The Proper Name

IN NOVEMBER 1995 the city of Bombay was officially renamed Mumbai. The government of India finally gave in to the request by the state government of Maharashtra to change the name of the city on all letterheads, official stamps, tags, and so on. Newspapers tried to estimate the cost of this operation, and the renaming caused a brief if intense debate in the city and state. The state government, headed by the regional party Shiv Sena (Shivaji's Army), and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) argued that the renaming was meant to highlight the local origins of the city's name derived from Mumbadevi, a local goddess of Koli fishermen who originally lived on the islands and marshland that became the city of Bombay.

The renaming aimed at undoing the Portuguese and later British perversions of this name. Vernacular newspapers in the city and the rest of the state supported the "vernacularization" of the city's name and argued that the city really was not renamed. The only novelty was, it was argued, that the vernacular pronunciation of Bombay in Marathi, one of the city's two main languages, was now properly spelled in English. According to this view, the renaming was a minor, entirely justifiable, and long overdue act of redress on behalf of the vernacular world. Parts of the English-language press, some quarters in the Congress Party, and some intellectuals and spokespersons from significant minorities in the city, such as the Urdu-speaking Muslims, opposed the renaming on the ground that Bombay's cosmopolitan character should be reflected in its name. In many of the city's newspapers one could find a stream of letters to the editor bemoaning the loss of the old name, and with it the older experience of Bombay, the dreams of Bombay as a metaphor of India's diversity, the imaginings of modernity, and the hopes associated with that name.

I recall a conversation I had with an elderly, retired civil servant a few weeks before the final decision was made. I sat in one of the suburban trains one evening, reading through an issue of *Times of India* that carried an article about the renaming issue. The elderly gentleman leaned over and said: "First these people created havoc in our city, and now they also want to take away the proper name of this city. It is a disgrace." I asked him why he felt so strongly about it. Was the issue not just one of how to spell the name? "Look," he replied, "people have known this place as Bom-

bay for two hundred years, all over it is written as Bombay, on every second house and statue in the city. Why should it be changed? . . . All over the country people know this place as Bombay, they know it from films and all. . . . I grew up here; yes, I do occasionally say Mumbai when I speak my mother tongue, but its proper name is Bombay."

The man got off at Marine Lines. He lived in a pleasant neighborhood only a five-minute walk from Marine Drive, in the heart of what one may call classical Bombay, with its apartment blocks and elegant houses from the 1930s and 1940s, that stretches from Churchgate Station to the elite areas of Malabar Hill. As I reached for my notebook and wrote down his words, the expression "its proper name is Bombay" kept coming back to me. I realized how precisely the different connotations carried by Bombay and Mumbai, respectively, actually condensed many of the social transformations and political conflicts in this part of India in the past century.

What does a proper name imply? Just as a proper noun refers to the individuality or inherent properties of an object or person, a name cannot be "proper" unless it marks, or symbolizes, the individuality and properties ascribed to its object. To be recognized by a proper name signifies respect for the choice and meaning of this name, just as proper names accord a measure of uniqueness and subjectivity to persons or groups. The right to name, and the entitlement to hold a name for oneself, shapes the style and ways that objects or persons are known and how their assumed properties are described. Following Kripke, we can say that for a name to become proper it must become a "rigid designator," a signifier that creates meanings but cannot be substituted by a set of descriptions. A rigid designator defines a context and "holds" sets of connotations as designated objects, none of which can fully describe the designator (Kripke 1980, 48). Or, to go a step further, we can argue that proper names do not describe objects or places. They create and fix those objects. As Žižek argues, "[the identity of an object] is *the retroactive effect of naming itself*: it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of an object." (Žižek 1989, 95) (Žižek's emphasis). Mundane processes of using names, affixing them, enunciating them, and so on, have exactly this quality of constant reiteration that builds up and stabilizes the imputed properties of a place, a group, a nation.

This notion of reiterative practices of naming as a creation and fixation of identities, and of the use of names as claims to certain identities, properties, or entitlements, is a central thread in this book. The underlying argument throughout the following chapters is that politics of identity generally is driven by the paradox that no identity, no sense of community, and no imputed property of a place ever can be self-evident or stable. There are always multiple meanings, many narratives, and inherent instabilities within such entities. One can say that the rigidity of the designator ulti-

mately is impossible or that the name never can become completely "proper." The reply to this is, however, always more reiteration of a particular meaning of a name, new inflections or supplements that can support and extend particular meanings of a name or a designator, or maybe to invent a new name altogether. The efficacy of a name, and thus an identity, in terms of the fixing or accruing of meaning and connotations, depends, therefore, on its constant performance—in authoritative writing, in public speech, images, songs, rumors, and so on.

