

CONTENTS

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----|
| | Introduction | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1 | Regulation: How the Politics of Skill Become Law | 29 |
| CHAPTER 2 | Production: How Skill Makes Cities | 76 |
| CHAPTER 3 | Skill: How Skill Is Embodied and What It Means for the Control of Bodies | 113 |
| CHAPTER 4 | Protest: How Skillful Practice Becomes Resistance | 149 |
| CHAPTER 5 | Body: How Definitions of Skill Cause Injury | 184 |
| CHAPTER 6 | Earth: How the Politics of Skill Shape Responses to Climate Change | 216 |
| | Conclusion | 256 |
| | Postscript | 264 |

Notes · 279

Bibliography · 313

Index · 343

Introduction

THE MEN RAN. They ran in the clothes they had: jeans and flip-flops, or work boots. Some men, their feet cut up, abandoned their plastic sandals on the side of the road and ran barefoot on the hot pavement. They ran in the heat of the afternoon—with temperatures well into the mid-80s°F and the air humid. They ran past the police lined up on the side of the road. In places, they ran past tables with bottled water, but the water had been left out in the sun and was hot and undrinkable. They ran for a long time—maybe hours. Their jeans chafed their skin. Their lungs burned, and their muscles cramped. A few collapsed. Many tried to step off the road, to stop running and rest, but they were forced back, yelled at that they needed to finish the race.

The men, many thousands of them, had been press-ganged to run the Qatar Mega Marathon 2015, organized in Doha as an attempt to set a new world record for the race with the most runners.¹ The race's official website advertised the marathon as a protest against the bad press that Qatar had received after being awarded hosting rights for the 2022 World Cup. It billed the event as a “decisive response to the campaign waged by the sector of envious haters on the success of Qatar to host the 2022 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, and to their false allegations of persecution of workers and residents in our beloved country.”² Despite these efforts, enrollment in the race was low. Even after the organizers scaled back to a half-marathon and postponed the event from National Sports Day on February 2 to March 27—when the weather was much hotter, and each year hotter than the last—only a few hundred runners voluntarily registered.³ To make up for the shortfall of participants, the organizers conscripted construction and factory workers. At the end of race, the organizers announced that thirty-three thousand runners had participated.⁴ They fell many thousands short of the record.

The race was held on a Friday, the only protected rest day for workers. Buses picked the workers up in the early morning from their labor camps in

the industrial area, a segregated zone in the desert where they were lodged. The Al Sadd Sports Club, which organized the race, later admitted that it had asked companies to encourage workers “with decent jobs” to take part, but insisted that participation was voluntary and appropriate running gear was made available to anyone who wanted it.⁵ Many of the workers bused to the marathon route would likely not have known that they would be expected to run a race. But all of them would have found it difficult to refuse. These workers were migrants. They worked in Qatar under a sponsorship system that gave their employers the ability to deport them without notice and for any reason. The photographs and footage of the race show South Asian and African men, massed at the starting line, wearing identical white T-shirts and running bibs marked with contestant numbers.

Still, some of the migrants refused to participate.⁶ The start time was delayed until 2:00 p.m., and workers who refused to run were ordered to remain on the buses that brought them, where they had already sat for the entire day in the heat, without water or food. When the club spokesperson was asked about the decision to confine workers to their buses, he said, “We wanted to keep the course clear, and for the course to look presentable.” He conceded that he pressed workers in the race to “keep going” because a world record was at stake. “I spoke to them very politely,” he added. “They are human as well, right?”⁷

When I read the press coverage of the Mega Marathon, I was reminded of a field trip I had made to a construction site for an oil and gas facility in Qatar just a few months before. I was in Qatar studying workplace practices in the construction industry and the process through which workers developed skill on-site. As part of my fieldwork, I went to observe construction on a liquefied natural gas (LNG) train, where workers were building a section of the plant where natural gas would be pushed through a network of pipes and then cooled into a liquid so that it could be shipped around the world. The construction site in Qatar’s northern desert was massive. Tens of thousands of workers from different trades worked concurrently on different elements of the structure. Like other construction sites I visited in Qatar, it was frenetic and crowded. In many places, workers bunched up as they waited to walk through the narrow passageways marked out by scaffolds and ramparts. Throughout the day, I shadowed different trades—mostly scaffolders and welders.

In the afternoon, I went to one of the on-site welding workshops. Located in a large hangar-like structure, the workshop was a vast, multipurpose space: small subcomponents of the structure were welded in one corner, training to improve welding skills took place at another end of the hangar, and quality control and the verification of the integrity of welded seams took place in another quadrant. The Turkish director of the welding center, Mehmet, would later describe it to me in elegiac terms. “This place is like my paradise. I have twenty-five years working as a welder. [Welding] is something that comes into your body. It’s like your blood. I can just look from outside at the finished product, and I can see how the

welder is doing. Even from the sparks, I can see his philosophy. I can see whether he is moving slow or fast, how much he understands the work.”

The LNG train required welding that was flawless. The materials that would be pushed through the train’s maze of pipes were highly volatile and flammable. To assess the welding quality, the center used an X-ray system. “Visual testing is not enough, even on the best seams,” explained Mehmet. Radiographic testing was essential because even slight discontinuities in the internal structure of the weld could have consequences that were catastrophic. “There are many factors. If you weld in the high heat, the seam won’t have integrity. If you are not confident, the seam won’t have integrity. If we see even one problem, we retrain,” added Mehmet. Natural gas and the potential for explosion meant there was no margin for error, and the center continually tested and reinforced the expertise of its workers, who were already incredibly adept.

Ordinarily, the center was busy and cacophonous, with hundreds of welders, supervisors, and apprentices at work. But the day I first visited, it was empty. There were two supervisors at the desks in the office at the entrance, a few workers were sweeping the floor, and a couple of others were quietly doing maintenance on machinery. The scaffolding manager who accompanied me that day asked where everyone was. “Sporting match,” answered one of the supervisors.

The company had scooped up hundreds of men from the welding hangar and sent them to this sporting event—perhaps a soccer game; the supervisor was unsure. Someone in the government had made the request. The company had supplied the workers to fill the bleachers in the audience so that the international press would not report an empty stadium in a country that wanted to position itself as a global sporting destination.

This kind of conscription of construction workers was commonplace in Qatar, although this was the first time I had observed it directly. By and large, companies viewed it as a tax, a request that disrupted production, but with which they had no choice other than to comply. Companies bused their workers from labor camps to the sporting facility where the workers would be used as props. The workers would be treated as bodies, press-ganged into whatever activity was required, perhaps in the heat, perhaps without sufficient access to water, food, or rest. The welders missing from the training center were also, undoubtedly, used in this way. And in the process, their humanity, like that of the migrants forced to run a half-marathon in flip-flops, was turned into something that was no longer clear or certain, something that was open to question. “They are human as well, right?”

Work, Workers, and the Politics of Skill

In 2010, Qatar won, somewhat improbably, the hosting rights for the 2022 FIFA World Cup for soccer. The Qatari government began channeling hundreds of billions of dollars of state revenue toward reinventing itself as a global

destination for sports and culture. It commissioned state-of-the-art stadiums, tourism facilities, and infrastructure for the games, and recruited hundreds of thousands of men—mainly from South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa—to build the structures.

As the country began the buildup to the games, the international press and human rights organizations turned a spotlight on the working conditions experienced by the migrants on construction sites in Qatar. The reports were damning; they identified numerous instances of forced labor, low or withheld pay, debt bondage, injury, and death. The reports pointed to the regulations that governed the employment of migrant workers in Qatar as the enabling cause for the patterns of exploitation they documented.⁸ Migrant workers were in Qatar under the country's *kafala*—or sponsorship—system, which bound migrants to their employers, who were defined as sponsors in Qatari law. Under the *kafala* system, migrants were prohibited from changing or quitting their jobs, even in cases of abuse or the nonpayment of wages. They could be deported at any time and, for a while, were barred from leaving the country without their employer's permission. The image of the construction worker, dressed in blue overalls, became the symbol of the exploited migrant in Qatar, a visual shorthand for the conditions produced by a labor relation that resembled bonded labor and slavery.

I wanted to reach behind this image of the exploited construction worker and understand how the conditions that were reported had been produced. Most of the reporting and research on work in Qatar, and more broadly, throughout the Persian Gulf, was inferential. Research took place at work's edge; workers were often interviewed outside the worksite, and their testimonies about the working conditions they faced were used to make assumptions about how the structure of work produced labor violations. To be sure, restricted access to worksites made this research approach necessary. For the most part, the Qatari government and the companies it contracted barred observers from conducting research on active construction sites. Yet this indirect research strategy also reflected a broader move in social science research away from the study of work and its content, and an assumption that the features that define work—the delineation of jobs, content of the tasks required, and occupational profiles along with the hierarchies they reflected—were, in established industries like construction, basically stable.⁹ The nature of work in construction was treated as well understood, and construction jobs in Qatar were presumed to be roughly similar to construction jobs everywhere. As a result, the chronic and egregious labor violations were attributed not to the content of jobs—not to the way work was organized, tasks were assigned, and supervision was applied—but instead to the regulatory framework—to the laws—that bound workers to their employers and set the floor for minimal working conditions.

Laws, like the *kafala* system, may set the terms of employer behavior and specify the outer bounds of labor exploitation, but work is the arena where

the conditions of work are defined.¹⁰ Practices that people engage in at the worksite shape the content of work and structure the power relations between employer and worker. I wanted to examine the on-the-job work practices taking place at construction sites all over Qatar in order to understand how the power relations outlined in the kafala system were enacted at the worksite. How did the content of work, patterns of labor exploitation at the worksite, and forms of worker resistance play out within the parameters defined by the kafala system? What did these labor relations reveal about the consequences of bondage for production, work, and the migrants who were, formally and contractually, bound to their employer?

To get at these questions, I focused on skill and practices of skill development. Skill is the marrow of production; all forms of production require competence and ability, both from the people who produce and from the organization that orchestrates their efforts. Skill is therefore necessarily at the core of all work and work relations. As a result, an attention to skill and skill development can highlight the lived experience of working and the power dynamics at the worksite. Skill is where worker autonomy, and worker expressions of initiative and creativity, chafe at workplace structures of control. Skill is visible in the coordination of effort and action; the expression of skill at the jobsite shows whether the organization of work is the product of managerial command or worker collaboration. Whether skill is recognized at the worksite, and whether those who enact or manage it receive credit for that skill, reveals a company's ethos and political culture. Skill illuminates the contours and patterns of labor practices at the worksite, and brings the conventions and routines of hierarchy, dominance, and power—as well as the strategies to challenge them—into focus.

