

BETTINA STOETZER

Ruderal City

Ecologies of Migration, Race,
and Urban Nature in Berlin

Ruderal City

BUY



**Experimental Futures: Technological Lives,
Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices**

A series edited by Michael M. J. Fischer
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BETTINA STOETZER

Ruderal City

Ecologies of Migration,
Race, and Urban Nature in Berlin

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PREFACE

FOREST TRACKS

This book's story began in the forest outside of Berlin. In the late 2000s, I embarked on a research project to study antiracist activism in Germany. This led me, quite literally, into the woods. In the formerly East German countryside surrounding the city, forest areas had become a transitory home to asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East, who found themselves living in derelict military barracks. After remaining in legal limbo for years, many African refugees, together with advocacy groups, began to organize protests to draw public attention to the everyday racism, spatial isolation, and violence they experienced. The refugees' encounters with German forests were the result of a series of transformations in national and European Union (EU) asylum policies, as well as the heated nationwide migration debates following Germany's unification.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of socialism ruptured and realigned Europe's political landscape. In the early 1990s, millions of people fled the war in former Yugoslavia (where my grandparents had grown up), while border conflicts and civil war increased in countries across Africa, such as Burundi, Mali, and Senegal. In 1992, close to half a million people sought refuge in Germany. Yet Germany's unification in 1990 also led to a resurgence in white nationalism: right-wing youth and neo-Nazis attacked refugee and migrant worker homes, setting them on fire in several cities. Soon after, EU and German asylum policies underwent sweeping changes that resulted in a sharp drop in the number of people seeking asylum and an increase in deportations. At the same time, local governments relocated

many refugee homes to the peripheries of cities or to remote forest areas in the countryside. By the mid-2000s, refugee activists and advocates were organizing against everyday racism and the spatial isolation of asylum seekers, who now often lived in secluded forest areas in Brandenburg and other parts of former East Germany.

For decades, scholars, artists, writers, and activists of color have highlighted the persistent legacies of racism and colonialism in shaping European social life (Gelbin, Konuk, and Piesche 1999; Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Steyerl 2003; Hügel et al. 1993; Kelly 2019; Nghi Ha 2010; Oguntoye, Ayim, and Schultz 2007; Red Haircrow 2018; Wekker 2016). Yet despite this important work, public and academic discussion in Germany often continues to focus on racism as a phenomenon of the past or as something that occurs elsewhere (Yildiz 2020), while largely ignoring the struggles of people of color against racism in Europe as well as the country's own colonial history. Addressing this silence, my first book, *InDifferenzen: Feministische Theorie in der Antirassistischen Kritik* (2004), tracked twentieth-century feminist, transnational conversations on race and racism in Germany and showed how these conversations shed light on the blind spots, as well as the privilege and power of whiteness in Europe.

Drawing on this earlier research, my next and new project initially sought to map ethnographically how antiracist coalition work on refugee rights exposed the ways in which structural racism infuses social institutions and migration policies in Germany. Participating in and engaging with antiracist networks in Berlin and Brandenburg, I had wanted to trace how activist movements build alliances while retheorizing racism and social justice on the ground. Yet when I arrived in Brandenburg, the forests themselves demanded attention. The landscape—the forest, the ruined military barracks, and the lack of access to infrastructure—was at the center of people's stories about what it meant to become a refugee in this place. A Kenyan activist spoke about having no access to warm water, having to walk through the forest every day, and encountering wild animals at night, all while being stuck in legal limbo for years. This was neither a fairy-tale forest nor the industrial forest that helped lay the foundations for Germany's economic power. This was a forest haunted by nightmares of colonial and racial violence—a space in which Europe's racialized others were administered into a refugee/savage slot, from which they were forced to prove their worthiness to be integrated into European society.

While many German Berliners and tourists saw Brandenburg's forests as a place of nature and adventure, to the Kenyan activist, the forest—which

she referred to as the German bush—was a space of unease and lack of possibility, crowded with uncanny creatures ranging from wild boars to bureaucrats to neo-Nazis (see also Stoetzer 2014b). Perhaps it is no surprise that people living in some of Europe's most notorious refugee camps have called upon images of the wild, invoking terms such as *the bush* or *the jungle* as they found themselves inhabiting the ruins of military barracks or shaky tents, dwelling on the edges of windy ocean cliffs, facing police violence, or having their temporary homes go up in flames. The so-called jungles in Calais, France, or Moria camp on Lesbos Island, Greece, are just two cases in point. As Deborah Bird Rose (2004) reminds us, racism makes for “wild country.” The Kenyan activist's experiences thus provided a glimpse of how landscapes such as forests can become sites of nation-making, dehumanization, racial violence, and exclusion. Her stories offered testimony to the ways in which colonial legacies and contemporary racial injustices materialize not only in bodies but also in relations to land. Yet, as this book will illustrate, these landscapes of exclusion and violence could also become the very grounds upon which alternative futures are forged.

While I listened to people's accounts of feeling stuck in the forests of Berlin's peripheries, I realized that the figure of the wild followed a different path in the city. In the mid-2000s, the media frequently reported on the city's diverse flora and fauna. Many white Germans ventured out to explore urban nature in Berlin. Meanwhile, the country was riddled with public dispute over the presence of refugees and migrants of color. As parks became sites of debate over how migrant communities inhabit the urban environment, many urban gardeners created so-called multicultural gardens to cultivate plants and alternative communities across class and ethnic difference, thus hoping to escape increasing social divisions. These divisions and disputes over migration are certainly not unique to Berlin. Instead, they offer a window into the role that relations to urban lands and nature play in racialization processes in Germany and Europe. And they provide glimpses of what it means to live in hazardous environments of dehumanization—which is the central subject of this book.

In the 2020s, climate disasters have begun to wreak havoc across the planet, shaking a false sense of security held across the wealthy global North. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and deepened the ways in which racial and economic inequalities affect whose lives become vulnerable and are exposed to risk. The Black Lives Matter movement has inspired protests across the globe. In Europe, these protests have reinvigorated the ongoing social struggle to confront anti-Black racism and police violence. The protests have

also initiated a larger debate about structural racism within mainstream society and have given rise to demands for reparations for colonial crimes and for truly decolonizing Europe (El-Tayeb 2020). Yet in Germany, too often, public discussion continues to see racism as something that is always “elsewhere,” contained as a phenomenon of the past or a problem of right-wing extremism. Although reflections of Germany’s colonial history have begun to be more common in various public arenas, the question of how this history continues to shape whiteness, anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, and other forms of racism today is rarely addressed. This is especially true when it comes to understanding how colonial history has informed extractive practices that have led to the contemporary environmental crisis.

As Carolyn Finney (2014) and Malcom Ferdinand (2022) teach us, the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and ongoing racial injustice continue to shape destructive modes of inhabiting the planet—while nature spaces and environmentalism are often coded as white (see also Linke 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). Nature can thus become a resource for cementing the nation, white supremacy, and settler colonial power. But, as I learned in the forest at the edges of Berlin, it can also become a site for confronting the violence inherent in practices of racialization, administration, and exploitation that shape Western relations to nature. This book thus embarks on a journey through the forests, parks, rubble spaces, and gardens of Berlin to seek out these openings and the alternative modes of inhabiting the world that people craft in them.

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x PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

On a chilly morning in the spring of 2017, I stood with Mehmet on the veranda overlooking his garden. As the sun began to peek through the clouds, he pointed out the garden's highlights: grape vines growing precariously on the side of the shack, the vegetable bed where cabbages would soon be thriving, his mother's cherry tree—just about to bloom—and a small pine tree that his father replanted after someone had thrown it away after Christmas. Built from scrap materials, the shack was crowded with odd objects: wooden and plastic panels, chairs, piles of tools, a colorful array of lamps, carpets, sun umbrellas, and a small sofa. But most impressive, with its trunk emerging out of the shack's front wall, was a five-meter-tall tree-of-heaven towering above the garden.

Mehmet's father, Osman Kalın, was a local celebrity. In the 1980s, when the Berlin Wall marked the boundary between East and West Berlin, he took advantage of a gap in state control and an "error" in precise territorial division. As local and family legend has it, it all started in 1983, when Osman left his job.¹ After working in construction for many years, he struggled with chronic back pain and was forced to retire early. Yet soon after retiring, he got bored and was ready for a construction project of a different sort. Living just a few blocks from the Wall, in Kreuzberg in West Berlin, he went on a stroll one day and discovered a small triangle of land in the Wall's shadow, littered with garbage. He began to clear it, and, after a few days, when nobody bothered to complain, he decided to plant some onions, a few tomatoes, and cabbage on the land. After a while, he added cucumbers, pumpkins, garlic,

beans, sunflowers, and collard greens. His wife, Fadik, and he also planted several fruit trees, and they built a small shed that soon became a two-story house, cobbled together from metal sheets, old doors, wooden beams, grids from abandoned fridges, and other things they found in the streets. Soon, a neighbor joined their garden project and took charge of a small piece of the land. During summers, the couple's children, grandchildren, and other members of the family would work in the garden every day, enjoying the sun and eating fresh vegetables. The garden soon became a meeting place for passersby and neighbors, who came to help out, take a break, and socialize.

Struggling on a small pension, the Kalins began to harvest the crops and sell them at the local weekly Turkish market. One day, just when the tomatoes began to ripen, two East German border guards knocked at Osman's door. Their garden, it turned out, was located on territory belonging to the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The East German government had constructed the Wall in a straight line to save money instead of following the zig-zag contours of the actual border, thus skipping the triangle of land on which the Kalins' vegetables were now thriving. After long negotiations, the GDR government allowed Osman to stay—provided the sunflowers did not grow taller than the Wall.

In 1989, the Wall tumbled, and Osman's garden was no longer in an abandoned corner but at the center of the unified city. When the new district office protested the garden dwelling, Osman insisted that the East German state had entrusted the piece of land to him. In the end, the dismal state of Berlin's finances assisted Osman's cause, and plans to relandscape the former border zone into a green corridor stalled. Osman's garden was once again left alone. In 2004, the borough administration finally granted him the right to stay, recognizing the garden as a significant part of local history.

Today, people affectionately call the garden dwelling the Berlin tree house (*Baumhaus*), or *gecekondu*, in honor of the squatter houses that emerged at the peripheries of Turkish cities during rural-urban migrations from the 1950s onward. Gecekondu literally means “place built overnight,” because such shelters often popped up overnight and people who built them took advantage of legal loopholes.² Many Turkish Berliners, like Osman, lived in such shelters before migrating to Berlin (Lanz 2007). Not unlike a Turkish gecekondu, Osman's Berlin version features a small orchard of apricot, apple, pear, and plum trees (fig. 1.1). The shack has survived heavy storms, cold winters, and even a fire. A local priest helped Osman tap into the water infrastructure from the nearby church. And the large tree-of-heaven, once a small shrub growing in the cracks of the sidewalk, has become an impres-



FIGURE 1.1 Berlin tree house. Photo by author.

sive part of the *gecekondu*'s front wall. Each year, as the trunk expands, Osman and his son cut further into the wall to accommodate its growth.

The *gecekondu* is well known among Berliners, and as far afield as Istanbul, where news reporters have chuckled about Osman's clever dealings. Sometimes, on weekends, tourist groups stop by. In front of the shack, Osman put a few chairs and a table. One day, the chairs and table were stolen and the bench was burned by hostile neighbors. The next day, Osman quickly replaced them. The table's legs are now cemented to the ground, offering a place for neighbors, kin, and friends to gather and chat.



