

## MASS DISPLACEMENT IN POST-CATASTROPHIC SOCIETIES: VULNERABILITY, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION IN GERMANY AND INDIA, 1945-1952

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The summer of 1945 in Germany was exceptional. Displaced persons (UN DPs), refugees, returnees, ethnic German expellees (*Vertriebene*)<sup>1</sup> and soldiers arrived in desperate need of care, including food, shelter, medical attention, clothing, bedding, shoes, cooking utensils, and cooking fuel. An estimated 7.3 million people transited to or through Berlin between July 1945 and March 1946.<sup>2</sup> In part because of its geographical location, Berlin was an extreme case, with observers estimating as many as 30,000 new arrivals per day. However, cities across Germany were swollen with displaced persons, starved of essential supplies, and faced with catastrophic housing shortages. During that time, ethnic, religious, and linguistic “others” were frequently conferred legal privileges, while ethnic German expellees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) were disadvantaged by the occupying forces. How did refugees, returnees, DPs, IDPs and other migrants navigate the fractured governmentality and allocated scarcity of the postwar regime? How did survivors survive the postwar?

The summer of 1947 in South Asia was extraordinary in different ways.<sup>3</sup> Faced with a hastily organized division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan (known as the Partition), between 10 and 14 million Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus crossed borders in a period of only a few months. Estimates put the one-day totals for cross-border movement as high as 400,000, and data on mortality range between 200,000 and 2 million people killed.<sup>4</sup> On both sides

1 The language of postwar displacement is extremely complicated, was used in different ways, and changed in a relatively short period of time. The term DP, for example, was formally used during the UNRRA period (1943-1946) to indicate those whose displacement was caused by Nazi aggression, and, during the IRO era (1947-1951), it referred also to those who faced a serious threat

of persecution in their place of origin. Neither of these definitions included the millions of ethnic Germans who fled or were displaced in the last year of the war and in the aftermath of the Potsdam Agreement of August 1945. The terminologies used by UNRRA and the IRO correspond to, but do not map exactly with, the definition of “refugee” that would be accepted after the 1951 Refugee

Convention and the formation of the UNHCR. For the present purposes, the key point is that DPs (UN DPs) were entitled to preferred rations while expellees were formally excluded from rationing regimes. For more on this very important distinction, see Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (New York, 2012), 31-33. See also below.

2 Angelika Königseder, *Flucht nach Berlin: Jüdische Displaced Persons 1945-1948* (Berlin, 1998), 30.

3 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *After Partition* (Delhi, 1948); Mohinda Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes: An Account of the Rehabilitation of Refugees from West Pakistan in Rural Areas of East Punjab* (Chandigarh, 1954).

4 Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford, 2013), 149, 151; Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge, 2009), 62, 95.

of the newly formed border, military and administrative agencies were reconstituted to manage not just the population flows but the everyday work of governing hundreds of millions of new citizens. In the capital cities, administrative personnel worked in courtyards and slept in tents and railway depots. Calcutta, Delhi, and Amritsar were just some of the cities that were points of first contact in the population transfer between the newly formed nation-states of India and Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

The German and Indian cases around the mid-twentieth century may seem to have little to do with one another, but there are a number of reasons to pair them. In Germany and India, displaced persons overwhelmed state and non-state actors with their needs. In Germany and India, DPs were forced to rely on informal strategies to survive. Historical entanglements generated by the war, comparable scales of displacement and the attendant disruptions, as well as the transformed material and political geographies are just some of the reasons that the German and Indian cases are worth considering side by side. Perhaps the best reason to explore these cases together is the many ways in which postwar Germany and post-Partition India mass displacements and their aftermaths have shaped the subsequent logics of migration discourse in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> This article is an effort to better understand the work of surviving in postwar Berlin and post-Partition India. Mass displacement and irregular migration play an important role in both of these stories.

Some of the best research on migration, particularly research done in the last ten years and informed by urban studies literature on “urban informalities,” focuses on the ways that migrants use information-sharing, kinship, and legal gray spaces to negotiate dangerous geographies.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of well-defined legal frameworks, adequately resourced humanitarian infrastructures, and basic economic opportunities, many migrants — both forcibly displaced persons and “voluntary” economic migrants — turn to “informal” strategies to survive.<sup>8</sup> They use unsanctioned transportation, engage

5 Md. M. Rahman and Willem van Schendel, “‘I Am Not a Refugee’: Rethinking Partition Migration,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003): 551–84; Joya Chatterji, “‘Dispersion’ and the Failure of Rehabilitation: Refugee Camp-Dwellers and Squatters in West Bengal,” *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2007): 995–1032; Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*; Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (London, 2007).

6 Peter Gatrell, “Putting Refugees in Their Place: Rewriting the History of the International Legal Refugee Regime, 1945–1960,” *New Global Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 1–24; Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch, “Refugees and the Nation State in Europe, 1919–1959,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (2014): 477–90.

7 On gray space, see, most famously, Oren Yiftachel, “Theoretical Notes on ‘Gray Cities’: The Coming of Urban Apartheid?,” *Planning Theory* 8, no. 1 (2009): 88–100; Ruben Andersson, “Europe’s Failed ‘Fight’ against Irregular Migration: Ethnographic Notes on a Counterproductive Industry,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 7 (2016): 1055–75; Noa Ha, *Straßenhandel in Berlin: Öffentlicher Raum, Informalität und Rassismus in der neoliberalen Stadt* (Bielefeld, 2016); »

» Loren Landau, “A Chronotope of Containment Development: Europe’s Migrant Crisis and Africa’s Reterritorialisation,” *Antipode* (2018): 1–18; Julia Schulze Wessel, *Grenzfiguren: Zur politischen*

*Theorie des Flüchtlings* (Bielefeld, 2017); Jason de León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Oakland, 2015). For a different perspective, strongly influenced by Foucault,

see Baris Ülker, *Enterprising Migrants in Berlin* (Bielefeld, 2016).

8 Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, 2006).

in unregulated labor, live (or squat) in irregular housing, and find food, medicine, and other everyday necessities through non-traditional channels.<sup>9</sup> Migration is work that mobilizes material resources (like money, for example) and virtual ones (such as knowledge of international law, connections to a smuggler, skills that qualify for special visa categories).<sup>10</sup> The work of migration is not, though, just about deploying existing resources. It is also about learning to navigate the material and virtual infrastructures of everyday life, including the formal and informal rules that govern social practice.<sup>11</sup> For migrants, the learning curve is always present. For vulnerable migrants, it can be very steep indeed. This was the case both in postwar Germany and post-Partition South Asia.

In post-catastrophic situations, though, it is not just migrants who must learn new ways to navigate everyday life, and in recent years urban studies researchers like Stephen Graham have shown, for example, what happens to cities and their residents when basic but often invisible infrastructures — sewage, water, energy — fail.<sup>12</sup> Cities without waste disposal, transportation, light, food, and water do not work in the ways that they are expected to work, leaving city residents to find new ways to accomplish their everyday tasks. This can relate to relatively low-stakes concerns, or it can be a matter of life and death. When, for example, the New York City subway system closed due to flooding in 2012, this represented a costly disruption to the infrastructure of everyday life that impacted residents in small and not so small ways. Disruptions to infrastructure in Port au Prince after the 2010 earthquake or Aleppo after its repeated bombing in 2016, however, were of a different order of magnitude, and the changes that residents in those cities were forced to make were vastly larger.

Infrastructures — both virtual and material — are key parts of the urban assemblage, and when they fail, it can be a serious challenge to accomplish tasks that should be relatively predictable — for example, finding food, shelter, security, or even navigating the city. When urban infrastructures break down, as they do in post-catastrophic societies, both the mechanics and the norms of everyday living change, and they can change quite dramatically. The key point for the present

9 For an older, yet still excellent, introduction to the field of urban informality, see Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad, eds., *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives*

*from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (Lanham, 2004). The field has grown dramatically in the last decade, but Roy in particular has continued

to publish some of the most incisive analyses on the topic.

10 Andersson, "Europe's Failed 'Fight' against Irregular Migration."

11 Material infrastructures are relatively obvious and might include recycling bins in Berlin or security checkpoints in Jerusalem. Virtual infrastructures are less obvious but no less important. Generally speaking, they refer to the epistemologies that structure everyday life. Examples of virtual infrastructures include kinship networks or the social knowledge that tells us where we are or are not welcome. On this broad — non-technological — understanding of the "virtual," see William H. Sewell, "A Theory of Structure," in *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*, chap. 4, 124–52 (Chicago, 2005), 131–34. On the sociological importance of these rules, see the seminal work by Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community* (Chicago, 1990); or, more recently, Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets* (New York, 2008).

12 Stephen Graham, ed., *Disrupted Cities: When Infrastructure Fails* (Abingdon, 2009).

purposes is that catastrophe can make people into strangers in their own homes and change the rules and routines of everyday life in both small and tremendous ways. The work of surviving troubled times is different for migrants and locals. It is also similar.<sup>13</sup> This was true in both postwar Germany and post-Partition India.