On the Qatari construction sites I visited, skill was *the* core principle around which work was organized, and to a degree far more pronounced than on construction sites I had observed in other settings around the world. Construction projects in Qatar functioned as vast training systems, and building practices doubled as vehicles through which hundreds and thousands of workers on-site developed specialized trade skill. Most of the migrants recruited to build Qatar's state-of-the-art structures arrived with minimal construction experience, if any, and the many workers who migrated from rural areas arrived with little exposure to the kinds of buildings they had been drafted to build. To make up for this shortfall in skill, construction companies invested heavily in training their workforces. They structured every aspect of their production processes to promote on-the-job learning, organizing their workflows to build skill stepwise, designing their supervisory systems to deepen competence in specific technical areas, and selecting their building materials to match the skill of their workforce. Many also set up specialized vocational training centers on-site for trade skills, like the welding hangar I visited at the LNG plant. Workers met these top-down interventions with apprenticeship

networks of their own. Informal practices of teaching and learning ran through every single workplace interaction.

The training systems on-site enabled workers to acquire robust and often highly advanced trade skill quickly. Workers who hadn't climbed a scaffold before their arrival in Qatar learned within months how to build towering grids, self-standing, elaborate, and sometimes rising so high that they shattered world records. Others developed cutting-edge skill in steel fixing, and workers who had never seen a construction document before working in Qatar learned how to turn diagrams on paper into arched and asymmetrical columns of rebar and wire. Still others learned how to build and install massive wooden frames that would hold liquid concrete until it congealed into deep foundations for Qatar's skyscrapers and the tunnel walls for Doha's new metro system. In these trades and others, workers quickly developed the expertise required to build the technically complex projects slated for construction in Qatar: stadiums with radical and gravity-defying architectural designs; ultra-modern installations for fossil fuel extraction and processing; luxury developments on archipelagoes reclaimed from the sea; and high-rise structures on waterfront land so saturated by underground water that the foundations had to be designed like boat hulls.

And yet when I asked managers and supervisors on construction sites about their workers, they invariably described them as unskilled. They identified their companies' advanced technical expertise as the most important asset their firms brought to the construction process and described the strategic investment they made to develop construction skill in their workforce. Managers and supervisors perceived their workers' skill clearly and precisely and assessed it repeatedly over the course of a project as they structured their training interventions for the advanced construction techniques required, and yet, quite jarringly, they routinely and indiscriminately dismissed their workers as unskilled, disparaging them as "poor quality," "unproductive," or simply and most derisively, "bodies." Even Mehmet, the supervisor who had waxed so eloquently about welding expertise, discounted the competence of the welders in his crew: "The technique belongs to the [building] design" and not to the workers who welded it.

As these managerial comments made clear, the meaning of skill on Qatari construction sites did not map onto actual observed ability. If skill was not about competence, what was meant by the term "unskilled"? What aspects of work, labor relations, and power structures on-site did it reflect? How did the representation of skill relate to the structure of the work and working conditions that migrants faced? And what it did reveal about the political standing of workers and the political rights they could access? How did their representation as "unskilled"—as bodies that were unable to acquire skill—connect with, and even legitimate, the conditions of bondage under which they had migrated and were employed?

To answer these questions, I needed to look at the valence of skill beyond the worksite and consider how skill was invoked in broader political discussions about the role of migrant workers in the Qatari economy. In government policy, public pronouncements, the local press, and even international advocacy reports and initiatives—spaces outside the worksite—migrant construction workers were also widely portrayed as unskilled laborers. Their function in the economy was described as providing brute labor power for a labor-intensive industry. Their skill, so obviously visible in Doha's gleaming skyline and its modernist developments, was downplayed or denied altogether. Skill, as a descriptor used to shunt migrant construction workers into the category of unskilled, had only a tangential relationship to the actual ability of the workers it portrayed. Skill was a political concept in Qatar, the organizing lexicon of a political language, and as a political language, skill was not a matter of competence but a matter of power.

To understand how representations of skill functioned as a political language, I needed to understand how the characterization of construction workers as unskilled shaped their political status as migrant workers in Qatar and how that political standing fostered the conditions—often extreme and exploitative—under which they worked. Stated differently, I needed to understand how the representation of migrant workers as unskilled in Qatar—representations used to describe workers with, as the organizer of the Mega Marathon put it, “decent jobs”—meant that those workers could be press-ganged into activities outside work, where they would be forced to use their bodies in ways that were painful and physically damaging. I needed to understand why a welding contractor that valued the skill of its welders, invested in the development of their expertise, and appreciated the nuance and creativity they brought to their work—“their philosophy,” as Mehmet put it—would deliver them to events where they would be treated as props, and undoubtedly be subject to conditions that were difficult, shaming, and injurious. I needed to understand how the experience of being treated as a mere body—or even the possibility of that experience—shaped workers' expression of competence, their assertion of the autonomy that is so critical to skillful practice, and their ability to imagine working with dignity.

For workers represented as unskilled, the politics of skill also had significant and tangible consequences that were felt outside the worksite. “Unskilled” migrants were subject to a set of policies that consigned them to second-class status. Bureaucratic roadblocks and migration controls, such as the Ministry of Interior's energetic antiabsconding campaign against “runaway” workers who quit their jobs, drastically narrowed their ability to access the already limited rights that the legal system afforded foreign workers. Workers classed as unskilled were confined, as a matter of urban policy, to peripheral zones of the city and excluded from most public spaces. Their physical mobility was monitored, sometimes through personalized GPS sensors, and constrained.

The living conditions in the labor camps, where most workers were lodged, were poor, and the workers' access to services such as health care and basic infrastructure was substandard.

The measures and politics applied to so-called unskilled workers occurred within the framework of the kafala system, but despite many of the claims made in international press coverage, they were not an automatic product of that legal structure. All foreigners in Qatar, regardless of the skill level ascribed to them, were covered by the same legal code. The kafala system did not distinguish among migrants, whether by country of origin, class, or profession; all migrants, whether executives, professionals, architects, doctors, nurses, maids, or construction workers, were bound to their sponsor in the same way. The kafala system specified the legal bonds that subjugated migrants to their sponsor—but the politics of skill in Qatar shaped how sponsors used the rights and powers afforded to them under the kafala system. Skill politics shaped the forms of exploitation that workers faced.

In reinforcing the subjugation of supposedly unskilled workers, the political language of skill did more than just set the stage for worker exploitation. It did more than degrade the political standing of unskilled workers, subjecting them to state control and leaving them open to employer mistreatment. Its effect was far more penetrating than this. The political language of skill shaped every aspect of work in Qatar—large and small, abstract and material, subjugating and empowering. It determined how companies operated, and how they approached skill, skill development, and skill use. The political representation of skill shaped the function of skill—technical competence—as the organizing logic for the industry. Political interpretations of skill overrode concerns with profit, growth, and even solvency.

The political language of skill, spoken and sharpened in spaces outside the worksite, told a story that became manifest at and through work. The politics of skill determined how companies operated, shaping the broader business parameters of construction like the ratio of capital to labor in production, profile of the technology used, and management of workflow. At the worksite, skill narratives deeply inflected the specific labor relations that emerged, bending the power relations between employer and worker. Workplace routines, hierarchies, and forms of control all reflected the broader politics of skill, but even more fundamentally, these politics shaped how skill was perceived and understood at the worksite, and influenced how competence was appraised and developed. Whatever forms of effective worker resistance did emerge in this restrictive context were articulated in opposition to the political language of skill. The most effective modes of resistance were strategies that sought to disrupt the political distinction between the skilled and unskilled. Even more profoundly, the politics of skill mediated workers' relationship to their own physicality, and in many cases, undercut their ability to perform their work safely, without bodily injury to themselves or others. Ultimately, the politics of

skill informed the economic value and social meaning of construction jobs for migrants, and shaped the consequences of migration for the communities and countries to which migrants returned.

The reason that the political language of skill had such a powerful effect on work and production was not because it was concerned with skill but instead because it was concerned with personhood. Because the political rhetoric around skill had little to do with actual competence, its advance into the work-site was never stalled by the reality of the way that skill was practiced on-site. But its effect on work was profound because it was used to define the political subjectivity of workers. Not only did this political language allocate different rights to agency, bodily integrity, and freedom from coercion based on whether workers were described as skilled or unskilled, but it created uncertainty about whether those portrayed as unskilled had access to the full experience of their own humanity. “They are human as well, right?” was the question that the organizer of the Mega Marathon had asked about the workers press-ganged into his race. Could skill, as an expression of intelligence and agency, be skill, in fact, if the workers enacting it did not have access to the full personhood necessary to enact it? Or would it rather become automated action that an employer could appropriate and direct? If the humanity of workers was unclear, was coercion necessarily a form of “power over,” or was it instead the simple direction of labor power, as a raw material input, to production needs? If workers were bodies and not skillful agents, did it matter that their freedom of movement was restricted and they were compelled to use their bodies in ways that went against their wishes, through measures like forced overtime, or even forced participation in races and sporting events? By creating uncertainty about the humanity of workers, the political language of skill generated questions like these, and turned work into a place where workers were separated from their skill, divided from their agency, and split from their bodies.

Skill as a Language of Power

The effect of skill as a language of power was ubiquitous in Qatar, but not unique to Qatar. The political language of skill is spoken in many different places, but across contexts, it uses the same logic to say much the same thing. Like all social categories, representations of skill structure economic and social interactions, political identities and coalitions, and power relations. These representations interact with other social categories, attaching themselves to signifiers of race, gender, and class, and amplifying the social hierarchies they produce.

As a political language, the representation of skill is impactful because it is believable. It seems to describe characteristics that are objective and observable, and less open to debate than other markers of social difference. We can have arguments about whether some people are skilled, and whether some

are more skilled than others, but the notion of skill itself, as acquired competence, seems credible and is generally shielded from political challenge. This sense of realness is produced by the duality in the way skill is defined: skill is represented at once as an attribute that grows out of personal initiative and action, and an economic resource that can be measured and translated into quantifiable—generally monetary—terms, as wage returns to skill.