I open with the story about this small garden to introduce the notion of a ruderal city. Nestled in a small gap in the city's border infrastructure and built environment, Osman Kalın's *gecekondu* took advantage of the state's desire to create order, to simplify and to draw straight lines. Instead of fitting into existing boundaries, the garden's ecology was made possible by a gap, both in Osman's life and in the gray zones of the nation-state. Cobbled together from dreams, hard labor, edible plants, streetside trees, and cast-off furniture, the *gecekondu* embodies what I call a ruderal ecology in the city.

Ruderal comes from *rudus*, the Latin word for rubble. Commonly used in urban ecology (e.g., Del Tredici 2010; Sukopp 2008; Sukopp, Hejny, and Kowarik 1990), the term refers to organisms that spontaneously inhabit “disturbed” environments usually considered inhospitable to life: cracks in sidewalks, spaces alongside train tracks and roads, industrial sites, waste disposal areas, or rubble fields.³ Unplanned worlds in the shadows of anthropogenic landscapes, ruderals are neither wild nor domesticated. Instead, they depend on “edge effects” and the juxtaposition of contrasting environments in one ecosystem.⁴

Ruderal ecologies can be found all over Berlin, and they entered my fieldwork in myriad ways. Yet it was Herbert Sukopp, a well-known urban ecologist, who drew my attention to their botany when I first met him in 2007. Surrounded by the Berlin Wall and cut off from their usual field sites in the countryside, Sukopp and other West Berlin botanists conducted research on plants growing in the bombed city’s rubble after World War II. As he and his colleagues followed the city’s rubble vegetation, abundant in unexpected newcomers from all over the world, they began to study plant migration and discovered a cosmopolitan ecology emerging in the city’s “blasted landscapes” (Stoetzer 2011, 54; Tsing 2014)—an ecology that was the result of capitalist trade, displacement, and the destruction that nationalism had wrought across Europe. Through my subsequent conversations and interviews with Sukopp, I learned about ruderal plants such as sticky goosefoot (*Chenopodium botrys*) and tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), whose seeds had entered the city by hitching rides on the boots of soldiers and refugees, or via trains, horse fodder, and imported materials. These plants still thrive in Berlin today, including in Osman Kalin’s garden. Attending to their ecologies and the stories people tell about them, I learned a new way of approaching “nature” in the city.

In this book, I offer the notion of the ruderal city as a framework for thinking about the heterogeneity of urban life in the ruins of European nationalism and capitalism. Exploring Berlin as a ruderal city (*Ruderalstadt*), I direct attention toward often unnoticed cosmopolitan yet precarious ways of remaking the urban fabric. Ruderal worlds emerge in the cracks of systems of urban governance and formal institutions. “Illicit” hitchhikers on infrastructural projects, they disrupt systems of human control and a social order in which only specific kinds of “human-environment relations” or “natures” have value and seem appealing.

Rather than constituting parallel cultures, wilderness, or cultivated nature, ruderal worlds thrive in in-between spaces and live amid inhospitable

tality and relocation. Following them entails never telling a singular story about “urban nature”—a fraught term that refers to both shifting ecological imaginaries about cities and their physical transformation (Gandy 2022, 2006).⁵ Like nature in the abstract Western sense, urban nature is built on histories of extraction, racism, violence, and colonization. Tracking ruderal lives in its place means catching glimpses of seemingly disparate worlds—to imagine urban ecologies otherwise, and to create an analytical lens that troubles environmental perspectives and combines them with an analysis of racism, migration, and social justice. Such a method of gleaning perspectives and thinking across registers is particularly salient at a moment when racism and capitalist exploitation are rendering much of the world inhospitable to many beings. Thinking with the ruderal, the goal is not to equate people with plants, but rather to ask how people, plants, animals, and other living beings are intertwined in projects of capitalist extraction and nation-making—and how they traverse these projects.

While scholars in the humanities and social sciences have written about ruderal plants or areas from the perspective of the history of science (Lachmund 2013) or by examining the aesthetics of and knowledges about urban nature and wastelands (Cowles 2017; Gandy 2013, 2022), I offer the ruderal as an analytic for ethnographic inquiry into contemporary urban life. Ruderal worlds are not utopian spaces of hope and cosmopolitan survival amid ruins, nor are they free from power. Instead, a ruderal analytic asks about the broader ecologies of human-built and social structures and the multispecies and often violent worlds they become part of. In short: ruderal worlds constitute an ecology of unexpected neighbors in the city.

Like other cities, Berlin has long been inhabited by diverse neighbors. And some have been more welcome than others. As concerns about climate change, environmental degradation, and species extinction have grown over the past decade, Berlin is often promoted as “Europe’s Nature Capital.” The city features a large diversity of plant and animal species, as well as many parks, lakes, gardens, and urban forests. Many local residents enthusiastically explore the city’s nature and its nonhuman newcomers. Yet while Berlin is celebrated as a “Green City,” its parks and forests have also become sites of contestation over migrant rights and appropriate relations to the urban environment. Amid intense political debate over migration, images of segregated, troubled neighborhoods abound.⁶ At the same time, many Berliners seek out urban nature precisely to find refuge from the city’s social divisions—for example by rediscovering allotment gardens or founding so-called multicultural or intercultural gardens.⁷

Based on fieldwork undertaken since 2007, *Ruderal City* offers an ethnography of the shifting racial politics of nature, migration, and the nation in Berlin and its hinterlands. Drawing on interviews and participant observation with migrant and refugee communities, as well as with ecologists, environmentalists, public officials, activists, and nature enthusiasts, the book illustrates that nature is a key register through which urban citizenship and belonging are articulated in contemporary Europe. *Ruderal City* takes readers on a tour of sites in and around Berlin that have figured prominently in German national imaginaries—urban wastelands, spaces of rubble, gardens, forests, and parks—to explore how racial, gender, and class inequalities are reconfigured in conflicts over the use, experience, knowledge, and management of the city’s green spaces and urban nature.

The book’s chapters show how projects of nation-making and racialization materialize in Berlin’s ecologies and in people’s relations to land and other beings. I direct attention to diverse but often unnoticed practices of remaking the urban fabric, including botanical research on “alien plants” in the city’s rubble after World War II, contemporary urban gardening in migrant neighborhoods, “wild barbecuing” in parks by Turkish and Southeast Asian diasporic communities, and the experiences of East African refugees living in former military barracks in the East German forest at Berlin’s periphery. These sites provide snapshots of social exclusions and practices that mark not only human bodies but also plants, animals, landscapes, and “things.” In this sense, the book offers insights into shifting ecologies of racialization, migration, and nationhood and a cultural politics of race, nature, and difference (Moore, Pandian, and Kosek 2003): in the book’s ethnographic stories, we can see how the nation’s borders and boundaries are naturalized, and how multiple kinds of bodies become “matter out of place” (Douglas 2002), outside the recognized national body.

Yet, nature cannot be seen as a given, and it is much more than a metaphor. Whether mobilized as a category for urban planning or as a resource with which to racialize people’s bodies or promote hope amid social conflict, nature becomes a way of assembling political order (Latour 2004) that always enlists multiple beings and is deeply fraught with histories of extraction and harm (Haraway 2008; Tsing 2012). Similarly, the scientific field of ecology has been entangled with the colonial encounter that has often rendered nature, or the environment, as an external and extractable resource (Ferdinand 2022; Hage 2017; Rajan 2006; Worster 1985). While attending to the ways in which relations to more-than-human worlds in the city are shaped by or rework racial, gender, and class inequalities, the

ethnographic material presented in *Ruderal City* goes a step further: it points to ways of “being alive” (Ingold 2011) that are more complex than what existing analytical categories of migration, nature, and the environment—categories that are always also the products of administration, exploitation, and racialization—are able to capture. Instead, ruderal practices emerge from imploded power structures. Like the *gecekondü*, they exceed efforts to domesticate the world. Attending to such ways of being alive, and the more-than-human socialities they enable, can enliven urban analysis and broaden our understanding of relationality and politics (see also Haraway 2015; Kohn 2010; Myers, forthcoming; Raffles 2010; Tsing 2015). A ruderal analytic thus challenges cultural critique to trouble and rework common analytical distinctions—such as the distinction between culture and nature, matter and infrastructure, inanimate and animate, the nation and its “outsider” (the migrant), as well as the city and its countryside.

Gleaning glimpses of urban life in the ruins of racism and capitalism, *Ruderal City* creates a dialogue between environmental perspectives and the study of migration and racial politics in Europe. A ruderal framework goes beyond the usual kinds of stories told about cities—and about Berlin in particular—stories that tend to focus on buildings and people. Examining how people’s relations to landscapes, plants, and other beings reshape urban socialities, I explore how to write about a politics of race and nation-making in ways that approach the city as a place of animate encounter. With this focus, *Ruderal City* speaks to the larger question of what constitutes cultural critique in a time of rubble—a time when the implosions of history, racism, colonialism, and capitalist modes of extraction render much of the world increasingly uninhabitable.

Anthropology as Cultural Critique in the Rubble of the Twenty-First Century

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, a shift has occurred in anthropology and related fields. Keywords such as ontology, the Anthropocene, infrastructure, multispecies ethnography, new materialism, and the environmental turn have proliferated in numerous forums. A new kind of reflexivity has emerged as anthropology reflects on the vulnerability and earthly entanglements of its central subject: the (hu)man, or *Anthropos*.⁸ In an era some call the Anthropocene,⁹ humans have fundamentally changed the course of Earth’s ecosystems (Chakrabarty 2012; Latour 2013) such that the modern fiction of nature/culture or human/nonhuman as ontologically

opposed categories is impossible to sustain (de Castro 2012; de la Cadena 2015; Descola 2013; Haraway 1991, 2016; MacCormack and Strathern 1980). Instead, terms such as “naturecultures” (Haraway 2008) account for the ways in which ecological relations are always material-semiotic and people’s relations to each other and the world are porous and deeply entangled.

This call for conceptual renewal carries a sense of urgency: in the face of climate change, social injustice, the global circulation of toxins and waste, and the destruction of habitats, anthropology, it seems, has become a science of ruins, examining the dynamics of life on a damaged planet (Tsing 2015; see also Dawdy 2010; Gordillo 2014; Harms 2013; Johnson 2013; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Stoler 2013, 2016). Responding to these developments and drawing on multispecies frameworks (Haraway 2015; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Kohn 2007, 2010; Raffles 2002; Tsing 2015) as well as longer legacies in feminist theory, science and technology studies (STS), environmental anthropology, and antiracist critique, many recent ethnographies model an anthropology that highlights the violence, vulnerabilities, and earthly entanglements of more-than-human worlds (Dave 2017; Govindrajana 2018; Helmreich 2009; Parreñas 2018; Weston 2017). Pushing beyond a framework of human impacts on the environment, these ethnographies place emphasis on “the effects of our entanglements with other kinds of living selves” (Kohn 2007, 4).¹⁰

With a similar interest in social-material relations, emerging anthropological scholarship on infrastructure directs attention to built environments and the physical networks of cities—such as roads, trains, water supplies, waste and sewage systems, or electric grids—to show how they enable social life and forms of urban governance (see Anand 2017; Boyer 2014; Carse 2012; Chalfin 2014; Fennell 2015; Larkin 2013; Schnitzler 2013). Anchoring analysis in the politics and poetics of human-built structures, this scholarship has opened up fresh perspectives on the relations between materiality, consciousness, and culture. This occurs at a historic moment when the limits of managing nature as resource and the toxic effects of late industrialism and of the (neo)colonial order become more visible (Fortun 2012; Liboiron 2021; Masco 2017). At the same time, the infrastructures of cities—specifically in the global North—are beginning to age and crumble and seem less reliable (as if they ever were). When the thing breaks, one notices its “thingness” (Heidegger 1970; Star 1999).