The cases cited above raise a number of challenging questions. In what ways was life in postwar Germany and post-Partition India “unprecedented”? If it was so radically new, how did migrants know how to achieve basic but extremely challenging goals like finding food, shelter, or security? Do we gain new understanding of the geographies of migration by including the host and transit countries that are, themselves, experiencing structural upheavals, as was the case in Germany in 1945 or India/Pakistan in 1947? And how does the migrant experience relate to the experiences of locals who are themselves navigating radically changed material and normative realities? After all, in post-catastrophic societies locals also often experience home as a foreign place, whether because the built environment has changed, basic infrastructures have been disrupted, social hierarchies have been upended, or because some combination of all of these elements is at work.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and capital is very helpful here.<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu argues that social organisms are powerfully structured by formal and informal rules, and that these rules are essential components of what individuals consciously and unconsciously know. Knowledge is, in Bourdieu’s sense, expansive: it includes not just those things learned in the classroom (the Pythagorean theorem, for example) or everyday life (what a yellow light means) but also the knowledge of how to comport ourselves, when it is appropriate (or safe) to argue, and so on.<sup>15</sup> For Bourdieu, knowledge is a core part of the individual habitus, and this kind of knowledge structures everyday interactions in ways that make society (relatively) predictable. Bourdieu also understands, though, that societies are hierarchical, and to help better explain these hierarchies, Bourdieu develops a theory of capital which, he argues, entails social, cultural, and economic dimensions.<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and of capital are fairly well known, but they become particularly interesting in the context of migration, because social, cultural, and even economic capital are often intimately connected to place. Status in a village, for example, does not necessarily translate into its equivalent in a city, just as a degree from a top university in one country does not

13 Indeed, more than 80 percent of displaced persons migrate to poor or developing countries that are themselves politically, socially, or economically unstable. Major receivers of DPs include South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, and Lebanon; see UNHCR, “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018” (Geneva, 2019).

14 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA, 1984).

15 *Ibid.*, 411.

16 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of the Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. E. Richardson, 241–58 (Westport, 1986), 242.

automatically register in a different one.<sup>17</sup> If knowledge and capital are so important for habitus, how do individuals function when the currencies of capital are no longer valued in the predictable ways they were in their place of origin *or in a home where the rules have become strange*? Bourdieu’s theory is useful not because it resolves the question, but rather because it addresses it: How do people — migrants or locals — survive when capital no longer functions as it should, and experience fails to offer a template for the future?

Historian William Sewell Jr. offers some clues. In his revision of Bourdieu’s theory, Sewell suggests that acts of learning, repurposing existing knowledge, and using resources in new ways are some of the ways that individuals and groups can navigate situations where the currencies of capital have changed.<sup>18</sup> Wealth or status in the place of origin or a multilingual upbringing; training as a carpenter, construction worker, or experience as a political activist may not mean the same thing under radically changed circumstances — in a new place or a new political-economic configuration, for example. They are, nevertheless, tools that can be useful in different ways in new environments. In this view, Bourdieu’s “capital” is best understood as a set of “schemas” and “resources” that can be repurposed to address new circumstances — a function that Sewell describes as “transposability.”<sup>19</sup> Sewell is particularly concerned with understanding how *change* occurs in history despite deep and durable structures.<sup>20</sup> But his analysis can *also* be used to understand how historical actors navigate new and unfamiliar environments. And this is particularly useful for both migration histories and the histories of post-catastrophic societies. This process of refiguring resources is, in many cases, precisely what happened in postwar Germany and post-Partition India, with some forms of capital finding new value, and others losing currency.

This article argues that adaptation and learning are critical elements of the work that goes into surviving situations where material and normative orders have been radically disrupted. While it does not resolve all of the issues it raises, by comparing the cases of German and Indian cities around the mid-century, it does help us to disentangle some of the variables that constitute historical and contemporary migration regimes, and to hone in on some features that are common to diverse kinds of (forced) migration experiences. In the ways that state actors distinguish between deserving guests and undeserving aliens, that rural and poor migrants are treated differently than

17 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 124.

18 Sewell, “A Theory of Structure,” 131–33.

19 *Ibid.*, 141.

20 *Ibid.*, 125.

urban and middle-class migrants, and that identity markers like ethnicity, religion, and language function in unpredictable ways, the cases explored in this piece suggest that we should focus not just on the differences between migrant and local populations but also on their shared vulnerabilities.<sup>21</sup> This research brings together insights from migration, forced migration, and urban studies to show how resources and knowledge were adapted to navigate vulnerability in postwar Germany and post-Partition India.

In the first part of this article, I explore formal and informal survival strategies in postwar Berlin, emphasizing the ways that extreme scarcity *forced* acts of learning, *transformed* social norms, and *normalized* practices that just a decade earlier would have been exceptional. In some cases, these changes were enduring, while in others they lasted for just a few months or years. This article draws attention to learning and adaptation by revisiting postwar German cases that are familiar to many of the readers of the present volume, in particular, the different kinds of transactional solidarities that surround housing, trading, and sex. The second part moves from the familiar to the less well known by looking at a number of different cities in India — Amritsar, Delhi, Calcutta, and Bombay — to illuminate the ways that historical experience created adaptable templates for surviving radically disruptive times. Here, the article focuses on the issues of (illegal) land occupation and political mobilization, in particular, in Calcutta and its outlying areas. While the article does not strongly distinguish between “adaptation” and “learning,” it could loosely be said that the first part is more concerned with how people learn new behaviors in the context of extreme scarcity while the second explores how they adapt collective action and national narratives for individual ends. The article concludes by suggesting some reasons why studying learning and adaptation helps us better understand post-catastrophic societies in an historical perspective, as well as the role formal and informal survival strategies play within contemporary regimes of mass displacement.

### **Migration, Informality, and Exchange: The Work of Surviving in Postwar Berlin**

Berlin in 1945 was a city in ruins. More than 500,000 of a total 1.5 million housing units had been destroyed during the war. Allied and German administrators estimated that the city contained 75 million cubic meters of rubble — nearly 20 percent of the estimated total of 400 million cubic meters of rubble in all of Germany.<sup>22</sup> Migrant flows

21 Loren Landau, “Urban Refugees and IDPs,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasbiyeh et al., 140–53 (Oxford, 2014); Stephan Scheel and Vicki Squire, “Forced Migrants as ‘Illegal’ Migrants,” in *Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, 188–99.

22 Dept. of Building and Housing, “Rubble Survey,” Berlin, 1949, LaB, F-Rep 280 No. 2208.



made already chaotic urban environments even more challenging to navigate and administer. Hundreds of thousands of evacuees — primarily women and children — returned in search of their former homes. Thousands of Jewish survivors made their way to Berlin, many of them seeking a way to Palestine or the United States. Political prisoners and enemies of the Nazi regime arrived by the tens of thousands. Probably the largest number of those moving to or through Berlin were ethnic German expellees from across Eastern Europe. Falling outside of the UNRRA/IRO mandate established in Article 12 of the Potsdam Agreement,<sup>23</sup> this population was, for the most part, not included in Allied rationing schemes.<sup>24</sup> More than seven million people moved to or through Berlin between Summer 1945 and Winter 1946. Across Germany, similar scenes were playing out, with cities and towns in the south and east experiencing the population flows with particular intensity. Shelter was a critical issue.

Food supply and distribution were also extremely compromised. For years, Germany had stolen resources from occupied territories, feeding citizens and soldiers by starving France, Poland, and Belgium, among others. As the Nazi “empire” collapsed inwards, food transfers from occupied territories stopped, causing immediate food shortages and more extreme rationing. By Summer 1945, wheat, potato, and rye production was roughly 60 percent of prewar levels. More than 80 percent of calories came from bread and potatoes, with an average allotment of just 200 grams of protein per week.<sup>25</sup> Even when food was available — through local production, imports, or food aid — the roads, bridges, and railways essential for transport were badly damaged, making distribution extremely difficult. In the summer the Allies issued millions of ration cards across Germany — 1.5 million in Berlin alone.<sup>26</sup> This remains one of the largest food assistance programs in the twentieth century. Despite these extraordinary efforts, rations fell far below internationally established subsistence baselines, and as shortages intensified, rations were repeatedly reduced. A baseline ration initially set at an average 1,550 calories per person per day sank continually during the first months of occupation, dropping to just 1,000 calories across all zones by the autumn of 1945.<sup>27</sup>

Rations provided a baseline for survival, but a five-tier system ensured that this baseline was extremely uneven. Those at the top of the system in Tier I included men engaged in heavy labor, as well

23 Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 31.

