

BOMBAY BROKERS

EDITED BY LISA BJÖRKMAN

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

INTRODUCTION URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE GLOBAL INTERREGNUM LISA BJÖRKMAN 1

PART I DEVELOPMENT RACHEL STURMAN 47

1 BUNTY SINGH BUILDER OF DREAMS LALITHA KAMATH 59	4 MEHMOODBHAI TOILET OPERATOR PRASAD KHANOLKAR 87
2 IMRAN HOUSING CONTRACTOR TOBIAS BAITSCH 68	5 KAUSHAL LAND AGGLOMERATOR LLERENA GUIU SEARLE 95
3 DALPAT MANAGER OF SERVICES LISA BJÖRKMAN 78	6 JANU SISTER-SUPERVISOR OF MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS UDAY CHANDRA 101

PART II PROPERTY LISA BJÖRKMAN 109

7 DR. K MIDDLE-CLASS SOCIAL WORKER YAFFA TRUELOVE 121	10 NIRMALA KAMATHIPURA'S GATEKEEPER RATOOLA KUNDU 145
8 ASHOK RAVAT SHIVAJI PARK'S SENTINEL LALIT VACHANI 128	11 FARHAD "SUE MAKER" LEILAH VEVAINA 154
9 SHAZIA PROOF MAKER SANGEETA BANERJI 137	

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UNI
NIVERSITY
VPRESS

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

PART III BUSINESS TARINI BEDI 163	
12	RAMITA SURROGACY AGENT DAISY DEOMAMPO 175
13	MUHAMMAD REVALORIZER OF E-WASTE ANERI TASKAR 182
14	DEEPAK MAKING MUMBAI (IN CHINA) KA-KIN CHEUK 191
15	LUBAINA FRAMING "DEVELOPMENT" LUBAINA RANGWALA 199
PART IV DIFFERENCE ANJALI ARONDEKAR 233	
19	BHIMSEN GAIKWAD SINGER OF JUSTICE SHAILAJA PAIK 243
20	SULTAN IMAGE MANAGER DAVID J. STROHL 253
21	RAJ CARTING COSMOPOLITANISM MAURA FINKELSTEIN 262
22	LAXMI DEALER IN EMOTION R. SWAMINATHAN 270
23	DHARAMSEY ASSEMBLER OF TRADITION EDWARD SIMPSON 278
24	DALVI SPEAKER OF CITIES GAUTAM PEMMARAJU 286
PART V PUBLICS LISA BJÖRKMAN & MICHAEL COLLINS 297	
25	SHASHI DOT CONNECTOR ROHAN SHIVKUMAR 307
26	ANIL PRAKASH AMPLIFIER OF CINEMA-INDUSTRIAL CONNECTIONS KATHRYN HARDY 315
27	GAURAVPANT MISHRA CROWD MAKER SARTHAK BAGCHI 322
28	SRINIVASAN KINGMAKER SIMON CHAUCHARD 329
29	MADHU DOOR OPENER BHUSHAN KORGAONKAR 337
30	POORNIMA DESIGNING RELATIONS AJAY GANDHI 347
PART VI TRUTH LISA BJÖRKMAN 355	
31	RAJANI PANDIT DETECTOR OF "TRUTHS" SRIMATI BASU 367
32	AFZAL TAXIMAN RUMOR NAVIGATOR SAHANA UDUPA 378
33	PAWAN PRISON MASTER ATREYEE SEN 384
34	SUJIT MASTER COMMUNICATOR ANNELIES KUSTERS 391
35	CHADDA REPORT MAKER PRASAD SHETTY & RUPALI GUPTA 401
36	PRAKASH DATA ENTREPRENEUR AMITA BHIDE 405

CONCLUSION OTHER PLACES, OTHER TIMES LISA MITCHELL 414
 GLOSSARY 425
 ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS 437
 INDEX 441

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PRESS

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The ideas that animate this book developed slowly over time—in conjunction with my own deepening ethnographic engagement with Bombay over the past decade or so. The idea to actually rope all my friends and colleagues into this somewhat-unwieldy project, however, came more recently and suddenly, during a particularly fantastic dinner in Bombay with Maura Finklestein, sometime in January 2017. As our dinner conversation turned to stories of the remarkable creativity and skillfulness of people we encountered in our research, I began to think about the generative possibilities of bringing such stories together in an unusual kind of book.

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Reading through the final *Bombay Brokers* page proofs in the bleak days of December 2020, I find that, in the face of the dark news filling my inbox each morning, the ethnographic accounts in this book nonetheless fill me with hope: these stories suggest that perhaps too much attention is being paid to conventional and empowered ways of reading and narrating the present. By contrast, the stories that populate these pages shine light through the cracks and contradictions that inhere in those empowered discourses and framings, revealing a world so remarkably full of creativity that it seems anything could happen.

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xii ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
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MAP FM.1 Places mentioned in Greater Mumbai. Drawn by Anand Prahlad.

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MAP FM.2 Places mentioned in Island City. Drawn by Anand Prahlad.

P R E S S

**INTRODUCTION URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE
GLOBAL INTERREGNUM** **Lisa Björkman**

IN APRIL 2014 I moved into one of those lovely crumbling old *chawl*^{*} buildings lining L. J. Road in the central Mumbai/Bombay¹ neighborhood of Dadar.² The tiny one-room flat had belonged to my friend Kranti's³ granny, who had recently passed away after living in the flat for more than sixty years. Granny's daughters had long ago moved out of their childhood home in the "Dadar chawl" and into larger and more comfortable residences in Navi Mumbai, in Goa, in Heidelberg. The little room remained shuttered while the building (which had been acquired by one of the city's larger property developers during the giddy turn-of-the-millennium property boom but had been put into cold storage following a protracted market slump) waited for the promised "redevelopment" under one or another of the government's market-driven schemes. In this context, Kranti's idea that "hey, you could stay in Granny's flat!" suggested a fine solution to the perennial problem of where to stay in Mumbai, this time for a six-month visit. Granny's flat itself was blissfully quiet and peaceful—notwithstanding the chawl's address

^{*} The glossary at the end of the book discusses meanings of specialized terms appearing in italics. Specialized terms that are more amenable to single-word translations are clarified with parentheticals in the text itself.

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along one of the noisiest thoroughfares in a very noisy city—situated as it was on the far side of the internal courtyard, tucked into the back corner of the third-floor corridor farthest from the shared toilet. Getting the place in shape was easy enough: we called in a carpenter to replaster the ceiling and to slap a fresh coat of paint on the walls. The room was already furnished with a bed and a desk, and the kitchen was fully outfitted with pots and pans.

The only catch was the cooking gas.

The problem was that Granny's propane cylinder delivery subscription had been canceled after she passed away. When Kranti called up the propane company to inquire about getting the subscription restarted, she was told that a new subscription would require current residents' proof-of-address documents—documents that, because no one actually lived there anymore, did not exist. Without proof-of-residence documents, it was not possible to get a gas subscription (or “connection” as such subscriptions are so aptly called in Mumbai). And by-the-cylinder direct purchases for domestic purposes were simply not available through any of the city's propane suppliers.

So I called Rasheed.

Rasheed was (among other things) the proprietor of two small-but-bustling roadside tea shops. Neither of Rasheed's tea shops had a commercial license, so I figured Rasheed might be able to “connect” me with other by-the-cylinder retail options. Kranti beseeched me—half-joking—to please keep a low profile and not to scandalize Granny's longtime neighbors with the comings and goings of rough-and-tumble “*dalal*” (broker) types.

Rasheed arrived a few hours later, huffing a propane cylinder up the stairs to Granny's third-floor flat with the help of a young man I'd not met before. I paid Rasheed in cash for the propane: a small deposit for the cylinder plus the price of the gas . . . and not a rupee more. I asked Rasheed, “Didn't you have to pay something . . . extra?” He shook his head, waving his hand dismissively: “Nothing like that.” I was puzzled: “But it's not . . . allowed.”⁴ Rasheed explained, “They don't give these cylinders to just anyone, but they will give to me.” He said this with no little pride. I pressed, but without probing the identity of Rasheed's “they”: “But how can they be sure that they won't get into trouble?” Rasheed explained, “I'm a businessman. I buy propane from them every day.” The men at the warehouse know this, he explained, so they are confident that Rasheed must have “managed” things properly: “Why would I take any risk when my own business depends on it?”

It seemed a good point.

Rasheed's knowledge of where such “risk” might lie, as well as his understanding of how to “manage” those risks, is born of his deep familiarity and

vast knowledge of Mumbai: an unquantifiable expertise gained from a life spent navigating and “connecting” the highly complex, constantly changing, and often-contradictory sociopolitical, institutional, and material fabric of the city. To survive and thrive in Mumbai, Rasheed has learned to divine the dangers—financial, social, material, ethical—posed by so many unknowns and contradictions, and to reconcile the risks they pose with the exigencies, possibilities, and pleasures of everyday city life. It was Rasheed’s mastery in such matters of divination and reconciliation that inspired me to ring him up that April morning to request his help in resolving my gas cylinder conundrum.

This book is about people like Rasheed—people whose material and practical expertise animate the everyday workings in and of one of the world’s more dynamic cities, but whose labors are simultaneously (and paradoxically) subject to much moralizing and hand-wringing. We take this paradox—the ethically fraught yet indispensable character of certain kinds of knowledge and labor—as a methodological and analytical jumping-off point for exploring broader questions about global-level transformations: economic, technological, political, socio-material, ideational. The ethnographic heart of the book comprises thirty-six character profiles, each written by one of the book’s authors. Each of us (we are mostly anthropologists but also artists, planners, and activists) has selected some person whom we have come to know through our research in Mumbai: someone who is generally not the protagonist of our research attention in the city (although they might be or become so), but someone whose work and expertise are indispensable to the processes and practices that each of us seeks to understand.⁵ As people who are at once central and liminal, their knowledge and know-how, manner and style become portals into urban machinations and meanings.

Taking the city of Bombay as the site for this collective ethnographic undertaking, this book is animated by a four-part set of questions.⁶ The first concerns the material-practical work that comes to be characterized in Mumbai in neither-here-nor-there terms such as *brokerage* (*dalali*): What does this work actually entail? What do these labors accomplish (or seek to accomplish) and to what end? What are the stakes of these activities and for whom?

The second part of the questions concerns the knowledge and resources enlisted in these activities: What is required for some crucial work to be done? How and by what means are these varied resources and skills acquired—and by whom? In addition to ethnography, each profile has a biographical component that probes how each profiled person narrates their own history and

how they describe the trajectory through which they acquired the technical abilities, embodied expertise, and socio-material resources and relations that enable them to do whatever it is that they do.

The third part concerns the moralizing talk that gathers around these people and their practices. The people profiled in this book emerge in the ethnographies as neither clear heroes nor villains, yet we see that they are rarely spoken of in neutral terms. Rather, they tend to be vilified and/or valorized within their respective domains of activity. We thus ask more questions: in what context—and in whose company—is some person or practice described using such compromising and unflattering terms as *nuisance* or *troublemaker*, *thief* or *khabri*, *dalal* or *agent*? And in what context or company might that same person and their work be characterized using more laudatory terms such as *social worker* or *karyakarta*, *partner* or *sirdar*, *sister* or *friend*? The ethnographies that constitute the chapters of *Bombay Brokers* track the various terms of epithet and praise. The discursive richness and complexity by which people and practices are described beg important questions of such talk: what processes and practices are characterized as ethically fraught—when, where, and by whom? What kinds of normative presumptions underpin opposing characterizations of a singular domain of practice? Attending to the discourse surrounding activities described in either/both complimentary or condemnatory terms reveals how moralizing evaluations are enlisted in the processes thereby set in motion.

Fourth (and finally), bringing these questions together, each ethnographic profile probes the historical and ethnographic specificity of the practices that move in and out of broker-like situations;⁷ what renders these particular domains of expertise and activity so salient at this particular historical conjuncture—indeed often valuable enough to command their own price (monetary or otherwise)?⁸ *Bombay Brokers* takes the city of Bombay and the paradoxical centrality and liminality of these practices as ethnographic sites and methodological points of entry for probing broader-level transformations characterizing the global present, for thinking about (and disturbing) received concepts and categories, and for raising comparative questions.

Bombay Brokers is about how embodied expertise, enacted at particular moments in particular locations, mediates the material-practical contradictions and “frictions” characterizing the global present.⁹ The people profiled demonstrate virtuosity in managing these contradictions, shedding light on the material skills and resources that they enlist in doing so. Using ethnography to probe these frictions—their genealogies, their uneven and contested

histories of emergence—is a methodological strategy aiming at generating new insights into our current historical juncture. In this sense, one obvious insight that *Bombay Brokers* yields is methodological, demonstrating the need to attend ethnographically (rather than, say, normatively or conceptually) to the material-practical forms of enacted expertise upon which contemporary life depends. Accounting for the decisive salience in Mumbai of the material dimensions of these liminal-yet-indispensable knowledge practices brings into view profound shifts (institutional, ideational, technological) governing the built form of the city and transforming the lives of its inhabitants: the introduction of market ideas and devices into the city's development planning frameworks, for instance, or the explosion of mobile communication technologies and new media platforms, as well as the new social imaginaries they set in motion.