For a name of a huge entity like a city to be "proper," it must, in other words, be able to mark the space of the city, its historicity, and the identity of its people in a clear and unequivocal manner. In the era of modern nationalism there cannot be two cities with identical names within the same state, at least not if they are of a certain size. The name of each city must be marked and fixed in time and space, in order for its people, its communities, and its social worlds also to be fixed in space (by a post fix "am Main," "upon Tyne," etc.) and historicized by being prefixed as new or old, for example.

The question of naming revolves, therefore, around the question of which space, and whose, should the name fix and territorialize as its object; which, and whose, history should it refer to and demarcate; and in which language should the name properly be enunciated. In this perspective, the question of Bombay/Mumbai appears as something slightly more complicated than merely a change of the English spelling of the vernacular pronunciation.

At a first glance, the change of the name was a rather straightforward assertion of the nativist agenda of claiming Bombay and all its symbols of modernity and power to be the natural property of local Marathi speakers, which Shiv Sena had been pursuing since its inception in 1966. Within this agenda, built on the discourse of the linguistic movement of the 1940s and 1950s, the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti (SMS), the name Mumbai would amount to a fixation of the city in the regional space of Maharashtra, as well as in the history, culture, and language of the Marathi—speakers of western India. As I will show in detail in the following chapters, this nativist discourse tried to efface the fact that most Marathi speakers were as alien in the city as everybody else by defining itself against "outsiders" constructed as enemies of Marathi speakers—Gujaratis, south Indians, Muslims, the central government, the established and "cosmopolitan" elite in the city, and so on.

However, the renaming also resonated with broader and nationalist concerns with decolonization of the mind, the discomfort shared by conservatives as well as leftist forces with the continuing dominance of English as a medium for education, cultural products, and the business world. The advocacy of vernacularization of public culture[1] as such has been

prominent in western India since the nineteenth century. To these powerful sensibilities, the renaming of Mumbai appeared as a much needed mark of distinction vis-à-vis a colonial past as well as a globalizing present. Bearing the official and authorized name of Mumbai, the city could be reinscribed in a national territory as a "proper" Indian city, within a national history and an emerging national modernity that recognized its indigenous cultural and linguistic roots, and its name could be properly enunciated in the vernacular. These sentiments were shared across the political spectrum in a variety of ways, from conservative Hindu nationalist forces to intellectuals, writers, educators, artists, and many others of leftist political persuasions. To be sure, the name Mumbai has occasionally been used in official documents of the state as well as the municipality over several decades. Prominent socialists campaigned for the change of name in the 1960s, and the initial moves to finally change the name were made by a Congress chief minister in 1992.[2]

Others, like the gentleman in the train, bemoaned the change of the name Bombay. In this name, it was argued, was contained a unique experience of colonial and postcolonial modernity—dynamic, intensely commercial, heterogeneous, chaotic, and yet spontaneously tolerant and open-minded. This was the Bombay of ethnic and religious mixing, of opportunities, of rags-to-riches success stories, of class solidarity, of artistic modernism and hybridized energies that so many writers have celebrated in novels and poetry. Obviously there were many different ideas of Bombay. There were the visions of the city's elite, always concerned with the unruliness of the endless crowds overflowing what was supposed to be the city's neat and elegant urban spaces. There were the nationalist dreams of India's new secular modernity arising from factories, offices, and institutions to override the older sectarian divisions of caste, language, and religion that abounded in the city. And there were the humble dreams of a better life, a good job, a bit of money entertained by the millions of people migrating to the city in search of a livelihood. This side of Bombay—the poverty, the little rays of hope, spontaneous solidarities and yet insurmountable difficulties facing the poor in the city—has recently been vividly represented by Rohinton Mistry in *A Fine Balance* and, earlier, in *Such a Long Journey*.

But these dreams had already been shattered and the celebration of the city's mythical cosmopolitanism had already been questioned years before the renaming actually took place. The critical events were, of course, the devastating riots that rocked Bombay in December 1992 and January 1993—the most protracted and serious urban conflagration in post-Independence India. In his essay, *This Is Not Bombay*, Dilip Padgaonkar, then the editor of *Times of India*, reflected in 1993 on the causes and consequences of the riots. Like many other citizens of Bombay he felt immensely

frustrated as he watched the demise of one type of dream, or imagination, of the city and the emergence of another much uglier, far more violent side of the city, "its flip side," as he put it:

> Few Bombay'ites now claimed that the city drew its pride, as in the past, from its cosmopolitan character . . . just beneath the surface you discovered the anguish of the city. Bombay had experienced a swift and sharp polarisation between religious communities and ethnic groups on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Conversations you heard in April (1993)—conversations that followed the initial, self-deluding remarks about the return of normality—sounded more or less alike. They betrayed the same hatred and prejudices, the same fears, the same despair. (Padgaonkar 1993, 3–4)

