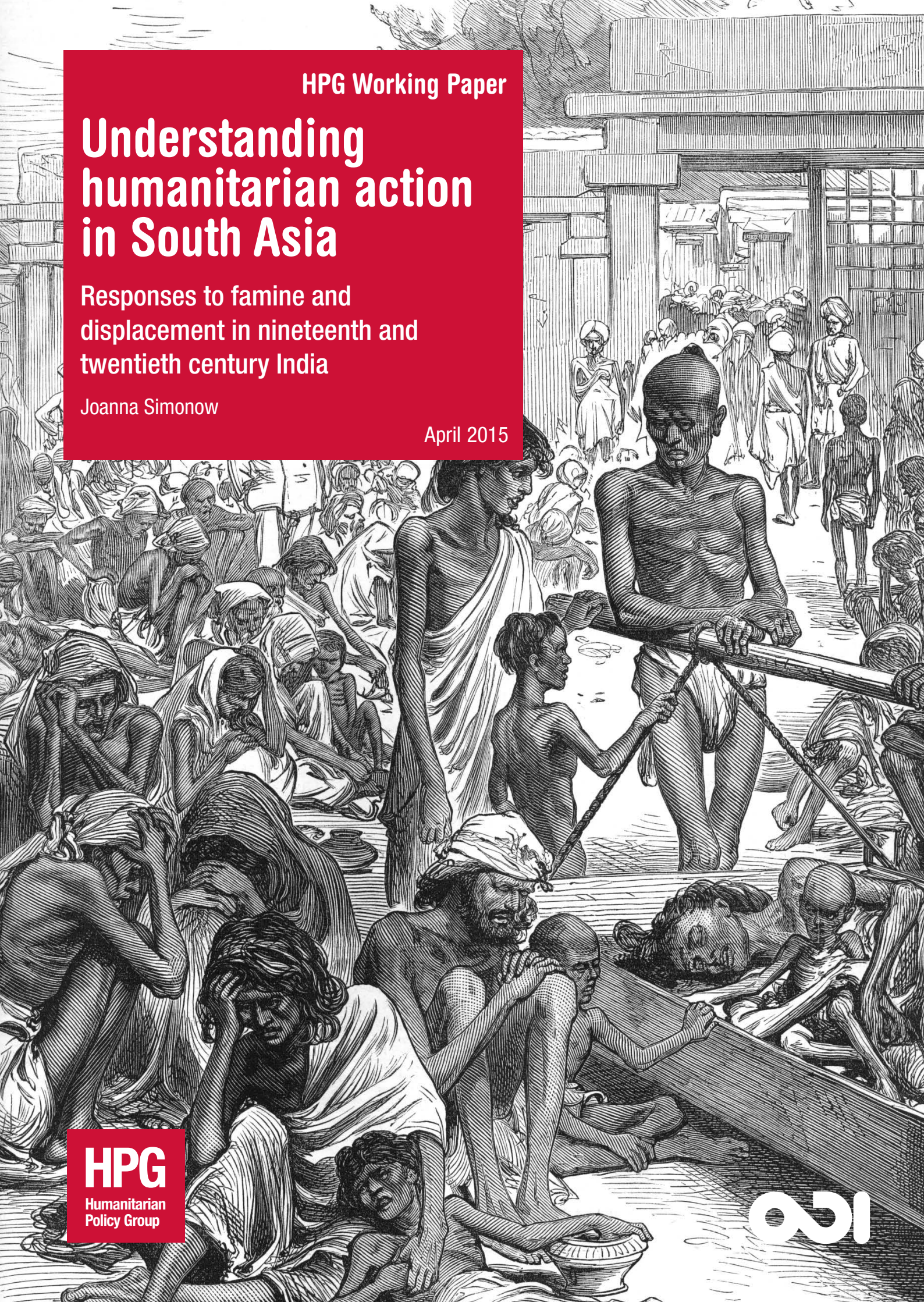# Understanding humanitarian action in South Asia

Responses to famine and displacement in nineteenth and twentieth century India

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About the author

Joanna Simonow worked as a consultant for the Humanitarian Policy Group's project 'A Global History of Modern Humanitarian Action'. She holds a Master's Degree in the History and Political Science of South Asia from the University of Heidelberg, and a Joint Master's Degree in Humanitarian Action from the University of Uppsala and Groningen.

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

Large-scale humanitarian disasters have long been a feature of life in South Asia. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, famines on the Indian subcontinent left millions dead. Half a century later, in 1943, between two and three million people are thought to have died in a terrible famine in Bengal, and in the early 1970s another 130,000 perished in Maharashtra (Brennan, 1984; Devereux, 2000). Significant population displacement and communal violence on independence from the British in 1947 left hundreds of thousands dead, and many more died or became refugees in the conflict between India and Pakistan that created Bangladesh in 1971. This Working Paper – part of the Humanitarian Policy Group's 'Global History of Modern Humanitarian Action' project – explores the concepts, mechanisms and practices underpinning humanitarian action in South Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a special focus on responses to famine and mass displacement.

While the idea of providing relief and assistance in times of need and distress certainly did not arrive on the subcontinent with the British, the colonial period nonetheless saw the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of famine relief, and the development of a particular set of response mechanisms and practices designed to identify who should receive assistance, when and how. As this paper shows, although clothed in the seemingly objective language of administrative and bureaucratic processes, and codified in ostensibly technical manuals, codes and guides, these were not in fact 'technical' decisions at all, but choices based on political calculation and a deep-seated set of assumptions and prejudices running through Victorian thinking about the moral and spiritual health of the English poor and the nature and limits of the state's responsibilities towards them in times of distress – thinking that, when transplanted to the Indian context, was overlaid by ingrained racial stereotyping. Thus, the paper discusses notions of the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor, and how these abstract ideas were translated into practical mechanisms to distinguish between these two categories in the provision of aid; the assumed purgative functions of famine as a stripping away of the weak; the relationship between private and public

charity; the politics of famine relief; and the role of the market in meeting the needs of the poor. It argues that the over-riding desire to minimise the costs of empire, including the costs of famine relief, combined with an instinctive faith in the *laissez-faire* economics of the market to put things right without extensive state intervention, led to responses that were almost without exception inadequate and incoherent.

The second half of the paper is concerned with the evolution of relief aid in independent India. Unlike the British colonial period, post-war India has largely been free of large-scale famine, in part because the new management of the country targeted starvation with much greater conviction, and viewed immediate famine relief as part of a wider problem of food insecurity and scarcity, resulting in the development of food distribution systems, the enhancement of food production and increased food imports (Drèze, 1988; Devereux, 2000). Instead of famine, the major crises in the country have been crises of mass displacement. This section of the paper focuses on the displacement that followed Partition in 1947 and the refugee influx that accompanied the Bangladesh war in 1971. It shows how, during the 1947 crisis, the relief provided by the newly formed Indian and Pakistani governments was impeded by a lack of institutional capacity and resources, while international aid was diverted to post-war Europe. Overwhelmed by the crisis, the Indian government focused on the relief and rehabilitation of Hindus from the West Punjab, disadvantaging the internally displaced Muslim population and turning a blind eye towards the crisis on its eastern flank, where millions of refugees from East Bengal had sought shelter. The new state essentially continued British policy and practice in its response by restricting assistance, categorising recipients as 'worthy' or 'unworthy' in much the same way as the British found a distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and employing techniques and mechanisms developed by the British to discourage reliance on state relief and push people towards the market for survival. By 1971 attitudes and capacities had changed; while old notions of 'good' and 'bad' poor persisted in government rhetoric, the Indian state successfully provided immediate relief to

10m refugees from East Pakistan. Also unlike 1947 the development of international response mechanisms and increased geopolitical interest in South Asia prompted an international aid response to assist India in stemming the refugee crisis.

1.1 Scope and limitations

This Working Paper is not intended to provide a complete account of the history of humanitarianism on the Indian subcontinent. The size and complexity of the region, alongside the richness of the historiography on its past, inevitably limits the scope of this research and necessitates choices about the sources consulted and the actors and topics addressed. It also introduces several biases. The first derives from the preponderance of studies on Hindu groups, which means that this paper focuses predominantly on movements that can be grouped within the socio-religious realm of Hinduism, while acknowledging the contribution of other, non-Hindu groups to the shaping of responses to human suffering. Second, the literature in this area, as in many other fields of historical enquiry, tends to focus on elites; the voices of 'ordinary people', including the people directly

suffering in the crises discussed here, are rarely heard, and they are very under-represented in historical research. Third, the discussion of the colonial period deals exclusively with famine relief in areas under direct British control, reflecting the dearth of research on relief practices in the princely states that nominally retained a degree of independence from British control.

The practices and ideas associated with humanitarian action in India are part of the global history of humanitarianism. As South Asian societies were influenced by global developments that changed public thinking about philanthropy, welfare and disaster response during the nineteenth century, many of the processes discussed here will remind the reader of similar, yet locally specific, processes in other regions and societies. The review highlights the importance of civil society actors, non-governmental organisations and the press in ensuring that the needs of affected populations are addressed; demonstrates the extent to which the humanitarian imperative is vulnerable to political and economic agendas; points to the tendency of governments to exclude certain groups of potential beneficiaries by employing bureaucratic barriers and exclusionary definitions; and highlights the need to strengthen state capacities to respond to disasters.