24 It goes without saying that this piece is not intended to create a morally repugnant and analytically unproductive equivalence between Nazi extermination camps and the work of postwar survival, or to privilege the experiences of German national or ethnic German expellees relative to Jews, Sinti, Roma, or other victims of Nazis. The present piece is not an *armes Deutschland* apologia but an attempt to understand some of the strategies that individuals used — regardless of their identity — to survive in extremely challenging times. There are, at the time of this writing, more than 70 million displaced persons around the globe today who are trying to do just that — survive. Historians have much to contribute to our understanding of survival in troubled times, and this piece is motivated by that political and ethical imperative.

25 District Office Tempelhof, “Report on Rebuilding Efforts in the Tempelhof District,” 1945, LaB, F-Rep 280 No. 2754.

26 Allied Kommandatura, “Food Requirements for 15 August–14 September 1945,” LaB, F-Rep 280 No. 3673.

27 Alexander Häusser and Gordian Maugg, *Hungerwinter: Deutschlands Humanitäre Katastrophe 1946/47* (Berlin, 2009), 50.

28 Ibid., 47.

29 Sven Reichardt and Malte Zierenberg, *Damals nach dem Krieg: Eine Geschichte Deutschlands 1945 bis 1949* (Munich, 2008), 70–71.

30 This is, of course, not the place to explore the intricacies of rationing across the four occupation zones. For more on this, see, for example, Rainer Gries, *Die Rationen-Gesellschaft: Versorgungskampf und Vergleichsmentalität: Leipzig, München und Köln nach dem Kriege* (Münster, 1991).

31 Häusser and Maugg, *Hungerwinter*, 41–47.

32 Joanna Simonow, “Understanding Humanitarian Action in South Asia: Responses to Famine and Displacement in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India” (HPG Working Paper, published by the Overseas Development Institute, London, May 2015, 4), available online at <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9634.pdf>

33 Anna Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception: American Occupation Policy in Postwar Germany and the Formation of Jewish Refugee Space,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 452–73, 456.

34 Ibid.

35 Malte Zierenberg, *Stadt Der Schieber: Der Berliner Schwarzmarkt, 1939–1950* (Göttingen, 2008); Leonie Treber, *Mythos Trümmerfrauen: Von der Trümmerbeseitigung in der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit und der Entstehung eines Deutschen Erinnerungsortes* (Essen, 2015); Jürgen Schmidt, *Rote Rüben auf dem Oliwaer Platz: Quellen zur Ernährungskrise in der Nachkriegszeit Berlins, 1945–1949* (Berlin, 2008).

as a broad range of political, cultural, and academic elites. At the bottom end of scale, the Tier V card was assigned to “other groups,” which included those working in non-essential professions, the unemployed, retirees, the disabled, and members of the Nazi Party.<sup>28</sup> The Tier V ration card entitled recipients to half the bread ration, one-fifth the meat allotment, and slightly more than one-fourth of the butter and lard entitlement allocated to those in Tier I.<sup>29</sup> Women — particularly those who were unable to work because of age, disability, or care-giving responsibilities — made up the majority of Tier V ration-card holders.<sup>30</sup> This ration card was widely referred to as a “ticket to heaven” (*Himmelfahrtskarte*) because on its own, it amounted to a death sentence: It was impossible to survive on the *Himmelfahrtskarte*, which provided just 500 to 800 calories per day.<sup>31</sup> In times of economic hardship or material scarcity, migrants tend to be the population least likely to receive state subsidies — residency and even citizenship requirements are just two of the most obvious mechanisms for reducing migrant access to food aid.<sup>32</sup> In the postwar case, though, the situation was rather different. At least for registered DPs and political persecutees, rationing was supplemented by the UN.<sup>33</sup>

The Tier V card was widely despised, but it was nevertheless evidence of a privileged status. For all its inadequacy, Tier V cardholders could count on a caloric baseline, unlike more than ten million postwar arrivals across Germany who did not qualify for ration cards on the grounds that their displacement was not caused by the National Socialists.<sup>34</sup> For the present purposes, this formal rationing system is important because of the ways that it was entangled with a range of informal survival strategies. There is excellent research on the things that people did to survive, and in the best cases, this research also excavates the mechanics of survival — how, for example, bribery functioned in black markets, rubble clearance was remunerated, or plots were distributed to urban gardeners.<sup>35</sup> The goal here is not to reproduce this literature by explaining what the survival strategies were or even how they functioned. I want to focus, instead, on the processes that are logically prior to action. How did migrants (and locals) adapt to their new environments, and what kinds of things did they have to learn to do so? While it is far beyond the scope of the present study to offer a comprehensive treatment of these strategies — indeed, each one could fill monographs — the following analysis tries to show how individuals and groups *learned* to survive in exceptional and extremely trying circumstances, taking up housing, black



markets, and transactional sex. This work of surviving was different for migrants and locals, but it was also similar.

Housing was, naturally, one of the most pressing issues for many Germans, and between 1945 and 1955, living with three walls or a collapsed ceiling was unremarkable. With Berlin adding a net 100,000 people per week, resource-strapped administrators were understandably overwhelmed.<sup>36</sup> Temporary housing arrangements such as the Nissen huts, tents, and other makeshift shelters were common throughout the city,<sup>37</sup> tens of thousands were housed in emergency intake centers like Marienfelde, and nearly 1,000 military barracks, as well as labor and prison camps, provided life-saving shelters for roughly 400,000 people in the immediate postwar period.<sup>38</sup> “Billeting” housing-seekers in underutilized apartments was another important solution. Between May and December 1945, nearly 390,000 people were billeted in apartments across Berlin. In many cases, this kind of cohabitation went on for years.<sup>39</sup>

Even under the best circumstances — when, for example, tenants took in members of their extended family or friendship network — cohabitation could be challenging. In the context of extreme overcrowding and material scarcity, though, billeting heightened the potential for conflicts in a variety of ways. Bathrooms and kitchens became particularly contested sites, as expellees, evacuees, refugees, DPs, and others who had lost all their possessions attempted to carve out space for themselves. In overcrowded homes shared with strangers, these were the rooms where the loss of privacy was felt with particular intensity.<sup>40</sup> Billeting and other emergency housing situations had the potential to unsettle social relations by creating unfamiliar constellations of persons within the household — different class, religious, linguistic, and generational units were forced together.<sup>41</sup> Under these circumstances, the challenges of basic communication, as well as understanding different norms and customs, could lead to misunderstanding and conflict.<sup>42</sup> Learning to live together and adapting to fluid normative orders was, in many ways, critical for survival — for finding and keeping a home — and in many cases, cohabitants failed to adapt to this new ordering. In

38 Dept. of Building and Housing, “Directives on the Use of Residential and Commercial Space,” Berlin, 1945, LaB, F-Rep 280 No. 2201; Stephen Lanz, *Berlin Aufgemischt: Abendländisch, multikulturell, kosmopolitisch? Die politische Konstruktion einer Einwanderungsstadt* (Bielefeld, 2007); Dept. of Building and Housing, “Massive Barracks in Borsigswalde,” Berlin, 1951, LaB, B-Rep 09 Nos. 126, 51, 56.

39 Berger and Müller, *Lebenssituationen 1945–1948*; Häuser and Maugg, *Hungerwinter*; Dept. of Building and Housing, “Directives on the Use of Residential and Commercial Space.”

40 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 2010).

41 Klaus J. Bade, *Homo Migrants: Wanderungen aus und nach Deutschland* (Essen, 1994), 45.

42 Jan-Hinnerk Antons, “Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany: Parallel Societies in a Hostile Environment,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 1 (2014): 92–114; Michael Prosser-Schell, “Ankunft und Einsiedlung von Flüchtlingen und Vertriebenen in Nordbaden 1945–1949,” in *Mobilität: Europa in Bewegung als Herausforderung kulturanalytischer Forschung*, ed. Richard Johler, 491–99 (Münster, 2011).

36 Thomas Berger and Karl-Heinz Müller, *Lebenssituationen 1945–1948: Materialien zum Alltagsleben in den westlichen*

*Besatzungszonen 1945–1948* (Hanover, 1983).

37 Uwe Carstens, “Zur Geschichte der Notunter-

künfte nach dem 2. Weltkrieg am Beispiel eines Nissenhüttenlagers,” *Jahrbuch für ostdeutsche Volkskunde* 35 (1992): 375–95.

thousands of cases, conflicts became so severe that legal, administrative, or police action was required.<sup>43</sup>

If there was often suspicion within the home space, there were also powerful incentives to maintain relationships. In the case of DPs, for example, migrant individuals and families that had relatively generous access to food and other basic provisions but lacked space and daily essentials sometimes found shelter with individuals and families who had homes but were faced with persistent hunger. Whatever tensions existed within the home, natives and foreigners transacted with one another based on complementary vulnerabilities and not just shared identity markers. Interestingly, the only group with nothing to offer — no food, household goods, or space — were the expellees who had, at least initially, thought of themselves as Germans.<sup>44</sup> Literature on migration tends to focus on the important role of kinship and other networks in stabilizing precarious diasporic communities, but in the context of extreme scarcity, the claim to a shared identity consistently proved to be less important than the material advantages offered by transactional relationships with “others.” As historians Sven Reichardt and Malte Zierenberg have shown, scarcity transformed identity in fundamental ways.<sup>45</sup> The Berlin case suggests that collaboration between antagonists — and antagonism within identity communities — was a vital part of postwar survival strategies in the context of extreme scarcity. And shelter was a commodity that could be traded against other goods and services, within the household, or in the marketplace.