Something had changed in Bombay. The city had seen riots and communal enmity before but never on that scale. Most people in the city will agree today that it is no longer the same city as it used to be, that Mumbai is not like Bombay. As a friend of mine, born and brought up in the central parts of the city, said some years ago:

> We have lost the optimism we used to have, you know, that life is hard but it is getting better next year when I find myself a new job, finish my school or whatever . . . now we have the same sense of chaos and corruption as in other parts of the country. Maybe we were just naïve, but there was this feeling of Bombay being ahead of the country, you know, that we had more scope, that we were more advanced, and all that.

Is this sense of loss, however widespread it may be, just a sentimental delusion, one may ask, a local appellation of the narrative of loss of order, morality, authenticity and community that seems intrinsic to most experiences of urban modernity? Is it not more true that this narrative of an ideal Bombay is a historical fantasy that conceals the fact that Bombay always was fundamentally divided by class, caste and religion? Is it not so that urban violence, state repression, and corruption were always a part of the city's life, as Chandavarkar has shown in his recent round of studies of colonial Bombay (Chandavarkar 1998)? Is not Bombay's Janus face that emerges from Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) the truth of the city—the intimate dependence of the elite and middle-class life of the city on the underworld, on sectarian violence, and on brutal exploitation; in brief, all that official nationalism for so long sought to repress and efface?

We must answer yes to all these questions. The history of Bombay does not at all fit into the standard depictions of the city as full of pragmatic business-minded go-getters and spontaneously peaceful and secular citizens. But this insight prompts a series of new questions regarding how these dominant discourses of the city were made possible, who produced them, and why they began to crumble in the 1980s? Does the renaming

of Bombay signify a new set of ideas of how urban modernity is going to be inhabited and governed, how space is going to be used, appropriated, and symbolically marked? Is it, as many older residents in the city believe, the parochial forces from the hinterland, the older notions of a "Marathi Mumbai" that now finally have conquered and defeated an "alien British Bombay," such as Meera Kosambi depicts the conflicting images of Bombay of the nineteenth century (Kosambi 1995)? Has Bombay in the same move been domesticated as Mumbai and reinscribed within a Hindu nationalist discourse of vernacular modernity in India, a Mumbai that may be Hindu in symbolic complexion and rhetoric but essentially retains most of the institutions and structures of the political economy developed by the postcolonial state?

Answering these questions presupposes that one begin to unlearn some of the well-established "rural bias" in much South Asian anthropology and come to terms with how ordinary social life is configured in urban India, how localities and identities are produced there.[3] As it will become clear in the following, the contending discourses on community, on modernity, and on political authority that I trace in the following chapters feed into a protracted and complex negotiation of the proper place of the urban experience, with all its ambivalences and condensed desires and impurities, within the dominant political imaginaries of western India.

INTERPRETING MUMBAI DREAMS

Unruliness, ambiguity, intensity, and anxiety are defining characteristics of the urban experience in most parts of the world. As Appadurai and Holston observe: "Like nothing else, the modern urban public signifies both the defamiliarizing enormity of national citizenship and the exhilaration of its liberties." Cities, the authors point out, have always been privileged sites for negotiations and enlargement of the meaning of citizenships, the definition of rights, the claims to certain entitlements from the state, as well as the rise of both reactionary and radical social movements (Appadurai and Holston 1996, 188–89). They observe further that the proliferation and intensification of global flows of capital, goods, and people in the last decade "tend to drive a wedge between national space and its urban centers" (189), turning vast cityscapes into zones of indeterminacy with multiple economic logics, multiple forms of law, and multiple forms of community and solidarity. These dynamics challenge several of the ideals of the nation-state—uniformity of the law and the capacity of national citizenship to encompass and override other loyalties—and have contributed to the growth of xenophobic and exclusivist movements and agendas in many large cities across the globe.

Such a wedge between Bombay and its hinterland has existed for more than a century but has been compounded and intensified over the past decades. In that light, the most striking feature of the renaming, and of what was staged as a conquest of the city by triumphant nativist and Hindu nationalist forces, was exactly the emptiness of their gestures and the absence of any broader vision of social or political transformation. The essential message was that of an ethnic marking of the city, its domestication within national as well as regional space: now Mumbai is "our city," now it is a symbol of "our modernity." The "we" for which Shiv Sena and BJP claimed to speak and to represent was the ordinary Marathi speaker, the elusive *Marathi manus*, and an even more elusive community of Hindus. The power of this representation did, undoubtedly, lie in its lack of precision and its reliance on an older notion of Bombay controlled by all that made average Hindus of the hinterland feel insecure: a sophisticated elite, an immoral and excessively Westernized intelligentsia, the working classes, the slum dwellers, the Muslims, and a future Mumbai that was marked by the familiar and nonthreatening, a Bombay with all its money, glitz, and power tamed and familiarized with all its threatening cultural and social difference effaced and thus transformed into "our Mumbai," into "our place" in the world.