These two faces make the politics of skill slippery and powerful. Slippery because the assumption, in most political discourse, is that we can recognize skill—we know it when we see it—and its role in economic production even allows us to measure it. But when we try to pin it down to arrive at a more precise definition, perhaps to open it up to political contest, the many and diverse expressions of expertise—practiced by many specific people in many specific contexts—make it difficult to identify what it is that we mean exactly by the concept of skill. And powerful because the representation of skill as an economic resource opens up the possibility that some people might not have it. It lays the groundwork for the category of unskilled. When skill as economic asset is overlaid with the idea that skill is the product of personal effort, the unskilled—the have-nots in this politics—can be made responsible for their lack of skill.

For the most part, debates about skill fall between these two ramparts. They tend to center on what constitutes skill and how to measure its value, with skirmishes that focus on, for example, whether skill that involves abstract cognition and is acquired through formal education is more valuable than skill that is manual and developed through practice.¹¹ Similarly, policy debates about skill tackle the institutional and political mechanisms through which skill is made visible in the labor market, through credentialing, labor institutions, or other means.¹² But on some level, these debates are semantic. The consequences of skill as a political concept have little to do with skill itself as a measure of competence, its content, or its value. The implications of skill as a political language do not hinge on whether the engineer is in fact more skilled than the welder. Skill becomes a language of power through its ascription of political rights and personhood, and its denial of rights and personhood to those persons represented as unskilled—a descriptor, when deployed politically, that frequently has little relation to actual expertise.

To understand how skill functions as a language of political exclusion, we have to look at the definition of skill that undergirds a politics of skill haves and have-nots. For skill to be represented as something that some people possess and others do not, skill has to be defined as something distinguishable from the everyday flow of human activity, as if it were an oil slick atop a flow of water. Skill has to be exceptional, because its quality as something out of the ordinary is what makes it identifiable and possible to assess. Moreover, skill has to contain its own competence so that its value is held in the skill itself rather than in the person exercising it. We have to be able to talk about the expertise required to be a doctor, the skill required to be welder, and the

craft required to be a musician, as if it were self-standing and could be considered separately from the life of a practicing doctor, welder, or musician. As if, in Mehmet's language, skill could belong to the building rather than to the worker.

Or as Karl Marx might phrase it, as if skill belonged to the capitalist and not to the worker. Marx's theory of the alienation of labor offers an early window into the political logic that underpins the category of skill have-nots and its function in the organization of capitalist production. His definition of labor is expansive in its inclusion of skill. Marx calls labor "life-activity, productive life . . . life-engendering-life," and views it as the ultimate expression of human creativity, capacity, and the skillful enactment of imagination; labor is the practice through which human beings engage with the world around them. This skillful, purposeful, and generative activity is what distinguishes humans as a species—as a *species-being*, as he terms it, that is perpetually creating itself and the world around it. The expression of productive capacity is how people inhabit their identities as "free beings" who produce not only to meet their needs but also to fulfill their dreams, "in accordance with the laws of beauty." In capitalist systems of production, argues Marx, the owners of capital strip off this imaginative, skillful capacity when they appropriate workers' labor. Workers are "estrang[e]d from the intellectual potentialities of the labor-process," and their labor is bent to "the shape of the powerful will of another, who subjects their activity to his aims." Workers are alienated from their labor—from the skillful, creative, and affective registers through which they enact themselves and their freedom—and are reduced to a degraded form of labor power. This debasement to skill have-nots, to people denied access to the productive capacities through which they enact their humanity, is at the core of the exploitation they suffer. Their labor "is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor."¹³

Once the generative fullness of labor is split in two, with labor power split from skill, then both labor and skill can be made abstract, depersonalized, and movable. Labor, stripped of its specific, contextual, and imaginative expressions, is reduced to a raw material that powers production processes designed and controlled by others. It is shucked out of specific persons and turned into "quantities of homogeneous human labor, i.e. of human labor-power," as Marx put it, measured only in units of time—hours and days—that are purchased with a wage. Skillful practice too becomes an abstraction; pulled out of the lived expression of the person enacting it, it becomes skill, a noun instead of a verb, generic and decontextualized. The tangle of contingent, imaginative, responsive practices become a fixed set of proficiencies that can be identified, isolated from other practices, and standardized. Skill becomes a self-standing ability—machinelike—made to run by the fuel of undifferentiated labor power.

Human capital is the most emphatic shorthand for this idea. Skill, as a form of capital, is an identifiable resource "out there" that can be bought,

whether by investing in education, hiring workers who have themselves bought the expertise, or making the investment to develop it.¹⁴ Skill, as human capital, is an asset distinct from the labor power of the practitioner, as if it were a tool—like a hammer—separate from the person using it and could be traded on the open market. And like all capital, skill is portrayed as fungible, independent of any context or persons. Knowledge can be introduced into the production process either through the skill of the worker or technology; both will generate returns on investment. According to this view of skill, it can be encoded in the building, as Mehmet claimed, rather than live as an expression of the welder's situated expertise and imagination.

But even in the most ruthless capitalist systems, even in the most orthodox Marxist accounts, this political representation of skill as distinct from labor requires some suspension of disbelief. To have any purchase, the notion that skill is self-standing has to allow for learning. The view of skill as an asset that can be separated out from the flow of human activity is can only function as a convention if it admits the process through which people acquire skill and draw it into their actions. This is because skill is in fact not a tool or machine. After all, a hammer is nothing more than an inert piece of wood and metal until a person picks it up and directs it at the nailhead. Skill is not a thing. It can only manifest as skillful practice and can only shape outcomes when actors enliven it through situated, imaginative, and intelligent responses to specific conditions. This means that the political definition of skill has to allow for the qualities of sentience that learning requires. It has to allow for the creativity and effort that go into the development of competence; it has to allow for the interpretative resourcefulness needed to apply as well as adapt those skills to situations that are diverse, contingent, and contextual. It has to allow for the process through which the person learns to imagine the arc of the hammer moving through the air, and adjust the movements of their arm, wrist, and hand to hit the nail on the head.

Moreover, because learning needs teaching, an acknowledgment of learning also requires the recognition of the social connections and interpersonal exchange that go into teaching and learning. But most of all, a definition of skill that allows for learning has to allow for agency. Learning cannot be forced; even under the most restrictive conditions, learning can only occur if the learner chooses to apply the imagination, attention, and initiative needed to develop skill and apply it in practice. Learning needs the exercise of will in response to a desire, and in this sense, learning is an expression of freedom.

This description of skill as a self-standing resource that is acquired and applied through learning is what makes the politics of skill so hazardous. It is why skill can be used as a political crowbar to pry people from their agency. If skill is an asset that some people have and some others do not, and if having skill is a product of the desire and purposive activity required to learn, then not having skill can be represented as not having the capacity for agentic creativity.

The absence of skill—being unskilled—can be equated with the absence of will, creativity, and sentience. If skill is an asset as fixed and external as a hammer, then the absence of skill can be invoked as proof that the unskilled person did not have the desire or capacity to learn how to use it. And if learning is an expression of freedom, then representing people as unskilled can easily slip into representing them as not having the desire or capacity for freedom. This is different than the representation of people as alienated from the generative, imaginative register of their labor, debased by an economic system that denies them the right to enact their birthright as free beings. The reason the politics of skill that allows for learning can be so pernicious is that the claim it makes is ontological: it is not that the unskilled are prevented from enacting the generative, agentic capacity of skillful practice; it is that their status as unskilled—as skill have-nots—indicates that they may not have that capacity to begin with. The legal restrictions or political dynamics that constrain the freedom of the unskilled become sidelined—and instead, unfreedom is recast as a reflection or even function of the basic character of the unskilled, and their fundamental inability to be free. Their humanity can thus be made uncertain and turned into a matter of question. “They are human as well, right?”

Skill Politics on the Body

This book explores the political language of skill—a language that inflects debates about labor market policy, immigration criteria, and wealth inequality and poverty. Ideas about skill enter political life stealthily, cloaked in claims of objectively observable attributes. Skill passes as a technical matter, protected from the kind of discussion and analysis through which the political dimensions of other social categories, such as race, gender, and national origin, are made visible and challenged.

My project is to make the political language of skill audible and make clear the ways that skill, as a language of power, is exceptionally powerful. As a language of power, skill is often tuned out, but the stakes for listening are high. Notions of skill structure basic political rights, and assumptions about skill run through the legal codes that protect rights to freedom, agency, and bodily integrity. As a marker of difference, skill shapes how we participate in social life and delineates and stratifies the social and political spaces to which we have access. The political definition of skill informs how we perceive and evaluate actual competence; it informs what we view as mastery and expertise. More fundamentally, it shapes how we learn and whether we are afforded the right to the imagination and interpersonal connection on which learning depends. The consequences of skill as a political language are also material: skill shapes how we experience our own bodies and even mediates our relationship to the natural environment, as our political definitions of skill and competence have begun to shape our response to the effects of global warming.

The politics of skill are so consequential, touching all part of our human existence, because of the ways they enlist the body. We use referents that are deeply corporal to assign value to skill, and determine who is skilled and who isn't. We define some skills as manual—the skill of a welder—and some skills as cognitive—the skill of an engineer—and appraise them based on their perceived distance from the body, privileging skill that seems further away from muscle and sinew. This is true even of skill viewed as valuable because of its embodied dimension. Tacit skill, defined as an ability that so fundamentally entangled with the body that it is impossible to fully describe with language or codify in any way, is celebrated when it provides the basis for skill that is characterized as conceptual and abstract. The tacit skill that enables the engineer to connect mathematical calculations to dreams of buildings that exist only in the mind's eye is judged, in social discourse and scholarly production, as more significant and far more sophisticated, than the tacit skill of a welder, and the embodied feel that allows them to adjust their speed or bend the angle of the blowtorch's flame to respond to changes in wind shear or cloud cover so that they can weld a perfect seam.

The political language of skill also draws on political portrayals of the body to hide and deny skill. As a long tradition of scholarship on gender and race at work has shown, representations of bodies as feminized and racialized fold skill into the body as a means to cheapen it. Gender and racial discourses entomb skill in the flesh of skilled practitioners and turn layered and creative skillful practices into an inert physical feature, or an innate bodily tendency over which the people who inhabit the bodies have no say and no control. Women's supposedly small and nimble fingers, for instance, become a stand-in for the skill that women garment workers develop.¹⁵ The racialized representations of male bodies, and especially their dismemberment into their backs, arms, and stature, erase the skill required to complete the challenging physical tasks that the rhetoric justifies, whether in agricultural fields or mines, or on sped-up production lines.¹⁶ And the skill involved in health care or childcare work is represented as an expression of women's caring instinct, especially racialized women.¹⁷ Skillful embodied practice is not skill at all in these representations; it is just raw corporality. By subsuming skill in the body in this way, burying it beneath racialized and gendered descriptions of physiques and biology, denying its existence and value, these social discourses make it possible to shunt groups of people into the category of unskilled based on markers of social difference that have no relation to actual competence or expertise.