The comparative question here is not “how and whether similar shifts are or are not happening in other cities” (although this may prove an interesting line of inquiry); our comparative approach seeks neither to read Bombay's particularities alongside empirical work in “comparable” cities (however defined) nor to measure such particularities against ideal-typical arrangements and normative ideals—about, say, the modern state and political mediation, about urban economies and entrepreneurialism, about socio-spatial transformations thought to characterize the global present more generally. Rather, the ethnographic material in this book raises comparative questions concerning how embodied expertise enacted in particular locations mediates the material-practical contradictions to which shifts taking place at different scales (global, national, regional, virtual) are giving rise. It is the contradictions born of these myriad and multi-scalar transformations that the work of these profiled people indexes. The comparative questions that *Bombay Brokers* yields are thus something like these: what new and emerging forms of labor and knowledge are simultaneously indispensable and yet morally suspect in everyday city life? What sorts of socio-material and institutional contradictions or “gaps” come into focus when we shift our empirical and analytical attention to the everyday labor of bridging these gaps? What are “brokers” brokering? What are “fixers” fixing? It is these sorts of comparative questions about the material-practical content of activities glossed as “brokerage” (phenomena that might otherwise be read as idiosyncrasies of particular cities and their histories) from which new understandings and insights about the contemporary historical moment might emerge, insights that push past received concepts and categories in order to glean other meanings and imaginings.

Brokerage

There is a large body of scholarship that labels much of what we are discussing here as “brokerage.” Indeed, brokerage is a concept in its own right, with long-standing research traditions clustering largely around questions of political and economic brokerage. Attention to this corpus of scholarship allows us to see how writings on brokers—like emic talk about brokers—speak to the challenges posed to prevailing concepts by historical churnings. Probing this literature on political and economic brokerage allows us to pose questions about the specificity of the current historical juncture that has inspired this book’s ethnographic exploration of brokerage.

Scholarship on political brokerage achieved particular prominence during the mid-century “decolonization” moment and the attendant rise of modernization theory in the 1950s. In the South Asian context, mid-century historiographical debates about the nature of anticolonial nationalisms hinged largely on the role of indigenous elites in struggles for independence: whereas Marxian and Dependency School historiography read anticolonialist struggles as an epic battle between colonial oppression and nationalist desires for freedom,¹⁰ historians of the so-called Cambridge School pointed instead to the narrow economic and political self-interest of indigenous political elites, who were held to have been less interested in grand ideals such as freedom than in “jockey[ing] for power and privilege”¹¹—whether within a British-controlled or an independent Indian state.¹² Independence-era historiography and sociology characterized the activities of Indian elites in similarly suspect, “agentive” terms, their work now simply consisting of facilitating the political and social incorporation of villages into the political community of the new Indian nation-state. In a classic account—published on the heels of Indian independence—M. N. Srinivas described relations of “patronage” between political parties and individual voters as pyramid-like in structure, with party leadership channeling state resources downward to voters through “intermediary” figures such as higher-caste landowners or moneylenders with whom poorer and lower-caste masses are described to have long-standing ties of social, ritual, and economic obligation.¹³

Modernization theory famously expected that the “critical functions”¹⁴ of these sorts of Independence-era brokers would gradually disappear, that their specialized (even monopoly) expertise and authority would be obviated by “modern” Weberian-style bureaucracies enabling a rationalized and impersonal interface between citizens and states. However, under the influences of both Marxism and poststructuralism since the 1970s (a period that

presided over what Jonathan Spencer calls “the death of political anthropology”¹⁵ Euro-American social theory turned away from brokers and brokerage as interesting sites where trials and transformations of the political present might be explored. On the one hand, structural Marxists—for whom the state was simply the locus and apparatus of capitalist power—theorized the “agentive” broker out of existence; on the other hand, for poststructuralists (especially of the Foucauldian variety), the exercise of power was by definition disciplinary and subjectifying. In this political and ideological context, questions concerning the content, meaning, and normative implications of various kinds of mediation and agentive action were analytically shelved.¹⁶

With global-level transformations (sometimes glossed as “globalization”) said to be presiding over the ideological and institutional unbundling of the Westphalian “triune of territory, state, and nation”¹⁷ as the privileged site and scale at which power and sovereignty are imagined, institutionalized, exercised, and studied, the intellectual climate appears once again to be changing. With the links between states and markets, bodies and territories, identities and nations increasingly unstable, we are now witnessing “the return of the broker”¹⁸ in both everyday life and in scholarly attention. Indeed, notwithstanding theoretical lack of interest in brokerage, recent years have seen a proliferation of ethnographic and historical work chronicling the myriad ways in which the paradoxes and inequities of democracy (post-colonial and otherwise) continue to be managed, mitigated, mobilized, and otherwise mediated—hierarchically arranged in patronage relations,¹⁹ organized and channeled by party systems,²⁰ pacified with welfare schemes,²¹ subjugated with physical or structural violence,²² governed and governmentalized with technologies to appease and discipline subject populations,²³ or negotiated and bargained through “instrumental” uses of the political rights of franchise²⁴—and have debated the extent to which these myriad forms of political brokerage exhibit both continuity and departure from long-standing patterns and relations of socioeconomic, structural, and ritual authority, and “differentiated citizenship.”²⁵ Of course, citizenship has always been differentiated in myriad ways the world over, but distinctively so in postcolonial contexts²⁶ and perhaps especially so in cities. Thus, at the heart of contemporary discussions about contemporary urban life is the figure of the broker, who bridges material, institutional, legal, or informational gaps²⁷ and whose existence reveals the “blurred boundaries”²⁸ between societies and states.²⁹

In the Indian context, scholarly debates about “brokers”³⁰ have largely been concerned with the normative question of whether political mediation

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either reproduces or destabilizes established structures of authority. On the one hand, mediation is characterized as a holdover from feudal times, when local leaders are said to have “constitute[d] a link between the sovereign and the people.”³¹ Others, on the other hand, have emphasized how contemporary forms of political brokerage do not only (or necessarily) shore up older patterns of authority but can work to challenge these structures as well.³² Even when challenging entrenched structures of authority, however, political mediation is described with deep ambivalence, as a morally fraught (and frequently violent) sphere of activity bound up with criminality and political-administrative distortion—what Jeffrey Witsoe³³ describes as the “democratization of corruption.”³⁴

If writings on political brokerage have thus been largely concerned with the normative implications of broker-mediated practices of “corruption” for idealized notions of state and citizenship, scholarship on economic brokerage has been similarly interested in what such practices mean for our privileged theories and understandings of economy, especially the functioning (or nonfunctioning) of national or global markets, the fate of labor, and the role of states and other regulatory bodies in fixing or improving economic growth or national welfare (however defined). The idea that national citizenries made up of enterprising and creative self-starters can both enhance national welfare and advance global development through innovative pursuit of profit, personal risk taking, and self-making has become an important focus of both scholarly inquiry as well as global development discourse and policy making—especially urban policy making—in recent decades. Recent years have seen a wave of popular and scholarly writing on “entrepreneurialism,” a valorized ethic of self-making thought to characterize the contemporary global era.

Indeed, the intrepid entrepreneur is celebrated in contemporary business school and development policy circles as the hero of late modernity: taking advantage of the reconfigured business environment and the availability of resources under global capitalism, the entrepreneur enlists the market in creating new sorts of social, economic, spatial, and personal mobilities and possibilities; in so doing, the entrepreneur is said to obviate entrenched hierarchies and to defy socioeconomic exclusions. And yet at the heart of the entrepreneur idea itself sits a tension: on the one hand, the entrepreneur is imagined and celebrated as a solitary and mobile risk taker, embodying a rugged and masculine brand of American-style individualism.³⁵ Yet at the same time, empirical work and development policy research show that risk-taking entrepreneurialism is not a property of individuals but is instead an

intersubjective practice enabled by particular institutional and sociocultural configurations and networks. Although individualist accounts applaud the scaling back of state-regulatory regimes for unleashing entrepreneurial spirit (theorized as a property of agentive individuals), critical scholarship has thus called attention to the structural conditions—socioeconomic relations and institutional contexts—that enable some individuals to thrive while thwarting the efforts of others.³⁶

Celebrations of entrepreneurialism have thus been critiqued for obfuscating entrenched and deepening inequalities of class, status, and power, and for ascribing socioeconomic successes born of preexisting structural endowments and class advantages to bootstrapping individualist heroics. In order to successfully enlist markets in challenging exclusionary social structures and hierarchies through enterprise and entrepreneurialism, critical scholarship suggests that what is needed is not some individual personality predisposition toward risk taking but (and on the contrary) strong, state-backed policies to mitigate and socialize risk: planning regimes, positive rights frameworks, public services (water, power, sanitation, and transport), and social programs for education, health care, and social security—the very sorts of state-directed policies and programs, in other words, that market-forward celebrators sometimes charge with having stymied entrepreneurial energies. Critical scholarship has suggested that the redirecting of state resources and policy regimes (either ideologically or in practice) away from these sorts of (modernist, statist, social democratic) redistributive and risk-sharing social programs for (national) citizens, and instead toward investments in infrastructures and institutional frameworks designed to attract and enable circulations of global capital, has simply subsidized (and given free rein) to the already empowered while abandoning the structurally disadvantaged.

Indeed, at the core of these debates is the question of apportionment and management of risk in the institutionally in-flux context of late modernity. Current-day transformations are unmasking the pretensions of territorially bounded nation-states to exercise control (even in theory) over lands, borders, people, and resources. In this context, renewed attention has similarly been drawn to various noninstitutionalized (or unofficially institutionalized) and nonstate geographies and socialities of trust: kinship systems, religious networks, trade diasporas or NGOs, and civil society actors, for instance. In this context “trust” has been theorized as kind of resource—even characterized in economic terms as an endowment, or form of “capital”³⁷—that business school and development industry experts point to as the “missing link”³⁸ that can bridge “institutional voids”³⁹ and enable valued processes

such as business success, ease of mobility, access to knowledge, social aspiration, and entrepreneurial striving.

For example, Harvard Business School professors Tarun Khanna and Krishna Palepu argue that it is the precise relationship between entrepreneurs and intermediaries that distinguishes developed markets from emerging ones: in developed markets, “the requisite information and contract enforcement needed to consummate transactions”—things such as market information, a judicial system that will enforce contract laws, a transparent regulatory environment—are provided by “specialized intermediaries.” What are termed emerging markets, by contrast, are defined by what they call “institutional voids”; in the absence of specialized intermediaries, “individuals are prevented by absence of information, contracts, funds, and what-have-you from coming together.”⁴⁰ Although plenty of “informal intermediaries” might exist in these institutional voids (say, individual local moneylenders), the professors argue that these are not “functional substitutes” for specialized intermediaries because they operate on “an uneven playing field”: they exploit informational and power asymmetries in pursuit of personal gain, deal in adulterated goods, and lend money at usurious rates of interest.⁴¹ It is precisely this situation of “low trust” that is theorized to yield entrepreneurial opportunities for those who manage to cultivate a “trustworthy” reputation. But what counts as an institution, and what counts as individual action—and to whom? In practice, this tidy analytical divide collapses: the professors’ advice for cultivating the trust needed for “winning in emerging markets” (which is the title of their how-to book) hinges precisely on an ability to capitalize on the very “informal” networks that they disparage as potentially exploitative: “You do need local expertise to be able to identify who to partner with and not to partner with,” they write, their corrective phrase *do need* acknowledging that the empirical need for “local expertise” runs counter to received entrepreneurial orthodoxy. Needless to say, the business school professors describe these theoretically unacknowledged but practically much-needed local experts as “deal brokers.”⁴² *Bombay Brokers* takes as its ethnographic point of departure this paradox of the necessary-yet-suspect character of such “local expertise.”

Ethnography in the Interregnum

Khanna and Palepu are not alone in their preoccupation with these matters of trust. Social theorists across the political spectrum have emphasized the shifting location of trust in our contemporary world;⁴³ the unbundling and

reconfiguring of sociopolitical, legal, and economic arrangements and institutions are understood to inject new kinds of risk (material-economic, environmental-climatic, business-transactional, socio-spatial, and moral-ethical risks) into everyday life, even in highly industrialized states where things such as contract law have generally been considered predictable and reliable. The current conjuncture is increasingly characterized as one of global economic and political crisis: on the one hand, with financial upheavals, economic stagnation, and vertiginous inequality presenting profound ideological and practical challenges to the market-forward orthodoxies that have governed international economic institutions for the past half-century,⁴⁴ observers have begun asking not whether but how global capitalism “will end.”⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the worldwide intensification of antiestablishment (“populist”)⁴⁶ political challenges is feared to portend the “end of democracy”⁴⁷ as the hegemonic basis of international political order and stability.