My contention is, in other words, that if we are to understand the transformation of Bombay into Mumbai, and the nature of the Mumbai dreams growing out of a violent movement like Shiv Sena, we need to see the importance of social imaginaries, of desires of recognition, and the attraction of the public spectacles of violence and assertion that Shiv Sena has employed so successfully over the years. My proposition, which will be preposterous to some, is that categories and logics derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis and elaborated by the work of Slavoj Žižek may be helpful in this endeavor. Many anthropologists reject psychoanalysis altogether because of its often ethnocentric and universalizing claims. Lacanian thought, however appreciated in literary criticism and film studies, has rarely been invoked by anthropologists or social scientists, partly because of its highly abstract and general nature.[4] To my mind, however, the possibilities of Lacanian categories lie exactly in their highly abstract outline of logics of identification that make them easier to "think with" and redeploy in other cultural contexts than, say, more conventional Freudian categories derived from clinical practice.

The basic Lacanian proposition I think with in this book is closely related to the logic of naming outlined above and what I have called the "impossibility of identities" (Hansen 1999, 60–65). The formation of subjects takes place in a constant interplay between three orders, or registers: the Imaginary (more immediate and sensory experiences, desires, and imaginings), the Symbolic (the conventions of society and culture—Lacan

often calls this *nom de pere*, name of the father, the Oedipal moment of the prohibitive command), and the Real (the central dimensions of experience that cannot be fathomed and symbolized fully—for example, death, contingency, violence, pain). The subject is split between these inherently conflictual registers and is always formed around a "lack" in being, an incompleteness because the symbolic order always is blocked and perforated by the injunctions of desire and fascination of the apparitions of the Real. This play between the "Law" and the forbidden is what Lacan called *jouissance*, or (perverse) enjoyment, and is at the heart of the impossibility of identity as well as the drive toward overcoming this "lack." Especially Slavoj Žižek has, with admirable creativity, shown the potentials of this type of thinking in areas as diverse as film studies, nationalism, the fascination of totalitarianism, consumption, and much more.[5]

I do not deploy these categories in the following because I believe that they can form the ultimate template on which questions of identity and subjectivity in Mumbai, or in India, can be plotted. But I believe that some of this abstract Lacanian logic makes rather good sense in interpreting questions of leadership, identification, the anatomy of resentment between Hindus and Muslims in contemporary Mumbai, and anxieties and desires generated by the urban landscape. I do not pretend to exhaust these questions, and even less to find the truth. But I invite readers to judge whether they, too, find that the mode of thinking and conceptualizing that informs the subsequent analysis—and occasionally is drawn out in more explicit form—is able to produce interesting, or maybe even provoking, conclusions. If so, this theoretical proposition will be wholly justified.

THE ARGUMENT

This book analyzes the historical formation of the political discourses, the identities, and the conflicts that changed Bombay from being the preeminent symbol of India's secular, industrial modernity to become a powerful symbol of the very crisis of this vision.

Many editorials in newspapers and commentary in the public debates have argued that the success of Shiv Sena and the proliferation of xenophobic discourses in Bombay is an anomaly, a symptom that something had gone wrong in its urban modernity. The rise of ethnic xenophobia and the souring of intercommunity relations in the city that engulfed the entire state in the 1980s have often been attributed to mismanagement by the Congress Party, excessive corruption, and the complacency and irresponsibility of the elites in the city and the state.

Another version of the search for anomaly was that Bombay's peculiar, fragmented, and disorganized structure of capitalist production in the 1970s and 1980s created a "predatory capitalism" of speculation and unproductive capital that dissolved the organized working class and prepared the ground for subsequent political and cultural changes in the city (Lele 1995). Older studies argued that the pattern of migration to Bombay created an imbalanced configuration of ethnicity, class, and status that prompted the growth of regional nativism and ethnic chauvinism (Katzenstein 1981; Gupta 1982).

My explorations of postcolonial Bombay tries to make three arguments that all, one way or another, are informed by my basic theoretical propositions regarding the instability of naming and the impossibility of identities. I argue, first, that Hindu nationalism and the politics of xenophobia should not be understood as anomalies inflicted by dark forces or structures of peripheral capitalism, but rather as possibilities always folded into India's unique experience of modernity and democracy. I try to show that the ostensibly clear distinction drawn today between "secular forces" and "communal forces" is more spurious than many would like to believe. I also try to show how relatively unexceptional much of Shiv Sena's discourse and practices are in the context of the historical formation of narratives and identities of caste and religious community in western India. But I argue that unlike most other parties or organizations in Mumbai, Shiv Sena has enthusiastically embraced modern city life and technological progress, and has provided young men especially with an ideal of an assertive, often violent, mode of being urban. Herein lies a key to much of its success.