Black-market trading was by far the most visible survival strategy used to circumvent shortages or supplement ration cards.<sup>46</sup> Men and women sold porcelain and jewelry, Persian rugs, paintings, cameras, money clips, utensils, bedding, and whatever else they owned. Black markets often saw luxury goods for sale, but in the context of postwar scarcity, other commodities commanded the highest prices. Bread, butter, meat, sugar, and shoes were always in demand. Cigarettes became a kind of universal currency, easily transported and exchanged.<sup>47</sup> Allied soldiers were rich in this currency, and often traded to great advantage. In October 1946, for example, Soviet soldiers received a shipment of 180,000,000 cigarettes — more than enough to smoke and to trade.<sup>48</sup> At the time, a packet of 20 cigarettes was trading for 70–100 Reichsmarks on the black market — enough to buy one kilogram of meat.<sup>49</sup>

43 “Entrümmung von städtischen Grundstücken,” 1946, LaB, B-Rep 09 No. 4; Dept. of Building and Housing, “Directives on the Use of Residential and Commercial Space.”

44 Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der Deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (Munich, 2009), 47–53.

45 Reichardt and Zierenberg, *Damals nach dem Krieg*, 77, 86.

46 Zierenberg, *Stadt der Schieber*.

47 Jörg Echternkamp, *Nach dem Krieg: Alltagsnot, Neuorientierung und die Last der Vergangenheit 1945–1949* (Zurich, 2003).

48 Allied Kommandatura, “Supplying Berlin, 27 October 1946,” LaB, F-Rep 280, No. 3435.

49 Rolf Steininger, *Deutsche Geschichte <I>: 1945–1947* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002).

It may seem self-evident that individuals who desperately need food might sell goods on the black market, but being a buyer or a seller in the marketplace is also learned behavior, and it is certainly very different from shopping or selling in a conventional retail space.<sup>50</sup> The value of goods, the danger of unscrupulous partners or the military police, the location of particular markets — all of these are things that must be learned. For those who were unfamiliar with urban environments, who did not know the language, who were isolated from social and family networks, or who felt unable to adapt to these particular market conditions, failure to learn the transactional rules could lead to ruin.<sup>51</sup> And capital — particularly social and cultural capital — were no guarantee of success in the irregular marketplace. Educated elites accustomed to deference, for example, could not rely on status to make effective trades, while a soldier or DP was able to set the terms regardless of class, status, or German-language skills. When it came to elites and subalterns who were equally challenged by scarcity, subalterns might indeed be better prepared than those from privileged backgrounds to trade labor or other services, or recognize opportunities in the informal marketplace. Those persons trading luxury goods may have been privileged in the years before 1945, but at least in the immediate aftermath of the war, capital that could not be traded was not necessarily an advantage. The point is not that the rich became poor and the poor prospered — indeed, those who were privileged before the war often remained privileged afterwards. The point is rather that extreme scarcity created possibilities for status mobility by changing the value of goods and services.<sup>52</sup>

Scarcity was obviously the backdrop to the vibrant black-market scene in cities across Germany and Europe, but migration also played an important role. Some recent arrivals — DPs and foreign soldiers, for example — commanded the dominant position in black-market exchanges because of their access to food, cigarettes, and other staples. As Reichardt and Zierenberg argue, black markets were often points of first contact between Germans and former (*Volks*)*feinde*, including Jewish and other survivors, and Allied military and civilian personnel.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Anna Holian has shown that, in Munich, black markets created a new kind of urban cartography. Möhlstraße, for example, was largely occupied by German and Eastern European Jews who traded relatively generous DP rations with the tacit acceptance of the American authorities. In the case described by Holian, Jewish survivors built a small commercial center by mobilizing

50 Zierenberg, *Stadt der Schieber*, 23–24.

51 Zeitgeschichtliche Sammlung, LaB, F Rep. Acc 2651 Nos. 1–6.

52 As Mike Davis and others have shown in writing on a wide geographical range of areas across various time periods, vulnerable populations are particularly disadvantaged by extreme disruptions, from war to natural disasters: Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York, 1999). On disaster anthropology, see Pinaki D. Mullick, “Disaster and Anthropology: An Overview on the Shifts of Theorizing Disaster in Interdisciplinary Spectrum,” *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences* 4, no. 4 (2014): 385–95. If climate change has anything to teach historians, though, it is that the privileged, too, are at risk from multiscalar disruptions, and that wealth does not necessarily translate into security or stability.

53 Reichardt and Zierenberg, *Damals nach dem Krieg*, 68.

social and kinship networks, as well as relationships with Allied personnel and locals.<sup>54</sup>

Other migrants, in particular the expellees who fell outside of the UN mandate, were in an extremely precarious position. In this context, the differential access to resources available to DPs, refugees, expellees, and other migrants was one element of a more general unevenness in the Allied rationing regime. All of this meant that some “foreigners” who were poor in social or cultural capital (for example, social networks, accepted credentials, “native” language proficiency) were resource-rich, while many “locals” were resource poor but commanded other kinds of capital. These relationships between Germans, DPs, ethnic German expellees, and others were, in many cases, marked by open antipathy, but they nevertheless fulfilled an important function for all parties.<sup>55</sup> Those who had little or nothing to trade, though, had to find other strategies, whether they were migrants or locals. Stealing, hustling, scavenging for food and fuel, selling labor, foraging in the countryside, or cultivating a small garden plot were all ways — both novel and not — that migrants and locals survived in postwar Berlin. These shared vulnerabilities and fluid material and normative hierarchies created spaces of exchange that also forced people into new kinds of social roles and relationships.

In the immediate postwar period, women and girls bore the burden of finding food and other staples, and as in so many other post-conflict situations, transactional sex was one way of supplementing rations.<sup>56</sup> Prostitution was one kind of transactional encounter that is well represented in the most famous cinematic representations of postwar Germany.<sup>57</sup> German women and girls also, in some cases, developed romantic relationships with Allied soldiers and other personnel that were transactional in other ways. Extreme scarcity was a backdrop for all of these relationships, and in many cases, the individual characteristics of the partner mattered less than whether the relationship could improve one’s chances for a better life. For example, Edeline Müller, who lived in Charlottenburg, recalls that, in the beginning of May (i.e., before the British and Americans arrived in Berlin), her neighbor “was happy to go with the Russians because she could get a meal...”<sup>58</sup> Whether or not sex was paid for, transactional relationships between women and men were characterized by extreme power differentials between, for example, occupying soldiers who were well-fed and flush

54 Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception.”

55 Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, 2009); Tilman Harlander and Gerd Kuhn, eds., *Soziale Mischung in der Stadt: Case Studies — Wohnungspolitik in Europa — Historische Analyse* (Stuttgart, 2012), 79; Prosser-Schell, “Ankunft und Einsiedlung,” 492–93.

56 Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*; Jennifer V. Evans, *Life among the Ruins: Cityscape and Sexuality in Cold War Berlin* (Basingstoke, 2011); Constance Formson and Dorothea Hilhorst, “The Many Faces of Transactional Sex: Women’s Agency, Livelihoods and Risk Factors in Humanitarian Contexts: A Literature Review” (Working Paper 41, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, published by the Overseas Development Institute, London, 2016, available online at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0896440f0b64974000060/WP41-transactionalsex.pdf>).

57 *The Sinner* (dir. Willi Forst, Germany, 1951) is one dazzling example of a film depicting the theme of transactional sex. This is also a key element of *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Germany, 1979).

