

I would always dream of my house.



\* Stories  
of  
Displacement

\* Geschichten  
von  
Vertreibung



Displacement, regardless of place and time, leaves deep cuts in the lives of everyone who has to experience it. The Audio Walk I would always dream of my house - stories of displacement broaches the issue of the loss and leaving of a home, tracing the unravelling of lives faced with dispossession.

Long before meeting in Karachi in 2015, both our artistic practices focused on uncovering the human dimensions of war and violence. We became interested in the escape and expulsion stories of our grandparents' generation, to make visible how experiences of war continue to cast their shadow on the present. The collecting of oral narratives became our way to document and understand experiences of dislocation, of suffering and trauma, of painful regret and nostalgia for loss of home. While Sonya interviewed people in Germany and the USA, who lived through World War II, the Holocaust and their aftermath, Shahana collected stories of refugees who had fled their homes during the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan.

These events caused the largest displacement of people in the twentieth century and were accompanied by unprecedented genocidal

violence. The coming to power of the Nazis in 1933 in Germany marked the beginning of a global escape, expulsion and resettlement movement during which around 40 million people were torn from their previous lives, uprooted and forced to make a new life elsewhere. Soon after, and also as a result of the events in Europe, the colonial rule of Great Britain in India ended. On 14 August 1947, the two independent states of India and Pakistan were established. This partition of territories, which gave statehood to Muslim-majority provinces of British India, forced 20 million people to leave their homes.

Refugee crises are routinely understood as only 'temporary', wherein refugees emerge fleetingly on the stage of history before being restored to a more settled existence. However, our project shows that displacement is a long and arduous process that fundamentally and irreparably alters the lives of those affected as well as following generations. For many, 70 years later, the violence of displacement is still on going.

In bringing together stories of displacement from seemingly disparate historical events, we draw connections around the conditions, experiences and making of refugees across

borders. While similarities in experiences of German and South Asian refugees are striking, we also acknowledge the differences of experience based on place and location. From the European post-war experience, the refugee emerged as an identifiable social and legal category in the world. However, excluded from the mandate of these newly written international refugee laws were refugees in non-Western parts of the world, including those in India and Pakistan who identified themselves as stateless. Mobility and refuge were not granted to the contemporary Indian refugees as basic human rights. Their peripheral location to the post-war international order left them in situations where options for seeking refuge and asylum were considerably more limited than their European counterparts. A politics of location continues to mark people today with differential legal, political and human standing, evidenced by the tightening of borders and criminalization of certain movement.

With *I would always dream of my house*, we hope to link past histories with present situations in order to apprehend these modes of dispossession as a fundamental part of our modern existence. The liminal zones of

indistinction inhabited by refugees of World War II and Partition, continue to multiply today. We live in a world, where an average of 42,500 people are forced to flee their homes every single day. Over 60 million refugees exist today, who live in limbo, belonging not to any country, but to the internment camps, where the dividing line between citizen and outlaw, legality and illegality, law and violence, and ultimately life and death are fatally blurred. Through tracing personal histories we attempt to understand this perplexing persistence of rightlessness in an age of rights.<sup>1</sup>

The personal histories presented here have not written themselves. As artists and mediators, we have been intensely, emotionally and politically involved in this project. Through conducting interviews, we became deeply aware of the burden of memory – the unbearable grief, exhaustion and speechlessness of remembering. We began to recognise that remembering also meant reliving the past from within the present. This entailed a refusal of neat chronologies, as the past kept mixing with the present. Stories had no clear beginnings or endings. Silences became equally telling, as speech faltered in the moments when something too painful was encountered. We embraced this

incompleteness, often even contradictoriness, in the stories as part of the process.

In the Audio Walk, we reproduce acts of remembering as a way of disrupting dominant narratives and frames of war which continue to claim some lives as grievable and others as not. We create a counter-geography that traces the erasures and disappearances inherent in the violence of displacement. We centre lives lived on the margins, in an attempt to apprehend the precariousness and vulnerability of the human condition across borders. As Judith Butler explains: “It is not that mourning is the goal of politics, but that without the capacity to mourn, we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose violence.”<sup>2</sup>

Shahana Rajani & Sonya Schönberger

<sup>1</sup> Borrowing from the title of Ayten Gundogdu, *Rightlessness in an age of rights: Hannah Arendt and the contemporary struggles of migrants* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), xviii.