But the use of the body in the politics of skill is more than about devaluing skill or denying its presence. The power of skill politics comes from the definition of skill in opposition to the body—as a resource that is fundamentally superior to and irreconcilable with the body.¹⁸ The distinction made between skill and the body—a version of the cartesian split between mind and body—is

the grammar that the language of skill relies on to call into question the personhood of those defined as unskilled.¹⁹

For skill to be defined as a stand-alone resource that some people have and some others do not, it *has* to be located outside the body. It can't maintain its character as an asset that is identifiable, measurable, and alienable—an asset that can be lifted off the welder and attributed to the building—unless it is abstracted out of the body. This is because when skill is left in the body—when it is considered a form competence expressed through the body—the boundaries around it dissolve and it becomes a stream of practices. It emerges in its full aliveness, observable as creative responses to emergent conditions, moment-to-moment expressions of connection and relationship, and ongoing assertions of agency and imagination. Skill in the body is revealed to be as immanent, changing, and imaginative as the living embodied persons who practice it. The hammer becomes incidental and the swing takes center stage as movement, graceful and adaptive, responding moment to moment to the pull of gravity and feel of the wooden handle in the palm. Skill viewed in the body can't be delineated and fixed and cannot be possessed. And importantly, it cannot be alienated. It cannot be lifted out of the hand and credited to the hammer. It cannot be lifted off the welder and attributed to the building. Skill viewed as embodied practice only exists when it is enacted, brought into existence as corporal expressions of competence and potentiality in the moment. The skill of both the welder and engineer exists only when they are engaging with it, when they are manifesting it by acting, connecting, or simply imagining. Since skill is not a thing but rather a flow, it cannot be “had.” An appraisal of skill as embodied, and thus as indeterminate and changing, makes the political fiction of skill *haves* and *have-nots* impossible and even inconceivable. We all are, in a sense, skill *have-nots* until the moment we become skill *haves* by bringing skill alive through practice.

Because so much rides on the distinction between body and skill, the body is where the politics of skill turn brutal. If skill is not a machinelike asset out there, and is instead an expression of embodied moments of creativity, intelligence, and will, then the only way to draw a political distinction between skill *haves* and *have-nots* is to control the bodies of those classed as unskilled. The representation of some people as not having skill requires the discursive, regulatory, and even literal policing of the embodied practices through which those defined as unskilled express the skill they are not supposed to have.

In this way, the boundary between skilled and unskilled cuts through the body. We may use wage, occupation, years of formal education, and certification to talk about skill and the people who have it. In the everyday interactions of work and production, we may even recognize skill as a continuum, running without break from the novice to the master. But ultimately, when we define some people as “skilled” or “unskilled,” we are talking about their bodies. We are talking about the extent to which their embodied existence is subject to

political regulation and control. The body is where we draw the line through rich, multifaceted, layered, and relational expressions of competence to split people into two categories: the skill haves—the highly skilled, the knowledge workers, the innovators—whose full range of creative agentic expression is recognized and elevated, and the skill have-nots—the laborers, the workers, the poor and dispossessed—whose skillful actions are an unthinking product of their bodily traits. The body is also where we *enforce* the line between skilled and unskilled, and where the politics of skill slip into actions of physical coercion and degradation.²⁰ The method of those actions is as racialized and gendered as the bodies of the unskilled are represented as being, and reinforces their status as laboring bodies without the capacities associated with skill.²¹ Once their full range of agentic and imaginative capacities are denied, and their personhood rendered questionable, then the unskilled can be forced to run marathon races in life-threatening heat.

This book listens to the language of skill and examines its political consequences as they played out in Qatar. It focuses on the lived experiences of the migrants working in the country's construction industry to understand the consequences of skill as a political language. But in some important sense, this book is not about Qatar; it is about the politics of skill. It takes place in Qatar because the language of skill was bellowed there. In Qatar's national development plans, geopolitical aspirations, laws, and the organization of society, the language of skill was spoken loudly and clearly. It takes place in Qatar also because people, companies, and governments from around the world came together there to develop new ways to speak about skill as well as repeat old understandings of who could be skilled and who could definitely not be. Global finance, hydrocarbon interests, firms, recruitment networks, and cultural institutions all used Qatar as a setting to refine the ways that the language of skill could be used to harden and normalize social divisions and hierarchies around class, race, and gender—and ultimately personhood. And finally, the book takes place in Qatar because as the earth began to warm, and the climate started to change, it was a site where the way in which the politics of skill defined the political and economic implications of those ecological changes was becoming evident.

The Politics of Migration and Skill in Qatar

Qatar is a small country, a diminutive peninsula appended to another peninsula, poking out into the Arabian Sea. In 2020, it had a total population of around 2.8 million, slightly larger than that of Houston, Texas.²² But Qatar has had an outsized impact on both the global economy and imagination. It is a country of extremes, where models of global capitalism and migration have been pushed to their limit, and where the interaction between these two dynamics has amplified the politics of skill.

Qatar was the wealthiest country in the world per capita in 2018, topping US\$130,000 per person (based on purchasing power parity).²³ Most of its revenue came from the production and export of oil and natural gas. That same year, Qatar ranked as the world's largest exporter of LNG, and the world's third-largest known natural gas reserves sat off the country's northern tip.²⁴ Qatar used its vast resources to reinvent itself as a global hub for sports, art, and elite culture. Its capital, Doha, boasted a skyline drawn by striking, futuristic skyscrapers, and as the country geared up for the 2022 World Cup using the slogan "Expect Amazing," it spent hundreds of billions on new developments and infrastructure. The construction activity was so frenzied that it changed local climate conditions in Doha. Qatar was already one of the hottest places on earth, and by 2020, was warming faster than any place outside the Arctic.²⁵ Its development activities were only accelerating these changes; construction turned Doha into a heat island where summertime temperatures rose so high that Qatar began to pour air-conditioning into its outdoor spaces, cooling the stadiums, markets, and cultural centers designed to position it as a global destination.²⁶

For Qatari elites, creating a version of the future out of glass and steel was a national project, but the people who were building this vision were all migrants. Nine out of every 10 people in Qatar were foreigners. In this respect, Qatar offers us the photonegative of the typical migration story: instead of a setting where migrants were the minority, workers in Qatar joined an economy where over 95 percent of the workers were foreign. In 2015, the midpoint of the research for this project, there were 1,955,627 people working in Qatar, but only a tiny fraction, 99,204 of them, were Qatari nationals, with most of them employed by their government.²⁷

Migrants working in Qatar came from all over the world. The government of Qatar did not release data on the nationality of foreign residents—although it undoubtedly collected them—but estimates based on embassy reports and a review of official government statements capture the diversity of the population. More than ninety countries were represented among Qatar's two million foreigners in 2017. Migrants from South Asia and the Middle East made up the lion's share. India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Egypt, and the Philippines made up more than half of the migrants in Qatar, but the numbers of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa were growing fast.²⁸ This diversity was part of the lived experience of Qatar; languages, religions, customs, and cuisines jostled and blended together in everyday life. Everyone—police officers and bank tellers, shopkeepers and lawyers, doctors and teachers—was from somewhere else.

Permission to reside in Qatar was tied to employment, and any rights and protections that migrants had stemmed from their role in the economy. All migrant workers in Qatar were governed by the kafala system and legally bound to their sponsor, usually their employer. The bonds of the kafala system loosened over the past several years, especially since reforms in 2017, and most

workers no longer required their employer's explicit consent to leave the country. Some were permitted, under limited circumstances and with regulatory approval, to change employers, and since late 2020, migrant workers could change jobs without their employer's permission. Even so, all migrants, irrespective of skill, profession, or nationality, remained employed under a system that tied their political rights to their economic function.

The kafala system was generally portrayed as the product of a specific—and Arab—cultural setting, but in fact, it was similar in its basic components to the regulatory structures that governed the employment of migrants around the world—and still do. Work visas in many countries—including the United States—tie migrants to their employers, and make it difficult as well as sometimes legally impossible for workers to challenge their working conditions or leave their jobs without jeopardizing their right to remain in the country. Just as in Qatar, these regulations reduce migrants to their economic function. They grant political rights only on a limited and often probationary basis, and in ways that are contingent on migrants' role in the economy. These regulations, however, generally do not distinguish migrants by skill; both highly skilled and unskilled workers are bound to their employers. In most countries, however, only a fraction of all migrants—sometimes smaller, sometimes larger—are governed by this kind of regulatory structure. In Qatar, by contrast, all migrants were covered by this regulatory framework. This means that 95 percent of the workforce was legally bound to an employer. Qatar had a robust and growing labor force, but it did not have a functioning labor market.

The presence of a labor force, but the absence of a labor market, made Qatar a useful place to observe the effects of the political language of skill. In settings with functioning labor markets, where workers can sell their own labor, the effect of the political language of skill occurs in a context that is noisy. This is because a functioning labor market is multivocal in that numerous voices, in chorus and competition, speak to the value of different kinds of skill. To be sure, marketplace bargaining over the value of specific skills is a deeply political process, structured by the economic imbalance of power between worker and employer, and contoured by racial and gendered discourses about the bodies of workers. The recognition and definition of skill is shaped by labor market institutions, such as worker and educational organizations, regulatory structures, and even societal norms. Still, workers' ability to commodify their own labor as well as choose *not* to commodify it, and withdraw from a profession or the labor market altogether if they are not compensated, gives them, individually and collectively, an avenue to make their skill visible—and make themselves visible as skillful practitioners. It gives them some ability to influence how their expertise is valued. By binding workers to their employers and snuffing out the emergence of a labor market, the kafala system in Qatar muted—or controlled for—some of the many voices, particularly worker voices, that determine the visibility and value of skill in the market, at the worksite, and in society. As a

result, it became possible to observe more clearly how the politics of skill played out in areas that might have seemed beyond its reach: intimate spheres of personal connection, material experiences of the body, and responses to the earth and its ecological changes.