2 Famine relief in the nineteenth century: ideas, concepts and theories

A cluster of ideas and ideologies informed the colonial regime's response to famine and famine relief, defining who was entitled to assistance (and who was not), when relief should be given, and how much assistance should be granted. These included the political significance of famine and relief, notions of the 'deserving' poor, suspicions around private charity, population theory, free market ideology and political economy. While many of these concepts and ideas originated in Britain, they were appropriated and adapted to the Indian context, both by colonial administrators and by the Indian elite, blurring distinctions between 'colonial' and 'indigenous' concepts. This section discusses the conceptual and ideological underpinnings of British famine relief in India, to set the stage for a more detailed analysis of the practice of famine response in the following section.

2.1 Famine relief in pre-colonial India

While the development of famine policies and institutionalised approaches to famine during the colonial period was crucial in the formation of state-sponsored famine relief in India, organised relief had a pre-colonial history, and policies in colonial India corresponded well with pre-colonial practice. Historical evidence attests to the duty of rulers to provide for their subjects in times of scarcity (Drèze, 1988; Sharma, 2001). Measures to reduce the effects of famine included the distribution of food, the use of loans and grants and public works (Sharma, 2001), and the practice of sharing wealth with the poor or needy (as well as the financing of educational, medical or religious institutions) seems to have been common amongst Indian rulers and merchant groups (Kozlowski, 1985).

In Mughal-ruled North India early strategies to counter the effects of scarcity included the regulation of food exports from famine-affected areas and attempts to regulate food prices (Habib, 2013). For example, the Nawab of Awadh, Asaf-ud-Daula (1775–95), apparently employed famine victims to build buildings, temples and river *ghats* (Sharma, 2001), in what can be seen as an embryonic form of state-sponsored public works. With the decline of Mughal power in North India during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, accompanied by the advance of the British, mercantile groups took over the patronage of institutions such as temples, pilgrim houses, orphanages and schools, which previously had been provided for by the ruler (Watt, 2005; Birla, 2008). In South India, centrally organised famine responses were limited to the distribution of food to the needy via village patronage systems (Ahuja, 2002).

2.2 Drivers of famine

A variety of factors contributed to the remarkable prevalence and extent of famines in colonial India. In the pre-colonial period, the impact of droughts and food scarcity was often eased through tax suspensions and grants, part of an elaborate system of relations between Indian rulers, landholders and tenants. Under the colonial regime this flexibility in dealing with harvest failure gave way to a fixed system of tax payments levied on landowners. This burden was in turn passed on to the peasantry, changing the traditional relationship between these two sections of Indian society. Money-lending and landless seasonal labour proliferated, contributing to the impoverishment of the peasantry and increasing their vulnerability to the effects of famine.

Vulnerability to famine was also a function of the increasing cultivation of cash crops such as cotton, jute, indigo and sugar cane, driven by the British preoccupation with extracting resources from colonial possessions and facilitated by the increasing integration

of India within the global economy. This had the obvious effect of reducing the supply of food for India's growing population, as well as promoting massive deforestation and over-cropping that decreased the quality of the soil. Neither of these factors – peasant impoverishment and a reduction in the food supply – were however regarded as causes of famine by the colonial administrators charged with responding to it, who instead tended to pin the blame on natural causes, predominantly drought (Mann, 1992).

2.3 Famine relief in British India: theories and concepts

The provision of relief in India was heavily influenced by the two centuries of debate on poor relief in England that preceded the formulation of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 (Battacharya, 1998). The legislation drew on Jeremy Bentham's and John Stuart Mill's thoughts on utilitarianism, which insisted on the need to create an incentive for the poor to work. Workhouses introduced as part of the Poor Law in Britain were intended to encourage discipline and bolster the moral fortitude of the poor.

In India, subjects of assistance were to be identified by 'self-acting tests' intended to detect the needy with a minimum of administrative effort (Battacharya, 1998; Drèze, 1988). Four tests to identify recipients were initially applied: the distance test, the residence test, the cooked food test and the labour test. The distance test, which compelled recipients to leave their home areas in order to access relief, was based on the assumption that only people suffering from acute hunger would be willing to make the journey. The residence test demanded that beneficiaries stayed in camps, where they would be subject to strict government control (Drèze, 1988). By making living and working conditions in these institutions unbearable, the 'undeserving' poor would be discouraged from seeking state assistance, and would instead look to their own labour for survival (Midgley, 1984). In the third test, assistance was provided in the form of cooked food prepared in ways that did not follow religious prescriptions, and hence palatable only to people hungry enough to suspend their religious obligations. Finally, the labour test was intended to sort the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' by demanding manual labour in exchange for subsistence wages (Drèze, 1988). Colonial administrators

preferred the labour test as it corresponded well with the utilitarian interest in transforming the needy into the 'industrious poor'. The other tests, by contrast, were less helpful; the cooked food test was deemed too insulting to recipients' religious beliefs and was abandoned, and the distance and residence tests failed to prevent high mortality because the majority of those seeking assistance died before they reached their destination, making the cruelty of the colonial famine response uncomfortably visible in the shape of corpses lining India's roads (Drèze, 1988; Bhattacharya, 1998).

Responses to humanitarian crises in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also influenced by the theories of the British economist Thomas Robert Malthus and the philosopher Adam Smith. Malthus, who taught political economy at the East India Company College near London, viewed wars, epidemics and famines as necessary checks against over-population (Ambirajan, 1976; Caldwell, 1998).[1] In line with this, colonial administrators tended to see famines as a necessary evil as the 'betterment' colonial rule had brought had reduced the influence of Malthus' other 'positive checks', including conflict and disease, leaving famine as the last available constraint to limitless population growth (Ambirajan, 1976; Caldwell, 1998). More than that, famine wiped out the most vulnerable segments of the population, increasing Indian society's resilience and improving its chances of development. Smith's writings on political economy, in particular *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* of 1776, emphasised the necessity of protecting the free market from state interference. According to Smith: 'famine has never arisen from any other cause but the violence of government attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconvenience of dearth' (Smith, cited in Davis, 2001: 31). Although the *Wealth of Nations* was written in the context of eighteenth century Europe, officials of the East India Company, who had studied Smith's theories at the Company's college in Haileybury, still saw it as relevant to the management of famine in India a century later. While pre- and

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1 The East India Company was founded as a trading company in 1600 shipping goods from Asia to Europe. To consolidate its trade with India, the Company founded colonies in Madras (1639), Bombay (1668) and Calcutta (1690). These functioned as bases for the growing expansion of the Company in the mid-eighteenth century. The Company was abolished in 1858 following the Indian rebellion the previous year, and the British government took over direct responsibility for the administration of the country.

early colonial approaches to the management of famine had used market regulation to enable people to access food during periods of scarcity, increasing faith in the virtues of the liberal market during the nineteenth century encouraged colonial administrators to view such measures as a last resort. Hence, colonial administrators discouraged controls on food prices, prevented restrictions on the transfer of food among Indian provinces and did not impose controls on imports and the storage of food (Chaudhuri, 1978; Rashid, 1980).[2]

Famine relief was also a political issue as the British competed for control of the subcontinent, first with foreign powers and, as colonial rule was consolidated, with emerging Indian nationalism. One aspect of this competition involved demonstrating the ability

to 'take care' of people living in British territory. However, the political imperative to be seen to act was in tension with the colonial regime's *laissez-faire* instincts, which encouraged administrators to restrict famine relief as much as possible. This opened up space for the nationalist opposition, and criticism of the colonial government's attitude towards famine relief was frequently aired in public debates and in the expanding print media. Many of the civil associations engaged in famine relief, while declaring themselves apolitical, were directly or indirectly linked to the Indian nationalist movement, and philanthropic practice functioned as a means to claim political legitimacy for opponents of British control. For the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, it was also a demonstration of the connection between Indian elites and wider society (Watt, 2011; Dang, 2014). As the colonial regime had portrayed its notion of public and utilitarian charity as modern and superior, practising this form of philanthropy also demonstrated the adoption of 'modern values', which supposedly lifted Indian elites to the civilisational rank of the British (Watt, 2011).

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2 In 1802 strong resistance from colonial administrators and merchants led to the abolition of a grain department founded only a few years previously to buy, store and sell grain in an effort to prevent scarcities and address rising food prices (Sharma, 2001).

3 Famine responses in colonial India

Famine management in colonial India focused on identifying the 'deserving' poor through the organisation of public works. The overriding imperative was to reduce expenditures and limit the scope of the regime's responsibility. Meanwhile, faith in the market to respond to scarcity prohibited any extensive interference in private trade, and price controls, the regulation of food exports, government-sanctioned food imports and the creation of grain and rice reserves were repeatedly discouraged. Malthusian population theory further encouraged administrators to limit famine relief as far as possible. Taken together, the various theories underlying colonial famine response frequently rendered famine management incoherent and ineffective. Famine policies were developed and institutionalised during the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as colonial power was consolidated and the governmental and administrative apparatus expanded (Sharma, 2001). However, despite institutional advances in the management of famine – notably the system of famine relief outlined in the Famine Code, introduced in 1880 – responses failed to reduce high mortality rates in the famines of 1896–1901 and 1943.

