

FROM FAMILY TO POLICE FORCE

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01

CONTEXT

Where the research is situated

Context of *From Family to Police Force* (2021)

- Ibrahim's research site is the border between Sindh (Southern Pakistan) and Kutch (Northwest India)
 - Increased police + military presence among civilians
- She looks at
 - Diverse modes of policing
 - Muslim families and their kinship practices
 - The social and moral orders in that society



Context of *From Family to Police Force* (2021)

IMPORTANT!!



Ibrahim's research site

**West Bengal (India) and
Bangladesh**

The “*Bengali*” women that Ibrahim describes are not necessarily from West Bengal or Bangladesh → Instead, Bengali has come to *mean* something entirely different in this context!



O2

CONCEPTS

Breaking down key concepts in
the introduction

POWER, POLICING, AND THE STATE

"In modern times, we have fetishized both the state and the police as fundamental sources of law and order." (Reiner, 2010)



But in the book, policing is defined as a

*"complex web of **discourses** and **practices** that are produced by **multiple agents** in service of **maintaining** what is basically a **contested social and moral order**." (p. 3)*

= NOT restricted to the realm of the state, but instead...

*"The act of policing occurs at a **multiscalar level** that abounds across civil-military and state-society domains." (p. 7)*

POWER, POLICING, AND THE STATE

Q: Who gives these “multiple agents” the power to police?



PS1101E will tell you: Sovereignty, or supreme power, is an abstract power vested in the state.

Ibrahim will tell you: *“Sovereignty, defined as the power over life and death...is **fragmented** across a range of sites and actors beyond the state that are invested in the maintenance of the social order”* (p. 15)

Traditional forms of authority also possess a degree of sovereignty

RELIGION, FAMILY, GENDER

Q: Who is policing? Who is being policed?



- Borderlands of India: amplified **Hindu-Muslim tensions**
 - The Indian state has an interest in policing *borders* and *citizenship*, to prevent (Muslim) outsiders from coming into India
- **But what about the Muslim families subject to this policing? Can they also police?**

RELIGION, FAMILY, GENDER

Q: Who is policing? Who is being policed?



- The institution of the family is vested with a degree of sovereignty that it exercises in service of protecting itself.
- The nuclear, heteropatriarchal family is something that is **policed**.
 -
 - Different rules and social roles for men and women

RELIGION, FAMILY, GENDER

Q: Who is policing? Who is being policed?



- Consanguinity (marrying your cousins) creates problems in kinship groups
- Marrying women from outside the community solves some of those problems, but...

Bengali women are subject to policing by the community on the basis of their origins/citizenship, their gender roles, and their religions.

THE SOCIAL AND MORAL ORDER

Q. What does policing (state and non-state) achieve?

*"Maintaining what is basically a **contested social and moral order**"*

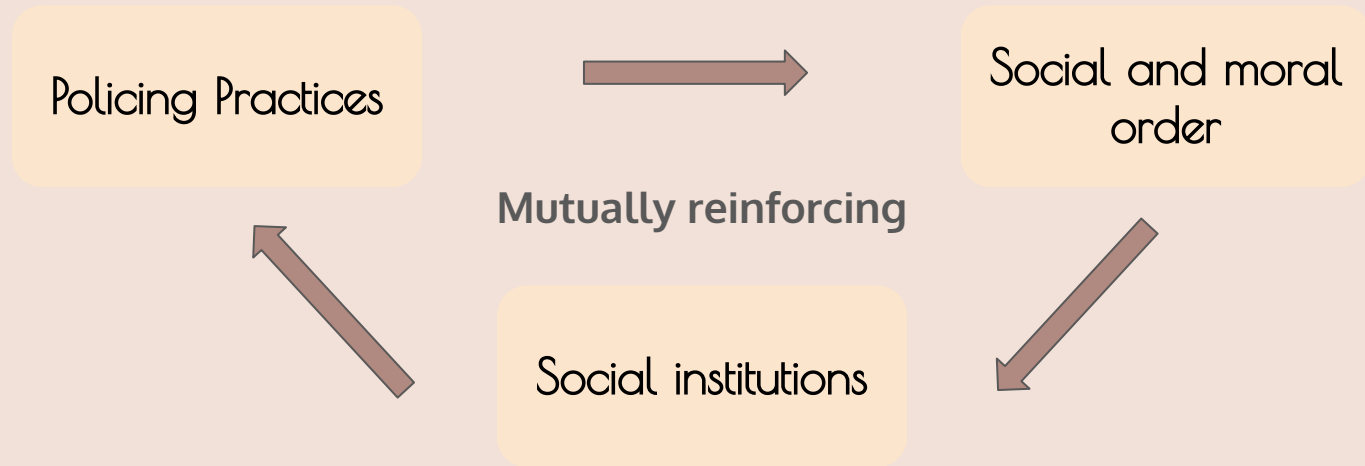


- Policewomen often file a legal case as a last resort
- An overall commitment to a patriarchal "familial ideology" (Kapur and Cossman, 1996)
- To avoid the disruption of the normative family setup

THE SOCIAL AND MORAL ORDER

Q. What does policing (state and non-state) achieve?

*"Maintaining what is basically a **contested social and moral order**"*





O3

APPLICATION

A stylized black line drawing of a woman in a sari, centered on a light pink background. The drawing is composed of thick, fluid black lines. The sari is draped over her head and shoulders, with a large, rounded loop at the top. The text "WHO IS THE 'BENGALI' WOMAN?" is written in white, uppercase letters across a black horizontal bar that passes through the center of the woman's figure.