Amid so much talk of crisis, a number of scholars have used the Gramscian notion of “interregnum” to describe the political present.⁴⁸ Gramsci famously borrowed the term *interregnum* from Roman law, where it marked an unusual situation in which—following the death of a king and the absence of any appointed successor—the legislative authority (i.e., the senate) found itself without an executive. In this situation of “interregnum” the Roman senate was empowered to act as “interrex” (temporary sovereign) for a limited period (exactly five days) until a new king could be appointed.⁴⁹ Gramsci borrows the Roman term but upends its meaning: whereas the Roman interregnum describes a situation where authority of the senate persists notwithstanding an empty throne, Gramsci’s use describes the inverse: “If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e., no longer ‘leading’ but only ‘dominant,’ exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously.”⁵⁰ Interregnum, in Gramsci’s terms, describes a “crisis” situation wherein the sovereign retains coercive power but in the absence of any legitimizing authority.

Crisis talk looms large in popular and scholarly writings on contemporary Indian cities, and especially so in writings on Mumbai. As literary critic Ulka Anjaria notes, contemporary representations of urban India (scholarly, literary, cinematic) tend toward either of two narrative genres: either “a celebratory plunge into the capitalist globalized future” or “a nostalgic lament for a lost cosmopolitan past.” The former genre—exemplified in the business school writings of Khanna and Palepu discussed above or the popular and scholarly work of market-forward economists and journalists such as Columbia

University's Jagdish Baghwati and Arvind Panagariya⁵¹—foregrounds the transformative promises that globalization holds for urban India: "Globalization has given the Indian underground a new energy[, and] an unfettered and liberal India is breathlessly absorbing everything, all the influences the world has to offer," writes Delhi-based business journalist Palash Krishna Mehrotra in a breathless collection of essays celebrating the aspirational upwardly mobile youth of urban India. "The old walls are crumbling," Mehrotra concludes, and young India "is in gobble mode."⁵² Mumbai-focused iterations of this globalization story narrate the socio-material transformations of industrial, working-class Bombay into aspirational, consumption-oriented Mumbai, alternately applauding or grieving the re-deployment of formerly industrial urban spaces and structures (erstwhile home to Mumbai's storied textile industry and its lively working-class Marathi culture) now as globally branded shopping and dining destinations for urban elites.⁵³ All the while, the dramatic and rapid transformations of the city's built fabric feature in a myriad of cinematic representations of Mumbai,⁵⁴ which is home to the world's by-far most prolific film industry, globally known as "Bollywood."⁵⁵

Alongside these triumphant accounts of millennial Mumbai in transformation runs a parallel narrative of urban crisis. "The city is seen as in decline," Anjaria writes, "from its cosmopolitan colonial history in the nineteenth century to the rise of Hindu chauvinism and rampant capitalist development in the 1990s, culminating in the Shiv Sena-influenced decision to change the name of the city in 1995."⁵⁶ Famously dubbed the "Maximum City" by internationally renowned journalist Sukhetu Mehta, contemporary Mumbai boasts a population somewhere between 18 million and 23 million for the metropolitan region (estimates vary wildly). But by any measure, the city is a staple of development-industry reports on the world's "largest" (most-populous) cities,⁵⁷ and it is consistently characterized as the world's by far most densely and dangerously overpopulated conurbation by a very large margin.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Indian census enumerators report that 60 percent of Mumbaikars live cheek by jowl in city *slums*, where basic infrastructural services such as municipal water supply are described to be both legally tenuous and practically unreliable.⁵⁹ Mumbai's slums and popular neighborhoods feature as the backdrop to popular and scholarly accounts of the city's storied underworld and its tortuous connections with global terrorist networks and plottings (which, needless to say, provide endless Bollywood fodder) as well as to the city's rough-and-tumble political class.⁶⁰ And indeed, Mumbai is home to one of India's longest-established ethno-nationalist

popular-political movements—the Marathi-nativist Shiv Sena party—which presided over the ethno-religious riots that rocked Mumbai in 1992–93 and which honed contemporary idioms of political theatricality long before the country’s contemporary administration.⁶¹

Yet, unlike Gramsci’s reading of interregnum from interwar Europe—which foregrounds a teleology of crisis and normative valence of morbidity (or “monsters”)⁶²—the view from Bombay appears somewhat different. Although a generation of subaltern studies scholarship has found analytical purchase in Gramsci’s description of power without authority—“dominance without hegemony”⁶³—the ethnographies in this book reveals that contemporary Bombay is neither in a state of imminent crisis nor overrun by monsters;⁶⁴ rather, the myriad everyday crises and contradictions of city life are managed, mitigated, and metabolized by a myriad of brokers. We take this proliferation in contemporary Bombay of people and practices characterized as brokers and brokerage as an invitation to explore the domains of activity that do not fit neatly into privileged and empowered categories through which power and authority are theorized and institutionalized. Probing the interregnum ethnographically—dwelling in the gaps that brokers are said to bridge, following the faults and failings that fixers are said to fix—compels rethinking some of the key canonical formulations and conceptual distinctions by means of which contemporary scholarship has tended to explain and explore contemporary social, economic, and political life: categories such as states and markets, citizens and sovereigns, cities and hinterlands, nations and territories, rights and wrongs.

IN A PROVOCATIVELY titled essay, “Welcome to the Seventeenth Century,” Charles Tilly describes how throughout much of human history, trade and enterprise—particularly long-distance trade and long-term enterprise—have depended on temporally enduring and geopolitically far-reaching social and political networks: “Under various names such as trade diasporas, lineages, and sects, such networks combine strong ties, considerable extent, many trials, and significant barriers to entry or exit.”⁶⁵ Tilly suggests that the “historically exceptional overlap of trust networks with economic organizations and governmental institutions” that has characterized the past four centuries may well be coming to an end.⁶⁶ Yet historiography from South Asia raises the question of whether Tilly’s “overlap” ever began in the first place;⁶⁷ long-distance, boundary-exceeding networks have played a central role in modern history, not least in aiding the ascent (to take one prominent example) of the British East India Company: enabling the trading firm’s transformation

into a colonial power and then facilitating the concomitant transitions to capitalism and industrialization over the course of the nineteenth century. Indian Ocean historians have highlighted the central roles played in that heady period by an array of (often Bombay-based)⁶⁸ intermediaries—*shroffs* (money changers), *dubashes* (translators), *dalals* (commodity brokers), *sarangs* (labor recruiters), *marfatiyas* (wholesalers), *muqaddams* (tax collectors), *thikadars* (contractors), and *arhatiyas* (financial brokers and moneylenders)—in facilitating and consolidating these world-historical shifts.⁶⁹ The spatial concentration of such people and practices in nineteenth-century Bombay reflects that city's location (territorial, institutional, ideational)⁷⁰ at the confluence of the seismic global processes and shifts characterizing that particular historical moment.

Bombay Brokers is similarly interested in the array of intermediary activities populating this historical moment: the practices that overflow the normative conceptual categories and institutionally empowered frames. Whereas the global present is witnessing the renewed salience of myriad forms of mediation—in enabling capital and commodity circulations and facilitating access to material and financial resources, global markets, infrastructural services, public goods, and various kinds of institutionally backed rights and entitlements—we have seen that popular and scholarly debates over the significance and implications of these proliferating forms of mediation have failed to change with them, devolving instead into age-old (and remarkably insistent) oppositions between free will and determinism, structure and agency, continuity and change.

This book pushes past these theoretical and philosophical impasses in three interconnected ways. First, *Bombay Brokers* argues that it is not the existence of mediation that is new, but rather the form and content of those mediations that have changed. Although a generation of scholarship—postcolonial and otherwise—has established the thoroughly mediated character of both everyday city life and of the modern state form, recognizing that sociopolitical and economic life (urban and otherwise) is always already mediated allows us to shift the analytical focus away from the figure of “the broker” as such—away, that is, from the question of whether “brokerage” is to be celebrated or condemned—and instead to the ethnographically more interesting question of how and why particular mediating practices are so salient and contested at this particular historical juncture in this particular place.⁷¹

Second, *Bombay Brokers* refuses the “methodological nationalism”⁷² that (still) underpins so much contemporary scholarship on contemporary politics and economy. Rather than beginning our inquiry within the territorial

confines and conceptual/methodological frameworks of the nation-state—to the exclusion and obfuscation of other locations, directionalities, and scales—we approach ethnographically the question of how multi-scalar (“global”) connections and flows are brought into being through what Anna Tsing describes as the “sticky materiality of practical encounters,”⁷³ as well as through affective regimes of “potentiality and emergence” that Hansen and Verkaaik term “urban charisma.”⁷⁴ This book takes the “sticky materiality” and “charismatic potentials” of Bombay brokerage as an empirical point of departure for exploring how boundaries (political regimes, territories, institutions, laws, and norms) are constituted by the very movements and mediations that such activities paradoxically appear to exceed.

Finally, in foregrounding the material dimensions of the practices glossed as “brokerage” and the embodied character of the expertise that animates those practices, the ethnographies explore the distribution of agency among not only human but also nonhuman “actants.”⁷⁵ Building on the insights from “new materialist”⁷⁶ scholarship, we thereby eschew a classic, humanist conception of the agentive, self-authoring, intention-driven subject and instead consider the dispersed, nonhierarchical, materialized character of “agency.” Attending to the distributed character of agency allows us to pose as an ethnographic question what brokerage is or does.

Our conceptualization of “brokerage” thus takes a cue from the work of social theorist Michel Callon. Drawing on Goffman’s theory of “framing,” Callon points out that any coordinated social action, negotiation, or transaction necessarily “presupposes a framing of the action without which it would be impossible to reach an agreement, in the same way that in order to play a game of chess, two players must agree to submit to the rules and sit down at the chessboard which physically circumscribes the world within which the action will take place.”⁷⁷ Framing is an always-incomplete project, Callon points out, because objects and activities cordoned off within some frame (conceptual or material) are organized by an array of socially and materially embedded elements (objects, ideas, and people) whose actual relationships necessarily “overflow” the boundaries of a frame; the irreducible materiality of the world means that the myriad elements cordoned off by some attempt at framing some situation (a labor contract, a land transfer, a film shoot, a claim to community belonging) are “simultaneously involved in other worlds from which they can never be wholly detached.” This phenomenon is understood by mainstream economics, where the afterlives (or rather “paralives”)⁷⁸ of these relational ties are referred to as “externalities.” A common example of market externality is industrial pollution: when

toxic waste discharged by a manufacturing plant into a local river affects the health of local residents, then these health costs—which were not taken into account when setting the price of the industrial good—would be considered market externalities. Market externalities are unavoidable because relations necessarily exceed any attempt at framing (hence the need to frame in the first place). And these relationships are of course materialized such that “something must overflow.” It is these material objects and flows that simultaneously produce and overflow the boundaries of any given “frame” that Callon calls “intermediaries.”⁷⁹

Bombay Brokers builds on Callon’s formulation, focusing ethnographic attention on category-exceeding intermediary objects and materials, as well as (and more crucially for our purposes) on the people who make it their business (often quite literally) to manage, mitigate, and maneuver along the routes that intermediaries (say, propane cylinders) travel. These people perform the morally fraught but socially necessary work of transgression, translation, and transborder navigation that Callon calls mediation: a “theory of action in which what counts are the mediations and not the sources.”⁸⁰ It is this “theory of action” that we propose to call brokerage, and the virtuoso performers of such actions whom we call brokers.

The remainder of this introduction focuses on two domains of framing and overflow in Bombay and on the concomitant mediations (i.e., brokerage) that these frames and flows produce and inhabit. Reflecting the extant literature earlier discussed, the first domain pertains to what’s framed as political, the second to what’s framed as economic. Empowered framings of the political are evidenced in pervasive moralizing discourses about “corruption”; those pertaining to economy inhere in everyday talk about “value.” In Bombay the fraught relations between the official categories—the laws, policy frameworks, and (more or less) institutionalized norms that seek to govern the city—and the real-time socio-material practices that overflow those categories are frequently glossed in the moralizing language of “corruption.” This “corruption” discourse is therefore a good place from which to begin to explore the shifting and contested framings—legal, institutional, ideational, and material—that so much moralizing talk holds to be “corrupted.”