Second, I argue that the rise of Shiv Sena and the transformations of Bombay were made possible by the decline of an older political culture that espoused paternalist social and cultural incorporation of the large majority of the population into a highly unequal system of political clientelism. This culture had been undermined over the years by a democratic revolution, and a rhetoric of entitlements and political aspiration which democracy in postcolonial India had promoted over four decades (for a fuller argument along these lines, see Hansen 1999). This extension of the languages of democracy allowed the assertion of new and plebeian identities, but it also intensified struggles over material and symbolic resources and produced more anxiety, more violence. The Shiv Sena addressed these anxieties quite effectively by offering the rhetoric of ethno-religious unity and solidarity that repackaged older anti-Muslim myths with registers of regional cultural pride and an effective strategy of staging a series of violent public spectacles. I argue that Shiv Sena developed the longstanding traditions of plebeian insubordination and assertion in public spaces in Mumbai into a highly violent strategy of political perfor-

mances that openly defied and challenged the idea of legality and changed popular perceptions of governance and the state.

Finally, I take issue with the interpretation of a phenomenon like Shiv Sena as growing out of caste groups, class segments, or communities—as if these constituencies, equipped with certain collective interests and cosmologies, always existed. Most of the time these distinctions operate in dispersed practices and as a historically produced phenomenology of difference, distinction, and appropriateness, as well as fantasies of the imputed attributes of other groups. But these identities are always fragmented, imprecise, and contested, and thus ultimately unattainable. My argument is, however, that it is this very lack of precision and correspondence that makes naming and its attributed distinctions (as well as the rumors thereof) between respectable and not respectable, clean and dirty, and so on, so effective and flexible.

I argue that some of the most effective (and imprecise) caste and community identities in contemporary Mumbai and Maharashtra, such as the notion of the Maratha, have been shaped through protracted formation of particular forms of naming and organization as ideological poles and "designators" throughout the twentieth century. Caste groups or religious communities, I contend, are not "out there" as groups *an sich* but only exist as collective identities when they are named in public rituals, organized, and reproduced through performative practices as groups and categories for themselves. I try to show how boundaries of caste and community have been both dislocated and hardened in the last decades in Mumbai. This process produced anger and anxieties, reconfigured social imaginaries, and made it imperative for many people to carve out a new sense of "our place in the world."

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This is not an exhaustive account of the history of Bombay and Maharashtra in the postcolonial era but rather a string of explorations of the political-ideological-cultural formations in the area in this period, particularly in the last few decades. The explorations that follow do not attempt to write any comprehensive history of the culture of politics in the state but seek to shed light on that larger history through ethnographies of changing politico-cultural practices in Mumbai. Some of my arguments and the material I present do, I hope, have wider relevance beyond the city and South Asia circuits.

Chapter 1 outlines the formation of a widely popular and effective ethno-historical imagination centered around the history of the eighteenth-century Maratha Empire. I argue that this register of historical

myths, symbols, and narratives were shaped, from the late nineteenth century on, around the idea of a continuous antagonism between the Brahman elite and the large Maratha caste. The "naming" and fixation of these communities in historical narratives and in the political dynamics of the postcolonial democracy have made them into effective markers of cultural and political identities in contemporary Mumbai.

Chapter 2 explores the formation of a distinct regional identity in Maharashtra from the 1940s on and how the distinctions between a cosmopolitan Bombay and a Marathi Deccan were crucial to the formation of the movement for Maharashtra as a mono-lingual state. I also explore how Shiv Sena in the 1960s and 1970s reworked the discourse of regionalism and redeployed it as xenophobic populism in the face of the ambivalences and anxieties that the urban experience of Bombay produced among many Marathi speakers. I analyze how Shiv Sena in the first decades of its existence developed both a regular organization and the essential features of an aggressive and highly visible politics of the public spectacle.

In chapter 3 I explore what has been called the rebirth of Shiv Sena in the 1980s. I try to put Shiv Sena's new radical anti-Muslim strategies in the context of broader political transformations in the state. More important, however, I explore the changing strategies and local forms of organization of Shiv Sena in this period, how the organization increasingly is pervaded by localized networks of builders and operators of questionable legality in the gray sectors of the economy, and how Sena's entanglement in the world of competitive politics created new challenges and a crisis of authority in the organization.