3.1 Early responses

The famine in Bengal in 1770, which left some 10m people dead, was one of the first encounters the British in India had with widespread scarcity and starvation on the subcontinent. Relief was effectively absent; while the East India Company tried to limit rice exports and restricted private trade by fixing rice prices, it also limited rice imports into areas of Bengal affected by the famine. Although famine became more prominent in the Company's calculations in the wake of the disaster, not least because the decimation of the Bengal population had drastically reduced land tax revenues, it was not until another famine in northern India in 1837–38, affecting 8m–9m people, that the regime began to give famine policy serious consideration, and the colonial power assumed some measure of responsibility for counteracting famine's effects (Brewis, 2010; Sharma, 2001). The response was however limited to public works, providing labour for 250,000 'able-bodied' famine victims, including men, women and children. More general relief, particularly the provision of food assistance, was regarded as the responsibility of private charity and hence was left to voluntary relief committees. In an effort to restrict numbers in public works, wages were set below market rates, and inhabitants of princely states who had migrated to British-controlled territory in search of assistance were excluded (Sharma, 2001) as falling outside the definition of a 'deserving' aid recipient.

3.2 Famines in the 1870s

The ineffective response to a famine that struck Orissa in 1866–67 was followed by a much more successful relief operation in 1874 in Bihar. Unlike earlier (and subsequent) responses, the colonial administration imported half a million tons of rice to ensure relatively generous relief in the form of public works and food assistance, keeping mortality levels unusually low (officially there were 23 famine deaths) (Davis, 2001). However, the senior official in charge of administering relief, Bengal Lieutenant-Governor Sir Richard Temple, was heavily criticised afterwards for the scale of relief expenditure, and the response to a subsequent famine in Madras and Bombay in 1877–78, also administered by Temple, represented another U-turn in the colonial management of famine. The famine developed into a widespread disaster affecting the Madras Presidency, Mysore, Bombay, the North-Western Provinces and the Punjab, causing the deaths of millions. Driven by a desire to reduce famine expenses and save his career, Temple implemented stringent relief measures in Bengal which were subsequently also applied in Bombay, Mysore and the North-Western Provinces. To be admitted into public work, relief seekers needed to travel at least ten miles and had to show signs of complete physical exhaustion upon their arrival. The food doles subsequently provided in exchange for hard

manual labour, by then known as the 'Temple ration' (amounting to 1,627 calories), were wholly insufficient to prevent mass mortality (Davis, 2001). The inadequacy of the food assistance provided in response to the famine was publicly debated in India and both the Indian and British press published graphic accounts of the suffering, prompting the government in London to order the colonial authorities to offer more generous relief and allow the distribution of privately collected funds (Brewis, 2010). Although wages for public works projects were adjusted, this came too late to prevent mass mortality, exacerbated by outbreaks of cholera[3] and malaria (Davis, 2001; Sharma, 2001).

3.3 Famines at the turn of the century

A subsequent evaluation of the famine response culminated in the production of the Famine Code in 1880. In more than 300 pages, the report outlined a system of relief focused on the creation of public works for subsistence wages for victims of famine still able to work, and the provision of 'gratuitous relief' for people too weak to work. Local relief mechanisms were put in place as early warning systems, using indicators including population and livestock movements, food prices, levels of social unrest and crime and the availability of credit. If a famine was indicated, the Famine Code stipulated the appointment of a Famine Commissioner and the creation of a limited number of public work sites known as 'test works'. If people migrated to these sites in search of work famine was seen as imminent (Mukherjee, 2011). In line with the official preference to allow the market and unregulated trade to balance out scarcities, the Famine Code did not foresee market intervention as forming part of future famine management. Instead, the evaluation report recommended doubling the size of India's railway network by adding another 10,000 miles of track (Sweeney, 2008; Davis, 2001), thereby

enhancing food security by integrating Burma's rice supply into the Indian market (Davis, 2001).

The Famine Code failed to prevent mass mortality during the two famines that struck India between 1896 and 1901. An intrinsic problem was the general rejection of trade and market regulation as a potential instrument of famine prevention. Thus, as food prices began to rise and the purchasing power of Indian peasants fell, grain exports to Britain continued and Burmese rice, which the Code expected would be used to make up shortfalls in India, was instead diverted to Europe (Drèze, 1988, Davis, 2001). Although the Code gave precise instructions on the minimum relief required to prevent starvation, these provisions were overridden by the perennial urge to limit expenditures; although the Famine Commission set up to look into the response found that high mortality rates could have been avoided by investment in gratuitous relief at the outset, it also concluded that 'the costs could have been such as no country could bear or should be called upon to bear' (cited in Davis, 2001: 175). Although money was available through an official famine relief fund, it had been redirected to finance the British war in Afghanistan.

As the famine unfolded the colonial government decided to use poorhouses to deal with famine-affected Indians no longer capable of work. As in Britain, the restrictive nature of these institutions resulted in unrest, and in many cases famine-stricken Indians chose death over confinement (Davis, 2001: 147). The poorhouses in turn prompted public revulsion, and nationalists used the issue to mobilise opposition to the colonial regime (Davis, 2001) and challenge the proclaimed moral and political supremacy of the colonial state. While the colonial regime used the setting in of the monsoon rains in 1898 to delineate the end of the famine, continued high mortality rates suggest ongoing human misery (Davis, 2001), and the subsequent famine of 1900 represented a seamless transition from one crisis to the next, rather than a discrete crisis event. In the five years between 1896 and 1901, a population equivalent to half of the people of contemporary Britain died through famine and related causes (Davis, 2001).

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3   In the Madras Presidency alone nearly 150,000 people died from cholera in 1876; 380,000 perished from the disease in 1877, and 50,000 in 1878 (Arnold, 1993).

4 Philanthropy in nineteenth century India: actors, concepts and sources

The colonial state was far from the only or most important 'humanitarian' actor in nineteenth century India. Despite attempts by the state to undermine and control private philanthropy, many of those affected by famine and disease were helped by non-governmental actors and private initiatives. Historically many Indians saw it as their duty to share their wealth with society and regularly donated to religious institutions such as temples, shrines and mosques, which offered services to care for the sick, poor and famine-stricken (Brewis, 2010; Arnold, 2008). The practice of donating a part of one's personal wealth can be found in many socio-religious practices and cultures in South Asia: examples include the Islamic traditions of *waqf* and *zakat* as practiced by Indian Muslims, and the *dharmic* giving or *dana* known to Hindus, Jains and Buddhists (see Box 1).

During the nineteenth century these indigenous philanthropic traditions came under sustained attack, both by the British and by Indian elites, for their indiscriminate and 'religious' nature, and 'religiously motivated donations' were seen as in contradiction with the Victorian definition of charity, which understood it as benefiting the common good and being explicitly utilitarian (Sharma, 2001; Brewis, 2010; Watt, 2005). In line with the assumption that British society was culturally superior, indigenous philanthropy was publicly discredited and the

Box 1: Traditions of indigenous philanthropy

Dharmic* giving or *dana
The umbrella term *dharmic* giving or *dana* refers to the allocation of material and other resources to another individual, group or institution. While *dharmic* giving is embedded in a system of ethics in which donations accrue religious merit, such as the collection of good *karma* and the quest for redemption (*moksha*), giving or gifting in India fulfilled a multiplicity of overlapping social, religious, economic and political functions. Donations transferred prestige and social recognition on the donor. They were also part of mercantile trading relations and were made by rulers to their people as a demonstration of sovereignty, and to perpetuate social and political hierarchies. While *dana* was used to assist the poor and the sick, this was only one dimension of the cosmos of indigenous giving (Heim, 2004).

Waqf*, *zakat* and *sadaqa
The practice of giving part of one's personal wealth to the community to provide relief to the poor and needy and to support Islam can be found in various Islamic traditions and practices. According to the notion of *zakat*, Muslims have a duty to give a fixed percentage of their wealth and income to charitable causes. Individual and voluntary acts of charity fall under the term *sadaqa*, while the umbrella term *waqf* (pl. *awqaf*) subsumes a multiplicity of different forms of endowment. The practice of waqf differed in accordance with regional and local variations as well as religious differences amongst the many Muslim communities in India. A basic principle of *waqf* is that property once transferred cannot be transferred again. Similar to the Hindu practice of *dana*, *waqf* fulfilled a variety of social purposes, sponsoring medical, educational and religious institutions, to provide poor relief and transferring power and status onto the donor (*waqif*) (Kozlowski, 1985; Majumdar, 2014; Khan, 2002).

difference between supposedly 'civilised' British and 'uncivilised' Indian philanthropy emphasised. As a result philanthropic practice began to change: elite groups pressed for the legal supervision of indigenous endowments (Kasturi, 2010; Watt, 2005; Birla, 2008), Hindu and Muslim donors began to use Anglo-Indian law to earmark donations for social welfare, and supervised and regulated charitable giving channelled funds to new civil society associations (Kozlowski, 1985).

