe.<sup>22</sup> Such multilayered and refracting experiences of identity demand that Ladakh be viewed, not merely as a frontier of either peace or hostility, but also as a cultural “crossroad”; not an isolated periphery, but a place located in an orbit of national and transnational networks of travel, trade, migration, knowledge exchanges, political alliances, and conflicts.<sup>23</sup>

#### BORDER APPROACHES

As is evident from the discussion above, the image of conflict-ridden borderland is only one dimension through which Ladakh’s culture can be represented. Yet, from the time I first began my field research, the border emerged as a dominant frame of reference. Living in Ladakh at this time, I could not ignore the struggles over power and identity that were consuming its people. Scholarly theory, as Anna Tsing (1993, 13) has argued, “cannot be separated from local dilemmas and proportions.” Metaphoric, discursive, and socio-political boundaries in the borderlands of Ladakh, which lie in the vicinity of that geopolitical entity, the LOC, became the main focus of my inquiry.

My fieldwork extended to three main localities that are situated at varying distances from the LOC. To understand how villagers coped with the Agitation, I stayed in Achinathang, a village along the Indus valley with a population of both Buddhists and Muslims. The village was part of a protected area near the LOC and I needed a special permit to live there. In spatial classifications made by Buddhist Ladakhis, Achinathang is also known as *phyi-nang-gi sa-mtshams* (“the border between insiders and outsiders”) as it is located at the southwestern edge of Leh district and borders the Purig region in Kargil district. This border also loosely represents a religious divide: the district of

Leh is almost 80 percent Buddhist and 16 percent Muslim, whereas an overwhelming majority of Kargilis are Muslim and approximately 18 percent are Buddhist.<sup>24</sup> Different orders of Buddhism are prevalent in both regions, but the most prominent are the bka'rgyudpa and Gelugpa sects. Shi'as, Sunnis, and Nurbakshis are the main Muslim groups. In the capital towns of Leh and Kargil that also share the names of their respective districts, I acquired archival and statistical information, interviewed politicians, observed and participated in cultural performances, and interacted with other scholars. Kargil is situated so close to the LOC that mountains on the Pakistani side are directly visible from the town. Leh, my point of entry and exit into Ladakh, is on the eastern end and not directly contiguous to the Chinese or Pakistani borders. It is a vibrant, rapidly urbanizing town of approximately 28,000 people, with a constant flow of migrants and travelers and a marketplace that is representative of its diverse population.

Research in both rural settings and town areas assisted me in placing this ethnography within what George Marcus (1995) describes as a "world system" scenario, connecting dynamic and intersecting spheres of boundary formation within Ladakh to processes of nationalism and modernization that mold the LOC. In the discipline of anthropology, following the work of Fredrik Barth (1969, 2000), there has been a long-established tradition of scholarship that investigates social boundaries between ethnic communities; what has been less privileged is research on international boundaries (Donnan and Wilson 1999; Donnan and Haller 2000). Noting the relative absence of border studies in anthropology, Renato Rosaldo (1988, 87) writes ruefully that "most metropolitan typifications suppress, exclude, even repress border zones." Rosaldo proposes that a greater concentration on these porous domains can lead anthropology away from confining and homogenizing the concept of culture.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, an anthropological emphasis on borders makes room for a perspective that not only offers us insights into neglected cultural zones but also makes for a critical inclusion of people's agency in discussions of territory, sovereignty, and international policy. According to Wilson and Donnan (1998, 4), "The anthropology of borders is one perspective in political anthropology which reminds social scientists outside the discipline, and some within it, that nations and states, and their institutions, are composed of people who cannot or should not be reduced to the images which are constructed by the state, the media or of any other groups who wish to represent them."<sup>26</sup>

The anthropological angle with which I approached the sociopolitical composition of borders in Ladakh is that of "performance." The concept of perfor-

mance can encompass all forms of action in its broadest sense, but here I use the term narrowly to refer to self-consciously staged “cultural performances,” which, according to Milton Singer (1977), allow anthropologists to see what people consider to be exemplifications of their cultural practices.<sup>27</sup> Cultural performances are frames in which the drama of life is mimicked and exhibited. Performance, however, is not just a passive mirror of society; in Victor Turner’s (1986, 22) words, it is “often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of, an evaluation (with lively possibilities of rejection) of the way society handles history.” Going steps further than Turner’s analysis, feminist theorists have forcefully demonstrated not only that society responds to history through performances, but that identities are constituted by virtue of being performed (Butler 1990). A focus on performance serves to widen conventional definitions of political power and identity, for it denaturalizes and exposes the social construction of state institutions. For instance, Clifford Geertz’s (1980) classic analysis of the theater-state, *negara*, shows how ritual, pomp, and ceremony were key to the expression of state power and the functioning of court politics in nineteenth-century Bali. The state, Geertz argues, “drew its force, which was real enough, from its imaginative energies, its semiotic capacity to make inequality enchant” (123). Anthropological critiques of Western models of state formation (Handler 1988; Herzfeld 1987, 1991; Kapferer 1988) have also disclosed that regardless of their claim to civil and rational standards, symbolic, theatrical, and poetic expressions of power were the driving engines of state politics in these societies, too.