“Corruption”

On December 26, 2007, following an especially active season of state-led slum demolitions (part of millennial Mumbai’s efforts to give the city a “world-class makeover”),⁸¹ residents of the recently bulldozed popular neighborhood of

Mandala in Mumbai's eastern suburb of Mankhurd delivered a bank check to the office of the chief minister of Maharashtra. In the letter that accompanied the check (which was jointly authored with Mumbai-based housing activists), Mandala residents requested that the chief minister officially transfer to them the parcel of state-owned land on which their now-flattened neighborhood had been situated. The letter referenced an intriguing legal precedent for this official transfer request: the government, the letter pointed out, had recently handed over a swath of primely located state-owned land to one of the city's largest property developers—at the token price of only 40 *paisa* per acre (less than USD \$1 per acre). The land gift (as it essentially was) had earlier been home to groups of indigenous people (so-called tribals), but—citing the city's need for affordable housing—the land been acquired a decade earlier by the State Development Authority at that same paltry price: 40 *paisa* per acre. The state's at-cost transfer to a large property developer of this vast swath of expropriated tribal land was made on the condition that the land be used to construct affordable housing. Mandala residents, citing this example, sought to outbid the developer/tycoon, calculating the amount of their own check at a slightly higher per-acre rate. As Mumbai housing activist Simpreet Singh explained, “If [land] can be given to [the developer], then why not to [Mandala residents]—and that too at a higher price?”

The check-and-letter stunt was of course not actually expected to result in the requested land transfer (although that would presumably have been a happy outcome); rather, it was part of a broader effort to draw public and media attention to the hypocrisy of a city that would criminalize and evict the urban poor from state-owned territories while using law and policy to give outsized land gifts to politically connected builders, all in the name of antipoverty housing initiatives.⁸² What's more, as the activists would go on to point out, while the developer failed to build anything remotely affordable on his vast tract of public land, Mandala's housing stock truly is affordable. Indeed, the publicity stunt took place in conjunction with a legal petition filed by Mumbai housing activists against this particular developer, who turned out not to have constructed the promised affordable housing upon which the land transfer was premised. Instead, the developer had created a fairyland township of gated enclaves whose intended occupants were clearly those who—in the words of the High Court judge who ruled on the petition—could afford to buy “Bentley and Ferrari.”⁸³ “How can you build palaces on land allotted for affordable housing?” asked the incensed Justice Dattu. “What is happening in this Country?” The court's outraged

ruling—which punctuated a countrywide “anticorruption” wave sweeping India in 2011–12—may have made headlines, but it resulted merely in a token, finger-wagging fine.⁸⁴ Yet that it did so at all is notable, the activists’ check-and-letter maneuver having thrown into relief—under the bright lights of the news media—the absurdities and contradictions of what was being carried out under the conceptual auspices and institutionalized policy frameworks of “world-class development,” “affordable housing,” and “antipoverty” programs. Calling attention to the material overflows of these conceptual and institutionalized frames (to use Callon’s terms), the housing activists’ attention-grabbing bank check revealed the inherent contradictions and routine transgressions of those frames. In so doing, the media-savvy strategists capitalized on the broader “anticorruption” climate of that particular moment.

Indeed, in a classic formulation Joseph Nye defines *corruption* as “behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role (elective or appointive) because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains.”⁸⁵ In line with this definition, corruption has conventionally been theorized by social scientists and policy makers in terms of boundary transgression: the term is used to describe the breaching of presumed divides separating public from private, lawful from unlawful, rationality from traditionalism. Scholarship has focused on the adverse effects of corrupt actions on social and economic outcomes (e.g., underdevelopment and inequality), on declining social and political trust and legitimacy, and on the subversion of the broader public good by the pursuit of individual gain. In the postcolonial context, as discussed in the previous section, corruption debates have largely been concerned with the extent to which such subversions either reproduce or unsettle established and institutionalized structures of authority.

In other words, an understanding of corruption as exceptional, deviant, indeed corrupting action presumes the existence of distinct phenomena that map onto these concepts: a unified and coherent state, for instance—one that is distinct from society and thereby amenable to subversion of its public purposes by private actors who violate its laws and undermine its projects. Yet a generation of scholarship has firmly established the falsity of this presumption, demonstrating instead how, as Timothy Mitchell explains, the ostensible distinction between states and societies “must be taken not as the boundary between two discrete entities, but as a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained.”⁸⁶ In this context the question of whether the so-called

corrupt mediations of brokers ought to be read as sign and substance of democracy (however conceived) or of its inverse appears to run aground on conceptual terms, presuming the prior existence and coherence of things like state and society, citizen and subject—things that are empirically in formation through the very mediations that are supposed to threaten them.

Indeed, a growing number of theorists have noted that conventional understandings of corruption as exceptional, deviant, indeed corrupting behavior are insufficient for making sense of the everyday character of so much of what is described as “corrupt.”⁸⁷ One strand of scholarship has thus trained attention on the discourse of corruption, showing how the disdain with which the “corruption” epithet is hurled testifies to the internalization of a particular state idea: the notion that state employees ought to work not for their own good but for the good of a broader public.⁸⁸ Yet as noted above, this corruption discourse testifies to a more basic belief in the empirical existence of a coherent state (corrupted or otherwise) that is distinguishable from society in the first place.⁸⁹ Another approach has turned an ethnographic eye to the everyday practices that people describe as corrupt. In his work on “ordinary corruption” among street hawkers and the police in Mumbai, for example, Jonathan Anjaria shows how “power . . . works more through moments of contingency than through a systematic rationality of rule.”⁹⁰ In Mumbai, claims to land, built spaces, and material infrastructures are bound up with a myriad of often opaque and contradictory rules and policy frameworks that render city residents and businesses perilously exposed to the political whims and administrative vagaries carried out under the rubric of “law enforcement.” This is especially (but by no means exclusively) the case for the 60 percent of city residents (including half of Mumbai’s police force) that the 2011 census reported to be living in “slums.”⁹¹

In the context of scams and scandals of unprecedented scale, corruption talk indexes and inhabits “new terrains of struggle” against forces of dispossession and expropriation.⁹² The heated conflicts over urban-development-related land claims and expropriations in Mumbai—especially the revanchist slum eviction and “redevelopment” exercises that are part and parcel of Mumbai’s “world-classing” efforts—are a powerful optic, as Doshi and Ranganathan have written, into the relationship between material and discursive dimensions of struggles over land and urban resources. High-profile demolitions and spectacular scandals like these are the bread and butter of anti-corruption activism and political ideology in contemporary Mumbai. In the first decades of the millennium, normative critiques of “corruption” fueled the formation of a new national-level political party—the Aam Admi Party

(Common Man's Party)—and loomed large as well in Narendra Modi's stunning rise to power during India's 2014 general election.

Bombay Brokers is shot through with stories of crime and corruption, of squatters and slums, of illegality and informality, of fakes and forgeries. Yet flying low to the ethnographic ground, we encounter material that is not entirely legible to the tidy moralities of either state-backed thieving on the one hand and headline-grabbing exposé on the other. The ethnographies reveal instead how discourses of corruption, illegality, and informality often have recursive relations with the very processes and practices that they profess to describe.

For an example, we can return to Rasheed and one of his tea shops. The small structure in which Rasheed's establishment is housed sits at the edge of a popular neighborhood where Rasheed lives with his brother's family. The neighborhood is known simply as "Transit Camp," so called because it was built by the state housing authority (MHADA) in the mid-1980s to "temporarily" house residents of condemned buildings while their homes were being reconstructed. After in-transit residents moved into their new buildings in the late 1980s, the block of single-room concrete structures was not demolished according to MHADA's original plan for the "temporary" settlement; rather, in a city woefully short of low-income housing stock, Transit Camp found a ready crop of new tenants. Rasheed himself (at that time a resident in Mumbai's film-famous "Slumdog" neighborhood of Dharavi) sought the help of a local politician (for whose election the politically active young Rasheed had energetically campaigned) in acquiring two adjacent rooms in Transit Camp, one for himself and another for his brother; the brothers promptly knocked down the dividing wall, transforming the two tiny spaces into a single, modest flat. Yet because Transit Camp was not envisioned as permanent housing stock, there existed no policy framework delineating the tenure status of new residents such as Rasheed, who simply pays a monthly "rental fee" (as he puts it) in exchange for permission to reside in the not-so-temporary-after-all transit camp. And given the vagary governing Transit Camp's built space as well as current residents' status there, the neighborhood is treated for service provision and infrastructure purposes (water, sewerage, and garbage collection) according to municipal policy frameworks pertaining to "slums."

To complicate matters further, Rasheed's Transit Camp tea shop is not actually situated in one of the concrete MHADA-built structures that make up the camp's residential housing stock. Rather, the tea shop is housed in a later-built structure, situated at the edge of Transit Camp and adjacent to

a gas station. The tea shop was constructed in 1991 by a now-elderly fellow who, like Rasheed, hails from the smallish city of Nagaur in the North Indian state of Rajasthan. The fellow, whom Rasheed simply refers to as “Chacha” (Uncle), had set up shop shortly after the petrol pump was opened in order to prepare tea and snacks for truck drivers stopping to fill up their tanks. Chacha held documentary proof of his tenure on the tea-shop plot since 1991 in the form of a ration card bearing his name and the shop’s address. This is a crucial piece of documentation for residents of Mumbai neighborhoods treated as slums, given a policy framework in contemporary Mumbai that ties eligibility for compensation in the event of a demolition to current residents’ ability to provide evidentiary proof that their tenure in a given structure predates a (constantly changing) slum-rehabilitation eligibility “cutoff date.”⁹³

With the security afforded by the proof-of-address documents for his tea shop-cum-residence at the edge of Transit Camp, Chacha ran a brisk business for twenty years. In 2011, however, Chacha began thinking about plans to retire to his Rajasthani hometown of Nagaur. Retirement presented a dilemma: Chacha had no children to whom to pass his shop, and selling the business was not an option because according to Mumbai’s slum policy framework (at that time), whoever purchased the business (and the structure housing it) would not inherit Chacha’s cutoff-date-meeting evidentiary proofs, meaning that the new owner would not have the requisite documentation necessary to obtain municipal water connections, propane subscriptions, or compensation in the event of eviction.⁹⁴ It was in this context that Rasheed approached Chacha with an idea: Rasheed proposed to lease the tea shop from Chacha, to whom he would pay a one-time deposit as well as a monthly rent payment. Rasheed and Chacha drew up a contract stipulating that when Chacha dies, the ownership of the structure will be transferred to a religious trust in Nagaur. Rasheed and his sons—who would retain indefinite tenancy rights—would continue making the monthly rent payments to the trust. The “contract,” of course, was not legally binding because the tea shop’s official status itself is ambiguous. But the contract was witnessed and countersigned by a few mutually trusted Nagori friends and relatives. And as a bonus, the Nagori trust—which is connected to a mosque—would provide Chacha (who owns no property in Nagaur) accommodation, food, and care for the duration of his retirement.

When Rasheed’s chit-fund turn came around, he used the cash to refurbish and expand the tea shop, renovating the storage area behind the structure (which abutted a drainage ditch) into a seating area for customers. To

accommodate the additional clientele, however, Rasheed needed to double his weekly propane allocation. This presented another problem because the ambiguous tenure status of the shop meant that there was no clear procedure by means of which Rasheed's establishment could procure a commercial license that would permit him more propane; Rasheed's repeated efforts to obtain a commercial license for the tea shop had been unsuccessful. Chacha had long managed without a license by keeping the scale of his operations small and making small weekly payments (*hafta*) to police constables who frequented for tea while on patrol.

The expanded space and increased propane deliveries to Rasheed's shop drew the attention of city officials, however, and the increasing *hafta* payments began to threaten the financial viability of his business. In this context, one of Rasheed's friends—a police constable from the nearby station and a tea-shop regular—had an idea: the constable filed a case against Rasheed for operating his tea shop without a license. Rasheed then presented to the court all the documentary evidence of his repeated efforts to obtain a commercial license; given constitutional "right to life" provisions, Rasheed explained, a sympathetic judge might order that he finally be issued a commercial license. Rasheed smiled as he recalled how he had told the judge, "Sir, I'm doing this work to fill my stomach and to feed my family; I've applied for a license, but it was denied. Please give me a license to do my business legally because that's what I want to do." The judge agreed, directing Rasheed to first pay a modest fine for operating without a license and then ordering the municipality to award him a commercial license. "There's no way to apply for a license," Rasheed shrugged, "but the court can order one."

At the time of this writing in 2019, Rasheed's license is still pending with the municipal corporation. Meanwhile, city life goes on, and Rasheed's business is bustling.⁹⁵ The opening nearby of a high-end residential complex and shopping center directs a growing stream of taxis past his tea shop; drivers stop for snacks and wait for customers in the shade of Rasheed's little shop, sharing news and stories, making friends and deals. And in the meantime, while he waits (and waits) for his court-ordered commercial license to be issued, Rasheed procures the propane he needs to make tea and fry *pakodas* by forging and maintaining relations with a range of people—at the company warehouse, the local police station, the political party offices—the very relations, in other words, that were instrumental in his bid to "become legal," as Rasheed put it.