4.1 Indian civil society associations

Civil society associations such as the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Movement and the Servants of India Society (see Box 2) combined Indian traditions and belief systems with contemporary organisational practice, often informed by their contacts with foreign and international actors (Kasturi, 2010; Watt, 2005; 2011). These civil actors benefited from the greater willingness

Box 2: Non-governmental relief and social reform: new actors and approaches

The Arya Samaj: securing the Hindu race
The Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati, provided famine relief for the first time in 1897. Fundraising through an extensive network of volunteers, the movement mobilised considerable resources during crises. Funds were administered by local relief committees and through temporary and permanent relief funds (Watt, 2005). Women, whose role in public life was traditionally highly circumscribed, were actively involved in fundraising for the movement (Watt, 2005). The Arya Samaj aimed to radically reform Hinduism in order to strengthen it in relation to other religions, notably Christianity, and it campaigned to counter the proselytising efforts of Christian missionaries (Jones, 1989; Cox, 2002). The version of Hinduism espoused by the Arya Samaj included a belief in a unitary God and the revitalisation of the *Vedas*, the ancient scripts of Hinduism. It also advocated for the abolition of the caste system in favour of a class hierarchy in which the guiding elite would be determined through education instead of birth (Zavos, 1999; Hardiman, 2007). Arya Samaj distributed its relief exclusively to Hindus.

The Ramakrishna Movement: serving humanity
The Ramakrishna Movement was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897, and undertook its first famine relief work the same year, in Murshidabad. It also engaged in street cleaning and hygiene education to reduce the prevalence of disease, and developed early organisational practices and policies to facilitate its work. Although it had a clearly articulated Hindu religious agenda, and viewed relief work as one part of a larger service to humanity (Beckerlegge, 2006). Believing in the

unity of humanity and the equality of all human beings, it challenged the exclusive provision of relief to Hindus by the Arya Samaj, and offered relief irrespective of religious affiliation (Beckerlegge, 2006; Ramakrishna Mission, 1944). Service and assistance was structured according to a threefold conception of the human into body, mind and spirit, which translated into a holistic view of a person's needs: physical help (*anna dana*) included the provision of food, shelter, clothing and medical care; the provision of education (*vidya dana*); and spiritual assistance (*jnana dana*) (Beckerlegge, 2006). By the early 1940s the Ramakrishna Mission had expanded significantly; according to its own account it had branches across India, as well as centres in Sri Lanka, Fiji, Mauritius, the UK, France, Argentina and the US (Ramakrishna Mission, 1944).

The Servants of India Society: advancing society
The Servants of India Society was founded in 1905 by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Classifying famines and natural disasters as 'enemies of humanity' (Devadhar, 1919: 9), its relief work was part of a broader concept of social reform and uplift. Members of the Society had to take a vow of poverty and devote their life to the betterment of Indian society. The aims of the organisation were infused with the idea of industrial development, notions of religious service and solidarity amongst Indians. At least during its early years, the Society promoted political self-determination through adherence to constitutional methods of change and dialogue with the colonial regime. Although the Servants of India Society declared itself non-denominational, it struggled to recruit non-Hindu members (Watt, 2005).

of donors to contribute to social welfare, education and disaster relief, and used these financial resources to expand their services.[4] Many of these organisations and movements embedded the provision of famine relief within a broader notion of social reform that saw famine as a phenomenon that could be prevented by measures that promoted long-term social change.

Through the engagement of civil associations the meaning of philanthropy began to change, and it was more frequently defined as service to society and humanity at large, rather than the mere act of giving. The social complexion of philanthropy also changed. By becoming a volunteer with the many associations and corps that formed in the late nineteenth century, Indians could directly and actively take part in philanthropic practice without necessarily contributing financially. Volunteerism was also opened up to women, who assumed an active role in fundraising. Fundraising techniques became more sophisticated as the demand for funds increased, and civil associations developed local, regional, national and, at times, even international networks to collect money (Watt, 2005). Volunteerism and social service was also important in mobilising support for the Indian nationalist movement, which drew on its volunteer corps to provide disaster relief (Mukerjee, 2011; Watt, 2005; Dang, 2014). Social work was a central ingredient in Gandhi's vision of Indian society, influenced by the concepts and practices of earlier civil society associations such as the Servants of India Society and the Arya Samaj (Watt, 2011). Gandhi's 'constructive programme' aimed to empower India's rural population to create self-reliant communities that would be able to feed and clothe themselves, ending their dependence on Indian elites and foreign regimes. Contemporary and later followers of Gandhi founded non-governmental organisations, adding to the diversification of India's non-governmental sector (PRIA, 2001).

4.2 Voluntary relief committees and famine response

During the famine of 1876–78 some 150 voluntary committees mustering thousands of volunteers

4   Due to the popularity and strength of Hindu reform movements and the social position of Hindu elites in British India, many of the most prominent associations active in the provision of welfare and famine relief had a Hindu profile. However, Sikh and Muslim associations were also formed during this period (Watt, 2005).

reportedly provided relief (Brewis, 2010). Founded largely in response to specific crises, these committees occasionally evolved into longer-term charitable institutions, such as orphanages, schools and hospitals (Brewis, 2010). Relief committees were overwhelmingly created by Europeans and, while growing numbers of Indian volunteers joined them, they were seldom admitted to higher positions (Brewis, 2010; Sharma, 2001). Following basically the same ideological prescriptions as the colonial state, relief committees were openly critical of indigenous forms of giving, preferring instead the use of tests, particularly poor houses, to select suitable recipients of private charity. Relief committees drew on the private donations of individual Europeans and Indians, as well as collecting funds internationally and occasionally receiving money from the colonial government. Responding to public pressure to allow private charity to respond to famine in 1877, the colonial state sanctioned the creation of an international relief fund centrally administered by a committee in Calcutta, which allocated funds to local relief committees. Significant amounts of money were collected through official channels: in 1877 an imperial network of Indian famine relief committees raised between £689,000 and £820,000 (Twomey and May, 2012; Brewis, 2010); during the famine of 1896–97 the official famine relief fund totalled £1.7m, and another £1m was raised in 1900 (Brewis, 2010).

As well as the private, or more properly 'semi-official', charity (Bewis, 2010) provided by local volunteer committees, growing numbers of international missionary societies and charitable organisations provided famine relief, as well as founding orphanages, schools and hospitals. The Salvation Army, for example, began work in India in 1882 (Magnuson, 1990), and in 1900 a relief mission to India initiated by the US newspaper the *Christian Herald* shipped 5,000 tons of grain to India, along with $640,000 donated by the newspaper's readers (Magnuson, 1990). US Christian missionaries collected $1m for famine relief through public appeals in affiliated newspapers and journals in India. American donations frequently circumvented British controls over private charity as they were channelled through missionary societies instead of the centrally administered relief fund, and missionary societies seem to have been significantly quicker in their response to famine (Brewis, 2010).

5 The Bengal famine of 1943

Given the severity of nineteenth century famines, the absence of severe food crises in the decades leading up to the Second World War allowed the colonial regime to assume that the problem was under control (Brennan, 1980; Devereux, 2000). The famine in Bengal in 1943, which led to the deaths of between 3m and 5m people, rudely shattered that assumption. Mortality peaked in December 1943, before easing off with the rice harvest at the end of the year, but diseases such as malaria, cholera and smallpox continued to cause high death rates throughout 1944. State-sponsored relief was hampered by competition between government departments, the imperative to keep Calcutta's war production running and a familiar reluctance to regulate food prices.

The Bengal famine was, to a greater extent than its predecessors, a man-made disaster (Amrith, 2008; Devereux, 2000). Rice prices increased sharply under the inflationary pressure of the war economy and accelerated by speculators and merchants who inflated market prices to maximise their profits, rendering food inaccessible to the impoverished rural population of Bengal (Amrith, 2008). Meanwhile, the priority placed on maintaining the war industries and workers of Calcutta meant that Bengal's food supplies were concentrated there, and it was only at the end of 1943 – too late to prevent the worst effects of the famine – that food stores in the city were distributed to rural areas (Greenough, 1980; De, 2014; Sherman, 2013).

The state's failure to prevent famine or mitigate its effects also made a powerful argument against colonial rule and in favour of Indian independence. Just prior to the famine, in July 1942, the Indian National Congress had passed a resolution demanding full independence from the British, and in his Quit India speech the following month Gandhi called for a nationwide campaign of mass civil disobedience, prompting the arrest of virtually all the Congress leadership, most of whom would see out the war in jail. Further afield, Japanese troops had ejected the British from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya and Burma, and seemed on the point of invading India itself. Under pressure at home and routed abroad, British rule in India – always more reliant on

perception than on actual material resources – was facing a serious crisis of authority.

5.1 The famine: causes

By any measure the Bengal famine was a massive humanitarian disaster. Estimates at the time put the number of dead at between one and a half and two million, either from starvation or more commonly from famine-related diseases like malaria, cholera and smallpox. The actual figure may well have been much higher, perhaps as many as three million (Devereux, 2000). Another half a million were made destitute and hundreds of thousands more lost land, livestock and other capital assets as systems of rural patronage crucial to the survival of the poorest sections of Bengali society collapsed (Greenough, 1980). The first signs of impending disaster emerged in late 1942; by the middle of 1943 there was clear evidence of famine in eastern Bengal, and by the following month more-or-less the whole province was affected. The effects of famine were not distributed evenly through Bengali society, but fell disproportionately on the rural poor; the well-to-do in the countryside were largely unaffected, Calcutta was largely spared and food traders and merchants prospered as prices rose.