The relationship between the politics of skill and ties of bondage was also especially pronounced in Qatar because it had existed for a long time. For over a century, most of Qatar's residents had been foreign, and almost all had been tied to their employers through various iterations of regulatory bondage in which their political rights were tied to their employment. When Qatar, in 1984, defined the version of the regulatory framework that still, with a few amendments, governed migrants' status in the country in 2020, some four decades later, nonnationals already represented more than 85 percent of its workforce—a proportion far higher than almost any other country in the Persian Gulf.²⁹ Even as Qatar swelled to absorb large numbers of foreign workers, the kafala system prohibited migrants, with few exceptions, from establishing long-term residence in Qatar. The migrant population in Qatar had always been made up of workers, growing in response to the country's economic needs at any given moment in time.

Historically, the size of the labor force in Qatar was spurred by the construction industry, expanding in response to the country's periodic modernization and urban development drives. In 2020, almost half the workers in Qatar were directly involved in Qatar's massive construction projects. (As a point of comparison, construction generally represents between 5 and 10 percent of the workforce in most countries.) The workforce for the industry was entirely foreign. Out of the 785,075 workers employed in construction in 2015, only 1,643—or 0.002 percent—were Qatari.³⁰ The construction companies in Qatar were also thoroughly international. Over the decade from 2010 to 2020, firms from around the world rushed in to participate in the construction boom. The projects that the government has awarded to international firms, operating as joint ventures with Qatari firms as required by Qatari law, totaled more than US\$120 billion in 2015.³¹

The projects commissioned by the Qatari government were more massive, cutting edge in their engineering, and radical in their design that ever before in the country's history. They required companies to pioneer new building approaches, materials, and technologies. The extreme heat in Qatar drove innovation too. Qatar experimented with new design strategies to shield residents from the intense heat, such as the application of paving material that reflected the sun's radiation or solar-powered cooling systems that drew on environmental conditions to modulate temperature.³² Because of these buildings' complexity, their construction demanded advanced ability. Qatar's capacity to build its future as a hypermodern destination—to keep the promise that we should “Expect Amazing”—fundamentally depended on the skill of workers that the Qatari legal system confines to employment relationships of

bondage. This tension heightened the political charge around the politics of skill in Qatar. To fulfill its modernist aspirations, Qatar needed the skill that migrants developed. At the same time, the regulatory structure the country used to govern migrant workers gave sponsors and employers enormous latitude to restrict the agentic creativity, embodied dignity and imagination, and freedom on which learning always depends.

Although Qatar's national development projects drove migration, the discourses that shaped the conditions that migrants faced in Qatar were as international as the array of companies operating there, as global as the financial flows that poured in and out of the country, and as encompassing as the World Cup games that the country was preparing to host.³³ The skill politics articulated in Qatar seeped out past the country's borders to enter global discussions about the rights of migrant workers and who should have the right to migrate to begin with. The political language classifying migrant workers as unskilled in Qatar joined the chorus of calls for the use of skill qualifications—"merit-based immigration"—to advance more restrictionist immigration agendas and use increasingly ruthless police measures against the bodies of those migrants defined as unskilled. The politics of skill spoken in Qatar inflected even those conversations that championed the defense of migrant workers. International campaigns to improve migrant working conditions, with their widespread adoption of the image of the overall-clad migrant as the symbol of modern slavery, slipped, however unintentionally, into discourses that echoed beliefs about unskilled migrant workers' limited capacity for agency. Global coverage of working conditions in Qatar argued over whether workers under the kafala system were free or unfree, but reports tended to pay less attention to the actual practices, rooted in the representation of migrants as unskilled, through which migrants' freedom was denied and their personhood rendered questionable. If political definitions of skill are another way of delineating freedom, then discussions about skill were fundamentally about freedom and unfreedom in Qatar and everywhere.

Research in Phases

The research for this project unfolded in several overlapping phases. With each phase, the reach of skill as a language of power became clearer. I began the fieldwork for this study in early 2013, when I traveled to Doha to examine the structures and practices that shaped work and working conditions in Qatar's construction industry.

In the first phase of my research, my goal was to learn what factors shaped work and working conditions for Qatar's migrant construction workers. I needed to understand how the construction industry was organized and the basic strategies it used to complete Qatar's massive development projects. I created an institutional map of the industry and the government actors that

shaped its operations. I traced the stages of construction, from project conception through delivery. I started with the architectural design process, and followed projects through the tendering and bidding process. I looked at how projects were awarded, and how subcontracting chains, building permits, and materials requests were assembled once the contract for the project was secured. I analyzed how firms hired and managed their workforce, including recruitment strategies, methods for integrating workers on-site, and the management of migrant workers at the close of the project. I explored how formal and informal institutions regulated these processes, and looked at variations within the industry.

To sketch out this institutional map, I drew on a broad swath of interviews. I interviewed the actors and organizations that shaped how the industry operated, including representatives and managers of local and international construction companies, supply chain and logistics planning firms, specialized engineering firms, and government agencies and social service companies that addressed labor law and working conditions on jobsites, including consular representatives. I also interviewed the government and semigovernmental agencies that defined the urban plans and building strategies to position Qatar as a global destination, including the Qatar Foundation, a royal institution directing the development of Qatar's educational complex, and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, charged with managing the construction of the stadiums and infrastructure for the 2022 World Cup.

To complement these informational interviews, I invited managerial staff from construction and consulting companies to roundtable discussions about industry dynamics, manpower management, and regulatory policies. In the interviews I conducted, my interlocutors had voiced sharp differences in opinion about the factors that shaped the industry and working conditions, and my hope in bringing managers together was to understand why. Over the course of the three two-hour roundtables I conducted, with a total of twenty-eight people, participants shared their frank assessments of challenges in the industry, especially those caused by government action, along with why the viewpoints that their colleagues expressed in the discussion were misguided.

The second phase of my research engaged more directly with work, workers, and work processes in the construction industry. In early 2014, I began the ethnographic portion of my research, spending time in the places that workers worked and lived. Ethnography is a method of inquiry that uses detailed and proximate observation to understand what people do in specific settings, why they act in that way, and how they interpret their own actions as well as those of others—and even how they understand themselves.³⁴ It requires a situational engagement from the researcher—a process of *being there*—and involvement in the flow of life of a place—sometimes termed “participant observation” in the technical literature. The researcher has to be responsive to the questions that the situation asks them to pursue—but they also have to

remain attentive to the questions that the social context and power structures make inconceivable or impossible to ask.³⁵

The first part of my ethnographic study was built on fieldwork at eight construction sites and three training centers. I also visited seven dormitories for workers—which in Qatar were called labor camps and were provided (and often closely monitored) by employers. Visits at each site lasted from several hours to several days. In selecting my research sites, I chose construction sites and affiliated labor camps that had good reputations in terms of their labor practices and production systems. I wanted to understand work and working conditions at firms that operated well, as opposed to at firms that made a habit of exploiting their workers to compensate for shoddy production practices. Also, patterns of workplace control or labor violations among firms widely considered to be industry leaders, locally and internationally, were likely suggestive of practices among industry laggards. This selection preference meant that the construction sites I visited were large, with several hundred to several thousand workers, and building projects commissioned by government or other institutional clients. Several—sometimes dozens—of firms operated on-site and were involved in the project through complex subcontracting chains. My research at these sites explored how production was organized, how different construction trades coordinated their work, how the training systems were designed, and how they incorporated informal practices of skill development. I looked at patterns of teamwork along with the ways that supervisors and workers structured their workflow. I asked about working conditions—shift schedules and pay scales—and living spaces—labor camps and sleeping quarters.

To deepen my ethnographic observation, I selected two sites for extended research. I spent hundreds of hours at these two sites, and followed them through much of 2014. At both sites, I focused on the processes through which migrant workers developed skill and expressed their mastery. I looked at learning processes and the kinds of exchanges they involved among workers. I explored how the many people involved in skillful practice on a site—workers, foremen, supervisors, engineers, and managers—interpreted skill, and how they valued the skill that was developed and shared. I examined how skill was used and controlled, and why expressions of competence were sometimes viewed as constructive and sometimes as insubordinate. Throughout, I was concerned with the interplay between skill and power.

The ethnographies of these two sites were spun out of a back-and-forth movement between interviews, formal and informal, and process observation. Through seventy-eight semistructured interviews and innumerable on-site conversations, I asked workers, foremen, supervisors, and engineers about work and skill. But I also followed them as they worked, watching how they enacted the skill they described and observing in action the kinds of teaching moments they recounted. This research dialectic was important because my interlocutors frequently found skill difficult to define. In part, this was because

the kind of skill used in construction has a large tacit component, and drew on aspects of competence that were impossible to make explicit or spell out in any propositional or systematic way.³⁶ So while workers enacted their skill when they scaffolded, poured cement, or welded, they could not pinpoint how they knew what they knew.

But the people I interviewed also struggled to describe skill because skill was not a fixed asset, with clear outlines and content, that could be lifted out of context or practice. Skill was not like a hammer. Instead, the skill I observed on-site was a stream of practice made up of skillful action. It was the ongoing process of developing responses that were more refined, precise, and attuned to the environment that was constantly being rebuilt and transformed.³⁷ This meant that the people I spoke with couldn't fully apprehend skill—their own or that of others—in the abstract. For my interlocutors and me to arrive at a shared understanding of what was meant by skill—including its emotional, interpersonal, and political registers—we had to rely on an iterative process that moved between a description of skill, observation of skill in action, and then further reflection on skill using the observed skillful practice as a touchstone.

At both sites, I chose a subset of task areas to follow and shadowed workers completing these tasks. Task areas are elements like scaffolding, cement form building, and steel fixing. Shadowing workers allowed me to engage more closely with the materials used in those trades so that I could better understand the physicality of the work and the skill it required—the scaffolding tubes and planks, hoses and nozzles for cement, and wires and rebar for steel fixing. This also allowed me to concentrate on the engineering and managerial facets of these task areas. I spent hours poring over construction documents, manpower histograms, health and safety checklists, and the technical specifications of the equipment used for the task areas I selected.

The construction sites in Qatar were as cosmopolitan as the rest of the country and involved workers from many different nationalities. The sites I selected were no different. A manager at one of two sites decided to count the number of languages spoken among the workforce, and his informal tally was twenty-two. This linguistic diversity required me to conduct research in a variety of languages and work with translators. Research was conducted in eight languages, and five translators worked on this research project. Even so, there were many gaps. But this was useful too; it gave me insight into how workers worked together, how they taught and learned from one another, and how they forged ties of solidarity without the benefit of a common language, apart from the stripped-down English used on most sites.