Although "corruption" talk tends to fixate on the money that is sometimes enlisted in this relational work, cash transfers do not always or neces-

sarily attend such work (recall that my propane arrived at cost). But more importantly, even in instances where cash does change hands, the meaning of the money inheres first and foremost in the relationship that cash articulates and inhabits. Indeed, as Ratoola Kundu writes in her profile of a “social worker” named Nirmala who enlists money in arranging the anthropologist’s meeting with a group of commercial sex workers, “Money alone would not have gained us access. . . . It was [Nirmala’s] relationship with these women that led them to speak with us.” Meanwhile, back at Rasheed’s tea shop a few months after filing the case, Rasheed’s police friend received happy news that—with the “help” of a local politician with whom Rasheed has long been associated—the constable’s long-pending request for an official transfer to a closer-to-home beat had finally been approved. While the transfer request may or may not have been cash-backed, to speculate with anti-corruption crusaders on the presence or absence of cash would be to miss the point. Whereas moralizing talk about the “corrupt” character of brokerage invariably involves talk about money, such cash-mediated relations are of a piece with the longitudinal, material-relational work by which law-legible (“legal”) claims are articulated.

Through Rasheed’s story, discursive framings of some activity as legal or illegal, formal or informal, are revealed to be ideological-practical effects and socio-material achievements rather than neutral descriptions of some prior relation to law or policy. The expertise and resources that many of the people profiled in these pages wield is precisely concerned with material, practical, and semiotic practices of producing legality and legibility to law or policy (to “become legal,” in Rasheed’s words) of diverse domains of practice, everything from building construction, land claims, infrastructural service provisioning, business ventures, and the production of official data and state-sanctioned reports. It is thus not simply the case that the boundaries between categories are blurred; such a notion obviously presumes the prior existence of the very things between which margins might become misted. Rather, what ethnography reveals is that the appearance of stability and coherence of things such as state, law, and identities of all kinds is invariably a temporally distal outcome of the very sorts of mediations that are held to be corrupting of those same formations and framings.

Just as probing “corruption” talk with ethnography destabilizes received wisdom about the modern state—about laws and legalities—upon which so much popular and scholarly writing on political brokerage is premised, so tracking discourses about the questionable “value” of certain activities presents an ethnographic challenge to conceptual tropes and framings of

economy. In Bombay we see how disparaging talk about brokers is invariably bound up with disparaging talk about the money paid to brokers as fees, yet also how the subject of such moralizing money talk is not confined to the conflation of broker fees with “bribes”—the notion, that is, that whatever fees the broker is paid pass (in part or whole) into the hands of duty-deviating state officials. Whereas in such cases the fee-commanding broker is disparaged as a mere conduit for what are presumed to be lawbreaking, “corrupt” actions of others, we see as well that money-related moral critiques of brokerage are also leveled at the broker’s services in their own right, calling into question the value of the expertise, labors, and services performed.

“Value”

In April 2018 I spoke with Pankaj Kapoor, founder/owner of the Mumbai-based real estate consultancy firm Liases Foras: a self-described specialist in “nonbrokering.” Liases Foras seemed to be the only “nonbrokering” firm in Mumbai (or in India, or anywhere else as far as I could tell), yet given the scope and diversity of its client base—from State Bank of India to Deutsche Bank, from Godrej Properties to the Maharashtra State Housing and Development Authority—the idea of nonbrokering seems to resonate in Mumbai. Eager to hear more about this remarkable concept and branding strategy, I had appealed to a mutual acquaintance to ask Pankaj to speak with me. Pankaj is a busy man (hence the appeal to a mutual acquaintance to broker the meeting), so when we sat down for our interview, I got right to the point: “What’s nonbrokering?”

The question seemed to please him: “My background is in marketing,” Pankaj began affably, “so I understand these things.” Pankaj told me about a book he had read in graduate school that had left a particularly strong impression: Jack Trout’s *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. “Take the example of cold drinks.” Pankaj summed up his major takeaway from Trout’s book: “At one time, there were only two major competitors in the industry—Pepsi and Coke. But then along came 7-Up! They called themselves ‘the un-cola.’ So like that, I came up with ‘nonbrokering.’” Fair enough, I pressed, but what’s so bad about brokering such that Liases Foras would want to differentiate itself in this particular way? After all, I pointed out, notwithstanding all the grumblings about brokers and dalals in Mumbai, real estate brokering seems to be the anomalous variety (not only in Mumbai but globally) whose practitioners somehow get a pass. Pankaj explained that the difference

between brokering and nonbrokering has to do with the precise way that payments are calculated:

When someone gives a job to a consultant, he's generally not only asking for advice; he also wants the consultant to facilitate the transaction. Real estate is all about transaction. There are two parties to a transaction, and then there's the middleman—the broker—who takes a commission. The commission is paid only after the transaction takes place because the fee is linked to the success of the transaction. A consultant working for commission won't give the true price; his advice will be suited to his own bias. But at Liases Foras we don't do transactions. We charge only fees, no commission. So in that way we give unbiased advice on real estate based on our research.

Pankaj's suspicion of brokerage, in other words, is not about the money per se (his nonbrokering services command fees as well) but rather is about notions of "bias" and distortion. The doubts stem from the way in which different sorts of labor are valued and from the relationship between that presumed value (or lack of value) and the ticket price of the services on offer. Pankaj maintains that the fees commanded by a consultant whose payment is attached to the details of a transaction is by definition compromised because the broker's personal interest (in maximizing his own commission) will lead him to misrepresent a property's "true price." The advice offered by the transaction-facilitating broker, in other words, is suspect because rather than adding value, the broker is suspected of distorting "true price" in order to eat a piece from the middle of the value chain. By contrast, Pankaj describes the fees commanded by Liases Foras's services as payment for value-adding service: what Pankaj calls "unbiased advice."

Moralizing suspicions about whether some work either adds or eats value index the opacity and transience of contemporary global regimes and norms of value production; contemporary critiques of "brokerage" are generated from within these existing ideologies and normative frameworks. But what are these contemporary ideologies and frameworks? At one level, Pankaj's disdain for the work of "transaction" recalls classical liberalism's characterization of what John Locke famously described as the rent-seeking nature of "brokers." Lockean liberal thought justified the accumulation of wealth only when that wealth accrued from "productive" activities: labor in land (the creation of "property") or the accumulation of materialized products of such productive labor (the free exchange of property). Economic activities

that were not productive in such ways—the work of bankers, scribes, and traders, for instance—were disparaged as parasitical “brokerage.” Wealth accumulated through such activities, classical (seventeenth-century) Lockean thought insisted, was not justified by natural law and thus ought not to be protected by positive law either. Andrew Sartori has characterized the ascent and transformation of liberal thought over the course of the nineteenth century as “a form of political argument” in which the quarrel-inciting contours were born of the sweeping changes of that particular historical era. Philosophical debates of that time reflect what Sartori characterizes as an anxious “grappling” with the moral dangers and empirical contradictions that nineteenth-century thinkers sought to navigate: new regimes of wealth accumulation, the rise of industrial capitalism, expanding geographies of imperialism, and attendant violences of land expropriations. Suspicions of certain forms of economic activity reflect uneasy intellectual efforts to reconcile the normative and empirical contradictions of that particular historical era.⁹⁶

Pankaj’s hand-wringing over the labor of “transaction” thus appears at once familiar yet strange: familiar in its suspicious disparaging of “brokers” yet strange because Pankaj’s typology of brokering and nonbrokering does not map onto Lockean liberalism’s normative presumptions of justifiable wealth as rooted solely in a labor theory of value, property, and right.⁹⁷ What normative principles of value (or its lack) are implicit in contemporary disparaging talk about certain forms of labor and expertise?

In thinking through this question, it is helpful to turn to another word whose moral valence has undergone a dramatic shift since the nineteenth century: *dalal*. In contemporary Bombay the words *dalal* and *dalali* are generally used in disparaging terms to mean pimp (and the act of pimping), either literally or figuratively.⁹⁸ Yet the term *dalal* did not always carry the pejorative connotation that it does in contemporary Bombay. Historically, Dalal was (and indeed remains) a western Indian surname—along the lines of Shroff (money changer) or Dubash (translator)—that simply described an occupation: Francis Steingass’s nineteenth-century dictionary defines *dalal* as “auctioneer, broker; a road-guide”;⁹⁹ another period translation gives the meaning of *dalal* simply as “agent between buyer and seller.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, while Locke expended much intellectual energy sorting valuable, property-producing labor from the parasitical activities of traders and brokers, by the nineteenth century, liberal political economists were keenly interested in the value that could be generated by trade. Economic philosopher John Stuart Mill (who, like his father, the economic philosopher James Mill, worked closely with the British East India Company and wrote extensively in defense

of the British colonial project) was famously enthusiastic about the potential societal gains to be had from taxing the “unearned increment”: increases in land value that accrue to proprietors even without labor or capital expenditures.

The ambivalent valence that *dalal* would come to assume can be traced—at least in part—to institutional changes attending the project of nineteenth-century colonial state making. Understandings of trade shifted dramatically in that period, as historian Johan Mathew demonstrates, from “transactions between individuals or firms to transactions between states.”¹⁰¹ In this context, moving goods in and out of port cities such as Bombay (indeed, Bombay looms particularly large in Mathew’s account) meant navigating increasingly complex procedures of passing through customs; in this context, Mathew writes that “firms started hiring clearing agents whose expertise was in managing customs formalities.”¹⁰² These customs agents were often recruited from the communities of dalals and muqaddams (village chiefs and revenue officers): people who commanded the necessary knowledge and practical expertise in actually existing trade practices to facilitate the commensuration and valuations among heterogenous goods and a myriad of currencies. While the expertise of dalals and muqaddams was thereby enlisted in official customs procedures, their newfound location inside customs offices simultaneously positioned exchange agents and commodity brokers to exercise discretionary judgment in their valuations of goods in accordance with their expertise in commensuration and familiarity with established principles of trade. Their long-established relations with particular firms and trades were of course the very skills that landed the brokers inside British customs offices in the first place. And yet this Janus-faced position—mediating between “official procedures” and actual trade and commensurations practices that overflowed those procedural frames—meant that dalals and their valuations were objects of invariable suspicion by colonial administrators. Meanwhile, the founding of Bombay’s stock exchange, along the aptly named Dalal Street in 1874 (so named after Parsi sharebroker Rustomji Dalal), signaled as well the centrality of such practices—of brokering and arbitrage—to capitalist development in the region.¹⁰³

In contemporary Mumbai, *dalal* is almost invariably used in a disparaging sense. Sometimes it is used literally to mean pimp: “Kam se kam koi randi ki dalali nahi karta” (At least he’s not out pimping some whore), shrugs Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor in her role as a straight-talking Bombay sex worker in the 2004 film *Chameli*. But more often the use is figurative. As Sanjeev Uprety notes (discussing the epithetical use of *dalal* in the Nepali

blogosphere), “To call someone a dalal is to say that such a person (or a political party) is functioning as a pimp, helping the foreign nations to rape or loot mother Nepal.”¹⁰⁴

Bombay Brokers takes the ambiguity that surrounds so much moralizing talk in Bombay about brokers and dalals as an invitation to ethnographic inquiry. Anxious efforts to sort “valuable” knowledge and labor from that which is “parasitical” (or “corrupt”) are themes that run through the accounts. For example, we see in Llerena Searle’s profile of Kaushal, a Delhi-born, Brazil-based real estate investor struggling to enter the Bombay property market, that abstract “property” doesn’t exist at all prior to the mediations of local “brokers” (Kaushal’s word), whose expertise in “land agglomeration” transforms land into “investable parcels and global assets.” Although Kaushal was initially dismissive of the expertise of local “partners,” the would-be Bombay investor quickly learned that entering the Indian property market—and perhaps the Bombay market in particular—required imitating these local practices by building “chains of intermediaries.” Kaushal began working with “numerous local ‘brokers’” to help him identify desirable parcels and to negotiate terms of purchase with proprietors. “Such intermediaries were necessary,” Searle writes, “because they have the kind of local knowledge and political connections that Kaushal didn’t have”; It was in learning the value of local knowledge of which he had initially been dismissive that Kaushal learned to act ‘like an Indian developer.’” Kaushal proudly rehearses his lesson: “If you take land and make a project, there are thousands willing to invest.”

Back at Liases Foras, Pankaj is of course well aware that “investable parcels and global assets” do not exist before his “unbiased research” represents them as such. As my conversation with Pankaj drew to a close, I asked him: “Do your clients ever try to convince you to facilitate transactions?” Pankaj laughed. “Of course they do! They try every day. Especially when we work for the government.” The state government, Pankaj explains, is one of Liases Foras’s regular clients. “After we give them advice, they always say ‘We want you to help us with plans for this or that project, or to select developers or buyers for projects.’” In fact, in most cases, Pankaj reflects that “clients ask us to sell their properties for them. But we refuse. Because if we start doing brokerage, then we would invalidate the credibility of our own valuations.” In other words, clients trust Pankaj to facilitate their transactions—land acquisitions for projects, tenders for developers—precisely because of Pankaj’s refusal to do so. In this context the discursive work of disparaging

“brokerage”—that is, of denying the value of the very expertise that will invariably be necessary (as Kaushal learns) in facilitating any eventual transaction—is part and parcel of how Liases Foras’s product (“unbiased advice”) acquires its own value.