People responded to the crisis in much the same debilitating ways they still do now, migrating to cities and towns, selling their possessions and assets to buy food, changing the distribution of food within the family (favouring men above women and adults over children) and splitting their families in search of food and income. Women turned to prostitution and survival sex, and parents sold their children for cash to buy food (Greenough, 1980). There was a clear age and gender bias in patterns of relief and survival, and there is good evidence of widespread abandonment and victimisation of vulnerable groups (Bose, 1990).

A congruence of factors lay behind the famine. The threat of a Japanese invasion from neighbouring Burma necessitated the movement of colonial troops to Bengal, increasing food consumption at a time

when supplies were already under pressure from the influx of hundreds of thousands of Burmese refugees fleeing the Japanese advance (Greenough, 1980). Land was confiscated in order to accommodate troops, depriving parts of the population of their main source of subsistence and income (Greenough, 1980). Livelihoods were further undermined by a denial policy under which the colonial government confiscated 66,500 boats to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. Many belonged to Bengali fishermen and the owners of offshore rice fields. Meanwhile, wage inflation in the countryside had not kept pace with rising food costs fuelled by wartime inflation, hoarding and price speculation (Sen, 1981), and disease and a cyclone and consequent tidal waves in West Bengal in October 1942 badly damaged the rice crop (Tauger, 2003).

5.2 State relief

Although by October 1942 the crisis indicators set out under the Famine Code had already been met, famine was not officially declared, the Famine Code was not made mandatory and the state did not consider famine management in the rural areas of Bengal a pressing demand. Instead, the government sought to contain the famine in rural areas, isolating and protecting Calcutta as the main centre of imperial war production. Tens of thousands of famine migrants in the city were removed to 'temporary collecting centres', where they were given (insufficient) food aid before being returned to the countryside. According to government estimates, over 55,000 people were received in shelters and camps during the relief operation (FIC, 1945). Thousands of troops were deployed to distribute food and monitor food kitchens to control diversion and corruption, and to keep order during what could be very chaotic and unruly distributions (Greenough, 1982). During the latter half of 1943, 6,625 food kitchens were providing cooked meals – in November 1943, the Bengal government reported that it was feeding over two million people a day, and providing food assistance to another 257,000; by the time the food kitchens were wound down, an estimated 110m meals had been given out.

Although the government embarked on a massive vaccination drive, efforts to inoculate the population against the main disease threats – cholera, malaria and smallpox – came too late to avert large-scale deaths, and work to repair wells and water sources and improve sanitation started only after the epidemics had begun to abate. Drug distribution was inadequate, and an extensive black market in anti-malarial drugs sprang up almost immediately. Doctors recruited for famine work were generally of low quality, with little knowledge of hospital organisation. Mortality rates in Bengal's hospitals were extremely high: of the 25,551 famine patients admitted to hospitals in Calcutta, 34% did not survive; in the countryside, 12% of the 203,000 famine admissions died, the lower rate probably a function of the fact that a larger proportion of rural people expired before they got anywhere near medical help.

5.3 Market interventions and rising rice prices

The reluctance to intervene in the market that had dominated nineteenth century approaches to food scarcity was also evident in the initial response in Bengal. Between 1939 and 1942, the British held six Price Control Conferences, but only in the last meeting, in September 1942, did the government admit the necessity of controlling the food supply. By the end of 1942, a Food Department had been established, but it concentrated on procurement for Calcutta's labourers and did not develop a scheme that included the whole population of Bengal (Mukherjee, 2011; De, 2014). Meanwhile, there was very little cooperation between the two government organisations charged with managing the famine response, the Department of Civil Supplies (DCS) and the Revenue Department. Theoretically the DCS had been set up to buy food on the market for resale in government shops, and to supply the public works programmes and food doles run by the Revenue Department. In practice, however, the DCS supplied no food for famine relief between October 1942 and April 1943. In an effort to compensate, the Revenue Department also turned to the market, in competition with the DCS, further increasing rice prices, which reached their peak in May 1943. Meanwhile, the Revenue Department concentrated its attentions on districts affected by the October cyclone, and it was not until April the following year that it undertook any form of relief work elsewhere in Bengal. As the Famine Code was not mandatory what relief was distributed was far below the scale envisioned in the Code.

5.4 Private relief

Considerable private relief supplemented the government's efforts.[5] Non-governmental organisations provided 40 gruel kitchens in Calcutta, and hundreds more were set up in rural districts. Meals were also provided through subsidised canteens and uncooked food was handed out by volunteers. Voluntary organisations involved in the relief response included the Ramakrishna Mission, the Bharat Sewak Sangh, the Friends Ambulance Unit, the Indian Red Cross and the Marwari Relief Society. The latter ran more than 60 relief centres in Calcutta and the districts, distributing Rs1,430,000 in food, clothing and medicine. The Indian Red Cross was heavily involved in the distribution of hundreds of tons of dried and evaporated milk, used for the therapeutic feeding of infants and pregnant and nursing mothers, and paid for by a fund-raising campaign organised by the Viceroy's wife (Greenough, 1982). According to its own reports, the Ramakrishna Mission started providing relief in June 1943, eventually reaching almost 1,200 villages and 22 towns. At the peak of the crisis at the end of 1942 the Mission was caring for 130,000 people (Ramakrishna Mission, 1944).

5.5 The aftermath of the famine

The Bengal famine became a powerful tool in the hands of opponents of the British colonial regime. As Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first prime minister, put it: 'In any democratic or semi-democratic country such a calamity would have swept away all the governments concerned with it' (Nehru, cited in Amrith, 2008: 1,026). The failure of the government to mount an effective response thus became part of the nationalists' demand for independence (Mukherjee, 2011). Indian politicians had used the failure of the British to mitigate famine to challenge the political legitimacy of the colonial regime since the late nineteenth century. From the early twentieth century onwards, actors associated with the Indian nationalist movement themselves organised rapid responses to famines and epidemics in an attempt to strengthen their support. Responding to famine also demonstrated the nationalist movement's ability to govern (Dang, 2014).

Awareness of the political importance of being seen to deal with famine and food insecurity also informed Indian policies after independence in 1947. Key shortcomings of pre-independence famine management, such as the general discomfort with market regulation, selective targeting and inadequate relief, were replaced by much more generous assistance and efforts to find a durable solution to the problem of famine. While the Famine Code's emphasis on public works by the poor was retained, substantial food assistance was provided where necessary, and government responses to famines in the decades after independence were notably more successful than anything the British managed (Devereux, 2000; Drèze, 1988). Annual crop failures continued after independence, but in the majority of cases shortages largely affected local enclaves, and the organisation of public works as envisaged by the Famine Code proved sufficient to ward off famine. When crop failures affected the whole country (as in 1966–67, 1972–73 and 1979–80), the Indian government broke with colonial practice and organised large-scale imports to guarantee the availability of food, as well as establishing food for work programmes and providing relief (Drèze, 1988).

Unlike the colonial state's focus on free trade and the politics of *laissez-faire*, the political elite in independent India saw centrally planned economic development as an effective way of countering scarcity and poverty. After independence the Indian government embedded famine relief into a larger strategy intended to ensure permanent food security. This was a clear break with colonial thinking and practice, which felt no obligation to ensure food security or provide poverty relief in any long-term sense. In contrast to earlier views on the limits of state responsibility, the Indian political elite after independence saw food insecurity as a potent and permanent threat and sought multiple ways to deal with the problem.

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5 Although wartime censorship banned the press from reporting on the famine, and prevented the use of the word 'famine' in the media, The *Statesman* newspaper published a photo dossier in August 1943 picturing famine victims in Bengal, attracting global attention to the famine.

6 The Partition crisis of 1947

The plan to divide the Indian subcontinent into the successor states of India and Pakistan was officially announced on 3 June 1947, and formal separation took place on 15 August. Partition, which divided the states of Punjab in the west and Bengal in the east along Hindu and Muslim majority lines, was accompanied by widespread communal violence and displacement which by the end of 1947 had left an estimated half a million people dead. Another 10m–15m were displaced (Brass, 2003; Feldmann, 2003). The influx of trainloads of refugees significantly altered the landscape of cities such as Calcutta, Karachi and Delhi. The Muslim League and the Indian National Congress initially provided ad hoc assistance, organising relief and drawing on volunteers mobilised in the struggle against colonial rule. By September, India and Pakistan had set up separate ministries to deal with the refugee crisis, but both governments were overwhelmed by the scale of a crisis that neither had foreseen (Mukherjee, 2011). In the aftermath of the Second World War and the widespread humanitarian and reconstruction needs in Europe, there was virtually no international aid response.

The refugee crises in Bengal and the Punjab differed fundamentally. The Punjab emerged as the centre of communal violence and displacement, demanding cooperation between the Indian and Pakistani governments to secure safe movement across the border. Bengal too was affected by violence that left thousands dead, but the smaller scale of the refugee crisis there meant that the Indian government did not accept that a humanitarian crisis was under way. As a result, relief for incoming refugees was restricted and there were frequent attempts to deny refugees any claim to assistance. Only a minority of incoming refugees were accommodated in camps.