58 Edeline Müller, LaB, F Rep. 240 Acc 2651 No. 1. This is a rather surprising statement, given the mass sexual violence that occurred in Berlin in late April and into May, perpetrated, in large part, by Soviet soldiers.

with cash and cigarettes, on the one hand, and the women who struggled to feed loved ones and themselves, on the other. A range of evidence suggests that there were also intimate relationships between German women and recent victims of the Nazi regime, including displaced persons (many of them former forced laborers), who typically received rations double those of Tier V ration-card holders.<sup>59</sup> While these relationships generated anger, particularly among returning soldiers, many contemporaries seemed to understand that, in the face of starvation, the category of one's ration card was more important than one's nationality, religion, politics, or class.<sup>60</sup>

Transactional sex, while a painful topic, helps to illuminate the ways that knowing and learning can occur in situations that are extremely unstable. First of all, it is worth pointing out that transactional sex is, in itself, nothing new. While the range of relationships that can be described in this way can be contested — many argue that marriage is extremely transactional while others vehemently disagree — it is clear that men and women in postwar European cities understood that sex *could* be traded for money, food, or other supplies. It is also worth noting, however, that knowing that sex can function as a commodity does not necessarily mean that an individual *knows how* to transact sex. In some cases, this could involve a straightforward proposition, with one person asking for or demanding sex in exchange for money, food, cigarettes, or security. The exchange partners could be male or female, German or foreign, civilian or military, and each kind of transaction carried risks, from violence, disease, or incarceration to non-payment, reputational harm, or even frustrated and embarrassing communication.<sup>61</sup>

Lea Bonenkamp Kaminski, who was 41 when the war ended, remembers that American soldiers, who were not allowed to fraternize with German women, would often throw partially smoked cigarette butts into the street. Bonenkamp Kaminski thought the soldiers were trying, informally, to communicate with the women — to “get us to come over to them,” presumably with romantic intentions, and she may have read the interaction correctly.<sup>62</sup> It is equally possible, though, that American soldiers simply did not experience cigarettes as a luxury good to be savored, or knew that hungry people could use largely unsmoked cigarettes as objects of exchange.

Bonenkamp Kaminski was not interested in fraternizing with the soldiers, but even if she had been, interpreting cigarettes thrown in

59 Alex D'Erizans, “Securing the Garden and Longings for Heimat in Post-War Hanover, 1945–1948,” *Historical Journal* 58, no. 1 (2015): 183–215, 196; Antons, “Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany,” 99–101.

60 Reichardt and Zierenberg, *Damals nach dem Krieg*, 86.

61 Erving Goffman, “The Arrangement Between the Sexes,” *Theory and Society* 4, no. 3 (1977): 301–31. Reputational harm or embarrassment may seem like relatively trivial things, but Goffmann argues that these social-emotional responses are fundamental elements of the social fabric as such.

62 Edeline Müller, F Rep. 240 Acc 2651 No. 1.

the street as an invitation would not have been a very reliable way of engaging in this activity. In other words, knowing that one could engage in transactional relationships is different than knowing where to go, find partners, make transactions, or protect oneself. For most of those living in postwar German cities, transactional sex could only become a survival strategy through information-sharing between women, the actions of an extractive intermediary, or implicit or explicit signals from soldiers or other potential partners.<sup>63</sup> This last point is not incidental. In part because victorious soldiers stood outside of a traditional social order in an anthropological sense, they had extreme latitude in their ability to approach women who would otherwise have been considered taboo. The large numbers of young men from faraway homes where they spoke other languages had a great deal to do with the effectiveness of transactional sex as a survival strategy. Troubling though it is, occupying soldiers and other “outsiders” provided cues both on the transactional *value* of sex but also on how and where to effectively find partners.<sup>64</sup> Whether it was transactional sex, black-market trading, exchanging space for food and other essentials, repairing damaged housing, using legal instruments to gain access to housing, or “hamstering,” theft, and urban gardening, surviving in the context of extreme scarcity required adaptation and learning that put existing knowledge and resources to work in novel ways.

The preceding section aimed to highlight some of the ways that people — migrants and locals — deployed informal strategies on the basis of shared vulnerabilities that were not necessarily tied to mobility, identity, or status categories. Postwar scarcity forced migrants *and* locals out of their habitual social positions, making them strangers, whether in their own homes or in a foreign land. The cases of post-Partition Indian cities, for all their differences from the Berlin case, share striking similarities as well. In the ways that individuals and groups negotiated extreme scarcity; in the way that social, cultural, and economic capital changed in value, and in the way gaps in formal support systems forced learning and adaptation, the Indian cases are not so very different from the German ones. In what follows, though, the focus is on the ways that shared historical experiences were adapted to provide templates for individual and group survival in troubled times. Because the Partition case is less well known to the present audience than the postwar German case, I begin by detailing some of the experiences of migration and survival in the post-Partition moment.

63 Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York, 1989).

64 Most of those who engaged in transactional sex in the postwar period never had before and never did again, and this meant both learning and forgetting. This is useful for understanding the historical cases but also for thinking about ensuring the safety and emotional health of the millions of women and girls who live in conflict and post-conflict zones in the present; see Evans, *Life among the Ruins*.



### Learning, Resources, History: Organized Protest and Land Occupation in Post-Partition India

The Partition of British India on August 15, 1947, set off one of the largest population transfers in modern history. In a few short months, millions of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus crossed newly forged borders in the East and West, with particularly intense flows in the Punjab region in the Northwest. Slower, smaller-scaled, and less violent population transfers began between West Bengal and East Pakistan in 1947, but this was just the first wave in a serial migration lasting roughly twenty-five years — one that achieved scales similar to the massive population transfers in the West. Official and unofficial reports agree on the exceptional nature of the migrations.<sup>65</sup> The *New York Times* and *Times of India* reported on multiple foot convoys ranging between ten and forty thousand people. The largest convoy stretched for sixty miles with as many as 100,000 people on the move.<sup>66</sup> Those traveling east towards Amritsar, or west towards Lahore — on foot, on bicycle, oxcart or train — contended with temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius in August and torrential rains in September. Attacks by armed bands were widespread. Knives, clubs, spears, and axes were the most common instruments of violence, but guns and even mortars were used.<sup>67</sup> Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were all participants in the massacres, with many citing earlier violence — in Rawalpindi, Calcutta, Delhi, Noakhali — as the reasons for their own actions. Forced conversion of Hindus and the abduction of women and girls were common during the high points of communal violence.<sup>68</sup> Refugee trains were attacked between origin points in India or Pakistan and their destinations. Trains would arrive in Amritsar or Lahore filled with dead and mutilated bodies. These attacks on refugee trains, in particular, evidenced a high level of sophistication, and it was widely agreed that former soldiers played a role in organizing them.<sup>69</sup> The journey was particularly difficult for the old, the young, and the infirm. Director General of Rural Rehabilitation in East Punjab M.S. Randhawa reports that in some cases, these most vulnerable travelers were abandoned on the roads connecting Lyallpur (now Faisalbad), Montgomery, and Rawalpindi in Pakistan, and Ludhiana, Ferozepur (Firozpur), and Amritsar in India.<sup>70</sup>

The living conditions of both those awaiting evacuation and newly arrived refugees were “appalling.” At the Purana Qila (Old Fort) in Delhi, fifty thousand Muslims were “huddled together for protection” as they waited for evacuation to Pakistan. Some reported waiting

65 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *After Partition*, 52–53; Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, 25–27.

66 *Times of India*, September 4, 1947.

67 *Times (London)*, August 24, 1947; I.G. Police East Punjab, “West Punjab as Reported: SitReps, 15–31 August 1947,” in *Select Documents on Partition of Punjab — 1947: Indian and Pakistan: Punjab, Haryana and Himachal — India and Punjab — Pakistan*, ed. Kirpal Singh, 515–18 (Delhi, 2006).

68 Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, 2000).

69 Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, 2017), 156.

70 Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, 28–29.

three days for their first rations. The *New York Times* correspondent in Delhi reported that camps for Muslims awaiting evacuation grew dramatically after city-wide rioting began on September 7 and had become “jammed to capacity.”<sup>71</sup> Delhi High-Commissioner Terence Shone wrote to a colleague that “one hundred kinds of improvised shelters had been made by the refugees. There were a few tents and lots of shacks with tin plate roofing.”<sup>72</sup> This was not a case of punitive treatment of evacuating religious minorities. Conditions for Hindu and Sikh refugees in East Punjab and around Delhi were equally bad. The *Times* (London) correspondent waxed lyrical in describing Kurukshetra, the largest camp in India, located some 90 kilometers East of Delhi.

There are 300,000 survivors of the most recent fratricidal war in this camp designed for 200,000. The first arrived by train with no possessions other than the stained rags in which they were dressed. None had received food from official sources in five days. They rode on the rooftops of trains, underneath the carriages, and even on the engines.<sup>73</sup>

In December 1947, there were roughly 1.2 million refugees spread across 160 camps throughout India.<sup>74</sup> Many more were housed in temporary or emergency shelters. As is true in the German case, millions of displaced persons spent years in temporary housing. Some of this housing was “pucca,” that is, it met building, zoning, and other regulatory codes. Much of it was alarmingly inadequate.

Ruined cities, evacuee trains filled with dead and mutilated bodies, refugee camps filled with starving inmates — these were some of the striking images associated with Partition. In official accounts, Partition is typically narrated as an “atavistic” but short-lived “orgy” of violence followed by a relatively rapid return to “normalcy.” And with mortality estimates ranging as high as two million, extraordinary violence and precipitous evacuations were indeed a central part of the Partition experience, reverberating through family histories and national narratives.<sup>75</sup> Images of explosive violence and rapid resettlement are only part of the story, though, and recent historiography brings together rich archival and oral materials to recover the plurality of refugee experiences. Millions of Muslim and non-Muslim refugees fled from ancestral homes, villages, and towns, leaving everything behind, but the majority managed to take along possessions that were valuable for monetary, sentimental, or subsistence

71 *New York Times*, September 19, 1947.