A useful structuring device for divulging how the state operates as a mechanism of social control, managing assertions of local heritage and converting rival interests into national icons and symbols, can be found in David Guss’s (2000) notion of “the festive state.”<sup>28</sup> Applying this concept to Ladakh, I explore the manner in which civil society interacts with and generates manifestations of the festive state—in official performances such as national day celebrations and military parades, in nonofficial state-sponsored functions such as the Sindhu Darshan and Ladakh Festivals, and in such public events as archery shows and movies that have become sites for negotiating and contesting status and power since the Agitation. Although the state is not always an obvious player in popular and cultural ceremonies, these ceremonies can be seen as sites that foster what Abner Cohen (1993, ix) refers to as “masquerade politics,” where politics is “articulated in non-political cultural forms such as religion, kinship, the arts.” Examining the construction of politics through categories of ethnicity, religion, class, caste, gender, race, or sexuality

also enables us to understand the performance of border subjectivity among populations placed under these categories.<sup>29</sup>

The border becomes a space where the state expresses itself through a habitualized performativity and repeatedly asserts physical and symbolic authority over its citizens, particularly over hybrid zones and migrant bodies that contaminate dominant notions of purity and unsettle orderliness (Haller 2000). Under these conditions of state repression, borders can inhibit the articulation of agency and efface hybridity, warns Smadar Lavie (1996, 82) in her analysis of Israeli-Palestinian identity, until “only the border itself remains, with its barbed wire, lookout towers, and minefields.” As Alejandro Lugo (1997, 61) notes, borders do not necessarily result in the decentralization of power, for they are “simultaneously a *bordure*: a border surrounding a shield.” Investigations of societies on the U.S.-Mexican border have disclosed that because border crossings and lines of purity are carefully screened and tightly regimented, citizens of these interstitial domains can become even more disenfranchised from the mainstream or else totalitarian in their defense of it (Behar 1993; Limon 1994).<sup>30</sup> For instance, the U.S.-Mexican border in Texas, the subject of a compelling ethnography by Jose Limon (1994), is bedeviled by hierarchies of power and dominance. Limon distinguishes between “wars of maneuver,” in which opponents face each other in actual physical combat, and “wars of position” that are fought on grounds of social relations and social stratification. Likewise, the Indo-Pakistani border is the locus for war as well as for national and ethnic acts of selective exclusion and inclusion. In the region of Wagah, soldiers on both sides convert the daily task of closing the border gates and lowering the flags in a riveting spectacle of uniform actions (Murphy 2001). According to Richard Murphy, “The Wagah border ritual is a dance of identical opposites, each poised in the mirror of the other” (186). Murphy argues that the border also manifests itself in social performances within Pakistan, such as the spring festival of Baisakhi in Lahore, where hints of the city’s multireligious heritage are either repressed by anti-Indian factions and orthodox religious groups or rendered to an ethnic past by the elite of Lahore.

The LOC too breeds the mistrust and adversity perpetuated in the policies and programs of India and Pakistan. In the borderlands that surround it, lines of control are produced in cultural performances, in zones of actual war, and in sites of social struggle. They are ratified in seats of ranking that distinguish castes and classes, played out in the game of archery and rites of passage ceremonies where religious and economic distinctions are imposed

and exposed, screened in commercial films in which gender boundaries are reproduced, and staged on national holidays to grapple with state power.

Conversely, Ladakh's mixed heritage and its proximity to Pakistan may provide it with a sense of urgency and an awareness of the value of tolerant and amicable relations in contrast to those centered communities who are isolated from the other side by geography and culture. Unlike the Kashmir valley, where the massacre and exodus of Kashmiri Pandits and the continued violence against Muslim civilians burden the possibility of restoring peace, Ladakh is still a society where various religions are living and interacting daily, making the need for reconciliation even more pressing and possible. Just as the inhabitants of the U.S.-Mexican border creatively stage the character of the devil to both enact the history of their marginality and subvert it in Limon's ethnography, Ladakhis also participate in cultural performances that delineate boundaries and simultaneously reveal ambiguities in centers that appear fixed. They resist lines of exclusion through gestures of intimacy and acts of longing. Often, expressions of plurality appear in fragments rather than coherent narratives, but, as the historian Gyan Pandey (1992, 28–29) suggests in his analysis of religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India, “With all their apparent solidity and comprehensiveness, what the official sources give us is also but a fragment of history. More, . . . what historians call a ‘fragment’ — a weaver’s diary, a collection of poems by an unknown poet (and to these we might add all those literatures of India that Macaulay condemned, creation myths and women’s songs, family genealogies, and local traditions of history) — is of central importance in challenging the state’s construction of history, in thinking other histories and making those contested spaces through which particular unities are sought to be constituted and others broken up.”