Pankaj’s disavowal of the value of the local expertise upon which the functioning (even existence) of the property market is premised (expertise that Kaushal comes to recognize as essential to the production of “investable parcels and global assets”) points to the central line of inquiry animating this book: What are the various forms of knowledge and expertise that are framed as valuable and legitimate, and by what legal-institutional or discursive mechanisms? And what forms of labor are treated as morally suspect, accused of eating from the middle of the value chain?

This line of investigation can be disaggregated into a few parts: first, what kinds of expertise are important enough (perhaps even necessary) to other, more legible or legitimate forms of social, political, or economic activity such that they command their own price? With Kaushal, for instance, we see that the knowledge of even where to go about finding potentially available land (let alone how to go about negotiating with landlords) is a highly valued resource for which investors are ready to pay a price. It is perhaps the particularity of Kaushal’s Wall Street training that leads him initially to misrecognize the value in such expertise—to describe local experts in India as “not that smart.” Only upon learning the value of “sending ‘brokers out in a *dhoti*’” is Kaushal able to see (let alone enter) the property market at all.

The second part of the question concerns the normative presumptions that animate these value-creating activities, as well as the moralizing critiques that are leveled against these activities and those who perform them.¹⁰⁵ This calls attention as well to the matter of currency (pun intended)—to the question, that is, of the material form in which accrued value is measured, stored, and moved, as well as the temporality of those circulations of stored value. In the profiles we see how much of the moralizing talk about brokerage involves the introduction of money—conceived of as a single measure of value—into social spheres previously and/or normatively governed by other moralities or logics of valuation.¹⁰⁶ By rendering comparable—that is, measurable by equivalent units of value—objects and relations that were previously governed by other logics or systems of value, these systems and moralities are held to deteriorate.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, we see in the profiles forms of knowledge and labor that are expected not to be available or exchangeable in monetary terms but instead to be governed by other logics:

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of “public good,” “social work,” or “democratic accountability.” It is the presumed undermining of these other moralities—embodied in the cash fees and payments—that invites the condemnation of certain forms of labor.

Reading Yaffa Truelove’s profile of Dr. K alongside Sangeeta Banerji’s profile of a nonelite “paid agent” named Shazia reveals the striking overlap in the domain of practice and expertise on offer by the two self-described “social workers.” Dr. K disparages the practice of accepting fees for services, citing “the fee and accompanying ‘bribes’” as the key distinction between his own “social work” and the “corrupt” activities of people who value “profits above helping the community.” Yet as the ethnography reveals, the difference between the two domains of practice inheres not in the existence of transactions but rather in the currency in which the transactions take place: whereas Shazia’s expertise is valued, stored, and moved using banknotes, Dr. K uses the currency of (nonmonetary) “barter.” The elite social worker points to the nonmonetization of his services as evidence of the distance between his social work and the “cash-fueled ‘corruption’ exchanges” of “paid agents,” but the normative implications of this categorical refusal are uneven. Shazia’s services are (echoing Simmel’s famous formulation) “freely”¹⁰⁸ available to anyone who can pay, yet Dr. K’s altruistic efforts are on offer only to the particular people with whom he happens to be acquainted: neighbors, servants, friends of friends. The ethnographies thus reveal the Janus-faced character of money, which appears to both democratize access to social services while also commercializing that access, thereby obviating entrenched hierarchies (caste, community, gender) while threatening to push services out of the reach of those who can’t pay.

And yet the profiles also reveal a spuriousness to this distinction between cash and other material forms of stored value. In Sarthak Bagchi’s profile of a political party worker named Mishra, for instance, we see how money is only one among many forms of “gift” that is put into circulation at election time—demonstrating that the exchange-gift binary breaks down. This brings us to the third part of the question on the attribution of value, which concerns the temporality of convertibility and exchange. In the profiles we see how the currency of cash works much like any other gift or currency of exchange in producing enduring relations of debt and obligation. In Tarini Bedi’s profile of the caterer/caretaker known as Muna, we see how “currency’ . . . took many forms; it was distributed, circulated, shared, and paid back as money, food, favors, interest, and opportunity, all duly delivered through care associated with the kitchen.” Indeed, as Bedi points out, the “monetary value . . . of the catering business” was less important to Muna than was the

“value of the other kinds of capacities” that the business facilitated, in one instance enabling her to find employment for a neighbor. In Bagchi’s profile we similarly see how the value of money is not reducible to the number printed on the note but rather inheres in the longer-sighted social relations that money’s movements both trace and produce. The meaning of election-season money inheres less in a note’s exchange value than in its semiotic character: the cash has value not only because it can later be used to buy things (shoes or pencils) but also because the cash note comes from Mishra himself. The banknote gift is both a communicative action and a material instantiation of the strength and durability of the ties connecting Mishra to broad networks’ power, authority, and resources.

Although Mishra’s own signified strength is part of what gives this gifted money its value, we see paradoxically how Dr. K-style conflation of cash with commoditization is part of Mishra’s own moral universe as well. Mishra insists that “gifts and cash do not profess to ‘buy votes,’” but he continues to blame “both voters and leaders for making elections more ‘commercial’ over the years.” The multiplicity and contradiction among money’s multiple moral registers are bound up with the incongruous temporalities that these circulations of election-season cash inhabit: the short-term temporality of purchase and the enduring character of political relations.

Bombay Brokers attends to interconnections among these four lines of inquiry into the attribution of value—the content of valorized knowledge and labor, the materiality of the currencies in which value is stored, the temporality of exchanges that become the object of moral critique, and the presumptions upon which those critiques are based—in order to shine light onto the fraught domains of framing and overflow that our Bombay brokers index.

Fraught Domains

The book’s thirty-six profiles fall into six thematic domains: development, property, business, difference, publics, and truth. These six themes did not precede the writing of the profiles; rather, they emerged over a two-year period of grappling with the ethnographic material itself. In order to explain how we arrived at these six themes, it will be useful to briefly outline the process by means of which this project came into being.

Bombay Brokers was conceived over dinner with a friend in Bombay, sometime in January 2017. At some point, the conversation turned (as it often does in Bombay) to stories of the remarkable creativity, skillfulness, and

sometimes sheer chutzpah of our research participants. I had been telling a story about a “plumber” named Sunny, whose expertise in procuring official water connections for households without residential documents had recently been at the heart of a high-profile hydraulic debacle in the eastern suburbs, one that had (at long last) compelled policy makers to rethink the rules governing water supply in popular neighborhoods.¹⁰⁹ My friend responded with their own story, about a fellow whose labors were similarly necessary yet fraught. And so I got to thinking: what if we gathered as many Bombay ethnographers as we could manage and asked each one to write a profile of some such person: someone who is not the protagonist of our research in Bombay (the official “water engineer” or the “film director”) but rather that person who always seems be hanging about, the one who—even if we can’t quite make out what they actually do for a living—nonetheless appears to be indispensable to whatever we are seeking to understand (how movies get made, how buildings get built)?

A few months later I sent around a series of emails to everyone I could think of who had an active research project in Mumbai, explaining the idea and inviting them to write a short character sketch. For many of us, the people about whom we have written are not only key actors in the processes and practices that our research seeks to understand, but they have also been central to our own efforts to learn about those same processes. Ethnographic encounters are invariably (and necessarily) bound up with the shifting and provisional relations of power and positionality that run through the sites and spaces where we produce knowledge: relations that facilitate our access to those spaces, condition our perceptions, and inform our interpretations. The relationships that we have forged through the research process, in other words, are of a piece with the relational worlds upon which our research attentions are trained. These interpersonal intimacies are thus foregrounded in many of our profiles: attention to the social relations by means of which knowledge is produced is what ethnographers refer to as “reflexivity.” Rather than “claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation,” reflexivity insists that the ethnographer account for the embodied, materialized, real-time research encounters by means of which knowledge is produced.¹¹⁰ Given the centrality of these social relations to the ethnographic enterprise, my email invitation to contribute proved remarkably fertile; indeed, many authors responded by noting that the real challenge would be to settle on only one such person about whom to write.

On receipt of the drafts some months later, I created a shared electronic folder to which all the authors had access and then grouped the authors into

clusters of threes and fours according to what seemed potentially productive overlaps, intersections, or tensions in the various profiles; the goal of the clustering exercise was to invite authors whose characters interface with similar domains of practice, institutional frameworks, political networks, or territorial scales to ask pointed questions of one another's profiles, as well as to gain insights into their own characters by virtue of the perspective that another profile might afford. The idea for the author clusters was to think together about these ethnographies in order to gain insight into the broader processes, contradictions, and gaps that the work of their profiled person bridges and brokers. In addition to these long-distance clustering and feedback-giving exercises, we convened five in-person *Bombay Brokers* authors' workshops (in Boston, Leiden, Göttingen, Oslo, and Bombay) in order to think collectively about the questions animating the project: What is the broker brokering? What is the fixer fixing? Whence the gaps that need bridging? The six themes emerged through these conversations.

Each of the six themes has a long genealogy and established theoretical tradition, yet we see how the material in the profiles destabilizes the epistemological and normative presumptions upon which received formulations and framings hinge. Focusing ethnographic attention on the material-practical content of the expertise that *Bombay brokers* wield brings into focus the porosity of these discursive framings; we see how the busywork of brokerage is enlisted in producing and maintaining the conceptual boundaries of these valorized categories.

Part I features people who mediate the contradictions of “development” in Mumbai, where the fantasy of becoming a so-called world-class city has captured the imaginations of a generation of urban policy makers. The characters in this section wield a range of resources and expertise by means of which the territory and built fabric of the city are materialized and transformed under the auspices of development—and especially redevelopment—of the city’s heterogenous and “unplanned” territories: its popular neighborhoods, small-scale workshops, “informal” industries, and (above all) its “slums.” The expertise wielded by the people populating this section is highly embodied, and the skills employed and deployed are born of intimate involvements with the myriad materials that the city comprises: materiality whose irreducible excesses invariably exceed the tidily institutionalized “world-class” developmentalist visions and policy framings that would govern Bombay.

While the people profiled in part I are experts in mediating the contradictions born of efforts to materialize “development,” those in part II work at producing and legitimating claims of access to the city’s built fabric, claims

of access that are generally articulated in a privileged idiom of “property.” Contestations over access, use, and distribution of land are some of the most contentious in contemporary Mumbai—as in cities worldwide; as in the world more generally. The five people profiled in part II are experts in navigating the contradictions and contestations among competing practices and claims to urban resources (land, space, and infrastructures), and we see in the ethnographic material that “property” takes its place as just one idiom (if an institutionally privileged one) among many claims-making practices that are both legitimate and empowered in the city. The ethnographies reveal the gendered, racialized, and classed conflicts and contestations over the (re) production of various forms of hierarchy and differentiated access made in the name of “property rights.”

The domain of mediation and expertise explored in part III pertains to the world of “business” (*dhandā*). The seven character profiles show how ideas and practices of “doing business” animate projects of self fashioning and world making. Rather than presuming the meaning and morality of “doing business” or the value of “labor” or “consumer goods,” we see how value is accrued partially through the material-discursive work of differentiating business from hustling: *dhandā* from *tapori*. In this context the people profiled put markets to work toward a myriad of sometimes-conflicting goals. And we see as well the heterogenous temporal horizons of these value-creation projects, and by extension the heterochronous character of the markets and movements that such projects bring into being.

Part IV is about the tireless work of differentiation that characterizes Bombay life: the (re)production, contestation, and reconfiguration of myriad forms of difference and belonging. This is the work of navigating and mediating the contradictions of a myriad of crosscutting hierarchies: articulations and spatializations of identity and distinction. The profiles demonstrate attempts to cordon off and delimit domains of belonging and propriety (whether in terms of the fraught inclusivity of “citizenship” or the myriad forms of gendered, casted, communal, sectarian group-ness) in the context of these intersecting and counterposing forms of difference/differentiation. The expertise of these people is thus in the material technologies by means of which gender, caste, religion, regionalization, and nationality are produced, represented, and contested: how, when, and to what ends.

The six people featured in part V are experts in publicity. This section explores the social imaginaries and material technologies that are enlisted in the production and representation of publics. The characters profiled call attention to the shifting practices, tools, and techniques of mediation and

self making, and demonstrate how these labors animate new kinds of collective subjectivity and identity. The profiles demonstrate the importance of taking seriously the theatrical dimensions of urban life, demonstrating quite powerfully the recursivity in Mumbai between life and its representations, and calling into question the presumed divide between onscreen and offscreen lives.