In chapter 4 I tell a more detailed story of Shiv Sena's emergence and development in one of its oldest strongholds in Thane, a large industrial suburb north of Mumbai. I explore in detail how the wider changes, but also continuities, in the Shiv Sena's organization, production of authority, use of violence, and political strategies were played out on the ground.

Chapter 5 starts from the riots and the bomb blasts that shook the city in 1992–93. I explore the events and the subsequent official inquiry and strategies of the Bombay police in the light of a longer history of communal violence, policing, reconciliation, and spatial practices in the city. I analyze the production of truth as it took place in the official inquiry into the riots conducted by the Shrikrishna Commission between 1993 and 1997. I try, subsequently, to shed light on practices of the police in the city, and the relations between the police and ordinary residents in parts of central Mumbai.

In chapter 6 I move the perspective to how Muslim identities in Mumbai and Maharashtra have been shaped and altered over the past decades. Mainly concentrating on central Mumbai, I try to demonstrate how curtains of social stigma and stereotypes have separated Muslims from the

surrounding society ever more effectively. I explore strategies of employment and livelihoods in central Mumbai, the shaping of identities between religious authority and immoral strongmen (dadas) in the popular neighborhoods, and how Muslims have responded to the emergence of a new aggressive Hindu politics by rethinking widely held notions of community and political identity. I also look at public discourses of gangsterism and mythologies of the predominantly Muslim gangster dons.

In chapter 7 I look at the trajectory and performance of the Hindu nationalist coalition ruling Mumbai and Maharashtra between 1995 and 1999. I analyze some of the larger plans launched by the cabinet in this period, particularly in terms of housing and infrastructural development in Mumbai, and how these plans fared. I discuss the controversies regarding corruption in the state, and I try to make sense of the rather systematic contempt for the judiciary and democratic procedure displayed by Shiv Sena in particular. I analyze some of the cultural policies of Shiv Sena and its allies, and how the access to power and resources has reconfigured its position in the city and the state. I reflect on what these may tell us about the shape and content of the idea of Mumbai that has driven Shiv Sena leaders and enticed their supporters.

In the conclusion I reflect on what broader lessons the fragmentation of governance and public authority and the logics of majoritarian democratic politics in Mumbai may teach us about the relationship between state, community, and politics in contemporary India.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book has grown out of almost a decade of engagement with politics and culture in Maharashtra. The material for this book has been gathered in the course of annual stints of fieldwork and visits to Mumbai or elsewhere in the state since 1990. It was several longer stays, first in 1992–93 in Pune and Bombay, and later the winter of 1996–97 in Mumbai, that gave me vital insights into how people wore their shifting identities both in urban and rural Maharashtra. It was my own experiences during the riots in Bombay in 1992–93 and the subsequent changes in the city that made it important to me to study and conceptualize more carefully the links between xenophobic ideology and the experiences of modern urban life in India. My experiences in January 1993 taught me how lethal the militant Hindu identities and the casual, everyday anti-Muslim common sense I had listened to and recorded for a long time actually could be. These experiences also revealed to me what the atmosphere of a riot situation is like—the fear, the suspension of normal parameters of judgment, the uncanny silence, but also the dispersion and disorganization that char-

acterizes most riots, the heavily mythologized images of what may or may not happen next, and so on.

Let me reflect a bit on methodology—a subject so important in our training of students and yet relatively absent in most analyses of ethnographic material. As will be evident in the following chapters, the materials that went into this book have come from multiple sources: archives, newspapers, official publications, pamphlets, books, and programs published by parties and organizations. I have also over the years conducted a wide range of interviews with political leaders, local councilors, panchayat members, activists, social workers, policemen, bureaucrats, religious leaders, business people, local traders, and so on. However, the most valuable source of knowledge has been the hundreds of conversations and interviews I have had over many years with a wide range of so-called ordinary people in each of the areas I worked.

My preferred method when doing urban ethnography has been to select a neighborhood, a locality bounded physically by roads or other markers, comprising a couple of municipal wards and therefore constituting a political as well as an administrative unit. Such areas are objectified units of governance, but they also constitute spaces where people live, experience, and seek to produce their own worlds. As Appadurai has pointed out, the neighborhood as a physical and lived-in space is not necessarily in itself a locality. A locality is produced when quotidian spatial practices are made intelligible through a larger grid that gives them a context and a meaning as being different from its others and its neighbors, or as a smaller part of a larger whole (Appadurai 1996, 178–88).