72 The National Archives (TNA): DO 142/417; Lionel Carter, ed., *Partition Observed: British Official Reports from South Asia — 14 August to 31 December 1947* (New Delhi, 2011).

73 *Times* (London), December 6, 1947.

74 Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, 30–31.

75 Ibid.; Udit Sen, “The Myths Refugees Live By: Memory and History in the Making of Bengali Refugee Identity,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 37–76; D. A. Low and Howard Brasted, eds., *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence* (New Delhi, 1998).

purposes. Low and high caste, rich and poor, men and women, literate and illiterate, tenant farmers and Zamindar,<sup>76</sup> married and widowed women, young and old, Bengali and Punjabi — these are just some of the factors that shaped the shared Partition experience of dislocation.<sup>77</sup>

In trying to understand Partition-era displacement and resettlement, some historians stress continuities between colonial India and the time “since 1947.” Ravinder Kaur, for example, argues that social and cultural capital were critical factors in shaping the refugee experience and that, when combined with economic capital, could create transitions to new livelihoods that are hard to reconcile with the widely accepted picture of the Partition-era refugee.<sup>78</sup> In this view, one’s virtual and material resources before Partition were key factors in determining one’s life-course afterward. This is, to some extent, true. We know, for example, that refugees arriving at Kingsway in Delhi, Kurukshetra ninety kilometers away, or indeed dozens of other camps across India were sorted based on their ability to pay for their own rations. Those who could pay were housed in “privileged” sections of camps that typically provided basic infrastructure, while everyone else occupied the “ordinary” section.<sup>79</sup> In the aftermath of Partition, where formal shelter was only available for 15 percent of all camp inmates, the ability to buy privilege was no small matter but could mean the difference between life or death. In September, for example, more than one thousand people were killed when the River Beas swelled over its banks and swept away a refugee camp in East Punjab,<sup>80</sup> and by December, more than 500,000 were in danger of pneumonia and related illnesses.<sup>81</sup> The ability to buy space in a privileged section of a refugee camp, to use networks to find private accommodations with family or colleagues, or to rent or buy a new home was obviously an extraordinary advantage to those able to afford it.<sup>82</sup> In these cases, having wealth and privilege in one’s place of origin translated into relative security in one’s place of arrival.

Capital is a very helpful interpretive frame for understanding sociological continuities across the Partition-era rupture, but it is possible to overemphasize the socially reproductive logics of this heuristic in ways that make it difficult to explain historical change. After all, while Partition may not have been “unprecedented” in the ways that contemporaries regularly suggested — mass migrations, communal violence, extreme overcrowding and housing shortages, exploitation and sexual violence, drought and famine were familiar

76 “Zamindar” is the term used to refer to a class of large-scale landowners, often conferred with aristocratic privileges in both the Mughal and British colonial empires. The Zamindari system was abolished after Partition, though the stores of social, cultural, and economic capital frequently remained for generations afterwards.

77 Haimanti Roy, *Partitioned Lives: Migrants, Refugees, Citizens in India and Pakistan, 1947–65* (New Delhi, 2012).

78 Kaur, *Since 1947*, 13.

79 *Ibid.*, 10, 19.

80 *New York Times*, September 30, 1947.

81 *New York Times*, December 21, 1947.

82 Ian Talbot notes that these differences had long-lasting effects. In 1957, for example, the Haripura Refugee Colony for Dalits in Haryana was swept away by monsoon flooding, leading to prolonged protests against the Central Government; Ian Talbot, “Punjabi Refugees’ Rehabilitation and the Indian State: Discourses, Denials, and Dissonances,” in *From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970*, ed. Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould, and Sarah F. D. Ansari, 119–42 (Cambridge, 2014).

if not typical experiences<sup>83</sup> — Partition was a profound rupture in the everyday lives of tens of millions who were both directly and indirectly impacted.<sup>84</sup> Millions of Partition-era refugees did indeed mobilize their social, economic, and cultural capital in order to survive. But how did they navigate situations where their claims to status went unrecognized, where wealth had become penury, where education was no asset, or where assets that conferred privilege were no longer available? The currencies of capital only function when they are recognized by exchange partners, and for many families across colonial India, this “capital” was profoundly *local*, tied to land that could not be moved, hierarchies that were embedded in community life, and symbolic structures that were tied to place.<sup>85</sup> In many cases, Partition changed individual life circumstances enough that claims to status and privilege could no longer be asserted.<sup>86</sup> Put simply, Partition changed not just borders but the currencies of capital.

Contemporary observers widely remarked upon these transformations of capital, noting that upper-caste Hindus and prosperous Sikhs appeared bewildered by their new circumstances, while sweepers and laborers were adapting much more successfully. Lady Edwina Mountbatten, who took an active role in refugee relief and rehabilitation work after Partition, is reported to have commented that the “mostly working class refugees at Humayun’s tomb” in Delhi appeared “readier to help themselves” than upper-class and upper-caste refugees, who seemed to have lost their moorings.<sup>87</sup> The British claimed to be puzzled by this reaction to adversity, but Indians were much more sensitive to the ways that Partition had radically transformed individuals’ place in society. Describing the loss of immovable property that was a central part of leaving home for many of the more prosperous refugees, M. S. Randhawa remarked how Partition left many “disoriented” and “unmoored.” Many families rich in immovable property became (relatively) poor. The status that conferred privilege and identity in an agricultural setting might be meaningless in urban environments that value certification, training, or the ability to perform labor. For many of these families, Partition represented a fundamental rupture — a loss of capital across multiple axes.<sup>88</sup>

However sympathetic Indian observers may have been to the plight of the refugees, many also expected new arrivals to recognize that their historical entitlements, status, and privileges were not enough to rebuild their lives. Anthropologist B. S. Guha wrote in 1954, for example, that

83 Kaur, *Since 1947*, 88.

84 Khan, *The Great Partition*.

85 Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, 100.

86 Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*.

87 TNA: DO 142/146. Terrence Shone, Delhi Sept 21, 1947; Carter, *Partition Observed*, 276.

88 Randhawa, *Out of the Ashes*, 76–91.

... the refugees will have to realise that they themselves are the primary actors in the scene and without their own efforts no power can put them on their feet again. Old habits of easy going life and dependence entirely on the so-called liberal professions can no longer operate. Hard life, with sweat and toil, and use of two hands will alone reestablish them as has been done in war-devastated countries like Germany and Japan.<sup>89</sup>

Guha and others thought that middle-class and landed refugees should take their cues from day laborers rather than seek to recreate their lost status. This was, unfortunately, difficult to do. In the case of refugees living in a government camp in the Hugli (Hooghly) district, just one of a total of 240 Brahmin families took up cultivation. Not a single Brahmin family entered into the trades, despite available re-training schemes.<sup>90</sup> Those who had lost social, cultural, and economic capital were, at least in the cases described here, ill prepared to adapt to a dramatically changed social-anthropological configuration.<sup>91</sup>

For the so-called untouchable castes, or Dalits, Partition also represented, in some cases, a moment when their stores of capital were recalculated.<sup>92</sup> In colonial South Asia, the work of sweepers, gutter cleaners, and those who disposed of waste and animal carcasses was invisible. Dalits, and the work they did, were part of the “infrastructure” of the everyday — and as Stephen Graham has argued, infrastructure typically becomes visible only when it no longer functions as expected.<sup>93</sup> During Partition, in overcrowded transit and refugee camps, though, everyone began to notice the importance of the so-called untouchables, who made up a fundamental part of the invisible urban infrastructure. Confronted with camps filled with waste and debris that upper-caste/class Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims were unwilling or unable to remove, sweepers were singled out as essential workers. Indeed, the governor of the Muslim majority Sind province in Pakistan ordered that the untouchables, themselves Hindu, be supplied with green armbands adorned with a white star and crescent. Police were ordered to go “immediately to the aid of anyone in difficulty who is wearing such a badge” to provide them safe passage, even in the case of violent attacks.<sup>94</sup>

Although this directive by Sind’s governor may have been a small matter — just one decision in one province affecting one population — and the reconfigured status and identity of the Dalit

89 B. S. Guha, *Studies in Social Tensions among the Refugees from Eastern Pakistan* (Delhi, 1959), xiii.

90 *Ibid.*, 11.

91 Mullick, “Disaster and Anthropology”; Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith, eds., *Catastrophe and Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster* (Santa Fe, 2002).

92 “Dalit” was a term popularized by B. R. Ambedkar, the first Minister of Justice of independent India, and a key proponent of political, social, and economic justice for low-caste Indians. Dalit can be variously translated as “broken,” “scattered,” or “oppressed.”