Approaching this kind of ruination as more than an impetus for aesthetic contemplation or imperialist nostalgia (Huyssen 2006; Rosaldo 1989; Stoler 2013), in which one mourns “what one has destroyed” (Rosaldo 1989, 107),

anthropological reflections on ruins offer new sensibilities for grasping the spatial and temporal life of modern world-making projects—and their destructive effects.¹¹ Yet curiously, while abandoned factories, toxic dumps, weedy lots, and the gutted infrastructures of canals, roads, and schools appear as integral elements of urban landscapes, infrastructures and ruins are often theorized separately from one another.¹² In a similar vein, while crowded with images of rubble overgrown with weeds, scholarship on ruins rarely describes or theorizes the actual ecologies or animate worlds that emerge in spaces of ruination, even as some authors highlight the afterlife of ruins and its materiality.¹³ As a result, focusing on infrastructure as substrate of human cultural systems risks assuming a vitalist dynamic, even when considering infrastructure's failures, highlighting its "experimental ontologies" (Bruun Jensen and Morita 2016), or showing how progress and ruination are intimately tied together (Johnson 2013). This vitalism depends on a deeply gendered and racialized binary distinction between technology, culture, and infrastructure as an active form of externalization, and matter, nature, or ruins as a passive, inanimate, or degenerate form (Le Guin 1989; Yusoff 2018, 13).

These dualities between infrastructure and ruins, or between active technology and passive "matter," also correspond with a nature/culture divide in urban scholarship. Although ecological metaphors played a formative role in understanding and managing twentieth-century urban human life (J. Light 2009; Mitman 1992), the lively presence of animals, plants, and other organisms in cities has long functioned as the constitutive outside, or other, of much urban analysis. With the development of industrial society and the emergence of sociology and anthropology, the city—specifically the European metropole—became the locus of culture, independent of the resources and labor of the countryside and the colony (Cronon 1991; Williams 1973). Whereas theorists such as Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss chronicled the (symbolic) role of animals and nature in rituals, myths, and everyday life, these are mostly absent (except in analogy) in the writings of many nineteenth- and twentieth-century theorists, such as Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Max Weber, who focused on "advanced" capitalist societies and their formal institutions (Jerolmack 2007, 875). Approaching the city as a solely human habitat, urban scholars have often reproduced a colonial and capitalist logic of urbanization that associates cities with progress and conquest over external nature (Wolch 1998, 119). Although recent scholarship has challenged this divide by examining various ecologies of urbanism (Anand 2017; Barua 2021; M. Bennett and Teague 1999;

Brantz and Dümpelmann 2011; Chalfin 2014; Gandy 2013, 2022; Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006; Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan 2013; Wolch 1998), urban analysis often continues to treat nature as a background to urban life, “a physical place to which one can go” (Haraway 1992, 66).

Ruderal City offers an alternative to this binary approach to urban life. If we see urban environments as spaces built on the discursive, spatial, and material ruins created by racism, colonial exploitation, and dispossession—and if, as Anna Tsing (2014, 87) points out, “ruins are now our gardens”—then the questions become: What does it mean to live in these ruins, and who inhabits them? Whose natures materialize in today’s cities and postindustrial landscapes? These questions set the stage for tracking the unruly heterogeneity that exists in the cracks of the urban fabric and its institutions.

It is with this focus on heterogeneous ecologies and unlikely neighbors that *Ruderal City* tackles the larger question of what constitutes cultural critique in a time of rubble. As Ryan Cecil Jobson (2020) and Savannah Shange (2019b) remind us, anthropology’s field is quite literally on fire and has never been far from other fields of dispossession and violence such as the plantation. After all, the origins of anthropology were deeply entangled with the colonial encounter (Asad 1997) and early anthropological thinking contributed to the ascendancy of scientific racism (Burton 2015). The nature/culture dualism played a powerful yet ambiguous role in these developments. Throughout the twentieth century, one of the field’s goals was to offer its mainly Western audiences a critique of Western culture, and to retrieve a sense of cultural heterogeneity amid the violence and destruction of colonization and global capitalism. For many anthropologists working in the early twentieth century, including Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, the culture concept offered a challenge to European and North American biological racism and its ruinous effects (M. Anderson 2013, 2019)—especially in the wake of Nazi racism and anti-Semitism. Yet while these theories uprooted the idea that social hierarchies reflect natural, and hence inevitable, essential differences, some of the early twentieth-century liberal antiracist scholarship ultimately reinforced the modernist nature/culture dualism.

As Kamala Visweswaran (1998) argues, by splitting race from culture and assigning it to biology, major currents in anthropological thinking failed to trouble changing discourses of race, which in the postwar era increasingly drew on notions of culture instead of biology. Furthermore, by narrowly defining racism in relation to immigration, early antiracist scholar-

ship sidelined more radical projects of repair—such as those articulated by William Willis (1972) and Diane Lewis (1973), who situated racism in the context of slavery and settler colonial violence. Challenging racial orders in ways that nevertheless minimized the structural features of racism while othering immigrants and people of color further normalized whiteness (M. Anderson 2019, 13). The racial contradictions of American liberalism and its inability to address white supremacy thus found their mirroring within the discipline itself (M. Anderson 2019).¹⁴ The challenge for anthropology in the face of continued racism and accelerating environmental harm is therefore to trouble its “settled” liberal categories and fortify those more radical, feminist, Black, and Indigenous traditions that have opened pathways for tracing the persistent power of race and racism in their relation to other modes of exploitation (Harrison 1995; Hage 2017; Jegathesan 2021). Anthropology needs to account for the fact that it is not separate from the havoc that colonial exploitation of land and people wreaked and continues to wreak across the globe.

Decolonial, antiracist, and feminist critiques have challenged claims to scientific authority within anthropology and the discipline’s reifications of culture for a long time (Behar and Gordon 1995; Clifford and Marcus 1986). In the 1980s and 1990s, feminists, activists, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) scholars made visible the limits of the culture concept for understanding and explaining the social reproduction of power and inequality (Anzaldúa 1999; A. Davis 1981; Gilroy 1987; Hall 1992; Visweswaran 1998). Work published as early as the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) has shown that racism has biological and visceral effects resulting not only from physical violence but also from the slow violence of environmental injustice, or because of unequal access to health care, mobility, and housing (Burton 2015; Gravlee 2009). As Burton (2015) points out, the “common refrain that race is a social construct” often “fails to sufficiently explain what race is and how it impacts people’s lives. In fact, the constructivist approach can obscure the dynamic relationship between race, politics, history, and biology.”

This critical work has paved the way for an anthropology that tracks racism as a structural feature of nationhood in the global North and grapples with the intersectionality of social injustices in order to destabilize white supremacy and decolonize the social sciences (Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre 2019; Jobson 2020). Rupturing what Kathryn Yusoff calls “the racial blindness” (2018, xii) of planetary imaginings in the Anthropocene, it is necessary

to center the unequal exposures of Black and brown bodies to harm and dehumanization in order to decolonize ecology (Ferdinand 2022) and also to better understand the “intersectional ecologies” (Guarasci, Moore, and Vaughn 2021) of urban life in Europe. As Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (2017) have observed, BIPOC communities have faced catastrophic end times and environmental devastation for centuries. The concept of the Plantationocene (Haraway 2015; Haraway et al. 2016) thus offers a critical alternative to the universalizing notion of the Anthropocene by centering slavery, colonialism, and racism as driving forces in shaping a “plantation logic” and extractive modes of relating to the world. Yet it is important to remember that Black, brown, feminist, and Indigenous scholars have put forward nonbinary approaches to human-nonhuman and environmental relations in the wake of colonialism, slavery, and the plantation for many years (Jegathesan 2021).

By turning to Europe, *Ruderal City* addresses the embodied effects of multiple forms of racism and the ways in which white supremacy and histories of violence and inequality inscribe themselves onto urban landscapes. Not unlike anthropological theory, post–World War II European political discourse delegitimized earlier, colonial, and fascist biological racisms while highlighting cultural difference in their aftermaths. Decades of antiracist scholarship and social movements based in Europe have shown how, with the rise of postcolonial migrations into Europe, seemingly insurmountable and static cultural differences have become the central theme of a new racism (Gilroy 1987; Ha 2014; Hall 1992; Hügel et al. 1993) that also shapes policy-making about who lives and dies at Europe’s borders (Mbembe 2020; see also Balibar 1991; Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). While thousands of refugees have died seeking to cross EU borders, public discourse often frames migrants as bringing ruination upon European cities. Addressing these shifting racisms, *Ruderal City* asks how the ruins of European colonialism, racism, and capitalist extraction are challenged and remade in everyday relations to urban landscapes. What seeds does contemporary urban life contain for an ethnographic retelling of histories as iconic as the Berlin Wall or the Anthropocene, and for creating more livable futures? As the world deals with ongoing loss of hospitable environments due to increasing nationalism, racism, and extractive economies, anthropology can, with these inquiries in mind, reinvigorate its earlier question of what cultural critique might look like in a time of destruction.

In the Rubble of Europe

As literary scholar Fatima El-Tayeb (2008) has argued, the common narrative about the history of the European Union is that it constructed civil society in the ruins left behind by World War II. Yet this very project continues to be fraught with Europe's colonial legacies and the ongoing violence and exclusions at Europe's outer and inner borders. While the fall of the Berlin Wall held the promise of a less divided Europe, the decades since have been riddled with historical ruptures that radically altered the political landscape throughout Europe and the world. The collapse of socialism introduced intense cultural, economic, and political changes, opening up new possibilities and challenges to remake Europe's borders and rethink ideas about the homogeneity of Europe and the nation-state.¹⁵ Migration and asylum have been at the center of these reborderings: as Cold War walls have fallen, new wars and nationalist movements have erupted across the world—and new border fences have gone up in the process.

These reborderings have been long in the making. The Schengen Agreement (first implemented in 1985) was aimed at eliminating border controls among its members while strengthening the surveillance of borders with nonmember states. This has had far-reaching consequences for EU immigration and asylum policies, temporary visa regulations, the implementation of cross-border policing, and judicial cooperation (Feldman 2011; Pieper 2008; Tazzioli 2019).¹⁶ In the mid-2000s, when I began fieldwork in Berlin, asylum and migration infrastructures had been scaled down to a historic low in Germany and elsewhere in Europe in the aftermath of the 1990s so-called Asylum Compromise (Asylkompromiss) and the war in former Yugoslavia. Meanwhile border securitization became both increasingly militarized and outsourced to external territories. This dramatically changed in the wake of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015: as the war in Syria escalated, increasing numbers of refugees fled violence, ecological destruction, and poverty in the Middle East and Africa.¹⁷ Making their way to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkans, many people have continued to risk their lives on shaky boats or encounter violence at the border since then. Despite the fact that thousands of people die while attempting to cross the Mediterranean,¹⁸ EU governments continue to assert control over migratory movements from the global South, claiming a state of exception and exacerbating refugee displacement and exclusion (Feldman 2011; Hess and Kasperek 2019; PRO ASYL 2020).