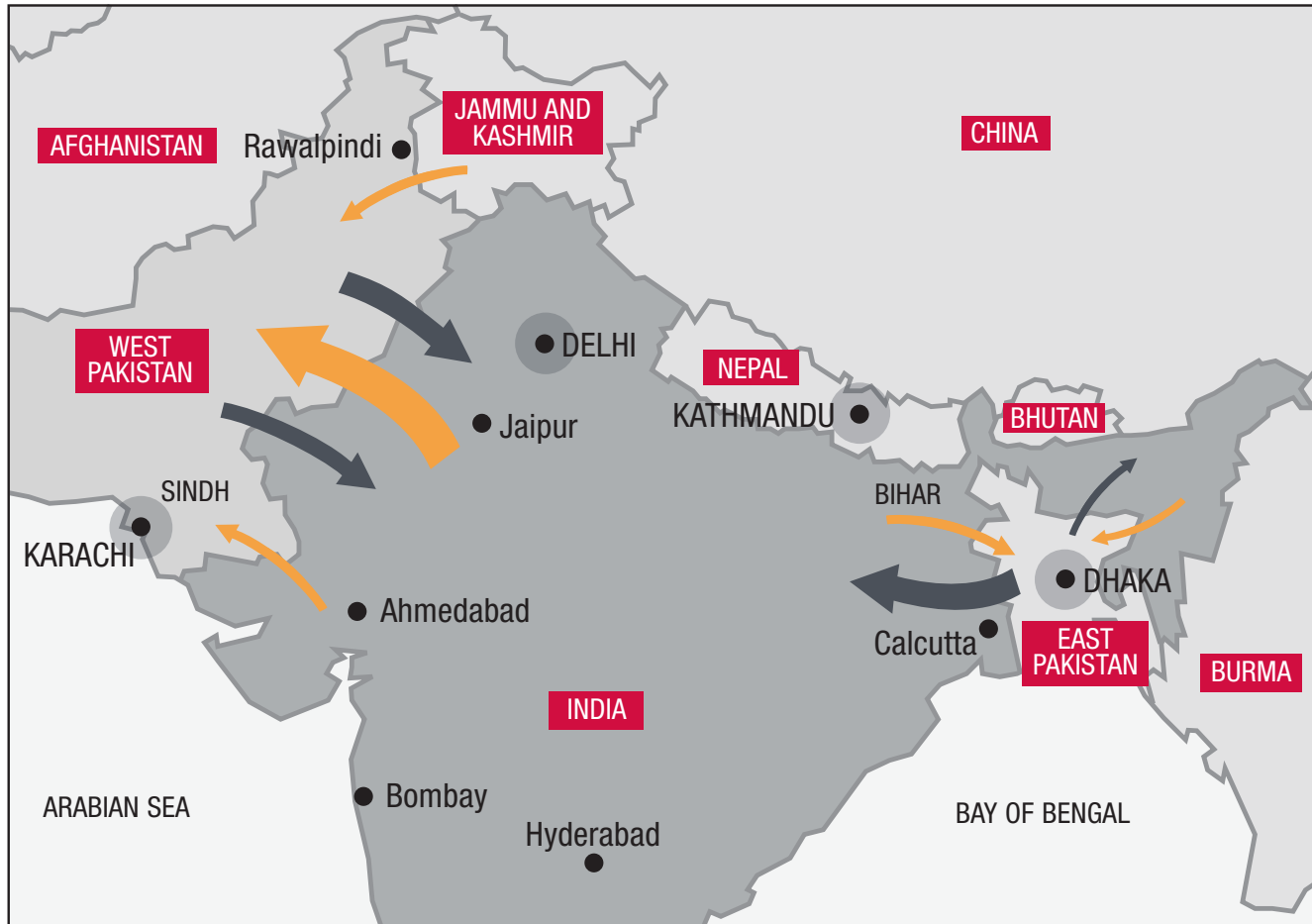## 6.1 Protecting refugees on the move: violence in the Punjab

The newly formed governments of India and Pakistan recognised the need to protect refugees, but proved incapable of doing so. Police and military forces assigned to protect refugees either participated in communal violence themselves or did not intervene to stop it (Talbot and Singh, 2009). One of the consequences of Partition was the break-up of the British Indian army, which prior to 1947 had consisted of British, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim soldiers. After Partition and the disintegration of the police force in Punjab, security was meant to be provided by the Punjab Boundary Force, which had been assembled out of the few Indian army battalions that had remained intact. However, the Boundary Force proved inadequate to the scale of the violence (Awen, 1985; Marston, 2009); the fact that non-Muslims constituted the majority of its personnel made it ill-suited to protect Muslim refugees (Zamindar, 2007), and it was accused by the Pakistani government of taking sides in the conflict. As a result, India and Pakistan agreed on the establishment of a Joint Military Evacuation Organisation (MEO), comprising equal contingents of Muslims and non-Muslims, to manage the exchange of populations between East and West Punjab (Talbot and Singh, 2009). By 15 November 1947, the MEO had escorted 1.7m refugees to camps on both sides of Punjab's new border (Chatterji, 2001).

The violence of Partition exacted a particularly heavy toll on women, with large-scale abductions and forced conversions, massacres and 'systematic communal outrages' (Major, 1995: 59; Butalia, 2000; Menon, 1998). The Indian and Pakistani governments reached an agreement on the repatriation of abducted women at an Inter-Dominion Conference on 6 December 1947.[6] A common approach was agreed which foresaw the creation of central recovery offices and transit camps for women on both sides of the border. The MEO was assigned the task of ensuring their safety. Both governments sought the assistance of female social workers (the number in India was significantly

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6   Inter dominion conferences between India and Pakistan were held to find agreements on the separation of British India's institutional apparatus and to settle social and political questions which required both governments' agreement. Central issues discussed included the treatment of refugees, the handling of evacuee property and the repatriation of women abducted during Partition (Khan, 2007).

higher than in Pakistan) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which had sent a delegation to India in 1947 (Rey-Schyrr, 1998). Despite these efforts, the process of recovery was slow, and the general response to the needs of women inadequate. While tens of thousands of women were abducted during Partition, only a few thousand were repatriated (Menon and Bhasin, 1998). Local and communal authorities contested the right of women to repatriation, and their communities and families often refused to accept them on their return. The fear of rejection led many women to commit suicide or resolve not to go home.[7] Concerns that forced repatriation constituted a

second abduction led the two governments to agree that it should not be considered a legitimate means of returning abductees (Aiyar, 1995). Although women continued to be repatriated through official channels until 1956, by 1952 main efforts seem to have come to an end (Aiyar, 1995).

6.2 Sheltering refugees and the internally displaced: state responses in India and Pakistan

By September 1947, both India and Pakistan had designated special ministries to organise assistance for Partition refugees. Both governments embarked on the provision of immediate relief and the development of long-term rehabilitation. Relief provided by the central Indian government focused on non-Muslim refugees from East Punjab, who largely sought shelter in North India, half a million of them arriving in Delhi in the months after Partition. Although West Bengal too was slowly sliding into a full-blown refugee crisis

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7 Abducted women were often tattooed to mark them as the 'property' of their abductor. Displaying a visible mark, either in the form a tattoo or a pregnancy, increased women's anxiety that they would not be accepted back by their families and communities. The refusal of families to take back their women prompted political leaders to openly condemn this stance, and public campaigns were organised such as the national 'Rehabilitation of Abducted Women and Children Week' in February 1947.

at the end of 1947, centrally controlled relief and rehabilitation remained directed towards the Punjab, while the government of West Bengal was largely left to its own devices in meeting the immediate needs of incoming refugees.

India operated 160 temporary refugee camps in total, providing shelter for 3m refugees by the end of 1947. Forty-five state-run camps were situated in East Punjab providing shelter to 1.2m refugees (Gatrell, 2013), including India's largest and best-equipped refugee camp at Kurukshetra, which accommodated 250,000 people. The number of incoming refugees – at times up to 25,000 in a night – meant that even Kurukshetra, a showcase of Indian refugee relief, collapsed under the enormous burden placed upon its facilities as overcrowding led to the temporary breakdown of the camp administration. In an effort to ease the pressure, the government decided to disperse refugees across India, even as far as the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Thirty-two camps were set up in the Bombay Presidency and three in Madras (Khan, 2007).

In Delhi communal violence prompted the government to relocate Muslims to state-protected 'Muslim zones' (*mohallas*) to separate them from Hindu and Sikh communities. However, the arrival of half a million Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan led to a housing crisis that made it difficult to keep Muslim-owned property empty (Zamindar, 2007). Although legally under the protection of the government Muslim property became the backbone of rehabilitation programmes for Hindu refugees (Pandey, 1997). A government-appointed legal custodian administered abandoned property and (temporarily) allocated it to non-Muslim refugees. While theoretically Muslims had the option to claim back their property, non-Muslim refugees were protected from eviction, and returning to their homes became nearly impossible for Muslim refugees who had been relocated to Delhi's *mohallas* (Zamindar, 2007). Meanwhile, Muslims not finding accommodation in the *mohallas* formed ad hoc camps, the largest of which, at *Purana Qila* (Old Fort) and Humayan's tomb, each accommodated about 60,000 refugees (Pandey, 1997).