WHO IS THE 'BENGALI' WOMAN?

THE 'BENGALI' WOMAN: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE STATE

SUBJECTIVE POLICING, SEEN AS AN 'OTHER'

"Police rely on intuitive sartorial and linguistic markers to "recognize" them in the absence of documentary evidence of their nationality

This includes imbuing general personality traits (such as a new bride's "shyness") or presumed disability (inability to speak)

The "suspicion" of being Bangladeshi is thus tied into non-documentary forms of life: skin color, clothing, and speech (or its absence). (97)

Analysis

- Cultural markers and identities become incriminating
- While excessive bureaucratisation is detrimental, the lack of it is also problematic
- Policing of cultural identities

THE 'BENGALI' WOMAN: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE STATE

MOBILITY VIEWED AS TRAFFICKING

Those women in Kutch who are deemed to have transgressed some form or other of the social and moral code - that is, unaccompanied by men, travelling not for work but in search for marriage (93)

Evaluation of women's mobility is its designation as either marriage or trafficking, as the two possible legal registers for women's mobility—the one a legal and aspirational social status, the other a dreaded social evil. (95)

Analysis

- Enforcing the traditional view that women should be reliant on men
- Negative views of women's mobility - neither views of their mobility seems desirable or positive.

THE 'BENGALI' WOMAN: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE STATE

DIFFUSED SOVEREIGNTY

Hasham explained to me out of his sister's earshot that he did not want any *lafda* (problem or scandal) over the presence of women he could not vouch for personally

He had never mentioned Razia" and "he never once raised the question of "Bengali" women in his own village, even though he did not have any hesitation in discussing Halima, the "Bengali" sister-in-law of his own sister

Analysis

- The power no longer lies only with the state: now that families of 'Bengali' women know what law enforcers are looking out for, they are able to only feed the state information that they want.
- Only protected "Bengali" women in their villages as they can vouch for them: the affinal families collectively work to manage their appearances and interactions
- Self-policing by family to avoid being caught/labelled for trafficking

THE 'BENGALI' WOMAN: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE COMMUNITY OF WOMEN IN KUTCH

CIRCUMSCRIBED A ROLE TO REDUCE THE THREAT OF BEING DISCOVERED

Her "shyness" was a good excuse for not having to bring her out in company where her lack of facility in the local language would have otherwise given her away to the police as being from "outside," notably from Bengal. (93)

"She is confused between real life and TV life." Nobody speaks after this; An unspoken tension leaves a mark on the room, regardless of whether there is *actually* anything to hide. (112)

Analysis

-How the community helps the "Bengali" woman manage the terrain between "detection" and "deception"

-Making themselves visible is not always desired; highlights the tensions within the community in their management of privacy through everyday policing of boundaries

THE 'BENGALI' WOMAN: THROUGH THE EYES OF HER FAMILY

CULTURAL CAPITAL (ISLAMIC VALUES)

She is read through a different moral index for Muslims who see her as the bearer of an Islamic civility—although poor (therefore, sent far away in marriage by parents who cannot afford to provide her with dowry), she comes with cultural capital—that is, knowledge of reading and writing and of Islamic values—which she can then disseminate in her new environment. (99)

Zain *bhabhi's* (brother's wife) parents had suggested a "Bengali" wife for him. After his marriage, they said of him now, "He is poor but always well turned out in clean clothes and fed and looked after by his wife." (115)

Analysis

- Seen as the ones capable of helping their "not particularly attractive partners" lead a Islamic civilized life
- Judgement of women based on what they can bring to the table to maintain *mahaul* (atmosphere)



O4 CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

RECAP

01

CONTEXT
of the research

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in the introduction

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in the figure of the
'Bengali' Woman

CONCLUSION + Ibrahim's key argument

- 1) Family, marriage, and forms of reckoning kin involve forms of policing that are not discontinuous from what we associate with the state.
- 2) Rather: policing occurs at a multiscale level, across civil-military, state-society, and public-private domains.
- 3) Even if these multiple agents don't spring from the same source, and don't agree about the shared outcome of the moral and social order

What are policing practices, really?



Policing Practices

- Undertaken by the state
- Vested with supreme power
- In service of maintaining the **law**

- Undertaken by anyone
- With enough power to enforce
- In service of maintaining a **contested social and moral order**

Discussion Questions

- 1) What are some other forms of intimate policing that you can think of?
- 2) Re: "women's mobility is seen by law enforcement as trafficking/sex work" in what ways are women subject to policing by law enforcement that men are not?
- 3) Is the family structure a site of policing in Singapore? Why or why not?
- 4) **What makes a specific behaviour "policing"? Is any behaviour that is in service of "maintaining a contested social and moral order" enough to be called policing?**



Thank you!