As the rise of right-wing nationalist movements, antimigration campaigns, and Brexit departures, as well as ecological crises and epidemics, unsettle EU political cohesion, the future of Europe and its political formation—as supranational entity, as region, or as composed of distinct parts—has become increasingly contested. These contestations pose a challenge but also offer possibilities for addressing Europe as more than a “looking glass” (Herzfeld 2010) for anthropology: they can serve as a cautionary tale not to assume the continent’s or its nation-states’ boundaries in advance but instead to provincialize whiteness and unsettle anthropological theory and knowledge production about Europe itself. Cross-disciplinary scholarship and social movements challenging Europe’s exclusions can be a guide for once again reflecting on the status of Europe within the discipline (see also Asad et al. 1997). Scholars and activists of color have paved the way for decolonizing and rupturing the very concept of Europe: they have exposed white supremacy not only in right-wing groups but as an integral element of social life across European social institutions (Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre 2019, 47; Piesche 2017; Thompson 2018b) and as a structuring feature of extractive relations to land and nonhuman beings (El-Tayeb 2020; Ferdinand 2022).

Europe and its wealth emerged out of a *longue durée* of colonialism, capitalism, multiple racisms (including anti-Semitism; Islamophobia; anti-Black, anti-Asian, and anti-Latinx racisms), and their histories of plunder and expulsion. And yet, Europe is also shaped by histories of connection. Visual artist and cultural critic Hito Steyerl (2001) has invoked some of these perspectives of Europe in her work: they include stories about departures for a better life; the dreams of cleaning ladies, doctors, seamstresses, teachers, babysitters, mothers, and daughters; asylum seekers doing badly paid “labors of love”; intellectual traditions created in exile; and the travels of plants and their entanglements in histories of dispossession. Europe here is less an abstract idea than a dream: of equality, democracy, freedom, and prosperity. This dream can turn into a nightmare at any point and once again unleash violence, war, and exclusion. Keeping this juxtaposition in focus highlights the necessity of rupturing the very concept of Europe and the colonial order upon which Europe’s wealth continues to be built—and instead foregrounding the heterogeneous lives of “European Others” (El-Tayeb 2011) who have inhabited and built Europe all along. The story of Osman Kalin’s tree house captures this heterogeneity—a Europe in which the stories of people of color who become “migrants” or “refugees” (Thompson 2018) are at the center, laying bare its rifts. This sense of heterogeneity created

in the *longue durée* of migrations, racism, and colonialism, as well as in Europe's collapsed and yet rigid boundaries, guides my analysis throughout *Ruderal City*.

While there has been considerable debate in anthropology and the social sciences over how to make sense of the politics of migration and race in Europe (Cabot 2014; De Genova 2017; Fassin 2011; Fernando and Giordano 2016; Giordano 2014; Kleinman 2019; Özyürek 2014; Silverstein 2005), it was not until the summer of migration in 2015 that there was a surge in analyses on the topic (Cabot 2019).¹⁹ As a result, scholarship on mobility and migration today must reflect on economies of attention and be wary of erasing the long history of BIPOC and migrant activism and scholarship that has already troubled whiteness, racism, and ongoing colonial legacies within Europe for decades (e.g., Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre 2019; El-Tayeb 2011; Gilroy 1987; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018; Hall 1992; see also Stoetzer 2004).²⁰ It is thus crucial to look at the ways in which the very categories of migration, as well as the refugee and migrant, not only become subjects of scientific knowledge production but become racialized categories themselves, tied to state bureaucracies, to unequal distribution of wealth, dispossession of land, and disciplinary power (Brown 2005; De Genova 2017; Fernando and Giordano 2016; Gilroy 1987; Kleinman 2019; Malkki 1992, 498; Özyürek 2014; Silverstein 2005).²¹

In the aftermath of the Holocaust and decolonization, post-World War II European political discourse saw a shift that delegitimized earlier forms of fascist biological racism while highlighting “cultural difference.” With increasing migrations into Europe from the Middle East and Africa, seemingly insurmountable and static cultural differences, as well as the entire field of migration, thus became the central theme of a new racism (Balibar 1991). Critical race scholarship and activism have laid bare the historical breaks and continuities of these new racisms with anti-Semitism, anti-Black racism, and Islamophobia (El-Tayeb 2011; FeMigra 1994; Gelbin, Konuk, and Piesche 1999; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 1999; Hügel et al. 1993; Opitz et al. 1992; Otyakmaz 1995; Steyerl 2001). Others have developed critical analyses of the intersectionality of injustices (El-Tayeb 2011; Partridge 2012) or have ethnographically tracked the specters of nationalism and racism in Europe's urban fabric (Ha 2014; Linke 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). Racism here emerges as an integral feature of the structure of European life that is not limited to the past or to right-wing political movements.

Global protests against police violence and racism have more recently registered on the radar of European liberal publics. Yet political discourse

often continues to situate migrants and communities of color as external to Europe (El-Tayeb 2008; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018). Challenging this narrative and a widespread downplaying of colonialism's destructive legacies across European publics, Black scholars and scholars of color have stressed the "coloniality of migration" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018) to show that Europe's migration and asylum regimes perpetuate colonial and racialized hierarchies as they regulate movement across the continent's boundaries and determine who is seen as deserving access to Europe (El-Enany 2020).

Germany, as one of the most economically powerful European countries, is a desired destination for many refugees and migrants and has been at the center of much debate on migration in Europe (Mandel 2008; Partridge 2012; Shoshan 2016; Stoetzer 2018). Tensions around asylum in Germany's cities and their peripheries have grown since the summer of 2015, when increasing numbers of people fleeing war and violence in Syria and the Middle East embarked on the risky journey along the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkan route to Europe and Germany. As Noah Ha (2014) and others have shown (Zwischenraum Kollektiv 2017), racism, a key element of colonial power relations, continues to inform urban responses to migration: racialized practices of policing, planning, and memorialization shape the fabric of urban space in Germany.²² As migrant labor is often delegated to informal sectors, and as European political discourse stresses disconnection and division in cities as a consequence of migration, the question of how to confront the spatial dynamics of racialized exclusion has become more urgent than ever.²³ Decolonizing migration and the European city thus includes confronting the ways in which exclusions of racism and the nation-state become tangible not only at Europe's outer borders but also within its urban centers. And most importantly, it involves centering the perspectives and struggles for self-determination of communities of color (Zwischenraum Kollektiv 2017).

Yet to address the complexities of multiple borders—old and new—and the ways in which people inhabit and actively remake Europe's cities and their margins, it is important to push beyond a focus on urban space and migration. Developing a ruderal lens in this book, I instead think across different communities and thematic registers of urban life and its ecology to explore how the governance of nature in the city and its peripheries becomes a key site in which racialized inequalities, borders, and the nation materialize.

In this spirit, *Ruderal City* begins from the insight that the pervasive rhetoric decrying a clash of cultures in contemporary Europe and the mononaturalism persistent in thinking about urban and rural environ-

ments are poor tools to think with. Rather than asking how to maintain order amid disorder, or stressing the disconnection between urban inhabitants and their environments, it is time to change metaphors. In a world of ecological destruction and a political context in which migration and cultural hybridity are perceived as problems, it is important to turn attention to how the ruins of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism are inhabited in contemporary cities: Who is said to belong where? Who is racialized—and thus cast as less-than-human—with reference to nature or its ruination and thus rendered “out of place” in the city? By focusing on the ways in which urban socialities build alliances across species for more livable cities, the following chapters seek to capture the complexity of heterogeneous borders and the histories of rupture that constitute not only Berlin or Germany but also Europe and the world today.²⁴

Berlin, Ruderal City

There is perhaps no better place from which to think about urban life in the rubble of European capitalism and nationalism than Berlin. Throughout Berlin’s history, the city’s ecology and physical environment have played a central role in the formation and reconstruction of German nationhood, empire, and the political transformation of Europe. The traces of Germany’s imperial history, World War II, and Cold War divisions are still visible throughout the city’s streets, buildings, and green spaces today. Berlin has been constructed as a city at the center of world history: it is saturated with narratives about the West and twentieth-century European history (Boyer 2001, 424).

Hence, for scholars in the humanities and social sciences, Berlin has been a city under constant revision. It has occupied an important location in studies of national identity, fascism, postsocialism, and the formation of European (post)modernity. This is reflected in the attention paid to the city’s changing architecture, urban space, and intellectual culture.²⁵ The metaphor of Berlin’s “shifting sands” (Boyer 2001) not only points to the fact that Berlin and its surrounding state of Brandenburg are built on sandy soils but also signals processes of becoming, historical erasures, and ruination that have been at the center of the city’s physical and symbolic transformations. Yet while scholarship on Berlin has highlighted competing historical layers and overlapping cultural identifications, remarkably little has been said about Berlin’s *shifting sands* themselves. Little do we learn about how people have inhabited the city’s lands, or how other beings have been implicated in that.

A few scholars in geography, environmental and landscape history, architecture, and the history of science have tackled this gap (Brantz 2022; Rubin 2016). For example, Jens Lachmund (2003, 2013) examines the history of urban ecology in postwar Berlin, and Matthew Gandy highlights the aesthetic, cosmopolitical, and ecological dimensions of Berlin's urban nature and *Brachen* (fallow lands, wastelands) (Gandy 2013, 2022; Gandy and Jasper 2017).²⁶ In her book *Seeing Trees*, Sonja Dümpelmann (2019) shows us how street trees inspire politics, become aesthetic objects, reshape climates, mark urban space, and become instruments for remaking citizenship in Berlin and New York. Building on this scholarship, *Ruderal City* brings together diverging concerns with the built environment, memory, ecology, racialization, and nationhood. Rather than simply expand urban analysis to include nature and the nonhuman, I ethnographically trace how the intimate relations between people, landscapes, animals, and plants not only become sites of exclusion and racialization but also create new forms of solidarity, endurance, and healing in Berlin (see also Bauer and Bhan 2016; Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006; Lee 2016).

Curiously, as I will discuss in chapter 1, Berlin became a field site for ecological research in the postwar period, generating new knowledge about “nature in the city.” Botanical encounters in Berlin's bombed rubble landscapes traced the ways in which the city's very ecology was deeply entangled with the history of capitalism and empire. But even more than that, Berlin's very name tells us a story of nature in the making: signifying “a swampy place” or a “bend in the river,” the city's making involved the straightening of rivers, the draining of swamps, and the domestication of many beings.²⁷ As Berlin expanded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “nature spaces” such as parks and city forests provided important resources for “balancing” increasing class divisions, fostering social integration, and enabling other projects of social reform (Dümpelmann 2019; Hennecke 2011).

During fascism in the mid-twentieth century, urban life was seen as being in contradiction with nature: whereas the Nazis idealized the countryside as pure space of the German nation, they imagined the city as a site of ugliness, full of “social ills” and dangerous racial mixing. The Nazi regime, attempting to write its power into stone and carve a “living space” for the racial elite in a newly ordered Europe, sought to transform Berlin's built environment and rid the city of “foreign elements.” The regime's industrial projects and closely related systems of death and work camps, some of them located just outside of Berlin, enabled this transformation (Till 2005). At the end of World War II, the city's experience of urban breakdown created an awareness of both

the fragility of urban infrastructures and the city's ecologies. During Berlin's division, the city's infrastructure, its road and train systems, as well as its electricity network and water lines, were severed—though only partially.²⁸ At that time, Berlin's forests and parks offered a space of leisure for local residents who found themselves navigating dead-end streets, surrounded by the walls of the Cold War. As a forester in one of West Berlin's largest urban forests, the Grunewald, once told me: "The Berlin Wall would not have lasted if it hadn't been for the city's forests." This odd material-social history entered yet another chapter when, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent unification of East and West Berlin, the city's infrastructures were frantically restitched together.