In West Punjab, meanwhile, the Pakistani government provided shelter, food and medical relief for a million refugees in state-run camps. Cholera epidemics were frequent and living conditions poor, prompting the relocation of some 900,000 refugees south, to Karachi in Sindh (Ansari, 1995).

6.3 Colonial legacies and relief in Bengal: unworthy refugees and limited relief

The refugee influx into West Bengal was much slower and on a smaller scale than the rapid population transfers that took place in Punjab. It was nevertheless still a substantial crisis, with two million arriving by 1950, and there were still episodes of significant violence, including the killing of thousands of people in Calcutta in August 1946, followed by further violence in Noakhali and East Bengal in mid-October (Gatrell, 2013). Even so, the relative 'tranquillity' in Bengal led the Indian government to conclude that a desire for economic benefit, rather than a threat to life, was driving the influx of refugees. Labelling refugees as economic migrants limited the number of people entitled to state assistance and meant that the government of West Bengal could not draw on support from the central government in Delhi. Limited relief for incoming refugees was provided in temporary transit camps in the belief that the refugees would eventually return home (Chatterji, 2007; 2010). There was also little concerted effort to reach a long-term solution for refugees in Bengal, who were not entitled to participate in the central government's rehabilitation schemes.

Government rhetoric and practice in handling refugees in Punjab and Bengal recall nineteenth century distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor: 'genuine' Punjabi refugees, seen as forcibly displaced, were set apart from 'undeserving' Bengali refugees, who were labelled as economic migrants (Naqvi, 2007). This rhetoric was loaded with a racial classification that traced its origins back to the colonial period. Punjabi refugees were generally seen as 'worthy' recipients of state-sponsored relief because they belonged to what the colonial regime identified as the 'martial races', embodying attributes of manliness and trustworthiness (Chatterji, 2010). The Bengalis, by contrast, were generally regarded as lazy, emasculated and disloyal, and hence anything but 'deserving' refugees. The differentiation of 'deserving Punjabi' and 'undeserving Bengali' refugees was complemented by a definition of refugeehood that equated it with victimhood. Uprooted Punjabis, forced from their homes against their will, were understood to fall into this category, and therefore deserving of state assistance. Uprooted Bengalis, by contrast, were generally seen as having taken an active decision to cross into India (Chatterji, 2010). As

such, overly generous state assistance risked enticing ever-larger numbers of migrants – echoing colonial famine responses that aimed to avoid attracting the 'undeserving poor' by keeping levels of relief unappealingly low.

At the beginning of 1949, in an effort to wind down those refugee camps still receiving a limited amount of state assistance, the government began to restrict relief to the provision of assistance to male refugees for a maximum duration of one week, after which time 'able-bodied' males were expected to find employment to be eligible for continued assistance. The introduction of employment as a precondition for aid recalled the nineteenth century colonial practice of 'famine work'. In fact, conditions were even harsher as the government did not provide public work sites. Instead, 'able-bodied' refugees were expected to find work themselves, and present proof that they had done so. What must have seemed a nigh-on impossible task was made harder still because the government denied refugees access to Calcutta, the only major source of employment (Chatterjee, 2010). Relief was stopped and the camps closed down later in 1949. Although the government offered a small allowance to encourage refugees to move to other parts of India they were reluctant to do so, prompting the government to end the limited rehabilitation support it had been providing.

6.4 Non-governmental responses

Where the governments of India and Pakistan were unable to provide relief, individual and organised civil society philanthropy stepped in. However, non-governmental relief provided by local organisations tended to be influenced by communal divisions as many organisations providing assistance also played an active role in agitating and mobilising communities and organising or participating directly in violence. The Jam'at il Islami in Pakistan, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India all used access to beneficiary groups to challenge the political power of the new governments (Khan, 2007). The Jam'at il Islami set up refugee camps, buried the dead and provided food and medicine in West Punjab. The RSS (a member of which, Nathuram Godse, would shoot Gandhi in early 1948) operated four refugee camps in Delhi. In Bengal, where the influence of leftist parties was strong, relief was provided by the Communist Party of India (CPI) and its supporters (Khan, 2007).

A small but noteworthy alternative to the sectarian organisations described here was the Pakistan Voluntary Service. Headed by the wife of Pakistani Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, the Service supplied refugees with food, clothes and medical assistance. In India, Countess Mountbatten (the last Viceroy's wife) initiated and led the United Council for Relief and Welfare, supported by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (Gatrell, 2013; Khan, 2007). Other international involvement was largely limited to Christian missionary and charitable organisations with an established presence in India, such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Catholic Relief Services, the Quakers and St. John's Ambulance (Battarcharya, 2001). Although the ICRC had a presence in India, its delegate, Otto Wenger, was primarily tasked with the conflict between India and Pakistan in Kashmir.

7 Displacement and violence in 1971

The roots of the displacement crisis of 1971 trace back to India's independence. As in 1947, the crisis was driven by communal violence; unlike in 1947, however, India assumed full responsibility for providing assistance to the millions of refugees from East Pakistan who streamed across the border into Bengal. Also unlike 1947, the 1971 crisis touched on the interests of major international powers. Following an Indian request, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) became the 'focal point' and administered the international aid response, and international non-governmental organisations provided relief.

7.1 Overview

The displacement crisis of 1971 was the result of an escalation of the latent conflicts that had simmered in the subcontinent since 1947, combining long-standing neglect of East Pakistan by the political elite in West Pakistan, conflict within East Pakistan between Bengali Muslims – the majority population – and Bihari Muslims, who had come to East Pakistan as refugees following Partition, and the overarching hostility between Pakistan and India. Bihari Muslims shared cultural ties with the West Pakistani elite and became a privileged minority in East Pakistan. For their part, Bengali Muslims were generally distrusted by the West Pakistani elite and were regarded as having more in common with Indian (Bengali) Hindus than with their 'Muslim brothers' (Sen, 1999). This hostility prompted increasing calls among Bengali Muslims for the separation of East from West Pakistan and the creation of an independent state, Bangladesh.

In November 1970 East Pakistan was struck by a cyclone and tidal wave that killed hundreds of thousands of people. The disaster coincided with elections that delivered a convincing victory for the nationalist Awami League. The perception that the authorities in West Pakistan had been slow to respond to the cyclone exacerbated tensions between the two halves of the country. The government in West Pakistan refused to recognise the result, leading to widespread riots and massacres of Bengalis by the West Pakistan military. By March 1971 East Pakistan was in a state of civil war. The conflict ended in December 1971 following Indian military intervention; an estimated one million Bengalis were killed, and another ten million fled to India (Wheeler, 2013; Bose, 2005). In what was now the independent state of Bangladesh, Biharis in turn found themselves subject to retaliatory attacks and official discrimination.

7.2 The humanitarian response

The first wave of refugees streaming into India numbered in the thousands, but the volumes arriving grew rapidly, reaching eight million by September and ten million by December 1971, overwhelming India's border states of West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam. While the Indian government kept its borders open throughout the crisis, sheltering incoming refugees, supplying food and providing immediate medical assistance, it also emphasised the temporary nature of the refugee crisis and sought the quick return of refugees to East Pakistan. The country was still struggling to deal with the post-1947 influx and, while willing to host refugees, did not wish to embark on another large-scale rehabilitation programme. Even so, the government quickly assumed responsibility for managing the crisis and financed the relief provided by state governments.

After registration incoming refugees received an entry document permitting residence for three months. Family heads were issued a card on the basis of which food distributions were planned and vaccinations against cholera and smallpox provided (Saha, 2003; Seamann, 1972). The Rehabilitation Department of the Ministry of Labour, which was charged with administering relief, established a Special Branch Secretariat in Calcutta. A Central Coordination

Committee for Refugee Relief was subsequently tasked with organising refugee camps, the provision of supplies and the general coordination of the relief effort. The Food Corporation of India managed supplies to the camps, distributing food and additional allowances for the purchase of basic goods.

An estimated 7m refugees streamed into West Bengal, with a further 1.4m arriving in Tripura and another 670,000 in Meghalaya. The majority of refugee camps were set up in West Bengal, which had 492 out of the total of 825.[8] Almost all of the camps were administered by state governments employing retired army officers as camp managers. Registering such large numbers was extremely challenging, and millions went unregistered, often staying with extended families or friends outside the scope of state relief. Shelter was inadequate throughout the crisis as the Indian government sought to keep spending on shelter materials low, preventing refugees from building more robust accommodation. Generally poor living conditions led to high mortality rates in the camps (Bass, 2013).

Government rhetoric was designed to emphasise the temporary nature of the refugee influx: camps were referred to as transit camps to denote that their occupants were expected either to return home or move on; legal categories and administrative measures were used to create a distinction between refugees involved in previous crises and the refugees of 1971, and state governments were instructed to use the terms 'migrant' or 'evacuee', not refugee (Datta, 2013). Fears that refugees would elect to stay in India proved unfounded, as many returned quickly after the end of the conflict in December. Repatriation assistance included a two-week food ration and money to pay for the return journey.