The very notion of boundaries, the contestation of what a locality really is or means to whom, where it starts and ends, assume critical importance if one, like I did, intended to study and map the variations in local configurations of identity and political organization. As we all know, interactions in urban space are not bounded by, or defined by, physical localities in the same way as in rural areas. Most larger and supra-local urban structures manifest themselves in every neighborhood, albeit in differing forms: the labor market, networks of trade and associations, urban governance and services, political networks. All these structures transcend the locality, much of their dynamism derive from the fact that they are supra-local phenomena, and yet their effects can only be studied in localities. Instead of despairing in the face of the elusive and often unfixable nature of social boundaries in urban space, I decided to make the localized notions of what the locality was, where it began and ended, what characterized it, and so on—in brief, the local phenomenology of locality and space—into an object of scrutiny.

In the localities I zoomed in on over the years—in Thane north of Mumbai, in the old city of Pune, and in central Mumbai—I tried to map

them in various ways. I met as many of the local "somebodies" as possible—councilors, local representatives of larger or smaller organizations and associations, politicians, prominent activists, some of the prominent business people, police officers, and so forth.

In some areas I also managed to do more systematic surveys of the socio-demographic composition of the locality, according to the standard sociological technologies. These results were interesting in that they represented a different form of knowledge against which I could compare other forms of local knowledge of the area—how many various categories of people there were, where they lived, how they lived their lives, and so on. The third and most vital component in my work was long conversations with a range of ordinary people in the locality—often families or groups of people. I tried to meet and get to know a fairly representative cross-section of people within the given time limits—something I could never quite live up to but that nonetheless enabled me to get to know a dozen rather different families in each locality I worked in.

However, as anyone who has carried out extensive fieldwork will know, the more structured parts of one's work is constantly interrupted by, and mixed with, scores of casual unplanned conversations with all sorts of people. Some of these turn out to be the most interesting part of the research. Some open new perspectives, and others remain a single succinct statement, as in the case of my fellow passenger at the suburban train in Mumbai. In the chapters that follow, both voices appear: those emanating from my structured work and those from the more unstructured parts of my research. Throughout the text, I try to bring the voices into context, as well as the statements I employ to support a given argument. This is not just to give a certain ethnographic flavor to the text; the location, timing, and context of a given narrative is obviously crucial to the interpretations to which it can lend itself. I do not pretend, however, that what I represent in the following, and use in my analysis, is completely true to the authentic meaning or intention of the narratives I recorded on location. Indeed, the very idea that such authentic selves, speech, or intentions exist and can be made available to scientific knowledge is, to my mind, the ultimate illusion. A quick glance at our own unclear, multifaceted, and often undecidable motives for using certain words and gestures rather than others should bring the point home. This does not mean that the voices and narratives that emerged from hundreds of conversations are inauthentic; rather, it means that they cannot be regarded as testimonies to any "truth" or final meaning. Social sciences are not truth-producing disciplines, and this book does not pretend to represent any truth of postcolonial Bombay and Maharashtra. It is an "account of accounts," my interpretation of the primary and secondary material at my disposal, material which in the case of interviews is produced through my agendas and my questions and made

possible by the hospitality and kindness of so many ordinary people. In other cases, I talked to people with clear agendas, people who wanted me to see the world in a particular way and who represented their world in that light.

Every bit of the material I present is a tiny fragment of a larger corpus of text—thousands of pages of transcripts, archival material, newspapers—and is the result of a heavy process of selection and editing. To claim anything else would be dishonest. The acknowledgment of the weighty presence of the social scientist in every bit of the production of ethnographic material does, however, not preclude critique of the quality of the interpretation, the grasp of categories or vernacular meanings, of voids and shortcomings in the material presented. On the contrary. Social science is ultimately about producing interpretations that seek to be convincing by virtue of the cohesion of their argument, the quality of the material they present, and the subtlety of the analysis of this material. To my mind, reflections on the way material has been collected and generated is part of this procedure that can convince readers. But putting the cards on the table also renders one more vulnerable and open to critique of what one did not do, the questions one did not ask, and so on. In his recent book, Akhil Gupta writes that he has tried to avoid the standard procedure of creating an "analytical closure" around the ethnographic material. Instead of knitting all the loose ends together, he has tried to render the material more open to reinterpretation and rethinking (Gupta 1998, 30). Although I find this a laudable strategy, the present book is more conventional in its attempt to interpret a range of evidence of events, processes, and discourses spread over several decades and various localities. The methods I adopted in generating this material were, no doubt, ethnographic, but the aim of this book is to generate a more general argument on the logics of democracy, identity, community, and locality at play in the political culture of Bombay/Mumbai and Maharashtra in the postcolonial era. Although I tend to wrap my material in theoretical reflection, I hope that this analytical closure does not prevent readers from getting a feel of the polyvalent character of statements and processes under scrutiny.