Today, new regimes of urban and environmental policy-making have once again transformed Berlin's physical environment, reconstituting it as a national capital, a global city, and a new European cultural center. Urban nature and green space have played a key infrastructural role in these efforts to renaturalize the nation. For example, the city's post-1989 landscape program created a greenbelt as part of a plan for the unified Berlin (SenStadt 2014, 22). The remaking of the city's ecologies has thus aided in unifying the city and nation and helped it appear as part of a "natural order."²⁹ In addition, the city's nineteenth-century legacies of environmental conservation, experiences of urban breakdown in 1945, and the subsequent political division and deindustrialization during the Cold War, as well as Berlin's financial crisis since 1989, have generated an abundance of open spaces in the city and its surroundings.³⁰

In 2022, even as many spaces are being paved over and lost to urban development, almost 40 percent of Berlin's urban space still encompasses forests, allotment gardens, parks, or urban "wastelands" (*Brachflächen*).³¹ As part of a wider global trend of creating environmental agendas for cities and integrating a consideration of urban ecologies and biodiversity into urban planning, Berlin has thus widely been marketed as a flourishing Green City (SenStadt 2014, 3). Reports show an increasing number of plant and animal species in the urban area, at times outnumbering species diversity in the surrounding countryside. As a result of warmer winters, urban sprawl, increasing traffic, deforestation, and monoculture farmland, many animals escape the countryside and find new habitats in the city (Riechelmann 2004). For example, with an estimated population between four and six thousand, wild boar use the city's corridors at night and together with other critters have also crossed my fieldwork paths many times.

Intrigued by this diversity, a variety of publics tending to urban nature have proliferated: during Berlin's annual Urban Nature Day thousands of

residents tour the city to discover nature's magic—they search for weeds on sidewalks, follow the tracks of wild boar in forests, listen to the songs of nightingales in parks, or tour the vegetation of urban wastelands. Similarly, TV shows, news reports, and documentary films with titles like *Wildes Berlin* frequently portray both the city and its peripheries' abundant wildlife, including foxes, praying mantes, and raccoons as well as plants like trees-of-heaven and black locust. Exoticizing metaphors abound in these reports, as they celebrate the “urban jungle” or engage a multiculturalist logic of welcoming new neighbors into the city.

Yet while nature returns in these celebrations of Berlin as a Green City, public policy and media concerns about immigrant segregation and unemployment also reframe urban spaces as harboring troubled neighborhoods or parallel worlds within the city's body. Cultural imaginaries about urban nature and green space thus not only divide urban space into abstract categories of nature versus culture or technology—categories that elide more complex historical divisions and ecological relations in the city—but also emerge as terrains upon which urban conflicts around racism and migration play out. Yet in the process, relations to urban land get remade and the ecology of the city is imagined otherwise.

Rethinking Migration and Urban Nature

Berlin's physical, economic, and social fabric is shaped by a layered history of empire, displacement, and exile. The city's contested history of migration spans across centuries, continents, and ethnic communities. In the seventeenth century, French Protestant Huguenots, impoverished traders called *refugies*, settled in what was then the Prussian Empire. In the eighteenth century, Jewish communities became naturalized citizens and yet were confronted with continuous discrimination (Lanz 2005), and together with Roma and Sinti people faced persecution and genocide during Nazism and throughout the twentieth century. During the height of colonization and before World War I, Berlin residents included people from Germany's colonies such as Togo, Namibia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Samoa, and Papua New Guinea (El-Tayeb 2001; van der Heyden and Zeller 2002).³² In the post-World War II period, migrant workers from countries such as Turkey, Spain, and Greece in West Berlin, and from Vietnam, Mozambique, Cuba, and Angola in the East, reshaped the cultural and social life of the divided city.

In the aftermath of Germany's unification, nationalist movements gained traction and antimigration sentiments intensified. After an initial postuni-

fication euphoria and construction boom in the 1990s, Berlin plunged into a fiscal crisis, which coincided with deindustrialization and wide-ranging changes in labor market policies and welfare reform implemented a few years later. Unemployment rates and poverty rose among many Berliners, and the city's Turkish and Middle Eastern communities, comprising close to 10 percent of the population, were especially affected because many were employed in the manufacturing sector (Lanz 2007; Mandel 2008; Partridge 2012).³³ Yet, as in many other cities across Europe, public discourse and policy has often located the source of these inequalities in migrants themselves—especially in their presumed lack of economic productivity seen as leaving traces of dereliction across the urban landscape.³⁴ Middle Eastern and African migrants and asylum seekers in particular have been held responsible for local crime and for failing to integrate into German society—despite growing evidence that they become targets of racial profiling and policing (El-Tayeb and Thompson 2019; Thompson 2018b). In this context, the question of how Middle Eastern and African communities inhabit nature in Berlin has become a key site in marking people's status as strangers and as racialized others, irrespective of citizenship. While people are often stigmatized on the basis of their residence in certain neighborhoods, public discourse poses their supposed lack of belonging to the urban environment as a source of danger: the danger of fire breaking loose, of wildness imposing itself on the civilized city.

These debates echo ideas about what it means to be German: the notion of *Heimat* (home or homeland) conveys the idea that Germanness is rooted in the land and that racialized bodies are foreign and threaten the natural world.³⁵ In recent years, local and national media have painted a gloomy picture of the capital's migrant problem. They depict scenes of unruly gangsters wreaking havoc on the tranquility of green space, or of unemployed, wild barbecuers—pursuing a pastime popular among many of the city's Middle Eastern residents—filling Berlin's green lungs with smoke and littering its parks with garbage. Both the bodies of migrants and the environments they inhabit, as well as the smoke, meat, and litter they produce, figure as polluting “matter out of place” (Douglas 2002). Meanwhile, migrants are rendered almost animal-like, in need of containment (Stoetzer 2014c).³⁶

Tropes of undomesticated wilderness also inform public policies—for example, in the form of EU-based integration projects aiming to undo racial segregation, poverty, and urban decay. Attempts to integrate migrants into German society through language classes, education, and neighborhood beautification projects follow the colonial logic of civilizing populations—cast

as spatially and racially other—by forcing people to conform to national political, social, and economic norms (Silverstein 2006, 289; Stoler 1995). These policies and Germany’s “integration industry” (Nghì Ha 2010) are directed not toward all migrants but toward migrants of color from the Middle East and the global South.³⁷ As Paul Silverstein (2006) points out for France, plans to reintegrate Europe’s hot spots, such as the *banlieues* in Paris, recall the Marshall Plan for rebuilding war-struck Europe, drawing parallels between the ruins of war and Europe’s racialized urban peripheries today.

By 2015, the numbers of people attempting to enter Europe while fleeing political conflict in the Middle East and North Africa soared to historic highs.³⁸ With Germany among the core destinations, Berlin’s local bureaucracies scrambled to accommodate asylum seekers.³⁹ Initially, public sentiment seemed welcoming toward migrants and refugees, especially those from Syria. Yet a closer look at media coverage reveals that naturalistic metaphors abounded—of waves, rivers, tides, and tsunamis of people straining Europe’s and the nation’s resources, not unlike natural disasters.⁴⁰ These scenes of chaos, waves, and so-called hot spots (*Brennpunkte*) at and within Europe’s borders infused political decisions to distribute and manage asylum seekers’ arrivals. As a series of violent incidents occurred after 2015, such as the events during New Year’s Eve in Cologne, narratives of especially male migrants and refugees as dehumanized crowds running amok and bringing ruin upon Germany’s cities echoed across public discourse.⁴¹ Subsequent reforms of asylum law, enabling faster deportations of those considered undeserving, have aimed at domesticating this seemingly natural force at Europe’s gate.

Amid these intense debates about nature and migration, the city’s green spaces—especially its gardens—once again provide spaces of hope for escaping social divisions. Since the mid-2000s, so-called inter- or multicultural gardens have proliferated across Berlin and other German cities. By cultivating plants, urban residents hope to overcome cultural barriers and create communities of care for urban lands. Meanwhile, planners and politicians advocate for gardening as an opportunity to “integrate” immigrants into society: by engaging with plants, people can identify with their surroundings and let “integration grow” (Der Beauftragte des Senats für Integration und Migration 2007). The hope is that these engagements with nature can create and sustain community, building the grounds for a “true” multicultural society to sprout in the city’s gardens (C. Müller 2000). Whereas after the war, rubble plants formed an ambivalent urban ecology amid nation-making

projects, in the gardens of today's Berlin plant cultivation involves dreams of unifying the nation.

While these efforts attempt to produce new socialities across difference, migration regimes and racism manifest differently at Berlin's peripheries. Since the mid-2000s, many asylum seekers fleeing persecution, political conflict, war, and economic precarity in countries such as Kenya, Cameroon, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey have found themselves living in isolated shelters in the forests near Berlin. This is a consequence of postunification asylum and migration policies that first erected new shelters in cities and then, as a response to xenophobic attacks on these shelters in the 1990s, relocated many refugees to rural East Germany or to the peripheries of cities. In the case of Berlin, these relocations were often to the grounds of former military barracks situated in the surrounding countryside in Brandenburg's forests. Struck by high unemployment rates and depopulation in the years following unification, this region has also been increasingly marketed as an ideal place of recreation for city residents and tourists.⁴²

Refugee activists and advocates have mobilized for years against the invisibility, immobility, and isolation of migrants in the forests of Brandenburg. But it was not until the late 2000s that the countryside moved to the forefront of public attention. In response to several violent attacks on migrants, refugees, and citizens of color, the struggle against racial violence and the increasing presence of right-wing youth in rural regions in the former East (see Shoshan 2016) intensified. These developments illustrate that racism and exclusion are more than just urban problems. Whereas many nature spaces in the city are sites of hope for overcoming social divisions, Berlin's forests and urban peripheries have transformed into landscapes of exclusion in which refugees inhabit the ruins of socialism.

In the context of these uneven developments, we can see how the struggle for inhabiting the European metropole continues to be shaped by a colonial dynamic that divides populations into those deserving to have access to the city and to the possibilities of a flourishing life and those who do not. As decolonial scholars have shown, urbanization processes in European cities continue to depend on stigmatizing, criminalizing, and dehumanizing racialized subjects—while at the same time exploiting their labor (Zwischenraum Kollektiv 2017).

Thus, as we expand our analytic lens of urban life to consider urban ecologies, there is a pressing need to remain alert to the “sticky” and persistent colonial and ethnoracial politics at work in European cities. Indeed,

images of ruins, unruly nature, and urban plight in the global North, as well as a widespread sense of embattlement and porosity of national borders in the context of Europe's "migration crisis," express fantasies of colonial reversal—at a time when various projects of governability of our global order, such as the nation's efforts to shore up borders and domesticate its others, as well as capitalism's extraction of natural resources, are coming undone (Hage 2016). Similarly, attending to a city's ecology, we need to ask how unruly forms of (bio)diversity can so easily be co-opted by neoliberal projects of profit making that celebrate resilience and cultural hybridity (Helmreich 2016; Moore, Kosek, and Pandian 2003) in the city. After all, in cities across the global North, including Berlin, an aesthetics of urban wastelands too often paves the way for gentrification and displacement, especially of migrants and communities of color.

