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“Reading like a mystery tale, this engagingly written book explains why, in a poor part of Mumbai, there are many people without houses alongside apartments without occupants. Lisa Björkman’s story exposes the machinations of city planning in a field of contention that includes powerful NGOs, a range of informal associations, activists, so-called social workers and politicians, and it illuminates the chaotic and complicated ways in which people negotiate the city. It shows, too, the cruel absurdity of ideas about the possibilities of ‘community’ action that are so entrenched in the development discourse, and it touchingly describes the daily struggles of the urban poor. In the way it is written, the book is also an ambitious and original experiment, encouraging reflection on ethnography and on the practices of interpretation and meaning-making that animate the craft of research. It is a pithy and powerful little book.”

— JOHN HARRISS, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver

“Waiting Town presents a powerful punch against simplistic narratives of eviction and resettlement. It is written with attention to the power and agency of people confronting eviction: people who are witnessing a project set up for this purpose just besides where they squat. As Björkman shows, it is their world of pipes and water puddles that holds a mirror to Bombay, and to the necessarily ‘messy’ politics that define urban contestations today. Reminiscent of Lisa Peattie’s 1968 path-breaking View from the Barrio, Waiting Town serves as a model of writing, framing, and representation—an entry into questions of what Abdoumaliq Simone calls “majority life.” Björkman suggests to us how those urgent questions might be posed in ways that matter.”

— SOLOMON J. BENJAMIN, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

“An immersive reading that details everyday politics of claimmaking through years of ethnographic inquiry.”

— OMKAR NADH PATTELA, Indian Institute for Human Settlements