The third phase of this research project focused on the processes through which migrant workers were recruited. This portion of the research took me outside Qatar to a selection of countries where recruitment took place. In Manila, Philippines; Kerala, India; and Kathmandu and Dhanusa, Nepal, I traced the recruitment networks that connected local communities to construction sites

in Doha. I interviewed government officials, recruitment agency owners and staff, and staff at centers for vocational training and trade testing. I spoke with advocacy organizations, and people who hoped to migrate or had recently returned. The field trips for this third layer took place through fall 2015.

The final phase of the research for this project, through fall 2016, was a historical analysis of Qatar's kafala system. As the political valence of skill became clear through the layers of fieldwork, I wanted to explore whether and how skill had been woven into the regulatory structures that govern migration to Qatar. The kafala system in its contemporary form was a product of a century of global trade and regulatory exchange, and striated with imperial dictates governing the movement of people that set the parameters for the use of indentured labor. Archival research as well as the many careful historiographies on migration under the British Empire allowed me to trace how these historical currents structured the political definitions of skill built into the kafala system.

In this book, I have changed the names of the people I spoke with, construction firms I visited, and many of the organizations that participated in this research project. To protect the confidentiality of people and organizations, I have also changed details that may be identifying, including but not limited to nationality, trade, and location. The importance of the commitment to confidentiality that is part of any academic research involving people was only underscored by the political sensitivities that attached to this project at various points in time. These political winds and the ways they buffeted my research—and specifically the ways they constrained my access to construction sites and migrant workers—are described more fully in the book's postscript.

This book is about the politics of skill, and how the power relations they produce shape work and working conditions. It is also, in important ways, about men. The workforce in Qatar's construction industry was male; in 2015, 99.5 percent—780,528 out of 785,087 people working in the industry—were men.³⁸ On all the construction sites, and in all the training centers and labor camps, I did not encounter a single woman. This, of course, had implications for how people responded to me, my female research assistant, and one of the translators who was a woman. The responses were complex and varied: for some, it made it easier to talk about skill and working conditions, and even share confidences, whereas it made others more guarded and reserved. In all cases, however, the experiences of workers were experiences they had as men. As a result, the politics of skill described in this account are inflected with gender politics. How skill was expressed, how the body was experienced, and how political definitions of personhood shaped subjectivity were all gendered. This means that while this book can offer a window onto how skill functions generally as a language of power—the mechanism through which it structures work and narrows rights to agency—it can't make definitive claims about how this language is spoken when it is used to define the role of women at work or in society. It does,

however, mean that this book can, and does, speak to the politics of masculinity in Qatar and ways it gendered political representations of skill. It does engage with the gendered ways that men's bodies were racialized, controlled, and disciplined as well as the gendered practices through which men drew on skill to create connection, community, and shared imaginaries. The use of pronouns in this book—the deliberate and specific use of male pronouns and male-gendered nouns when the discussion considers the politics of skill as men experienced them—positions it in the rich and burgeoning conversation about gender in the Persian Gulf region and the way it structures labor relations there.³⁹

A final point on notation and nations. While I am cognizant of the political valences attached to the terms “Persian Gulf” and “Arabian Gulf,” this book uses them interchangeably. The term “Arab countries” is used colloquially—and sometimes in academic writing—as a stand-in for countries of the Persian or Arab Gulf region, but in my writing I use “Arab” to refer to all the countries in the Middle East and North Africa that view themselves as culturally Arab, and have also been subject to Orientalist representations, both historically and at present. Finally, this book takes Qatar as its focus, but Qatar, perhaps to a greater extent than many countries, has been shaped by regional and international political currents and conversations. Strategic jockeying in the region has both hemmed in and sharpened Qatar's development ambitions. The blockade that Saudi Arabia—joined by the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain—imposed on Qatar in 2017 had the most direct impact on the country's modernization plans and geopolitical alliances—all of which shaped its approach to the recruitment of workers, construction schedule, and labor relations. I detail those pressures when and where they elucidate the politics of skill that played out on Qatari construction sites as well as in the country's marathon races.

Skill through the Layers

The argument that runs through this book is that skill, as a language of power, shapes all aspects of economic and social life. It has certainly structured all facets of life in Qatar, and has, in many respects, been more influential in shaping working conditions than any specific labor relations at the workplace. This book traces the reverberations of skill as a political language, and shows how these reverberations structure social and economic life, at the many different levels in which that life unfolds. Each chapter—or essay—examines a different layer of life and considers how the politics of skill play out there. The analysis that runs through these chapters begins with skill as defined in political and regulatory structures, follows it through production and work as well as protest and resistance, and tracks it all the way down through its expression on the body and in relation to the earth.

The book's trajectory—from the more abstract to the more material—follows the path that the political language of skill uses to shape social and

economic life. The chapters follow the language of skill from its clearest register down to more material contexts, where its sound is more blunted and blurred. Skill emerges most clearly and audibly as a political language in the spheres that are most overtly political, and where political discourses are marshaled to shape legal and institutional structures. As it moves into society, its expressions mix and merge with the actions involved in production, work, and protest, and the language of skill becomes more equivocal and ambiguous, though no less powerful. When the politics of skill reach into the body, they become interwoven with the experience of being embodied and become difficult to distinguish from the physical sense of self. And as they touch down to earth, the politics of skill shape responses to changes in the environment, but their effect is difficult to identify because the responses themselves are still emergent and evolving due to the unprecedented ecological shifts caused by global warming.

In exploring the effect of skill as a political language, the book makes a second but equally important claim: skill derives its power as a political discourse from its believability. Because skill as a political category is treated as if it were real and as a stand-in for measures of actual competence, the political consequences of its use fade into the background where we cannot see or do not look for them. Likewise, the way that ideas about skill inform our interpretation of social and economic life remains underexplored. As a result, an examination of how the politics of skill operate at different layers of social and economic life also brings to light the assumptions built into the frames that we use to analyze and understand life at those layers. The chapters, in their reflection on skill, engage the conceptual frameworks that guide inquiry at the layer they consider.

Regulation opens the book with an analysis of the way that the political language of skill has been codified into law throughout the development and history of Qatar's kafala system. The chapter traces how political definitions of skill shaped the political rights afforded to migrants and details the forms of bondage specified for their employment. Qatar is often represented as a place outside history, a lost stretch of desert that joined the modern world only after the discovery of oil and gas in the mid-twentieth century. In press accounts and academic writing, the kafala system too is portrayed as a cultural hold-over from an earlier, isolated time. This chapter challenges this representation, and shows that the contemporary kafala system, along with ongoing efforts to reform it, was forged through more than a century of global economic exchange and political interconnection. It traces the kafala system's defining features, all of which stem from the distinction the British made between skilled and unskilled migrants when they governed the movement of indentured workers within the empire. The chapter investigates how this regulatory process was refined through wave after wave of international investment and engagement, and examines how international reform efforts, which led to a significant overhaul of the kafala system between 2016 and 2020, reproduced the tiered definitions of personhood and freedom associated with different categories of skill.

Production looks at the way that political definitions of skill shape and are shaped by economic systems. This chapter explores how the political division between skilled and unskilled migrants drives business strategy and the organization of production. More centrally, it shows that skill politics determine what buildings are built. Qatar adopted a high modernist approach to urban planning and embraced its method of imposing political values on society by building those values—concretely—into the buildings and plan of the city. Qatar’s modernist structures and urban design reflected as well as enforced a sharp social divide between migrants classified as skilled and those classified as unskilled. It also enacted the modernist view of skill as the purview of a professional elite, imprinted and contained in the design of buildings and urban spaces. Ironically, this modernist approach to urban development increased the construction industry’s reliance on the skill of the very workers who were segregated into marginal tracts of the city, and excluded from the very buildings and built spaces that they created.

Skill examines the embodied qualities of skill, and how power is expressed through the representation and control of skill. Construction on Qatar’s building sites required skill that is deeply sophisticated but also deeply embodied, and this chapter documents the richness and complexity of the learning processes through which it was developed. Learning on-site grew out of many repeated moments of interpersonal connection, attunement, and creativity, and as a result, was an expression of agency. Managers and supervisors sought to control and appropriate workers’ skill, but because the skill was embodied, this meant exercising physical control over the men who enacted that skill and the bodies through which they expressed their competence. In this way, labor relations on-site became a vehicle through which skill was used to deny the embodied qualities of agency and imagination required to enact it.

Protest considers the role of skill and learning as strategies of political resistance. Protests were illegal in Qatar, but they still happened frequently. Companies tolerated wildcat strikes and short-term work stoppages so long as they adhered to certain patterns and did not build solidarity among workers from different countries. As a result, these protests were ineffectual; they were hemmed in and disciplined by management, and any protest that broke through the limits imposed on labor action was cut short through the deportation of striking workers. In this context, the practice of learning—as a form of praxis—emerged as an important form of resistance to exploitation on-site. Learning became a vehicle through which workers consciously affirmed their agency in a work setting that denied them claims to agentic creativity and personhood, and reduced them to bodies. Workers used learning to strengthen their interpersonal relationships across nationalities. They used these cross-national social ties as the basis for tactical solidarity to challenge exploitative conditions and unsafe practices.

Body examines how the politics of skill shape the experience of the embodied self in the physical world. This chapter takes as its focus the heat injury

suffered by workers on Qatari construction sites. Heat injury manifests, sometimes immediately and sometimes with delay, as cardiac arrest and organ damage or failure. It also significantly, and sometimes permanently, disrupts cognition and interferes with the ability to direct physical movement. The politics of skill, expressed at Qatari worksites in the denial of worker agency and exercise of control over workers' bodies, heightened workers' exposure and vulnerability to extreme temperatures. They were pressed to work in heat conditions that were dangerous and damaging. The heat, through its effect on their bodies, also destroyed their access to the skillful practice, social connection, and emotional attunement they needed to protect themselves from extreme temperatures. This allowed the culpability for injury to be shifted onto workers, and the damage their bodies sustained was invoked to confirm the political representation of workers as unskilled.