*We never wanted to leave Hindustan. The unceasing violence forced us  
140 million Muslims in India. We left our*



*s to leave our homes. When we came to Pakistan in 1948, we left behind  
r homes behind in India, we left our land, our water, blood and soil there.*

Chiraghuddin was born before 1930 in Fatehpur Sikri in Uttar Pradesh, India. During his childhood, many Hindu-Muslim riots were occurring in UP. His family kept moving from village to village to stay safe from the bloodshed. At Partition, his family stayed in India. In 1948, they were forced to flee when his father was attacked and nearly killed in Qasba Kagarol. They reached Agra on a horse cart, and stayed in a refugee camp. From here, they took the train to Pakistan. At Munabao they were told to get off and walk in the scorching desert before reaching the Khokrapar border. They stayed at Mirpurkhas for many weeks, before reaching Karachi. They lived with their relatives in the informal refugee settlement of Quaidabad. In 1958, the military-state displaced them to Korangi Township, ten miles outside the city where they had to build their lives from scratch again.

*It was such a desperate situation, that the men were accused to ha*

*ve made the war. And I always think it's kind of unfair because men and women have experienced this time together.*

Christel was born in 1933 in Gumbinnen, East Prussia. After her father, a customs official, had been transferred to Berlin, the family lived in the district of Alt-Moabit until 1943. As the bombings increased in Berlin, Christel's mother decided that they should be with their relatives in East Prussia. At the same time the father was called up and sent to the Eastern Front. In 1944, the German-born population of East Prussia was forced to leave the area. The escape led initially to Carlsbad where Christel experienced the last days of the war. They tried to move back to Berlin, but were not allowed to stay at first. The mother managed, however, to arrange accommodation in Berlin in Tiergarten – the sector under charge of the British. Here, Christel spent the post-war years. In 1945 the family had received the last sign of life from the father in form of a letter.

*When I came back from Germany, I used to drink hard liquor for a while. For a few weeks I drank. Not for a long*

*while. Then I said, what the heck, this doesn't help. Won't do any good for my time. But it didn't help me understand, about losing my family like that.*

Eva was born in 1927 in Margita, a small town in Romania. She came from a middle-class Orthodox-Jewish family. In 1940, the Hungarian army occupied Margita. In the following years the situation of the Jewish population increasingly worsened. In 1944, after the German invasion, Eva and her family were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Most of her family was murdered there.

After a couple of months, Eva was sent to Salzwedel, Germany, in an all-girls transport.

In Salzwedel, the girls had to work at an ammunition factory. The factory was liberated in 1945 by the American army. Eva stayed in Germany before returning to Romania in the fall. Unable to remain there for emotional reasons, she ended up migrating to the United States and settled in New York City.

Gumbinnen  
Etawah

اُلہاس نگر

Quetta

پوڑنان

Salzwedel  
Pittsburgh

Berlin

فتح پور سیکری

Sukkur

New York Ci

Ivano-Frankivsk

جوڈھپور

Stanislawow

Regensburg

Auschwitz

East Prussia

وراکلاؤ

قصبہ لگارول

Karachi

Bombay

Agra

Achhnera

argita

جھلوری

کراکو

Oradea

میرپورخاص

Gleiwitz

پینل کھیرا

Moscow

ty

*Quite late, not far from her death, my mother said, should I ever ha  
She lost everything*



*ve done anything wrong to you, I ask your forgiveness. The little old lady in her life. Really, belongings, home, husband, all gone, nothing was left.*

Gisela was born in 1935 in Berlin. Her parents had originally lived in the Warthegau region, as German settlers and farmers. However, they had to leave their farm in 1925, as the area around Poznan became Polish again. Only in 1940 they were able to return to their farm as part of the resettlement policy of the Nazis. For four years Gisela lived there with her parents until in January 1944 an appeal was issued to the population to leave the area as the Red Army was approaching. Together with the village community Gisela's family went on the flight, which ended in the town of Gleiwitz. There they fell into the hands of Russian soldiers. The father was taken away and never returned. The women and children were left alone under the command of the Russian soldiers. On the 8th of May 1945, they were finally free to go. Gisela's mother decided to return to Berlin to be with the remaining relatives.

