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Ethnicized Displacements: A Comparative Study of the Lived Experiences of Afghan Pashtuns and Afghan Hazaras in Quetta, Pakistan

My dissertation places displaced Afghans, many of whom have lived in Pakistan for decades, in a broader context of politicized subnational identities (ethnicized identities) and related violence. I use qualitative data from Quetta, including in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations. These stories help understand what it means for different groups to be “displaced” and “urban”, and how this influences their access to space and services. I recognize refugees’ and other displaced people’s ability to exercise social and political agency in host cities despite their multifaceted vulnerabilities, while also making connections with theories of social and institutional informality and everyday practices of insurgent activism and citizenship.

My research finds that ethnicized identities influence displaced people’s urban experiences by fostering different kinds of grassroots solidarity networks and imposing different sociospatial constraints on different subnational groups as they navigate the urban in everyday life. Sociospatial constraints connected to ethnicization shape community members’ decisions to access healthcare and their choice of healthcare facility. My findings build on social determinants of public health, while also addressing two key gaps in global refugee policy and planning theory: I critique global refugee policy for grouping displaced people by national origin (e.g. “Afghan refugees” or “Syrian refugees”), showing that nuances induced by politicized subnational identities are critical in shaping their experiences (e.g. “Afghan Hazara refugees”, or “Afghan Pashtun refugees”). My findings also inform radical and insurgent planning theories and theories of urban informality about the specific vulnerabilities that millions of transnationally displaced people face in cities around the world.