Earth considers how political definitions of skill shape interpretations of the ecological environment and responses to the changes caused by global warming. This chapter looks at the recruitment of migrant labor and shows how companies in Qatar leveraged climate change damage in migrant sending areas to recruit workers at lower wages. Companies in Qatar preferred workers with the ability to learn—with absorptive capacity—over workers with demonstrated skill, including skill documented through certification. This preference for unskilled workers allowed companies to train workers in the specific skills required for a project, but gave them the scope to render those skills invisible too, and thus to deny workers their own agency and personhood. Companies in Qatar viewed climate-damaged areas as promising sources for workers with absorptive capacity because global warming had often only recently impoverished them. The residents in those communities still retained the benefits of the investments in human development—in education, nutrition, and health—they had made in more ecologically stable times; they retained especially the foundation that those investments established for the ability to learn. Skill politics in Qatar closed the cycle of climate damage: an industry emitting large amounts of carbon and bankrolled by hydrocarbon revenue capitalized on the damage caused by the use of fossil fuels to source learning at bargain prices. The final two chapters of this book underscore that the consequences of skill politics are not abstract or ideological but rather cause tangible material injury to the body and the earth.

The conclusion of this book argues that listening to the language of skill in Qatar can allow us to hear its discourse in places beyond that small peninsula—to perceive how it shapes political rights, definitions of personhood, and the material conditions of being alive everywhere. The book shows that listening to the political language of skill—slippery, powerful, and pervasive—matters because if we listen, we can also respond. If we listen, we can also contest the ways that the political language of skill shapes migration, work, and agency, now and in a rapidly warming world.

INDEX

- accidents, 186, 190–91. *See also* body
- Aga Khan Trust for Architecture, 151
- AirPatrol platform, 111
- Alien Act (1963), 57–58
- Aluminum Cladding Solutions, 173–74, 181
- Amnesty International, 30, 70, 151, 185, 222
- Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), 41–43, 51. *See also* Petroleum Development Qatar (PDQ)
- apprenticeship, 134, 174
- Arendt, Hannah, 172, 175
- Ashghal (Public Works Authority), 94, 217
- Asian workers, 60–63
- Audsley, Matthew, 44–45, 49–52
- bachelor (as a designation), 80–84, 103, 110–11
- Bangladesh, 217–19
- Barwa City (residential development), 86
- Belgrave, Charles, 36
- Al-Bidda Tower, 151
- bin Thani, Sheikh Abdullah, 41–43
- bin Thani, Sheikh Muhammad, 35
- Blatter, Sepp, 29–30, 32, 66. *See also* Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA); World Cup (2022)
- body: cardiac failure and, 185–86, 191; causes of deaths and, 186, 191; climate change and, 200, 214–15; constraining of workers ability to ensure their own safety and, 206–14; culpability of the wounded and, 192, 205–6; deaths and, 184–86; emphasis on the dead and, 187; extreme temperatures and, 187–89, 191–93; fatality rates of workers, 186; heat injury and, 193–97, 200–201; heat safety practices and, 202–6; hydration and, 194–95, 207–8; injury vs accident, 186, 190–91; skill and, 14–16; slavery and, 39; three types of injuring and, 206; view of the body as a separate entity and, 198–200; wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) index and, 197–98. *See also* workers; working conditions
- Braverman, Harry, 109
- British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 264–66
- Burawoy, Michael, 267
- Burrow, Sharon, 31, 73
- Butler, Judith, 158
- capital, 11–12, 102–5
- capitalism, 257
- climate change: construction's impact on, 221; heat as an occupational hazard and, 200, 214–15; recruitment of workers and, 218–22, 241–46, 254–55. *See also* body; recruitment, of workers; working conditions
- Clinton, Bill, 29
- Cochrane, Ronald, 54
- cognition. *See* embodied cognition
- construction industry: bid process and, 95; climate change and, 221; contractual disputes and, 98–99; easing of kafala regulations and, 108; effects of heat on productivity and, 189; expansion and contraction of, 19, 59–60, 92–93; fast-tracking of projects and, 97, 138–39; governments dual role in, 94–96; insufficient labor and, 230; international firms and, 93; labor over capital and, 102–5; legally mandated partnerships and, 95; manhour estimates and, 138–39, 145, 229–30; material and machinery imports and, 97–98, 150; modernism and, 84–85, 107, 109; non and late payments and, 96; pop-up nature of, 93–94; private sector investment in, 91; procedure development and, 107; profit margins and, 93; quality assurance and quality control (QAQC) and, 142–44; regulation of labor imports and, 98, 230–35; sequencing of tasks and, 101–2; subcontracting chains and, 95–96, 142; training systems and, 108–9; unpredictable volatility and, 85, 94; visa process and, 230–35; wage

- construction industry (*continued*)
bills and, 233–34; worker fatality rates and, 186; worker training and, 2–3, 5–6; workforce demographics and, 19; workforce education levels and, 122; World Cup boom and, 86, 96–97, 216. *See also* manager interviews; recruitment, of workers; training, of workers; workers; working conditions
- coronavirus, 259–61
- Darwish, Abdullah, 43–45
- deaths. *See* body
- didactic structuring, 134
- DLA Piper, 68–69, 186
- Doha: bay of, 91; descriptions of, 40; industrial district of, 76–82; Labor City and, 110–12; modernist development model and, 82–92, 97; Mshereib Downtown Doha project and, 87; New Doha Port, 87; segregation of workers by skill category and, 80–82; skyline of, 76, 86–87. *See also* Qatar
- Downey, Greg, 125
- Dreyfus, Hubert, 124
- Dukham. *See* Umm Saïd Terminal
- ecological body. *See* body
- Education City (campus), 87, 113. *See also* Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies (QFIS)
- embodied cognition, 120–27, 133–35, 147, 188, 206, 211–14. *See also* learning; training, of workers
- emigration, 47
- Energy City (business hub), 87
- exit visas, 72–74, 103
- Faithful+Gould, 94
- Fakhroo, Yousuf Mohamed al-Othman, 73
- Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA): calls for workers rights and, 30–31; calls to retract the award to Qatar and, 185–86. *See also* Blatter, Sepp; World Cup (2022)
- freedom: learning as an expression of, 13; skill and, 32–33, 262–63
- Freire, Paolo, 171, 175
- Gardner, Andrew, 64
- Garner, Pessoa, and colleagues, 223
- gender: skill and, 14, 126; worker housing and, 81; workforce demographics and, 24–25, 237
- General Secretariat for Development Planning, 89
- Gladius, Marlies, 267
- Gordon, Jennifer, 226
- Great Britain: oil concession and, 41–52; pearling industry and, 36–38, 40
- Great Depression, 39
- Gulf War (1991), 60
- Gundev, Ghimire, 264–66, 272
- Hamad International Airport, 86
- Harkness, Laura, 64
- Harrison, P. W., 37
- Hay, Rupert, 40–41, 51
- heat injury. *See* body
- heatstroke. *See* body
- Hernández-Leon, Rubén, 225
- Holston, James, 88–89
- Homayounpour, Houtan, 73
- Hopper, Matthew S., 38
- Human Rights Watch, 30, 185, 223–24
- hypothalamus. *See* body
- indenture system, 49, 223
- India: labor oversight and, 49; as a source of workers, 47–48, 55–56, 244–46
- Indian Emigration Act (1922), 47, 55
- injury. *See* body
- Integrated Rail Project, 87
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 243
- International Labor Organization (ILO), 31, 71–73, 252
- International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), 29–30, 70, 73, 185, 224
- Jacomb, M. B., 46
- Jarkas, Abdulaziz, 96, 98
- Jung Woo Development Co., 62
- kafala system: abusive labor practices and, 29–30; Alien Act (1963) and, 57–58; development of, 32–33; exit controls and, 59–60, 69, 72–74, 103; historical analysis of, 24; labor violations and, 4; pearling industry and, 35–36; reforms to, 17–18, 53, 64–65, 69–75.

- 103; sidestepping of, 61–63; skill and, 8, 121; as the source of “slavery-like” conditions, 31–32; wages and, 103–4
- Katodrytis, George, 90
- Khalifa stadium, 70
- Korea, 62
- Kuwait, 60
- labor: ARAMCO, 51; British oil concession and, 42–43; construction industry chaos and, 102–3; forced, 11; modernism and, 82–86
- labor camps: alienation of, 11; Bawra al Baraha, 70; confinement to, 30; Doha industrial district and, 76–80; gender and, 81; Labor City, 70, 110–12; living conditions and, 8, 30, 68, 70
- Labor City (labor camp), 110–12
- labor strikes: general strikes, 53–54; Umm Saïd Terminal and, 53, 56; wild-cat strikes and, 55
- labor violations: Government of India Act no. 13 and, 49; kafala system and, 4; the worksite and, 4–5
- Laithwaite, John Gilbert, 42
- Lave, Jean, 126, 134, 174–75
- learning, 12–13, 116–17, 119–33, 171. *See also* embodied cognition; training, of workers
- Le Corbusier, 88–89
- Lermitte, B. H., 44
- Liquid Natural Gas (LNG), 2–3, 5, 17, 63, 87
- living conditions, of workers: heat and, 209–11; Labor City and, 110–12; nonpayment of wages and, 150–51, 154; segregation from local citizens and, 80–82. *See also* labor camps; workers
- Lobel, Mark, 265–66
- Local Roads and Drainage Program, 87
- Longhurst, Henry, 45
- Lorimer, John Gordon, 36, 38
- Lusail City (residential development), 86, 89, 150
- al-Mana, Salih, 43–45, 53–54
- manager interviews: bullying and, 145–48; confidentiality and, 270–71; diversity of workers and, 128; Filipino workers and, 253; integrating new workers and, 139–40; manhour estimates and, 138–39, 145, 229–30; manpower agencies and, 140–41; national difference and, 144; nonpayment of wages and, 104; QAQC process and, 142–43; risks and challenges in Qatar, 99–102; sorting rebar and, 163; technical skill and, 173–74; trade testing and, 248–49; wage theft and, 110; worker resistance and, 155–57; workforce training and, 108–9; workforce uncertainty and, 105–6, 232. *See also* construction industry
- Mangera Yvars, 113
- Marchand, Trevor, 125
- Marx, Karl, 11
- Mason, F. C., 52
- migration. *See* recruitment, of workers
- Mikimoto, Kokichi, 39
- Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs. *See* Ministry of Labor
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 231, 234
- Ministry of Interior, 98, 231, 234
- Ministry of Labor, 156, 185, 217, 224, 231, 233
- Ministry of Labor and Social Development, 98
- Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, 103
- Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning, 81
- Mitchell, Kevin, 90
- modern body. *See* body
- modernism, 82–92, 97, 107, 109–10
- Nash, Linda, 198–201
- Nasser, Gamal, 56
- natality, 175
- National Association of Foreign Employment Agency (Nepal), 238
- National Development Strategy*, 72–73
- Neisen, Ludwig, 34
- Nepal. *See* recruitment, of workers; workers
- New York University, 270
- noncooperation movement of 1920–22, 47
- no objection certificate (NOC), 55
- North Dome field, 63
- Al Nuaimi, Issa Saad Al Jafari, 72