Part VI features people who are experts in verification and authentication. The six ethnographies explore situations calling for investigation, where this need for investigation indexes the anxieties and instabilities animated by society-level changes. The ethnographies in this group demonstrate a range of situations that require investigation and explore the contested terrain of constituting “verification”: what forms of knowledge are deemed “true” (when, where, and by whom), and what is the value of this “truth”? The profiles show how practices of verification—about landholdings, social identity, or personal character, for example—are enlisted in efforts to inflict harm and/or produce value. The ethnographies demonstrate the coexistence of multiple, incompatible “truths,” such as in the imperative to reconcile the imperative of equal-before-the-law proceduralism with the equally real existence of political power and the authority to sidestep legal equality in the service of various forms of hierarchy: caste, class, community. The profiles thus explore fraught questions concerning who has access to what kind of knowledge and when and how various “truth” accounts ought or ought not to be made “public” or put into circulation.

Each of the six parts is prefaced by an analytical introduction that brings the ethnographic particularities of the individual pieces into conversation with one another, drawing out common themes, unpacking the overlaps in material-practical expertise, and discussing some of the broader context in which these particular practices have become so simultaneously crucial and contested. The introductions therefore have a twofold function, first in teasing out common themes and second, in so doing, working to guide readers in recognizing certain signposts as they are encountered in the rich ethnographic material. For this reason it is suggested that interested readers consider revisiting the part introductions a second time after having read the profiles.

A FEW HOURS AFTER Rasheed delivered my propane cylinder, my cell phone rang. It was Kranti’s mother, calling from her home in the suburbs: “I heard you had a gas cylinder delivered,” she began. “Yes,” I answered, a bit nervously. “Why . . . did someone complain?” She clarified: “Mrs. Patil from

across the courtyard rang me up.” She paused and then continued: “Your friend who brought the cylinder,” she began haltingly, emphasizing the word *friend*, “do you think he might be able to send one to me as well . . . ?” I breathed a sigh of relief and rang up Rasheed.

Notes

1. Bombay’s name was officially changed to Mumbai in 1995 when (following a bloody season of politically orchestrated rioting) the Marathi-nativist Shiv Sena assumed control over the Maharashtra state government (for an illuminating discussion of the city’s renaming of Mumbai, see Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). However, this “before-and-after” story elides the nomenclatural complexities of the contemporary city. Many people continue to use *Bombay*, especially (but neither completely nor exclusively) Urdu-speaking Muslims, portions of the political left, and the city’s intelligentsia. Many people will use *both* names—sometimes alternating according to the language (or accent) in which they are speaking: *Mumbai* when speaking Marathi, *Bombay* when speaking Urdu, Hindi, or English. What’s more, because *Bombay*, *Bambai*, *Bumbai*, and *Mumbai* exist along multiple spectra of vowel and consonantal sounds, it is not always clear (and perhaps intentionally so) exactly which name is being used. This nomenclatural heteroglossia is reflected in the book’s profiles.

2. The maps on pages 13–14 show the locations of various places mentioned through this book.

3. Unless otherwise noted, names throughout the book have been changed.

4. This particular conversation took place in Hindi, a language whose Bombay variation includes the English-origin words *allow*, *manage*, and *risk* (riks).

5. The idiom of *practice* has been taken up by anthropologists in recent decades as a way to navigate some of the impasses among phenomenology, structuralism, and materialist strands of Marxism, and to draw attention to dimensions of human activity that cannot be abstracted to thought and language. Our use of the word *practice* in this book draws on both Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian strands of practice theory and emphasizes three interrelated things: first, our accounts demonstrate that patterns of human activity are neither given by—nor add up to—a coherent body of rules, regularities, or normative justifications (externally given or otherwise); practices are not given by a coherent body of semantically articulated presuppositions, nor are they prior to or separate from the mediations of language. Following on this point, the ethnographies demonstrate that there is no useful distinction to be drawn between (so-called) *discursive* and *nondiscursive* forms of practice. Rather, our accounts reveal how language itself is a social practice that entails “rich practical and perceptual engagement with our surroundings” and that involves “complex bodily skills” (Rouse 535). Third, our

conceptualization of practice rejects presumptions of mind-body autonomy—and the distinction between “natural” and “social” worlds upon which such presumptions hinge—that inform some strands of practice theory. Instead, the material in this book demonstrates how social practices are “embodied, and the bodily skills through which they are realized are intimately responsive to the affordances and resistances of their surroundings” (Rouse 536). For discussion and elaboration of these points, see Webb Keane, “Perspectives on Affordances, or the Anthropologically Real,” *Hau Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8, nos. 1–2 (2018): 27–38; Webb Keane, “A Minimalist Ontology, with Other People in It,” *Hau Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8, nos. 1–2 (2018): 45–47; Joseph Rouse, “Practice Theory,” in *Handbook of the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 15, *Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*, ed. Stephen Turner and Mark Risjord (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006).

6. These are the questions that were posed to the authors when inviting them to write contributions.

7. Here we take a cue from Appadurai’s important insight that “things can move in and out of the commodity state” (Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 13).

8. The relationship between price and value is discussed later in this introduction.

9. Our approach to exploring these multi-scalar shifts thus shares analytical and methodological overlap with what anthropologist Anna Tsing terms *friction*: “the awkward, unequal, unstable and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.” In her study of “global connections,” Tsing demonstrates ethnographically how dynamics generally glossed as “globalization” (the seeming universalization of things such as “science,” “capitalism,” or “politics”) are actually brought into being through the “sticky materiality of practical encounters” (Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004]).

10. Bipan Chandra’s *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India, 1880–1905* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1966) is exemplary of this genre.

11. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5.

12. Whereas Cambridge University historian Anil Seal’s pioneering work *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* focuses rather narrowly on the high-caste and foreign-educated character of indigenous elites, historian Sumit Sarkar notes that subsequent work of Cambridge School historiography “disaggregated the category of ‘elite’ into locality-based ‘patron-client’ linkages or ‘factions,’ equally animated by selfish interests” (Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968]; Sumit Sarkar, “Nationalisms in India,” in *India and the British Empire*, ed. Douglas M. Peers and Nandini Gooptu [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]). For a summary of these debates, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), chapter 1.

13. Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas, "The Social System of a Mysore Village," in *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*, ed. McKim Marriot, 1–35 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

14. Sydel P. Silverman, "Patronage and Community-National Relationships in Central Italy," *Ethnology* 4, no. 2 (1965): 172–89.

15. Jonathan Spencer, *Anthropology, Politics and the State: Democracy and Violence in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

16. Johan Lindquist, "Brokers and Brokerage, Anthropology of," in *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Science*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015).

17. Zygmunt Bauman, "Times of Interregnum," *Ethics and Global Politics* 5, no. 2 (2012): 49–56.

18. Deborah James, "The Return of the Broker: Consensus, Hierarchy, and Choice in South African Land Reform," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 2 (June 2011): 318–38.

19. Anastasia Piliavsky, ed., *Patronage as Politics in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

20. Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Yogendra Yadav, "Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989–99," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34–35, no. 21 (August–September 1999): 2393–99.

21. Partha Chatterjee, "Democracy and Economic Transformation in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 16 (April 2008): 53–62; Joop de Wit, *Poverty, Policy and Politics in Madras Slums: Dynamics of Survival, Gender and Leadership* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1996); Tariq Thachil, *Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

22. Thomas B. Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

23. Akhil Gupta, "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (May 1995): 375–402; Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

24. Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, 40–41.

25. James Holston, "Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries," *City and Society* 21, no. 2 (2009): 245–67.

26. Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

27. G. R. Reddy and G. Haragopal, "The Pyraveekar: 'The Fixer' in Rural India," *Asian Survey* 25, no. 11 (1985): 1148–62; Jeffery Witsoe, "Corruption as Power: Caste and the Political Imagination of the Postcolonial State," *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 1 (February 2011): 73–85.

28. Gupta, “Blurred Boundaries.”

29. C. J. Fuller and Veronique Bénéï, *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India* (London: C. Hurst, 2001).

30. In the Indian context, the figure of the “broker” is also referred to as an “intermediary,” a “fixer,” a “dalal,” and a “middleman.” See R. Véron, S. Corbridge, G. Williams, and M. Srivastava, “The Everyday State and Political Society in Eastern India: Structuring Access to the Employment Assurance Scheme,” *Journal of Development Studies* 39, no. 5 (2003): 1–28; C. Jeffrey, “Democratisation without Representation? The Power and Political Strategies of a Rural Elite in North India,” *Political Geography* 19, no. 8 (2000): 1013–36; S. Jha, V. Rao, and M. Woolcock, “Governance in the Gullies: Democratic Responsiveness and Leadership in Delhi’s Slums,” *World Development* 35, no. 2 (2007): 230–46; Reddy and Haragopal, “The Pyraveekar”; J. Parry, “The ‘Crisis of Corruption’ and the ‘Idea of India,’ in *The Morals of Legitimacy*, ed. I. Pardo (New York: Berghahn, 2000); Witsoe, “Corruption as Power”; P. Oldenburg, “Middlemen in Third-World Corruption: Implications of an Indian Case,” *World Politics* 39, no. 4 (1987): 508–35.

31. Reddy and Haragopal, “The Pyraveekar,” 1151.

32. Hansen, *Wages of Violence*; Craig Jefferey, *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

33. Jeffrey Witsoe, “Everyday Corruption and the Political Mediation of the Indian State: An Ethnographic Exploration of Brokers in Bihar,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 6 (2012): 52.

34. This ambivalence toward brokerage contrasts sharply with celebratory accounts of what are characterized as *direct* forms of “insurgent” political claims making, material appropriation, or “occupation” that are theorized as democratizing “alternatives” to relational (that is, brokered) forms of “client patronage.” See, for example, Solomon Benjamin, “Occupancy Urbanism: Radicalizing Politics and Economy beyond Policy and Programs,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 3 (2008): 719–29; James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

35. In their discussion of how market reforms in India have enabled “the rise of Dalit entrepreneurs,” for instance, Kapur, Babu, and Bahn argue that “a combination of grit, ambition, drive and hustle—and some luck” have enabled some structurally disadvantaged and socially excluded individuals “to break through social, economic and practical barriers,” thereby remaking not only their own lives but also challenging powerful social-political structures and exclusionary nationalist ideologies (Devesh Kapur, D. Shyam Babu, and Chandra Bhan, *Defying the Odds: The Rise of Dalit Entrepreneurs* [New Delhi: Random House India, 2014]).

36. John Harriss, *Depoliticizing Development: The World Bank and Social Capital* (London: Anthem, 2002); Barbara Harriss-White and Elisabetta Basile, “Dalits and Adivasis in *India’s Business Economy: Three Essays and an Atlas*” (Haryana: Three Essays Collective, 2014).

37. Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995): 65–78.

38. Christiaan Grootaert, “Social Capital: The Missing Link?,” World Bank report, April 1998.

39. Tarun Khanna and Krishna G. Palepu, *Winning in Emerging Markets: A Road Map for Strategy and Execution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2010).

40. Tarun Khanna, *Trust: Creating the Foundation for Entrepreneurship in Developing Countries* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2018), 64, 225.

41. Khanna, *Trust*, 64, 225.

42. Khanna and Palepu, *Winning in Emerging Markets*, 64–65.

43. For example, see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Charles Tilly, “Power: Top Down and Bottom Up,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (1999): 330–52; Francis Fukuyama, *Trust* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

44. Some of these institutions have themselves begun voicing concerns about the threats to political instability posed by the vertiginous inequality over which they have presided and have themselves begun (gently) advocating for increased social spending (Rune Møller Stahl, “Ruling the Interregnum: Politics and Ideology in Nonhegemonic Times,” *Politics and Society* [May 2019]: 2).

45. Wolfgang Streeck characterizes the collapse of the global order in terms of a “post-capitalist interregnum” (Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System* [London: Verso, 2016]).

46. William Mazzarella, “The Anthropology of Populism: Beyond the Liberal Settlement,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48, no. 1 (2019): 50.

47. David Runciman, *How Democracy Ends* (London: Profile, 2018).

48. “The crisis consists precisely of the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born,” writes Gramsci in an often-cited passage of *Prison Notebooks*; “In this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” Chantal Mouffe uses “interregnum” to characterize contemporary “period of crisis” in which the contemporary “populist moment” unfolds; economic sociologist Wolfgang Streeck characterizes as a “post-capitalist interregnum” the ideological and material challenges to the contemporary global order; Zygmunt Bauman characterizes the unmaking of an “old order” based on a Westphalian “triune” of territory, state, and nation as one of interregnum (Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* [London: Verso, 2018], 15; Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?*; Zygmunt Bauman, “Times of Interregnum,” *Ethics and Global Politics* 5, no. 1 [2012]).

49. Philippe Theophanidis, “Interregnum as a Legal and Political Concept,” *Synthesis* 9 (fall 2016): 110.

50. Gramsci, cited in Theophanidis, “Interregnum,” 110.

51. See Jagdish Bhagwati and Arvind Panagariya, *Why Growth Matters: How Economic Growth in India Reduced Poverty and the Lessons for Other Developing Countries* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014).

52. Mehrotra, cited in Ulka Anjaria, *Reading India Now: Contemporary Formations in Literature and Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 63.