7.3 The international aid response

Despite general distrust of the UN, which was seen as biased and ineffective (Bass, 2013), the Indian government requested humanitarian assistance on 23 April 1971. UNHCR coordinated international relief in eastern India, as well as facilitating the repatriation of Bihari Muslims to Pakistan (UNHCR, 2012; Manly, 2007). Half of the $40m for relief was covered by international financial assistance transferred to the Indian government, either directly or via UNHCR. Amongst the largest contributors to UNHCR were the US and the UK (Debnath, 2011). The World Food Programme (WFP) provided thousands of tons of oil and milk powder, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) transferred medicines and equipment, including 21m doses of cholera vaccines, and set up Nutritional Therapy Centres. Across the border, the UN East Pakistan Relief Operation (UNEPRO) was established in December 1971. UNEPRO was subsequently succeeded by the UN Special Relief Office in Bangladesh (UNROB), which completed its mission in 1973.

Many international and national humanitarian organisations, including Oxfam, Care and national Red Cross Societies, were already working in border areas to assist people affected by the cyclone in November 1970. Oxfam assumed the leadership of the Disasters Emergency Committee, comprising War on Want, the Save the Children Fund, Christian Aid and the British Red Cross Society. The Committee raised an initial sum of over £1m in the UK for immediate assistance, and in April 1971 Oxfam began providing humanitarian assistance to refugees in Calcutta before expanding into areas most directly affected by the crisis. The agency complemented government relief through the distribution of additional food rations, medical care, sanitation facilities, drinking water, child feeding, clothing and shelter, working closely with Indian volunteers and channelling relief through national civil society organisations (Raghavan, 2013; Black, 1992). As public support began to wane in the latter half of 1971 Oxfam mounted an unprecedented media campaign, *The Testimony of Sixty*, comprising eyewitness accounts and photographs (Raghavan, 2013).[9]

The ICRC mounted a four-year mission between 1971 and 1975 with a particular focus on the repatriation of Bihari Muslims to Pakistan. Although the organisation registered more than half a million Bihari Muslims, and the Pakistani government issued permits for those who wished to settle in Pakistan, the criteria under which the government would accept them were narrow, and the number of refugees entitled to Pakistani nationality was severely limited.[10] Many

8 Tripura: 276 camps; Meghalaya: 17 camps; Assam: 28 camps; an additional 12 camps were located in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (Saha, 2003).

9 *The Testimony of Sixty* can be accessed at http://de.scribd. com/doc/130825631/The-Testimony-of-Sixty.

refugees were effectively stranded in Bangladesh, neither recognised by the Bangladeshi government nor recognised as Pakistani citizens. One legacy of the presence of the ICRC is 'camp Geneva', a slum district in Dhaka that began life as a temporary shelter (Manly, 2007).

The international aid response to the crisis served both as a means to retain influence in the region and to meet public pressure to act, especially in the UK and the US. US support for West Pakistan and the Soviet Union's alignment with India made South Asia a cockpit of Cold War rivalry, exemplified by the dispatch of a US nuclear-armed aircraft carrier to the coast of Bengal (Rothermund, 2002). Despite reports that US-supplied weapons were being used by West Pakistani troops against civilians in the East the strategic imperative to maintain good relations with West Pakistan meant that the US did not intervene diplomatically or put pressure on the government of West Pakistan to end its military involvement. It was only with India's intervention at the end of 1971 that the US called for a ceasefire and troop withdrawal, but

UN Security Council resolutions to that effect were repeatedly vetoed by the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, US efforts to create a triangular relationship with Pakistan and China, India's regional competitors, coupled by the lack of international support for India's position from Europe and the US, prompted closer Indian alignment with the Soviet Union, and the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship in August 1971. Bolstered by Soviet backing India felt confident enough to mount the intervention in East Pakistan that finally brought the war to a close.

While the absence of international support during the Partition crisis of 1947 left the Indian political elite disillusioned, during the Bangladesh war in 1971 the Indian parliament came close to denouncing the UN in general for its inability to end the violence (Bass, 2013). This sense of historical grievance persists today. Although India has long subscribed to the core values of the United Nations and has frequently used UN channels to push for reforms and pursue its interests, it is still critical of the UN for its perceived bias towards industrialised Western countries, and is a strong proponent of reform of the organisation (Price, 2005). With the notable exception of WFP, India is also reluctant to channel international assistance through the UN's humanitarian agencies, and the bulk of Indian aid is provided bilaterally.

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10 The categories were: 'domiciled in former West Pakistan'; 'employees of the Central Government and their families'; and 'members of divided families, irrespective of their original domicile' (Sen, 1999: 641).

8 Conclusion

India today is a provider of humanitarian assistance on an international scale: it was involved in the relief response in Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Indonesia following the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, assisted Pakistan with cash and in-kind assistance after the Kashmir earthquake in 2005 and flooding in 2010, and provided notably rapid assistance in the wake of the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Reflecting the military's long-standing role in the provision of relief following domestic disasters, the Indian government tends to reply on the logistical capacities of its armed forces (Meier and Murthy, 2011) to a larger extent than Western counterparts, while relying less on the implementation capacities of national NGOs – despite India's vibrant civil society and the long and rich history of private philanthropy and civic association traced in this research – and preferring bilateral assistance over multilateral channels. Conceptually humanitarian assistance tends not to be seen as a form of aid distinct from development, but as an integral element of it. Again, this understanding of humanitarian action in a wider social sense has historical roots in the Indian elite's demands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that disaster relief be embedded within longer-term measures to foster development. It also reflects independent India's efforts to achieve greater coherence between emergency relief and long-term social development, in response to a century of criticism of the colonial state's preoccupation with limiting its responsibilities in emergencies.

The evolution of humanitarianism in India, and the scope, quality and timeliness of humanitarian responses, have also been deeply conditioned by the political, social and economic context and the interplay between government and civil society. A historical perspective reveals a long-standing tendency of governments to limit their responsibilities to potential aid beneficiaries through the introduction of exclusionary definitions and bureaucratic barriers. During the colonial period, the East India Company and, later, the British colonial state feared that famine relief would place an unsustainable burden on the country's finances and hamper efforts to extract value from the colony. Ideas on poor relief, and the perceived distinction between the 'deserving' and the

'undeserving' poor that originated in discourses in Britain during the 1830s, were instrumentalised to limit spending on disaster relief. By providing relief to a selected group of recipients – the labouring poor – the colonial regime reduced the number of people entitled to state assistance, leaving the rest to the vagaries of private charity. Efforts to limit demand were matched by a concomitant reluctance to manage supply through the regulation of the food market and price controls.

Despite independence in 1947, earlier colonial racial stereotypes and ideas about the 'deserving' poor persisted, and the new Indian state differentiated between Bengali and Punjabi refugees in a way that can only partly be explained by the different nature of the crises on India's eastern and western borders. Rather, this was a deliberate effort to reduce the state's liability towards the victims of the humanitarian crisis occasioned by Partition in Bengal. Thirty years later, limited resources rather than the continued influence of Victorian thinking resulted in a similar distinction between '1971 refugees' and earlier migrants, thereby preventing them from seeking long-term rehabilitation in India.

A historical review of responses to famine and displacement during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also highlights the growing importance of the media and public opinion in generating funding and shaping responses. With advances in technology, communication and transportation networks grew, and images and stories of suffering were transmitted across the globe. Both in India and internationally, news coverage of famine solicited donations, stimulated public pressure for governmental action and made the state politically vulnerable to accusations of incompetence and neglect. In the twentieth century, the Bangladesh crisis was accompanied by graphic media accounts of suffering, as well as prompting Oxfam's first large-scale media campaign, *The Testament of Sixty*, and a pair of concerts organised by George Harrison in New York, a precursor to the later 'aid concerts' of the 1980s.

An understanding of the history of humanitarianism in India also underscores the enduring importance of

politics and political interest in determining the nature and scope and beneficiaries of relief responses. Although the Famine Code of the nineteenth century provided a detailed set of regulations to avert starvation, they were often not implemented for political or financial reasons, and the management of famine in British India often appeared to be a secondary concern. Thus, during the prolonged famine of 1896–1901 the political imperative to finance the Afghan war took precedence and diverted funding away from relief; in 1943 the overriding objective of maintaining the war economy in Calcutta drastically reduced assistance in famine-affected rural areas. During the post-independence crises of 1947, lack of geopolitical interest in South Asia by Western states consumed with dealing with the aftermath of the Second World War in Europe meant that there was no international humanitarian response and no neutral actor was present to provide protection for civilians suffering in the communal violence that was at the core of the crisis. Conversely, in 1971 the superpowers were deeply involved, with the United States backing West Pakistan and the Soviet Union aligning itself with India.

The consequent deadlock in the UN Security Council and diplomatic failure made humanitarian assistance the only available tool to respond to the crisis. This, combined with geostrategic interest in the region, saw a much more extensive international relief response.

Indian humanitarianism has been shaped by the country's historical experiences, its varied cultural practices and the transfer of ideas via its continuous exchange with the outside world. As India's contributions to international humanitarian aid grow, Indian actors and concepts of disaster relief will become more visible. The evolution of humanitarian practice in India can only be understood fully by extending the perspective on humanitarianism to the global level, strengthening the argument that humanitarian action evolved through the interplay of forces that transcended national borders. Taking a longer view enables a more inclusive perspective of humanitarian action as a global phenomenon, and deepens understanding of Indian humanitarian engagement today.

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