93 Graham, *Disrupted Cities*.

94 *New York Times*, October 12, 1947. None of this is to suggest that the lives of Dalits were, in a post-Partition context, freed from the historical burdens placed on them. The point here is simply that the value of the resources individuals and groups across the subcontinent were utilizing was changing.

may also have been temporary, without long-term administrative or legal implications, it highlights the instability of social and material systems in the aftermath of Partition in its transgression of deeply ingrained communal, social, cultural, and religious boundaries.<sup>95</sup> Partition, migration, and new sociocultural and political configurations were changing how capital was valued. How did individuals and groups, then, learn to use a “currency” that was in flux? How, for example, did they find new homes in an extremely competitive environment?

Yasmin Khan’s brilliant work offers some clues, showing how tactics and strategies learned during the Quit India movement, labor protests, and wartime mobilization all became resources in the post-Partition fight to create new homes. The Quit India movement had brought millions onto the streets to protest British colonial rule in India. Many of these people, particularly women and lower-caste people, became politically active for the first time. Experiences with wartime mobilization, food scarcity, and rationing *also* became resources for vulnerable populations in the post-Partition context. During the war, total mobilization had drawn tens of millions of rural laborers to cities for work in war-related industries, and until 1943, this provided a range of economic opportunities to some of the poorest Indians. As the war came to an end, the majority of workers who had moved to cities for the wartime industries became part of the urban poor.<sup>96</sup>

The years immediately preceding Partition, then, already saw urban populations organizing to survive, and in actions ranging from the Quit India movement to labor protests, these individuals were exposed to the mechanics of large-scale organizing, including learning the spatial discipline required to deflect police brutality, as well as publicity and public relations work.<sup>97</sup> In 1946 alone, there were twenty-nine industrial disputes involving nearly two million workers and a loss of over 120 million man hours. In Hyderabad, three thousand to four thousand villages were in revolt, with peasants arming themselves and seizing land; in Delhi, refugees clashed with police who tried to prevent them from occupying Muslim evacuee property;<sup>98</sup> and in Bombay, hundreds of Sind refugees occupied the municipal hospital in Dharavi demanding the “right to stay put.”<sup>99</sup> Organizing, political protest, as well as violent and non-violent resistance became parts of a broadly applied repertoire of social practice. This repertoire was repurposed during post-Partition conflicts. The politics of

95 This instability echoed far beyond the “migrant” populations, and has shaped popular and parliamentary political culture up to the present day. Ian Talbot notes, for example, that Partition saw an increased focus on initiatives aimed at improving the conditions of Dalits. Ultimately, these have resulted in a highly developed system of reservations and other “affirmative-action” strategies for the “scheduled castes,” which are constitutionally designated castes targeted for economic and social uplift.

96 Khan, *The Great Partition*, 16-17.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid., 26-27.

99 *Times of India*, October 24, 1947.



vulnerability may have been amplified by the displacement of millions of refugees, but it transcended the boundaries between “local” and “stranger.” As sociologist Liza Weinstein has shown, these kinds of political actions — learned in the prelude to Partition and repurposed by refugees after 1947 — became central to the evolution of social movements in South Asia more generally.<sup>100</sup> This was particularly true in the case of West Bengal, where the “long Partition” blurred the boundaries between locals and migrants even as the national boundaries became increasingly solid.

In West Bengal, the logics of migration may have been amplified by Partition, but they were rooted in longer histories of migration between what became East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and urban centers in West Bengal. Calcutta, after all, had been the capital of British India until 1911 and continued to be the largest regional center for decades thereafter. In the preceding decades, it and other cities in West Bengal had drawn hundreds of thousands of agriculturalists, artisans, shopkeepers, professionals, and laborers from smaller cities, towns, and villages from the East. Many of these migrants moved to cities because they could mobilize kinship, social, and professional networks in them, and could justifiably expect to find greater economic opportunities than in the countryside.<sup>101</sup> Refugees from East Pakistan in the period from 1947 to 1952 were following the routes and mobilizing the knowledge and networks that economic migrants had used for generations. In most cases, there was little to distinguish them from generations of vulnerable locals who had migrated to West Bengal in the time preceding Partition. Indeed, many of them did not consider themselves to be refugees at all: the fact that Hindu anticolonial activists ended up on the “wrong” side of the border in East Pakistan did not in itself change their identification as Indian.<sup>102</sup>

This is not to say that path dependencies in migration patterns and policy simply reproduced pre-Partition logics: the intensification of population flows collided with shortages in housing, labor, and food markets to amplify and ultimately change the nature of political mobilization. The Azadgahr (Refugee) Colony, founded in the Tollygunge district on the urban perimeter of Calcutta, is a case in point, and helps us to understand how displaced populations navigated environments where they lacked many of the basic elements needed to survive. Azadgahr may have been founded to give a home to refugees, but the larger dynamics of land occupation in the area

100 Liza Weinstein, *The Durable Slum: Dharavi and the Right to Stay Put in Globalizing Mumbai* (Minneapolis, 2014).

101 Joya Chatterji, “Dispositions and Destinations: Refugee Agency and ‘Mobility Capital’ in the Bengal Diaspora, 1947-2007,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 2 (2013): 273-304, 278.

102 Rahman and van Schendel, “I Am Not a Refugee”; Roy, *Partitioned Lives*, 4; Udit Sen, *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition* (Cambridge, 2018). Partition did, of course, dramatically affect the experiences of displacement, which were clearly different for refugees than they were for earlier generations of migrants.

show that migrants and locals engaged in many of the same learning and adaptive practices.<sup>103</sup>

Anthropologist B. S. Guha described the formation of the Azadgahr Colony for refugees in a now famous study for the Anthropological Survey of India, completed in 1954. “[F]ounded by the efforts of the refugees themselves on the initiative of a small group headed by Messrs. Indu Ganguli and Sadanada Banerjee,”<sup>104</sup> Azadgahr was a local initiative that took shape in a series of community meetings in Tollygunge over the course of 1949. Ganguli, Banerjee, and others were looking for ways to assist a growing population of vulnerable migrants that the provincial government seemed both unable *and unwilling* to help. In the eyes of the Congress Party, homeless and economically vulnerable migrants were easy recruiting targets for the Communist Party of Bengal, which had spent years cultivating relationships with landless migrants in Calcutta and other urban centers in West Bengal. Here, shared histories and common vulnerabilities between migrants and locals, who were themselves often first- or second-generation migrants, helps to explain the Congress Party’s reluctance to admit Hindu minorities from East Pakistan, or the tendency to “disperse” these new arrivals away from the cities where they might become politically active.<sup>105</sup>

Shared histories and common vulnerabilities were also some of the reasons that locals organized in order to find homes for the new arrivals. Ganguli proposed the large uncultivated plot adjacent to his own home as a potential target for development, and organizers calculated that leasing costs would be covered by subscription fees paid by future residents of the colony. The idea was a good one, at least from the point of view of homeless refugees, but the landowner rebuffed initial requests. At that point, Ganguli and others resorted “in desperation ... to forcible occupation.”<sup>106</sup> Guha glossed over this leap, from scouting potential properties to desperation and land seizure, but he might have mentioned that Calcutta, with a 1947 population of just over two million people, housed an estimated three million refugees in 1951.<sup>107</sup> Ganguli, Banerjee, and their small community were desperate to lease the property because development-ready land was extremely difficult to find.

In late 1949 or early 1950, Ganguli and a small group of men seized 30 acres. In subsequent months, they surveyed the land, divided it into 390 plots, and distributed plots to “bonafide” refugees for a small fee. Then the work of the refugees — now informal settlers — began.

103 Joya Chatterji has written the most important study of the Azadgahr Colony. See, for example, Chatterji, “‘Dispersal’ and the Failure of Rehabilitation.” See also Sutaparani Dasgupta, “The Self-Settled Refugees: Squatters’ Colonies in West Bengal,” in *The Aftermath of Partition in Bengal*, 121–60 (chapter 3). For a general, but still excellent, work on the topic, see Peter Gattrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford, 2015).

104 Guha, *Studies in Social Tensions*, x–xi.

105 Chatterji, “‘Dispersal’ and the Failure of Rehabilitation”; Roy, *Partitioned Lives*.

106 Guha, *Studies in Social Tensions*, xi.

107 This figure is based on the 1941/1951 census data. See Khan, *The Great Partition*, 189.

The new residents cleared scrub and trees, prepared plots, built roads, huts, and houses, dug wells, cleared snakes, and fought off jackals. They did more than simply create a physical infrastructure, though. They elected a central council to resolve disputes, elected ward officials responsible for tax collection and the maintenance of public spaces, and they started educational, community, and training groups. All of this was done, as Guha described it, “in the teeth of opposition and oppression of the landlords and police. As a reaction to it, the colonists organized themselves into fighting corps and raised a fighting fund. The Muslim inhabitants feeling insecurity of their life retired from the place.”<sup>108</sup> In the course of 1950-51, Azadgahr grew.