- Packer, E. V., 44
Palestinians, 60
Palgrave, William, 35
Pan-Arabism, 56
The Pearl (residential development), 86
pearling industry, 34–40
Persian Gulf coast, 34–40
personhood: political definition of, 256–59, 262; political language of skill and, 9; urban planning and, 110–12.
See also workers
Pessoa, Silvia, 64
Petroleum Development Qatar (PDQ), 43–46, 48–53. *See also* Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC)
power: learning and, 126; skill and, 9–13, 257
praxis, 170–83
press gangling, 1–2
protest. *See* worker resistance
Public Works Authority (Ashghal). *See* Ashghal (Public Works Authority)
- Qatar: abolition of slavery and, 55; abusive labor practices and, 29–30; Act No. 14 (1992), 61; Alien Act (1963) and, 57–58; authoritarian regime of, 266–68; blockade of, 25; British oil concession and, 41–52; carbon footprint of, 221; citizenship and, 57; climate of, 17, 187–89, 193; commercial advantages for citizens and, 57; coronavirus pandemic and, 259–61; demographics of, 17; GDP of, 65; governance structure and, 89–90; independence and, 58; infrastructure investments and, 58–59, 63, 86–87, 96–97; Labor Act of 1962 and, 57; labor force size and, 19, 58, 60, 63–64, 216, 257–58; labor market of, 18, 58–59; Law No. 1 (2015), 69; Law No. 3 (1984) and, 59; Law No. 4 (2009), 65; Law No. 13 (2000), 95; Law No. 13 (2018), 72; Law No. 14 (2004), 223, 227; Law No. 21 (2015), 69; Law No. 26 (2005), 95; Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) and, 2–3, 5, 17, 63, 87; management of foreign labor force and, 61, 64, 70, 72–73, 230–35; migrants and, 17; national development plan and, 84; National Human Rights Committee and, 185; nationalization of the oil industry and, 58; pearl production and, 35–41; per capita earnings and, 17, 92; population of, 16, 41; *Qatar National Vision 2030* and, 89–92, 269; radical nature of construction projects in, 19, 113–15, 122; revenues of, 17, 59, 63, 92, 96; Saudi Arabian embargo on, 98; treatment of researchers and journalists and, 264–66; World Cup and, 3–4, 29–30, 66, 86. *See also* construction industry; Doha; kafala system; labor strikes; modernism; working conditions; World Cup (2022)
- Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies (QFIS), 113–15, 117. *See also* Education City (campus)
Qatar Foundation, 21, 67–68, 90
Qatari Chamber of Commerce, 231, 234
Qatari National Research Foundation, 268–71
Qatar Investment Authority, 90, 94
Qatar Mega Marathon, 1–2
Qatar National Vision 2030, 72, 89–92, 269
Qatar Petroleum, 94
Qatar Primary Materials Company (QPMC), 98
Qatar sovereign wealth fund, 86
Qrail, 216–17
- race: merit-based migration and, 261; racism and, 145; skill and, 14; workers intrinsic traits and, 161–67
- recruitment, of workers, 30, 43–45, 47, 55; absorptive capacity and, 246–49, 253; British oil concession and, 43–47; climate change and, 218–22, 254–55; construction industry demands and, 235–37; debt and, 227–28; deceptive practices and, 30, 222–26; as a functionally separate industry, 224–28; manpower agencies and, 105, 140–41, 152; merit-based migration and, 261; national training programs and, 250–54; Nepal and, 237–41; no objection certificates and, 55; place-based strategies and, 241–46, 249; QRail and, 216–18; trade testing and, 247–49; visa process and, 230–35. *See also* workers

- repertoires of contention, 157–61
research threats and termination, 271–75
resistance. *See* worker resistance
“Revealed: Qatar’s World Cup Slaves,”
185–86, 189–92
rhabdomyolysis. *See* body
Rosch, Eleanor, 120
- Al Sadd Sports Club, 2
Safer Migration Project (SaMi), 251
sensorimotor perceptions, 133
Shell Corporation, 46
Sidra Hospital, 101
Silatech, 269–70, 272
skill: body and, 14–16, 122–24, 133–36;
climate change and, 220; cultural
value and, 180; definition of, 10,
120–21, 140–41, 147, 256; as a form of
capital, 11–12; freedom and, 32–33,
262–63; gender and, 126; Labor City
and, 110–12; obedience and, 116,
120–21, 146–48; political action and,
161; politics of, 6–10, 18–19, 25–26,
188–89, 256–58; power and, 9–13, 25,
257; praxis, 170–83; production and,
5; resistance and, 170–71; violence
and, 147–48; worker segregation and,
80–82, 110–12. *See also* embodied cog-
nition; training, of workers
slavery: kafala system and, 31; manumis-
sion and, 39, 45, 51, 54–55; oil industry
and, 45–46; pearling industry and,
35–39; worker recruitment and, 45
Sooying Kim, 62
Sturman, Rachel, 49
Supreme Committee for Delivery and
Legacy, 21, 67, 224, 269
Supreme Council of Health, 272, 275
Sysorex, 111
- Tarrow, Sidney, 158
Technical Education and Skills Develop-
ment Authority (TESDA), 252–53
al Thani, Jassim, 62
Al Thani, Ali bin Abdullah, 51, 54–56
Al-Thani, Ahmed bin Ali, 56, 58
Al-Thani, Hamad bin Khalifa, 62–64, 92,
269
Al-Thani, Khalifa bin Hamad, 56, 58,
268
- Al-Thani, Tamim bin Hamad (Sheikh),
67, 268
Al-Thawadi, Hassan, 29
Thompson, Evan, 120
Tilly, Charles, 157
training, of workers: control of bodies
and, 116–17; education levels and,
219; embodied cognition and, 120–27,
133–35, 147, 188; erasure of workers
contribution to, 109; national training
programs and, 250–54; on-site training
and, 2–3, 5–6, 106–7; overtraining and,
106; pre-departure training systems
and, 249; production processes as
training systems and, 85; scaffolding
training center and, 176–82; training
systems and, 108–9; by workers, 129–31
- Umm Saïd Terminal, 52–54, 56
unskilled workers: British oil conces-
sion and, 42–52; characterizations of,
6–7; kafala system reforms and, 67;
personhood of, 256–59, 262; and their
responsibility for their lack of skill, 10;
urban policy and, 7–8
Upadhyaya, Krishna, 264–66, 272
- Varela, Francisco, 120
violence, 147–48
visas. *See* recruitment, of workers
- wages: manpower agencies and, 141;
nonpayment of, 30, 103–4, 150, 154;
recruiting industry and, 225; theft of,
30, 110; wage protection system and,
69. *See also* workers
- Weightman, Hugh, 48
welding, 2–3
Wenger, Etienne, 126
wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT)
index, 197. *See also* body
- William L. Pereira Associates, 91
worker interviews: bridging national dif-
ference and, 172; confidentiality and,
270–71; heat and, 211–12; resistance
and protest, 149–50; stadium scaffold-
ers and, 117–19, 129–30, 135–36, 148;
strikes and, 151; training and, 179
worker resistance: challenging workplace
practices from within and, 167–71;

- worker resistance (*continued*)
grievances and, 149–50; repertoires of contention and, 157–61, 167; skill-based, 170–71, 176, 182–83; strikes and, 151–55, 167
- workers: absorptive capacity and, 246–49; agency through skill and, 171–72; Alien Act (1963) and, 57–58; bachelor designation and, 80–84, 103, 110–11; Bangladeshi, 217–18; body-to-body cognition and, 136–37, 144–45; categorization of, 43, 46–48; diversity of, 128; education levels of, 122, 218–19, 246–47; Egyptian, 166; erasure of the contribution of, 121; Ethiopian, 152–55, 162–63, 167; fear and, 136; Filipino, 166, 252–53; grievance and arbitration and, 64, 156; Indian, 164; integration of new, 139–40, 143–45; national difference and, 144, 155, 161–65, 172; Nepali, 164–66, 184–85, 191–92, 236–46, 250–52; Nigerian, 164; non-verbal communication and, 129–30; North Korean, 163; political rights of, 71; production challenges and, 102–5; race and, 161–67; racial hierarchies and, 165–66; rivalries between, 168–69; scaffolders, 115–19, 128–29, 135–36; social connections and, 174–76, 179–80; steel fixers, 134; Thai, 151–52, 155, 164–67; Vietnamese, 163. *See also* body; living conditions, of workers; recruitment, of workers; training, of workers; unskilled workers; wages
- worker welfare standards. *See* working conditions
- working conditions: as akin to slavery, 31; bodily welfare and, 49–53, 67–71; health and safety practices and, 30, 202–6; humanity of, 9; human rights reports on, 4, 29–30; minimum wages and, 72; press ganging of, 1–2; skill and, 6–7; World Cup related reforms and, 66–67. *See also* body; labor camps
- work permits, 57
- worksites: body-to-body cognition and, 136–37, 144–45; density of, 102, 127–28; disciplinary strategies and, 143–44, 149, 155–57; integration of new workers and, 139–40, 143–45; kafala system and, 4–5; learning on, 119–20, 129–30; rebar and, 162–63; safety and, 128–29, 135–36, 169–70, 188, 197–99, 202–14; skill narratives and, 8; worker welfare codes and, 68–69. *See also* body; workers
- work visas, 18
- World Bank, 222–23
- World Cup (2022): awarding of hosting rights and, 29; construction boom and, 86, 96–97; Qatar Mega Marathon and, 1–2; Qatar's hosting of, 3–4, 29–31, 66; worker deaths and, 184–86; worker recruitment fees and, 224. *See also* Blatter, Sepp; Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
- Younes, Jamal, 96, 98
- Zolberg, Aristide, 158
- Zwanziger, Theo, 66