*The initial thinking was, we will go back to our Sindh. Sindhri Sindhri faded away in course of time. We had to face reality.*

*Khri hum ayein ge wapis! (Oh my Sindh, we will return!) But these hopes  
city. My parents stopped talking about Sindh. It was too difficult for them.*

Karthar was born in 1935 in the village of Taib in Sindh, India. His family owned agricultural land and was very well off. On the Independence of India, Karthar, his mother and siblings, were in Karachi visiting his uncle. In January 1948, violence broke out in Karachi during which hundreds of Sikhs and Hindus were killed, their homes looted and burned. Karthar's family was saved by Muslim refugees who protected them from the mobs. Karthar's family left for India by ship. After reaching Okha port, they got on a train to Bombay, but their train was terminated at Ahmedabad station. They stayed at Platform No. 1 for one week, after which they were shifted to a refugee camp where they stayed for one month in harsh conditions. His mother then found a rental accommodation on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, with no water, electricity or sewage line. They lived there for over fifteen years before they were able to move closer to the city.

*I would always dream of my house. I always dreamt about the house  
you see later on I understood that these are fears. I read*

*se in Sukkur. And I dreamt that someone would kill me in my house. But realized this is my state of mind because of my hurt and prejudices and all.*

Madhuri was born in 1934 or 1935 in Sukkur, Sindh, in India, where her father worked in the railway services. Sukkur, a Hindu majority city, became part of Pakistan on 14th of August 1947. In the days following partition, thousands of Hindu and Sikh refugees, fleeing the violence in Quetta, stopped at Sukkur on their way to India. They brought with them stories of massacres and killings. Hindu and Sikh families no longer felt safe in their ancestral homeland. In October 1947, Madhuri's family decided to leave for India. They travelled to Karachi and left by ship for Bombay. On reaching Bombay her family lived on the docks for one month in squalid conditions. Meanwhile her elder brother and sister searched the city for a home. They finally found shelter in an abandoned military camp in the suburbs. Today this refugee camp has grown into a whole city called Ulhasnagar.

*When we reached the border, I saw my sister standing on the other side. She was still alive. I ran towards her, but the military man beat me, pulled me back. I was so weak and thin built, I couldn't understand it. My sister and I were only separated by a wall.*

*side. We had gotten separated in the journey. We were so happy to see her  
ack. You can't just run there, he scolded me. A strange boundary had been  
rated by a few feet, but she was in Pakistan and I was standing in India.*

Mohammad was born in 1936 in Jaswantnagar, Uttar Pradesh, in India. His father worked for the infamous Chambal bandits. At Partition in August 1947 he escaped to Pakistan. His mother decided to follow after him in 1948. They travelled by train hiding in cargo boxes. The train terminated at the Khokrapar border, where they crossed into Pakistan. In Karachi, they lived in a tent on Jamshed Road for several months, after which state officials moved his family to Fatima Jinnah Colony near Quaid-e-Azam's tomb where they lived in a hut. In 1953, his family was displaced again to the new 100 quarters colony of Quaidabad at the outskirts of the city. Till this day, the state has still not given Mohammad legal title for his house. He has been pursuing a court case for property rights for the last seventeen years.

*Fortunately, my mother was very strong and able, very smart and the  
reason we all*



*at helped a lot, throughout the war. She was a gorgeous redhead. Another survived, because she was a beauty the Germans would kind of hit upon.*

Robert was born in 1935 in Breslau, Silesia.

He came from a wealthy Jewish family. In 1939, when Germans and Russians divided Polish territory among them, his family had to flee East and ended up in Stanislawow at the Polish-Russian border. In 1941, when

Germany attacked Russia, the German Wehrmacht occupied Stanislawow. Robert witnessed the killing of 14,000 Jews in one day. His family survived the massacre and was put in a ghetto. With luck they managed to escape the ghetto, fleeing to Warsaw. In order to stay alive, Robert and his brother were sent to work on a farm near Krakow. Polish farmers agreed to keep the two boys through the war. They stayed on the farm until their cover blew and their mother had to bring them back near Warsaw. In 1944, the family was caught up in the Warsaw Uprising. After Hitler defeated the uprising, Robert and his family were put on a train to Auschwitz. From this train they managed to escape under miraculous circumstances. After the war Robert spent some time in a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany before settling down in the United States.

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A project by Shahana Rajani & Sonya  
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\* گھر بدری  
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کہانیاں