Addressing what it might mean to decolonize the city and its ecologies, it thus becomes salient to examine the ways in which colonial and destructive modes of inhabiting the earth continue to shape contemporary urban environments. In this vein, *Ruderal City* explores how Europe's borders, including those of the nation and its racialized others, are reconfigured in conflicts over people's relations to the urban landscape. Rather than answer in advance *how* race matters, this book emphasizes the enduring power of racism *and* its historical specificity (Gilroy 2004). This means departing from a continuing and widespread insistence across Europe and Germany to narrowly define racism in relation to the biological racism that was operative during fascism, or is at work "elsewhere" (see also Yildiz 2020).⁴³ Rather, racism emerges as an "axis of power" and a "kind of body politic" (Brown 2005, 72) that, together with nation-making projects (Gilroy 1987), not only provides "a critical medium through which ideas of nature operate" but also "reworks the grounds of nature" itself (Moore, Kosek, and Pandian 2003, 3). Racial practices mark bodies, geographical territories, and environmental milieus with the force of their distinctions (Hartigan 2017; Moore, Kosek, and Pandian 2003). Terms such as *geographies of race* (Brown 2005), *intersectional ecologies* (Guarasci, Moore, and Vaughn 2021), *racial ecologies* (Nishime and Williams 2018), and *racialized ecologies* point to the ways in which experiences of racism, dehumanization, and inequality become embedded in people's relationships to other beings and to land. Moreover, as Deborah Thomas (2019) reminds us, racism structures labor regimes and modern capitalist production, creates hierarchies of value attached to different bodies, and thus continues to "provide the parameters of what it means to be human today" (41).⁴⁴ Rather than simply expand

urban analysis to include nonhumans, *Ruderal City* thus traces ecologies of migration and race to show how urban nature becomes the very terrain onto which racializations and nation-making are mapped out in contemporary Europe—but also how these are challenged.

Gleaning Methods for a Ruderal Analytic

The stories of the Berlin tree house and other makeshift sites convey practices of endurance and care in the city. Centering the lives that persist in the ruptures of capitalist urbanization and racial inequality, they comprise the heart of this book. Together, these stories offer a view into everyday forms of ruination and harm that, like rubble, are often labeled as insignificant.⁴⁵ A ruderal analytic thus directs focus to the *connective tissue* that binds people's lives to particular, often degraded, environments and to a lack of access to urban infrastructure and social mobility. Ruination, from this perspective, is an active process that uproots and displaces lives and shapes “what people are left with” (Stoler 2013, 9), while some people are stigmatized on the basis of that very residue. Yet while ruderal stories begin with ruins and decay, they do not end with it. As feminist and BIPOC writers have pointed out (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015; Tuck 2009), it is important to go beyond damage and to situate one's analysis in the desire to forge new alliances. Indeed, cities are abundant with emerging practices of “ecological care” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) and forms of living and dying and conspiring together (Choy 2011; Haraway 2016; Myers 2019; Parreñas 2018; Tsing 2015). By tracing the “nature work” (Jerolmack 2007) of various actors, including refugees, barbecuers, tourist guides, foresters, nature enthusiasts, scientists, media, policy makers, as well as rubble plants, rabbits, mushrooms, and trees in Berlin, I show how more-than-human relations can serve as sites of endurance, care, and alliances against harm (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 1998).

Taking ruins not as an end point of analysis but as a point of departure, *Ruderal City* calls attention to heterogeneous and unexpected lives amid inhospitable and often violent worlds. A ruderal perspective illustrates the gaps in modes of governance that seek to secure Europe's borders, exploit land and labor, and manage populations. By thinking with Berlin's ruderal ecologies, we can generate stories that are different from those narratives about cities in which mixing and cultural hybridity are either overlooked or seen as a problem. If we understand ruination (Stoler 2013) and rubble (Gordillo 2014) not as separate from but as central to the urban landscapes we inhabit, built on social exclusions, capitalist urbanization, and profound

environmental change, then, I suggest, the ruderal can serve as a guide to explore lives in the midst of these landscapes. Inspired by approaches in feminist, decolonial, and critical race studies, the following chapters thus eschew what Kim Fortun (2014, 314) has called the “Latour effect” in anthropology and science studies—namely, a singular focus on practices of expertise and actor networks that does not take a closer look at *the material and social constitution* of the toxic environments that make up people’s lives. This involves ethnographically exploring ways of knowing and inhabiting the city that depart from and, in fact, break down extractive and colonial modes of relating to more-than-human worlds (e.g., H. Davis and Todd 2017; Haraway 2016; Parreñas 2018; TallBear 2011).

Although ruderal worlds emerge in the cracks of cultivated landscapes and modern schemes of order, they are not free from power. Deeply fraught, they tell a story about the lives that persist in the face of racialized exclusions, violence, and environmental destruction. In dialogue with Haraway’s (2016) notion of “staying with the trouble,” a ruderal perspective highlights the ways in which cultural identifications and strategies of survival are never authentic or pure but instead are situated within histories of disturbance. The chapters follow the “roots and routes” (Clifford 1997)—and uprootings—of Berlin’s urban ecologies. In a nation where racialized others are treated with suspicion and never fully belong, some actors are unwilling to wait for their assigned place and instead stage spontaneous takeovers to create spaces of hospitality for humans and nonhumans alike.

By gleaning stories from these spaces, I look for evidence of how people, plants, and other organisms coevolve and conspire in partial connection. Landscapes are always more than the “material evidence” of the past or present—and they are more ambivalent than people might want them to be. Taking ruderal ecologies seriously therefore means more than reinterpreting multispecies landscapes or digging for deeper meanings in the sedimented historical layers of a city’s soils. Rather, it means “resituat[ing] and recomb[in]g” (Till 2005, 95) disparate stories in an attempt to do justice to the complexities of more-than-human relations in the city—and to imagine new possibilities for the future.

For this reason, *Ruderal City* is not immersed in the study of one particular community or bounded object. While multisited ethnography (Marcus 1995) follows a social group or practice across different sites, my analysis in contrast is both situated in several communities and locations in Berlin and works across and alongside sites. I seek out connections between sites and track how relations between people and other beings, both animate and

inanimate, not only intersect with forms of racialization but also exceed them. Throughout, I am committed to piling up stories that might at first glance seem disparate—from makeshift urban gardens, to traces of sunflower seeds on a sidewalk, to the smoke that emanates from barbecuing in public parks.

In an era of pervasive loss of hospitable environments, it becomes paramount to develop methods that allow us to look across scales, shift analytic frameworks, and tell a “rush of stories” (Tsing 2015). Again, feminist and critical race thinkers have paved the way here methodologically (Ebron and Tsing 2017), sketching out narrative practices that, rather than adhering to a logic of mastery and generalization, gather seeds (Le Guin 1989) of chance encounters that contain future possibilities.⁴⁶ Anthropology’s field is never outside or in any way separate from other fields of settler colonial dispossession and extraction (Shange 2019a, 2019b; Jobson 2020). Cultivating narrative practices of gleaning stories therefore also responds to instances of refusal (Shange 2019a; Simpson 2007; Tuck and Yang 2014a, 2014b; L. T. Smith 1999) by interlocutors in the field against ethnographic desires to document the “real lives” of migrants and refugees, to focus on suffering, and to benefit from the interiority of people’s lives. Honoring refusal includes creating more fragmentary, patchy ethnographic accounts that acknowledge partial, situated knowledges and follow the lead of interlocutors rather than privileging narrative thickness or a holistic picture (Liu and Shange 2018; Shange 2019a).⁴⁷

Instead of easily adding up, the stories in this book thus interrupt each other, “not to resolve differences nor to merely celebrate diversity, but to provoke encounters across differences” that produce new partial alliances, thick solidarities (Liu and Shange 2018), and collaborative strategies for survival (Fortun 2012, 455).⁴⁸ As Austrian artist Lois Weinberger has shown, ruderals call for modes of “precise inattention” (Kos 2004): if you are lucky, you catch a glance of them out of the corner of your eye. Indeed, walking along the city’s streets is precisely how you come across ruderal plants such as a tree-of-heaven. In this book, I show that such peripheral perspectives and the multiple stories they generate are also necessary for acknowledging moments of rupture and refusal in the rubble of Europe today.

Ethnography, in this vein, becomes a practice of gleaning narratives and creating connections between disparate worlds that forge spaces for unlikely neighbors, often framed as intruders. These neighbors, introduced in the following chapters, include more-than-human actors and practices that are both real and imaginary: from plants growing in the cracks of sidewalks, to

informal food economies, to encounters with uncanny creatures in the forest. In tracing these stories, I do not retain a hygienic distance from which to critique the failures of nationalism and racism in environmental narratives. Instead, I show how stories about the nonhuman and dehumanization in the city and at its peripheries bear weight on who and what lives get to flourish. This mode of storytelling is thus not only a “method” but also a strategy for forging alliances across different orders and “irreducible difference[s]” (Haraway 2003, 49). In other words, it is a way of reading stories against their grain, instead of discarding them as (ideologically) inappropriate.

In it all, my own positionalities—as a fieldworker returning “home” not *from* the field but *to* the field, as a German citizen, as a queer white woman, as a researcher from the United States, and as the grandchild of expellees from rural Serbia who were able to claim German nationality after World War II—are not fixed but come to matter differently in various encounters and in my writing about them. Throughout the book, I locate these positionings and reflect on the blind spots and limits as well as the connections, privileges, and mobilities they create.

Following such a method of juxtaposing and generating multiple stories, including my own, *Ruderal City* accounts for the fact that cities are full of wonders and horrors. Urban life is abundant with stories that are much more interesting and strange than the predictable outcomes of formal economies, infrastructures, and institutions that protect private property and segregated communities. Attention to specific instances in which lively beings ally and connect across the collapsed and yet rigid structures of European colonial and racial power (see also Simone 2016)—with open-ended outcomes—might reanimate not only urban analysis but also cultural analysis itself (Weston 2017).

Mapping the Terrain

Juxtaposing different ethnographic stories, the chapters that follow address a set of connected questions: What are the ecologies of belonging that bind people to particular environments and displace them from others? How do specific landscape practices not only create new forms of exclusion and harm but also forge new alliances and vital reciprocities? To what extent do these practices reimagine or reconstruct the nation? To put these questions more broadly: Who gets to define what counts as nature or the environment (*Umwelt*) in the city of Berlin and its peripheries? And who can inhabit and make these environments their home?

Chapter 1, “Botanical Encounters,” sets up the historical and analytical framework for the chapters to come. It focuses on an instance in Berlin’s history when the urban fabric was literally torn apart: the destroyed city after fascism. It was in that moment that the city emerged as a more-than-human habitat, abundant with unexpected neighbors. In the years after the war, many ruderal plants flourished in the city’s rubble for the first time, prompting West Berlin botanists to study plant migration in the city. Tracing this history, chapter 1 illustrates how these botanical encounters inspired a way of approaching nature in the city that both spoke to and departed from postwar cultural imaginaries of nature and the nation. The city’s rupture, I argue, gave rise to a view in which nature or the environment was not “out there,” but instead an unwieldy and integral part of the city—a ruderal city in which many beings have coexisted (however violently) all along.

Moving from the ruins of war to the gardens of today’s Berlin, chapter 2 examines how people’s care for plants becomes sites of both exclusion and hope in a city anxious about the presence of racialized migrant bodies. I situate a variety of urban gardening practices, including institutionalized multicultural gardening, as well as less visible everyday practices of cultivating plants, within broader projects of nation-making. I argue that while gardeners often aspire to wall out history and solve social conflicts through the care for plants, past and present racialized and class conflicts keep creeping back in. Indeed, gardens do not always turn out the way people have intended (Myers 2019). Hence, there is no single story to be told about gardens: nature serves as a tool both to shape a concept of culture, neatly fenced in, consolidating the nation, and to create openings for other possibilities (see also Satsuka 2015).

The next two chapters consider how debates about multiculturalism materialize in conflicts over urban parks and how Berlin residents inhabit them. Several parks have been at the center of public controversy over illicit food consumption and production. Chapter 3, “Provisioning against Austerity,” zooms in on the worlds of one of these parks—the Preussen Park (Prussian Park) in former West Berlin, often referred to as the “Thai Park.” In this park, Southeast Asian immigrants create an informal economy by preparing, selling, and exchanging foods. Following the park’s intimate economies, I show how the Thai Park picnickers inhabit urban green space while utilizing it as a resource to sustain livelihoods and tackle cultures of austerity through the provisioning and exchange of food.