The search for a home in a competitive environment forged linkages between “strangers” and “locals,” but the refugees were not without their own stores of capital. First of all, the residents of Azadgahr were, relatively speaking, better off than many Partition-era migrants because they were registered refugees who were entitled to certain legal protections. Refugee status was granted only to those migrants who had left East Pakistan before June 1948, and, as Guha implied and historians confirm, this earlier wave of displaced persons was both more prosperous and more likely to have taken assets along than later waves of refugees. Residence in Azadgahr was possible only for those who were able to pay the (admittedly nominal) fee for land, subscription, and taxes, and to supply their own building materials: while members of the new colony were not rich, they were not destitute either. At least in relative terms, Azadgahr residents were privileged refugees. This does not change the fact that the Azadgahr residents were forced into remarkably novel situations that required them to learn new ways of acting collectively.<sup>109</sup>

Among other things, future residents were all more or less involved in land occupation. This practice is, in its initial phase, typically relatively passive work, because landlords — particularly non-resident ones — often have no idea that their land has been occupied until well after the fact. To begin with, new residents stake a claim simply by being present. In later phases, though, the work becomes much more active, as was true in Azadgahr as well: colonists actively seized additional property, and this land had to be defended against the “rowdies” and “police” who were sent to evict members of the fledgling community. Violence, of course, was nothing new — indeed, it was a common feature of urban life in the years bookending partition. But learning to fight as part of an organized “fighting force” would,

108 Guha, *Studies in Social Tensions*, 52.

109 *Ibid.*, 52-60.

at the very least, have been a novel adaptation of experiences during the Quit India movement and during Partition.<sup>110</sup>

Setting up, building, securing, governing, and providing for a colony: certainly for most of the residents, these were utterly new experiences. But in the following years, land occupation and informal settlement became increasingly common elements in the vernacular political culture. Between 1947 and 1960, the numbers of similar self-settling refugee colonies expanded dramatically. By the late 1950s, there were more than 400 in and around Calcutta, and 63 in Tollygunge alone.<sup>111</sup> In mass demonstrations and organized land seizures, refugees and vulnerable locals drew on a repertoire created over decades of organized protests that began with the Quit India movement. Demonstrations and organized land seizure were widespread not just in Calcutta, but also in Delhi, Bombay, and other cities receiving large numbers of refugees during the long Partition. Partition was the proximate cause of a new kind of political culture that was very much tied to the right to homes. But the strategies used by refugees and the locals with whom they sometimes made common cause were adaptations of existing political cultures to new circumstances. In some cases, this process could stir admiration. In Azadgahr, for example, it was remarkable that members created alternative administrative, legal, and educational facilities.

Azadgahr was, in many ways, a success story, but not everyone was able to change when faced with the fluctuating currencies of capital, as can be seen from the case of the Brahmin families detailed in the Anthropological Survey cited above.<sup>112</sup> Nor should this obscure the fact that some learning and some adaptation are extremely troubling from an ethical point of view. In Azadgahr, for example, Muslim landlords were threatened and harassed in an effort to create space for refugees and vulnerable locals. Across India and Pakistan, intimidation and violence against religious minority populations was widespread, and both historical and contemporary observers noted that mob terror designed to drive out religious minorities often amounted to ethnic cleansing.<sup>113</sup> This was also behavior learned and adapted for the post-Partition context.

This does not mean that the post-Partition era entailed just slight modifications of colonial-era social, cultural, political, and governance practices. Mass displacement inserted migrants into new environments on a massive scale, and whether or not their transition to new

110 Ibid., 51-52.

111 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 160.

112 Guha, *Studies in Social Tensions*, 11.

113 In a September 23, 1947, letter to Mohammed Ali Jinnah (the first Governor General of Pakistan), Sir Francis Mudie (Governor of West Punjab) baldly asked: "How then can we accommodate 54 lakh (5.4 million) Muslims unless we get rid of the Hindus?" Singh, ed., *Select Documents on the Partition of Punjab*.

lives was smooth, they disturbed existing political ecologies in important ways. Cityscapes were transformed by the creation of refugee neighborhoods; urban demographics were dramatically changed by population transfers; social and economic relationships were altered by the presence of new residents in search of homes and livelihoods. Migrants and locals were changed not just by what they witnessed or experienced during Partition-era violence. They were changed also because their social positions and relations to one another changed as the currencies of capital fluctuated. These were sometimes dramatic shifts, and, in other cases, relatively minor ones.

As the two examples delineated here demonstrate, learning and adaptation were foundational for many of the formal and informal strategies that individuals used to survive in postwar Germany and post-Partition Berlin. Such an analysis of learning and adaptation can also teach us a great deal about the mass displacements that remain so common in the present day.

### Conclusion

In 1997, star architect Rem Koolhaas led a group of researchers from Harvard to Lagos, Nigeria, to try to understand how a modern megacity worked, and whether it held lessons for urbanists researching cities in the Global North. In a documentary on this and subsequent trips to Lagos, Koolhaas recounted his first impressions — awe, astonishment, and something akin to disgust.<sup>114</sup> As a city, Lagos appeared to fail on every level. Traffic did not move: buses, cars, motorbikes, and lorries would sit idle for hours waiting to traverse the city (Koolhaas and his team initially traveled by helicopter). In most districts, public services like water, electricity, sewage, and waste removal were inadequate or worse. Inequalities were extreme. To the world-renowned Dutch architect, all of this was difficult to accept — Lagos and cities like it constitute the antithesis of contemporary norms that celebrate mobility, equal access to public space and services, and inclusiveness across all categories.<sup>115</sup> In spite of the challenges, Koolhaas and his team continued to explore, and he began to see the city and its inhabitants in new ways.

Appearances to the contrary, Koolhaas decided that Lagos did somehow function — after all, more than 7.3 million people were living there at the time he was reflecting upon it. Water and transportation infrastructure were a mess, but water was distributed with great

114 Rem Koolhaas, *Lagos Wide and Close: An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*, with Bregtje van der Haak, filmmaker (2004), available online at <http://lagos.submarinechannel.com/>.

115 Gyan Prakash, "Mumbai: The Modern City in Ruins," in *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*, ed. Andreas Huyssen, 181-204 (Durham, 2009).

entrepreneurial imagination; and residents used different internal clocks and timeframes to move through the city. Koolhaas was particularly struck by the garbage pickers who had developed a complex choreography to navigate risk, vulnerability, and precarity. Trash pickers and water carriers were not, Koolhaas decided, simply victims of the system, but critical actors in a complex urban ecology. Koolhaas wondered whether this entrepreneurial informality, these bottom-up epistemologies, and the self-regulating governmentalities were a glimpse into a more chaotic but freer future in the Global North.

There is something admirable in Koolhaas's effort to valorize the life worlds of extremely vulnerable people, but as urban geographer Matthew Gandy reminds us, the problems of a Nigerian megacity have multiple histories — colonial geographies of systemic underinvestment, resource-driven boom-bust cycles, punitive monetary policy — that together explain why the garbage picker works in a toxic landfill rather than sitting in a school room.<sup>116</sup> State failure and, in particular, failures of the international system explain why Lagosians need to be so creative, why informality is so important, why local knowledge and networks are so critical to everyday lives. Koolhaas's fascination with urban informality, creativity, resourcefulness, and entrepreneurial ethos is part of a trend within development, design, and architectural studies that has been building for decades,<sup>117</sup> and it is indeed important to better understand how migrants and migrant communities create and mobilize knowledge in order to navigate new spaces. It is also critically important to recognize that the need for this kind of creativity and knowledge-building arises because of profound gaps in our welfare provision and migration regimes. These are issues worth thinking about in the context of the present cases.

The terms “learning” and “adaptation” generally carry positive connotations in everyday usage, and indeed many migration and urban scholars continue to celebrate the creativity of migrants fleeing violence and of locals surviving in exceptional circumstances. The cases in this article remind us, though, why vulnerable people are forced to adapt and the kinds of things they must often learn. Examples of adaptation, creativity, and learning might include sharing knowledge about legal gray zones or cross-cultural exchanges. They also include self-circumcision and beard-shaving to avoid detection, learning religious or national hymns to avoid communal violence, trading sex for life-saving food, or using a weapon to defend oneself against real or perceived threats. The cases of post-Partition India and postwar

116 Matthew Gandy, “Learning from Lagos,” *New Left Review* 33 (2005): 37–52.

117 Hernando de Soto, *The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World* (New York, 1989).



Germany appear, at first glance, to be extremely different and indeed, in many ways, they are. They also share some striking similarities, and these similarities teach us a great deal about the ways that mass displacement, prolonged homelessness, extreme scarcity, and fluid sociopolitical dynamics force learning and adaptation, often in extremely traumatic ways. This has the potential to generate new perspectives on the work of migrating across dangerous geographies and surviving in troubled urban spaces. This is, unfortunately, extremely relevant to contemporary global migration regimes.

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