Mumbai and the entire state of Maharashtra has, throughout the 1990s, been marked by high levels of political tension, violent rhetoric, and physical violence between Hindus and Muslims as well as between caste communities. Violence, antagonism, anxiety and fear did not only constitute phenomena I wanted to study, they also suffused the localities I worked in, the narratives I recorded, the problematics of everyday life, and so on. This constantly raised the issue of my own position in the localities. What was I up to? Whose side was I on in the ongoing battles over symbols and space? Why did I talk to some persons rather than others? A lot of my work was carried out during periods when the Ramjanmabhoomi/Babri Masjid

issue was on everybody's lips, and later when the riots and bomb blasts in Mumbai were at the center of many conversations and stories. The general sense of upheaval and conflict felt during these periods and the topicality of the issues into which I probed made it quite unproblematic to establish and justify my presence and interests. For once I felt that my status as a foreigner appeared as somewhat advantageous because so many people assumed me to be somehow outside, and maybe even fairly neutral. Besides, many informants were keen on explaining to me why all these upheavals took place, what the real stories were, and so forth.

But I could not cross boundaries freely. Needless to say, I could not mix freely with both Hindu activists and Muslims or supporters of leftist parties in the same locality. The deep communal divides between Hindus and Muslims and the web of suspicions, anxieties, and politicization of everyday life that enveloped most of the places I worked forced me to concentrate on only one community in each locality. That choice enabled me to mix more freely, to develop friendships and relations with people and organizations there, but it also raised the issue of loyalties and empathy vis-à-vis many of my informants.

One cannot remain neutral when working with violent nationalist organizations such as Shiv Sena, or the Hindu nationalist movement, their local activists, followers, and sympathizers. Their discourse, style, and aims were, and remain, the antithesis to everything I ever believed in, politically and ethically. I tried to understand how these milieus were structured and I was able to develop meaningful relations with a large number of individuals, but true empathy could never develop. In fact, the deeper I probed into these milieus, the more difficult it became for me to continue my "act"—pretending I was a friend of the cause and sympathetic to at least some of the convictions and worldviews of my informants.

Later, I found it more congenial to work among Muslims in Mumbai. This was partly because I felt the need to highlight the social world of a community that has been demonized and battered by Hindu chauvinism in the last decade, and partly because I no longer needed to put up an act. This was not because I necessarily shared the worldviews of my informants there or that I prefer the social world of Muslims to that of Hindus per se, but rather linked to the instinctive sympathy I developed for the victims of violent Hindu majoritarianism.

This book tells a story about Mumbai and Maharashtra centered around material generated in localities marked by high levels of Hindu-Muslim conflicts and often a strong presence of the Hindu nationalist and majoritarian forces. I fully realize that this merely is one among several possible narratives that could have been told about contemporary Mumbai, but I felt this was the most urgent and compelling. It is also marked, probably in more ways than I realize, by my own strong aversion to the virulent

anti-Muslim rhetoric that dominates the Hindu Right. I do not apologize for this, because I could not do it any other way.

Violent ethno-religious and political conflicts between the self-professed representatives of communities are strangely totalizing phenomena. They leave no privileged and neutral "voyeuristic" space for the social scientists or others. Violence, fear, and communal hatred are not mere cultural performances whose features and effects can be studied dispassionately at a distance. Researching identities, community, and violence means one gets involved, one hears, records, and writes about these topics in certain ways, and one invariably takes a stand; indeed, one must take a stand, not as the waving of certain flags but as a reflection on where one's allegiances and emotions are, what sympathies and empathies drive one to interpret events in certain ways rather than others. I began to study the rise of Hindu majoritarianism in Maharashtra because I thought it was an important process with far-reaching implications for the entire region. But I also had to realize how strenuous and ethically complex a venture that proved to be, both personally and politically. One conclusion I drew is that as much as one needs to understand the perpetrators of hate-speech and violence, one also needs to "de-exoticize" ethno-religious identities and alert oneself to their profoundly political nature and to their sometimes lethal consequences.

We need to understand that as academics we are producers and codifiers of knowledge of xenophobias and violence, and our statements are never innocent. They may well become part of the rewriting, justification, or consolidation of such identities. As I have discussed elsewhere, the Hindu nationalist movement in India, aware of the authority of science and "foreign experts," is a keen consumer and reinterpreter of a whole range of social science literature (Hansen 1999, 80–88). My own view is that the task of the social scientist is to produce knowledge and writing that defies ethnic closures by documenting and exploring the richness, diversity, and multivocality of the social world of even the smallest of localities. Good scholarship is usually unsettling to established or widely held ideas, and scholars, to my mind, should strive to make their work as useless as possible for those who promote ethnic closures.

Needless to say, the responsibility for shortcomings, errors, and other deficiencies in the text remain solely mine.