Whereas people in the Thai Park rework uneven global forces by creating an informal economy and the performance of gender, race, and kinship, this

is not the case at our next location. Chronicling different productions of the “Barbecue Area” in Berlin’s largest green space, the Tiergarten, chapter 4 turns to another kind of food production, the grilling of meat as urban leisure. The chapter traces how barbecuing has become a charismatic practice that triggers ongoing anxieties and pleasures around multiculturalism in Berlin and beyond. Via the specter of fire, smoke, garbage, and pollution, municipal authorities, media, and local residents portray barbecuing as a savage practice—a practice that threatens the civilized order of the European city and its proper human and nonhuman inhabitants. Barbecuing here is framed as a Turkish cultural tradition, while the barbecue area is marked as an other space in which migrant bodies are racialized and cast as out of place on the basis of their ostensibly inappropriate relation to the urban environment. At the same time, for Turkish migrants and Turkish Germans, barbecuing can create connections to land in the city that enable people to breathe, thus offering a refuge from work and the toxicity of everyday exclusions. By challenging European notions of domesticated nature, the Tiergarten picnickers forge a ruderal practice that caters neither to ideas about Turkish culture nor to German moralities of how to inhabit the city. Instead, they open a breathing space in which questions of who belongs to the city and who gets to be what kind of natural citizen can be renegotiated.

The two remaining chapters take us out of the city and into the forest at Berlin’s edges to explore how racialized geographies and ecologies manifest differently in the formerly socialist countryside. Here, outside the city, we see the flip side of the previous chapters: at the urban periphery, many migrants are locked out and relegated to forest spaces, where they live in the ruins of the Cold War. A postunification nature park, the Märkische Schweiz, is located in the March Oder region in the state of Brandenburg and just a few kilometers east of Berlin. The March Oder region suffered high unemployment and depopulation in the aftermath of German unification. Reconfigured as an ecotourist destination since the early 2000s, the region and the park have more recently become home to refugees from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, who find themselves living in isolated, partially government-run and partially privately run shelters in the forest. Tracking refugees’ experiences and stories about the “bush” in the park, chapter 5 describes a sense of the *unheimlich* (uncanny)—an affect of displacement and cognitive dissonance, a feeling of simultaneous strangeness and familiarity—that comes into being in the sensory stirrings of everyday racism, from being in limbo in the forest at the edge of a Eu-

ropean metropole, and in a social-material landscape in which the value of objects, personal histories, and imagined futures has shifted abruptly.⁴⁹ The *unheimlich*, I argue, offers a window onto contemporary ecologies of nation-making and racialization, as well as the lively worlds that fall by the wayside of the ruins that these create.

Chapter 6, “Stories of the ‘Wild East,’” explores these ecologies from a slightly different angle. Here, I look at how attempts to make nature matter in times of economic collapse and social-environmental change articulate not only with practices of exclusion and racialization but also with efforts to challenge these practices. I track narrative and embodied practices of making “wild country” (Rose 2004) that operate across different registers: as an economic strategy, as a reenactment of space, as efforts to create national unity, and as a racialized process of becoming alien or less-than-human. These practices emerge in the cracks of frail economies, scaled-down asylum infrastructures, and the ruins of socialist ecologies. As wildlife—including formerly extinct species—reenters the region and efforts at ecological restoration proliferate, local Germans reenact the East as a space of wilderness and colonial adventure. Meanwhile, refugees living in these zones and encountering various forms of racism narrate their lives as having spun out of control. Attending to these stories and reenactments sheds light on shifting ecologies of nationhood and race in a postcolonial and neoliberal world. Following them, we see how whiteness and the nation get remade through wilderness and nature, and how the lives of communities of color are dehumanized and situated outside the nation’s body.

The disparate sites and communities that appear throughout *Ruderal City* provide snapshots of social exclusions that work through people’s relations to plants, animals, and places in the city and its peripheries. But they also shed light on creativity not only in the cracks of the city’s built structures but also in the gaps of the very categories through which to make sense of urban life. Attending to the ways in which people and other beings transgress bounded naturecultures, the chapters not only offer a fresh way of thinking about life in today’s cities but also hope to contribute to cultural critique in the rubble of twenty-first-century Europe. This critique searches for the heterogeneity and persistence of life amid nationalism’s and capitalism’s destruction—and thus joins broader conversations about how anthropology can be accountable and build solidarities across injustices. If we want to imagine a future of social and environmental justice in contemporary cities (and thus envision what AbdouMaliq Simone, focusing on racial

and class inequalities in urban Africa, has called the “City Yet to Come” [Simone 2004]), we need to think harder about how unlikely neighbors in today’s cities and their peripheries—including barbecuers, food vendors, foresters, environmentalists, mushrooms, wild boar, antelopes, rabbits, safari guides, gardeners, bunker friends, and refugees—inhabit and traverse existing spatial orders and landscapes of ruination.

NOTES

Introduction

- 1 Many Berliners, especially people living in Kreuzberg, love to tell Osman Kalin's story. Both local news and Turkish newspapers have reported on his garden frequently in the past (e.g., *FAZ* 2007; *Milyet* 2000; Niendorf 2008; Reuters 2009). Osman Kalin passed away in May 2018, and his family's tree house (*Baumhaus*) was again featured in international news. My version of the story draws on conversations with Kalin's son, daughter, and neighbors, as well as on local narratives and news reports.
- 2 *Gecekondu* (or *gecekoncular*, pl.) is a combination of the Turkish words *gece* (night) and *kondur* (placed). In contrast to a Turkish *gecekondu*, the Berlin version did not serve as the main residence for Osman's family. For a survey of the literature on *gecekoncular* and changing representations of rural migrants as other in Turkey, see Erman (2001).
- 3 Forms of "disturbance" include vegetation removal through herbicide use or mowing, drought, fire, and soil erosion (Grime 1977).
- 4 Edge effects occur at the boundary between different habitats. While they usually imply changes in community structure and can increase biodiversity, the nature of these changes can be highly variable (e.g., Laurance et al. 2007).
- 5 See Gandy (2022) and Light (2009) for an analysis of different strands of urban ecological thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
- 6 In Germany, the term *Migration* is often used interchangeably with *Einwanderung* (immigration). Both are often racialized and become deeply fraught categories of governance. With this in mind, I use the term *migration* to refer to movements that include both people with formal visa status and

those without. I reserve the term *immigration* for those instances in which the intent of immigrating has been formalized or when referencing public discourse on immigration. Similarly, I use the terms *Turkish German* or *Turkish Berliner* to refer to both migrants and descendants of migrants from Turkey who use these categories as self-identification.

- 7 Although a ruderal analytic troubles the notion, I continue to use the terms *nature* and *urban nature* throughout the book to refer to categories of urban planning and management, as well as to capture the ways in which my interlocutors invoke, challenge, and otherwise make these categories meaningful in their lives.
- 8 As part of this moment, the human ceases to be a singular, self-creating actor. Yet amid pronouncements of overcoming anthropocentrism, humans often continue to appear as key agents in scholarship on new materialisms and the Anthropocene. In many instances, it is still *anthropos* at the center, as “man” contemplates his own ruins (Haraway 2016). Until very recently, some of this scholarship has contained remarkably little reference to earlier forms of reflexivity, specifically those marking the cultural critique and writing culture moments in anthropology, or to feminist and postcolonial critiques that highlight language, power, and embodiment (see Fortun 2012; Helmreich 2014). Even more importantly, the long legacy of contributions of Black and Indigenous critics and scholars of color for grasping the colonial, racialized, and gendered dynamics at the core of environmental destruction continues to get sidelined (H. Davis and Todd 2017; Jegathesan 2021).
- 9 Under scholarly consideration for several decades, the term *Anthropocene* seeks to account for a new geological era that marks the ways in which humans have fundamentally altered the earth’s geological development and shaped its atmosphere—not unlike the forces of glaciers or volcanoes. Debates about the term and when to place the beginning of this era—such as the advent of global trade, colonization, industrialization, the emergence of agriculture, or nuclear proliferation—abound (see, e.g., Hannah and Krajewski 2015; Haraway 2015). H. Davis and Todd (2017), Yusoff (2018), and Ferdinand (2022) point to the centrality of settler colonialism and slavery in shaping the destructive modes of inhabiting the world that have led to the Anthropocene. For an overview of emerging feminist and critical race ethnographies that intervene in universalist storytelling about the Anthropocene, see Ebron and Tsing (2017).
- 10 This work also challenges social theory’s confidence about who counts as a social actor, opening up a sense of agency in which “the world kicks back” (Barad 1998) and interferes with human schemes (Latour 2004; T. Mitchell 2002).
- 11 While humanities scholars have explored the emergence of European modernity in relation to literary, architectural, and cultural representations of ruins (Boym 2001; Hell and Schoenle 2010), many ethnographies trace the cultural and material lives of ruins. For example, Masco (2008) high-

lights how ruins emerge as a central element of nuclear nationalism, while Schwenkel (2013) delineates the material and affective attachments of Cold War urban restructuring and (post)socialist citizenship. Walter Benjamin's (2006) work has shed light on the ruins of capitalist modernity and, like the writings of W. G. Sebald, explores the legacies of nationalism and fascism in European urban landscapes (Buck-Morss 1991). The image of the ruin also exposes the limits of modern conceptions of linear time and space as planned by humans.

- 12 For a discussion of ruination that captures the paradoxical nature of infrastructure as productive and destructive, see Howe et al. (2016).
- 13 For exceptions, see Tsing (2015) and Weston (2017).
- 14 In his nuanced discussion of her work, Mark Anderson (2013) shows that the radical potential of Ruth Benedict's antiracist analysis stood in contradiction to the fact that she modeled solutions to racism in relation to the problem of integration of European immigrants, without questioning that very framework or addressing the specificity of racial distinctions and their origins in settler colonialism and slavery.
- 15 While some scholars have cautioned against taking the category of post-socialism for granted because of its heterogeneous historical trajectories (Humphrey 2002), ethnographers have shown that postsocialism continues to be useful for analysis because it serves as an allegory to shape people's subjectivities, memory, and cultural practices, and because its cultural forms provide a foil from which to evaluate global capitalism (Berdahl 2010; Rofel 1999, 2007; Verdery 1996). By showing that concepts such as the market, liberal democracy, and the economy are ideological vehicles rather than material realities, anthropologists of Eastern Europe have deconstructed central categories of European experience (M. Caldwell 2004a, 2004b; Lampland 1995; Verdery 1997, 2003). Europe, as the fraught reference point of much anthropological theory (Asad 1997), continues to serve as a looking glass in this scholarship to reflect back upon anthropology (Herzfeld 2010).
- 16 With growing and contested EU expansion, most EU members have become part of the Schengen Area and are required to adhere to its regulations. For discussion of the complexities of EU regulation of migratory movements, see Feldman (2011); Hess, Tsianos, and Karakayali (2009); and Tazzioli (2017).
- 17 For a genealogy of changing EU border regimes before and after 2015, see, for example, Hess and Kasperek (2019) and Kasperek (2021).
- 18 Since 2015, this passage has increasingly become dangerous due to stricter controls and asylum policies, as well as criminalization of nongovernmental sea rescue efforts. Between January 2014 and October 2019, 18,892 people died attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea (PRO ASYL 2020). This number excludes deaths due to police brutality and racist attacks, deaths in detention centers and asylum units, or suicides.