The quest for such fragments unravels the contradictions that prevail in official forms of history and tracks the submerged knowledges of marginalized groups. During a period when national identity and citizens’ rights are being argued on the basis of cultural heritage, when the state is making conscious efforts to erase interwoven histories and plural cultures by controlling information, redesigning history books, and designating some performances and citizens more authentic than others, a historical approach to the study of borderlands is all the more pressing. There are other texts that present a more straightforward and illuminating political history of the LOC; this ethnography follows the trope of the border in a “multisited” (Marcus 1995), interdisciplinary manner into cultural and temporal spaces that may otherwise be seen

as disparate. It juxtaposes the archives of official history and national narratives with travelogues, oral histories, literature, media images, and fragmented stories that articulate the major cultural debates in Ladakh from 1989 onward. It presents the symbolic and aesthetic elements of border performances in conjunction with social and material aspects of border life. Such an approach, according to George Marcus, enables ethnography to “discover new paths of connection and association by which traditional ethnographic concerns with agency, symbols, and everyday practices can continue to be expressed on a differently configured social canvas” (98).

Writing about border identity raises several ethical conundrums, especially when the border in question has been depicted as a place of violence in some representations and hailed as an idyllic utopia in others. It calls for a close examination of the politics of the ethnographer’s location and a mapping of the research terrain that places the ethnographer “within the landscape” (Marcus 1995, 112). As Marcus suggests, multisited research “is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography” (105). Ethnographers are not neutral observers of external realities, and my own association with the plains of India and its dominant Hindu religion oblige me not to take to the stands as a voyeur, consuming the exhibition of ethnic struggle between two minority communities in the mountains. Staying close to the thread of village life, the questions that I ask here investigate how the tremors of colonial, national, and regional practices affect the relationship between diverse communities in Ladakh and shape the way performances of nation and border are played out.

When there are matters of self-determination and belonging at stake, doing research on border identity puts the ethnographer in situations that often require a justification of his or her stance on political outcomes. Often, I had to face questions from Ladakhis and other Indians about my position on the Kashmir issue: whether I was for or against Kashmir’s independence, whether I supported the trifurcation of the state and the demand for Union Territory status in Ladakh. I could not always provide direct answers to these questions. Even though I have been doing research in Ladakh every year since 1989, the ultimate decision is not mine to make. The Kashmir issue stirs so much pain, passion, and patriotism that those of us critical of state practices on the Indian front are invariably accused of sympathizing with violent Kashmiri militants or of being disloyal citizens who turn a blind eye to Pakistan’s

military aggressions and its poor record in treating religious minorities. Already known, already imagined, the often-repeated assertions of Kashmir as paradise, Kashmir as ours, Kashmir as the symbol of India's successful secularism, and, in the more recent and dangerous years of political conservatism, as the symbol of secularism's failures have generated such a sense of familiarity with the region that very few Indians, or for that matter, Pakistanis, are taught anything about its culture or history. Because the Jammu and Kashmir border has become so vital for the self-perceptions of India and Pakistan and because the human cost of this lack of knowledge is so vast to both countries and to the region itself, it becomes imperative to move beyond ready explanations of the Kashmir conflict that make cultural differences appear innate and irreconcilable. On closer inspection, it becomes evident that the animosity between various religious and regional groups of Ladakh arises under specific circumstances and needs to be understood in the context of their histories. Through frequent demands for Union Territory status, Ladakhi leaders have strategically worked to publicize the area's problems and to obtain financial commitments and political leverage for it that are quite unprecedented in other rural parts of India. But as these demands are crafted in response to neoliberal and nationalist ideologies of security, development, and politics, their effectiveness in securing intercommunal trust has been very limited (see van Beek 1999, 2000). To provide additional grounds for assessing such strategies and developing alternative strategies, I have chosen to analyze, rather than conceal, displays of discord that are connected to the political movement that arose in the area in 1989 and to seek artful models of plurality within Ladakh's culture as Ladakhis decide the future of their homeland.

Finally, this book must admit to being only a partial account of the realities of border life. The LOC is, for now, what Oscar Martinez (1994) describes as an "alienated border," where the possibility of cross-border interaction is proscribed by political tensions, militarization, and religious conflicts. Like most Ladakhis, my Indian nationality makes largely inaccessible border crossings into Pakistan's northern area of Baltistan on the opposite side of the LOC from Ladakh, and restricts my understanding of Baltistan's place in the production of Pakistani national consciousness, of its processes of accommodation and resistance, of the power of its cultural performances, and of the parallels and discontinuities between Balti culture and neighboring areas.<sup>31</sup> Still, the specter of those stories haunts the telling of this one, and the hope for an end to the prolonged strife animates the writings of some of us on both sides of the border.