53. The decline of Mumbai's textile industry is generally narrated as result of some combination of technological innovation, neoliberal gentrification, and ethnic politics. See Neera Adarkar, ed., *The Chawls of Mumbai: Galleries of Life* (Delhi: ImprintOne, 2012); Darryl D'Monte, *Ripping the Fabric: The Decline of Mumbai and Its Mills* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). For a critical engagement with these nostalgic narratives, see Maura Finkelstein, *The Archive of Loss: Lively Ruination in Mill Land Mumbai* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

54. See, for instance, Vikramaditya Motwane's film *Trapped* (Phantom Films, 2016). For a scholarly account of the Mumbai film industry, see Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

55. Although Bollywood's profitability is second to America's Hollywood (Bollywood's earnings are merely 10 percent of the American film industry's), in terms of number of films produced, Mumbai is unmatched: in 2012 it produced more than 1,600 films against America's 476 (and China's 745) (Niall McCarthy, "Bollywood: India's Film Industry by the Numbers," *Forbes*, accessed November 29, 2019, www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2014/09/03/bollywood-indias-film-industry-by-the-numbers-infographic/#f7aoa6o2488b).

56. Anjaria, *Reading India Now*, 61.

57. Claire Burke, "500 Years in 59 Seconds: The Race to Be the World's Largest City," *Guardian*, March 21, 2019, www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/mar/21/500-years-in-59-seconds-the-race-to-be-the-worlds-largest-city.

58. Elzy Kolb, "75,000 People per Square Mile? These Are the Most Densely Populated Cities in the World," *USA Today*, July 11, 2019, accessed November 29, 2019, www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/07/11/the-50-most-densely-populated-cities-in-the-world/39664259.

59. See the glossary for an account of Mumbai "slums" and their enumeration.

60. Vikram Chandra's novel-turned-Netflix-series *Sacred Games* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007) is exemplary.

61. For sensitive and compelling accounts of the Shiv Sena's rise to power in Mumbai, see Hansen, *Wages of Violence*, and Atreyee Sen, *Shiv Sena Women: Violence and Communalism in a Bombay Slum* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

62. Slavoj Žižek uses a different translation of Gramsci's statement in his book *Living in the End Times*, in which the phrase *morbid symptoms* is replaced with "monsters" (Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* [New York: Verso, 2011], 249).

63. Drawing on Gramsci's formulation, South Asia historian Ranajit Guha—a foundational thinker of the "subaltern school" of historiography—calls this "dominance without hegemony" (Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998]). Jean and John Comaroff later reversed the formulation, insisting that colonial power actually tended to be a matter of hegemony without dominance (Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991]).

64. However, it depends on who you ask.

65. Charles Tilly, “Welcome to the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Twenty-First-Century Firm: Changing Economic Organization in International Perspective*, ed. Paul DiMaggio (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 201.

66. Tilly, “Welcome.”

67. Indeed, Tilly’s “overlap” was only ever a reality for certain classes of people in the West as well.

68. For a recent account of nineteenth-century Indian Ocean traders and brokers in which Bombay looms large, see Johan Mathew, *Margins of the Market: Trafficking and Capitalism across the Arabian Sea* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

69. Key works in this extensive literature include C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770–1870* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Amalendu Guha, “The Comprador Role of Parsi Seths, 1750–1850,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (November 1970): 1933–36; Mathew, *Margins of the Market*; Ghulam Nadri, *Eighteenth-Century Gujarat: The Dynamics of Its Political Economy, 1750–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Asiya Siddiqi, “The Business World of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 19, no. 3–4 (July 1982): 301–24; Lakshmi Subramanian, *Three Merchants of Bombay: Business Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2016).

70. Territorially as the sole deep-water port on the subcontinent’s western shore, institutionally as the seat of British colonial power in West India, ideationally as the locus of the Indian nationalist movement.

71. Here we take a cue from anthropologists Johan Lindquist, Joshua Barker, and Erik Harms, who have proposed focusing ethnography on what they call “key figures” (along the lines of Raymond Williams’s “keywords”), with the idea that “key figures” can shine important light onto “the ground,” against which a particular figure acquires meaning. “Figure and ground,” they write, “form a composition that shift in relation to one another when located in time and place. As such, this composition becomes capable of communicating something larger than itself” (Joshua Barker, Erik Harms, and Johan Lindquist, “Introduction to Special Issue: Figuring the Transforming City,” *City and Society* 25, no. 2 [2013]: 160). *Bombay Brokers* takes up this provocation and invitation to attend to “figures as real people” as way of opening up new ways of thinking “the ground.” Joshua Barker, Erik Harms, and Johan Lindquist’s book *Figures of Southeast Asian Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014) served as something of an inspiration for the current work.

72. Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4. Goswami defines *methodological nationalism* as “the common practice of presupposing, rather than examining, the sociohistorical production of such categories as a national space and national economy and the closely related failure to analyze the specific global field within which specific nationalist movements emerged.”

73. Tsing, *Friction*, 1.

74. Thomas Blom Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik, “Introduction—Urban Charisma on Everyday Mythologies in the City,” *Critique of Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2009): 8, 22. In their influential formulation, Hansen and Verkaaik characterize the “complex realization of properties or potentialities of people and their environment through actions and events” as “infra-power.”

75. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 54.

76. Following Coole and Frost, we use the term *new materialisms* broadly, including the vast body of work inspired by Latour’s “actor network theory” and Deleuzian notions of “assemblage” (without attempting to reconcile the debates among them). (Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010], 1–43).

77. Michel Callon, “An Essay on Framing and Overflowing: Economic Externalities Revisited by Sociology,” in *The Laws of the Markets*, ed. Michel Callon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 250.

78. Indeed, as William Mazzarella (personal communication) points out, “Externality is not subsequent to the model-salient features of the situation.”

79. Callon, “An Essay,” 256–57.

80. Callon, “An Essay,” 267.

81. For discussion, see Lisa Björkman, *Pipe Politics, Contested Waters: Embedded Infrastructures of Millennial Mumbai* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

82. As housing activist Simpreet Singh notes, the goal of these sorts of efforts is to “show the scandal of Mumbai’s development . . . to create suspense and shock. . . . It’s the only way” (quoted in Sapana Doshi and Malini Ranganathan, “Contesting the Unethical City: Land Dispossession and Corruption Narratives in Urban India,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 107 [2017]: 1, 187).

83. Jaspal Singh Naol (Jal), “Hiranadani’s Special Leave Petition Dismissed by the Supreme Court Upholding HC Judgement,” March 30, 2012, <http://socialactivistjal.blogspot.com/2012/03/hiranadanis-special-leave-petition.html>.

84. “MMRDA formed a six-member committee in 2007, and on the basis of its report, slapped a penalty of Rs1,993 crore on the developer in 2009. The amount was subsequently reduced to Rs304 crore, and then to Rs89 crore in January 2010. . . . In August, justice Sawant gave a clean chit to the developer, following which Nirajan Hiranandani filed a plea seeking dismissal of the PILs pending for the last three years” (Kanchan Chaudhari, “HC: Will Hiranandani construct low-cost homes in Powai?” *Hindustan Times* Mumbai, December 16, 2011).

85. Joseph S. Nye, “Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis,” *American Political Science Review* 61, no. 2 (1967): 417–27.

86. Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 77–96. For some key anthropological works in this genre, see Veena Das and Deborah Poole, *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004); C. J. Fuller and Veronique Benei, *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2012); Gupta, “Blurred Boundaries.”

87. For example, Jonathan Anjaria, *The Slow Boil: Street Food, Rights and Public Space in Mumbai* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); Beatrice Jauregui, “Provisional Agency in India: Jugaad and Legitimation of Corruption,” *American Ethnologist* 41, no. 1 (2014): 76–91; J. P. Olivier de Sardan, “A Moral Economy of Corruption in Africa,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, no. 1 (1999): 25–52; Jonathan P. Parry, “The ‘Crisis of Corruption’ and ‘The Idea of India: A Worm’s Eye View,’” in *The Morals of Legitimacy: Between Agency and System*, ed. Italo Pardo, 27–55 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

88. Parry, “The ‘Crisis of Corruption’ and the ‘Idea of India.’”

89. Gupta, “Blurred Boundaries.”

90. Anjaria, *The Slow Boil*.

91. See the glossary entry for *slum*.

92. Sapana Doshi and Malini Ranganathan, “Contesting the Unethical City: Land Dispossession and Corruption Narratives in Urban India,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 107, no. 1 (2017): 183–99.

93. The slum-rehabilitation eligibility cutoff date looms large in contemporary Mumbai—and therefore also in the profiles. See the glossary entry for *slum*.

94. A government circular in 2012 addressed this problem by allowing transfer of ownership of slum structures; for extended discussion, see Björkman, *Pipe Politics, Contested Waters*; Lisa Björkman, “The Engineer and the Plumber: Mediating Mumbai’s Conflicting Infrastructural Imaginaries,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 42, no. 2 (March 1, 2018): 276–94.

95. Or at least it was until the 2020 COVID lockdown.

96. Andrew Stephen Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 232.

97. Pankaj’s nonbrokering services involve neither labor in land nor free exchange of property but rather the giving of advice.

98. The Hindi/Urdu/Marathi word *dalal* comes from the Arabic words *dallāl*—which means something like “a person who offers things in an auction”—and *dalāl*—which describes the act of flirting with a woman. Although the connection between the two etymological origins of the Hindi word—agent and flirtation—is unclear, Arabic language scholar Khaldoun Almously (personal communication, 2019) offers that the contemporary Hindi valence of *dalal* as “pimp” could be the result of a historical conflation of the two Arabic words: “the auctioneer could be offering a woman.”

99. Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met with in Persian Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1892).

100. Horace Hayman Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms and of Useful Words Occurring in Official Documents Relating to the Administration of the Government of British India, from the Arabic, Persian, Hindustani, Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Uriya, Marathi, Guzarathi, Telugu, Karnata, Tamil, Malayalam and Other Languages. Compiled and Published Under the Authority of the Honorable the Court of Directors of the East-India Co* (London: W. H. Allen, 1855), 121.

101. Mathew, *Margins of the Market*, 166.

102. Mathew, *Margins of the Market*, 164.

103. It is unclear why the designation *muqaddam* did not take on the pejorative sense of *dalal*. In contemporary Bombay, *muqaddam* seems to be used in a rather banal sense to indicate various sorts of mid-level supervisor. In the Municipal Corporation's Department of Hydraulic Engineering, for instance, the term is used to describe the senior-most nonengineering staff position, reporting to the junior engineer (Distribution) (Björkman, *Pipe Politics, Contested Waters*, 234). Yet “dalal” was among a number of professions undergoing a shift in moral valence in late nineteenth-century Bombay. Between 1864 and 1921, the Bombay Census reclassified the occupation of “prostitution” from the category “luxuries and dissipation” (alongside “bracelet dealer,” “musician,” “photographer,” and “toymaker”) to a new category termed “unproductive occupations” (L. J. Sedgwick, *Census of India 1921*, vol. 9, *Cities of the Bombay Presidency*, part 1 (Report) [Poona: Yeravda Prison Press, 1922], accessed May 29, 2019, <https://archive.org/details/in.gov.ignca.31069/page/n77>). These sorts of changing census classifications, historian Ashwini Tambe notes, provide insight into the “formation of colonial categories and the social valence they carry” (Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009], 116).

104. Sanjeev Uptry, “Pimps, Paranoia and Politics: Narratives of Masculinities and Femininities in the Nepali Blogosphere,” in *Media as Politics in South Asia*, ed. Sahana Udupa and Stephen D. McDowell (London: Routledge, 2017), 63.

105. This question connects to the earlier discussion of the obfuscating discourse of “corruption.”

106. Theorists of money from Marx to Simmel have emphasized money’s particularity as an object of exchange that renders “everything quantifiable according to one scale of value” (Bill Maurer, “The Anthropology of Money,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35, no. 1 [2006]: 20). “It is in the nature of a general-purpose money,” Bohannan (1955) writes, “to standardize the exchangeability value of every item to a common sale” (cited in “Introduction: Money and the Morality of Exchange,” in *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, ed. Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch, 13 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]).

107. The effects of this “great transformation” (Maurer, “The Anthropology of Money,” 19) on sociocultural life have been both celebrated and condemned: on the one hand, money’s “qualityless” quality has been feted for “freeing” people from oppressive gender, caste, or other hierarchical institutions; on the other, this same qualitylessness has been cast as amorality, with money accused of undermining and disembedding other sociocultural institutions, relations, and moralities. “If modern man is free,” Georg Simmel (1907) writes, “—free because he can sell everything and free because he can buy everything—then he now seeks . . . in the objects themselves that vigor, stability and inner unity which he has lost because of the changed money-conditioned relationships that he has with them” (cited in Maurer, “The Anthropology of Money,” 23).

108. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. D. Frisby (New York: Routledge, 2004).

109. Björkman, “The Engineer and the Plumber.”

110. Timothy Pachirat, “The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor,” *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 143–62.

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