- 19 The term *summer of migration* has been suggested as an alternative to the crisis language that is usually applied to the events of the summer of 2015 when more than a million people applied for asylum in Europe fleeing the war in Syria and the Middle East.
- 20 While a rich tradition of scholarship has highlighted the historical contingencies of the social construction of race (Dominguez 1986; Hartigan 1999; Visweswaran 1998), as well as the negotiation of racial, ethnic, and gender formations in diverse global contexts (M. Anderson 2009; Clarke and Thomas 2006), the study of race in continental Europe has remained marginal for a long time (Brown 2005; Gilroy 1987, 2004, 2006; Hall 1992; Harrison 1995). Earlier research highlighted the relationship between racism and nationalism (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Gilman 1982; Mosse 1985). Another concern has been whether contemporary migration discourses that assume an unassimilable cultural other can appropriately be labeled racism (Balibar 2004; Glick-Schiller 2005; Silverstein 2005; Stolcke 1995). Some scholars argue that Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments should not be labeled as racism because they move beyond the nation-state and do not construct biological difference (Bunzl 2005). Others have criticized this position, emphasizing that shifting ideas of racial difference and the nation, often couched within a language of culture, shape not only national but supranational European practices (Glick-Schiller 2005). In this view, nation-building projects remain dependent on attacking the fundamental rights of migrants and on implementing and enforcing new forms of state control that target Muslim bodies as potential threats to “national security” in the so-called War against Terror.
- 21 For an analysis of the racialization of the very figure of the migrant in public debate and migration studies, see Silverstein (2005).
- 22 See also, for example, Decolonize Berlin—an association of different activist and civil rights groups that critically address German colonialism and its continuities in German society with the aim to implement strategies of decolonization in education, science, business, and urban planning (<https://decolonize-berlin.de/en/organization>, accessed December 30, 2020).

Struggles for decolonization in Berlin have especially also focused on the erasure of the violence of colonialism within Berlin’s built environment. See, for example, Sandrine Micosse-Aikins’s (2017) analysis of the Humboldtforum.

- 23 Recent ethnographies have offered crucial tools to examine the spatial dimensions of nationalism and racism (Shoshan 2016), tracing how migrants and communities of color challenge notions of citizenship and reshape European cities via claims to urban space (Brown 2005; Çağlar 2001; Glick-Schiller, Çağlar, and Guldbrandsen, 2006; Kleinman 2019; Kosnick 2007; Mandel 2008; Pred 2000; Sawyer 2006; Silverstein 2004). Work that has destabilized the Euro-American centeredness of much urban theory

crucially adds to these conversations. See Baviskar (2007), Mbembe (2003), and Simone (2010).

- 24 In a commitment to “thinking between the posts” (Chari and Verdery 2009), my research shares the premises of work in the anthropology of postsocialism, postcolonial studies (Gilroy 2004; Stoler 1995), and subaltern urbanism to develop comparative and transnational frameworks for analyzing contemporary urban life under globalization and liberalization (Roy and Al Sayyad 2004).
- 25 Ethnographies of Berlin have tracked Cold War divisions in the pre- and postunification city through analysis of intellectuals and media markets (Boyer 2001, 2005), the police (Glaeser 2002), or changing notions of kinship, the state, and nation (Borneman 1991). Moreover, research on the “New Berlin” has examined the metaphorical construction of history and memory in built landscapes (Till 2005; Jordan 2006; Huyssen 1997; Ward 2011), the symbolic reconstruction of Berlin as capital (Binder 2001, 2009), or the historical relationship between national identity and architecture (Ladd 1997). Only rarely is this scholarship in conversation with ethnographies of identity formation in migrant and refugee communities or poor neighborhoods or ethnographies of labor migrants and race (Amrute 2016; Bendixsen 2005; Çağlar 1995; Knecht 1999; Mandel 1996, 2008; Pecoud 2002; Soysal 2001).
- 26 See also the essays on Germany and Berlin in Brantz and DümpeImann (2011).
- 27 The name Berlin is often associated with the animal on the city’s coat of arms, the Berlin bear, and the German diminutive *Bärlein* (little bear). Yet Berlin’s etymology more likely derives from the city’s natural history and Slavic origins. From the sixth century onward, Slavic fishermen established settlements in the region that later became Berlin. One origin story of the name is that it stems from the Slavic term *Brl*, which means marsh, swamp, or damp place (MacDonogh 1997, 4). Another version refers to Rhenish and Dutch colonists in the twelfth century: they called their settlement *to dem Berlin*, which means “a bend in the river” (Pundt 1972, 5).
- 28 The sewer network in particular became a source of ongoing conflict between the East and West German governments throughout the city’s division. For a comprehensive history of Berlin’s twentieth-century urban infrastructure, see Moss (2020).
- 29 Like Yanagisako and Delaney (1995), my argument here accounts for the ways in which categories such as race, nation, and gender operate to make social inequalities appear as part of a natural order. At the same time, as they argue, it is important to not abandon an analysis of the meanings and relations that used to define these domains (11).
- 30 Berlin has a long history of preservation policies. For example, before Berlin officially became integrated into one city in 1920, the “enduring forest policy” (*Dauerwaldvertrag*) of 1915 preserved forest areas in and around the

city on a large scale. Forests provided both water resources for the city and a space of recreation for urban residents. Featuring public “restaurants” that offered water and spaces for Berliners to bring their own food, the goal was to prevent social conflict and unrest (Weisspflug 1999). Berlin’s forests are also shaped by a history of militarism. From the mid-eighteenth century on, the Prussian state financed almost half of its military and war actions through forestry in Berlin-Brandenburg.

- 31 This also includes water and agriculture (SenUVK 2022c). The German term *Brache* can be translated to “wasteland” or “fallow,” signifying a piece of land that is not utilized for profit. For discussion of the term and its significance in Berlin, see the film *Natura Urbana: The Brachen of Berlin* (2017), directed by Matthew Gandy; and Lawton et al. (2019).
- 32 For a detailed discussion of Africans living in Germany during the colonial period, as well as a history of colonial fairs and anti-Black racism focusing on “uncivilized nature people” as part of colonial anthropological science and eugenic movements in Germany and beyond, see Oguntoye (2004, 1997), El-Tayeb (2001), and van der Heyden and Zeller (2002).
- 33 Demographic categories are a contested terrain because the census and most statistical data in Germany (and in France) do not include racial or ethnic categories. This colorblind lens stems from historical concerns about cementing ethnic or racial identity and targeting communities of color, as was done during fascism. National statistical data and the Statistisches Bundesamt (Federal Statistical Agency) therefore rely on categories of citizenship (e.g., German vs. foreigner, or German vs. Turkish) on the one hand and “migratory background” (*Migrationshintergrund*) on the other. The latter identifies a “person with a migratory background” as someone who was born without German citizenship or who has at least one noncitizen parent who migrated to Germany after the 1950s (an extended definition also includes grandparents) (www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Glossar/migrationshintergrund.html, accessed June 3, 2022). Following these statistical categories, as of July 2019, close to 106,925 Berliners had Turkish citizenship and around 130,000 had citizenship from countries in the Middle East (Statistisches Bundesamt 2022). However, these data exclude people who have German citizenship and those who identify as Turkish, Middle Eastern, or Arab. Similarly, it is unclear how many Black people reside in Germany. Initiatives such as the AFROZENSUS, launched in spring 2020, estimate that there are one million Black, African, or Afro-diasporic people living in Germany. See also my discussion of additional statistical data on Southeast Asian migrants in Berlin in chapter 3.
- 34 See, for example, Thilo Sarrazin’s (2010) controversial book, *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany does away with itself), discussed in chapters 2 and 3.
- 35 Since the mid-2000s, the term *Heimat* has made a comeback throughout the political landscape in Germany. During the Nazi period, the idea of *Heimat*

was expressed as hatred against anything foreign (including Jews, who were seen as having scorned the natural world). Ultimately, this involved efforts to relocate human and nonhuman populations in order to restore national belonging, and it culminated in extermination. Yet as Lekan (2004, 6) points out, discourses of *Heimat* have been heterogeneous throughout German history and have included democratic understandings in addition to racist and nationalist ones.

- 36 The urban jungle is yet another colonial trope in which immigrants are cast in dehumanizing ways. Examples include media coverage of male Middle Eastern refugees as sexual predators during Cologne New Year's Eve 2015–16, or portrayals of migrant sports celebrities (such as the German Ghanaian soccer star Boateng brothers). In other contexts, perpetuating the violent history of colonial exhibitions, people of color are naturalized as inhabitants of nature spaces: in 2005, the Augsburg Zoo hosted an “African village,” a performance and market of African crafts, setting off antiracist protest (Glick-Schiller, Dea, and Hoehne 2005).
- 37 According to immigration law, courses aiming to teach German language and culture to immigrants can be required for non-European immigrants, but they are not mandatory for Westerners like US nationals (Nghì Ha 2010, 164).
- 38 By the end of 2015, close to a million people had sought asylum in Germany. In Berlin, more than 55,000 people applied for asylum that year. Between 2017 and early 2022, these numbers decreased. In 2019, as of October, only 5,299 individuals had applied for asylum in Berlin (Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten, “Zahlen und Fakten: Zugangslage Flüchteter, 2019,” accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.berlin.de/laf/ankommen/aktuelle-ankunftszahlen/artikel.625503.php>). The major countries of origin were Syria, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Turkey, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Somalia (PROASYL, “Fakten, Zahlen und Argumente,” accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.proasyl.de/thema/fakten-zahlen-argumente/>). Not all applications for asylum are processed, and in many cases, applications are turned down and people deported.
- 39 According to the UNHCR, the term *asylum seeker* refers to an individual seeking international protection whose status has not yet been determined, irrespective of location. *Refugee*, in contrast, refers to an individual “recognised under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.” Since 2007, the latter term is increasingly used to refer to people in a “refugee-like” situation and hence often conflated with *asylum seeker*. (See UNHCR, “Refugee Data Finder,” accessed March 31, 2022, http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview#_ga=2.211964628.1711905925.1574189046-2028994220.1537303912). For ethnographic analyses of the problematic language of crisis and the portrayal of refugees as victims versus illegitimate economic refugees or potential terrorists, see Holmes and Castañeda (2016) and the Hot Spots series in *Cultural Anthropology* in 2016 (e.g., Ticktin 2016).
- 40 For a broader analysis of wave metaphors, see Helmreich (2019).

- 41 In a well-known example, in the days following the 2016 New Year's celebrations, Cologne residents submitted 500 complaints about sexual assault by, as municipal authorities phrased it, "North African and Arab-looking men." In subsequent weeks, the image of refugees shifted from stories of innocence to stories of sexual aggression, greatly impacting public debate about asylum policy. The German Federal Center for Health Education also launched a campaign to educate refugees on matters of sexuality (Yildiz 2017).
- 42 Berlin's relation to the surrounding countryside in Brandenburg changed dramatically after the fall of the Berlin Wall. During the Cold War, the wall cut off connections between West Berlin and the countryside. While networks for electricity were separated, financial and practical reasons prevented a full separation of the sewer network (Book 1995, 184). West Berlin thus used the Eastern hinterland for waste disposal and wastewater management, causing conflict between the East and West German governments. As West Berliners' travels to the countryside were highly regulated, outings to the area became especially popular after 1989 (184). Furthermore, the GDR's legacy of large farms and fields continues to shape the agricultural landscape in eastern Germany, including Brandenburg.
- 43 In Germany, until very recently, the word *Rasse* (which translates to "race" but also "breed") has been defined in biological terms, with little discussion of the social construction of race. In the spring of 2020, following nationwide Black Lives Matter protests against racism and police violence in Germany and Europe, this led to debates about whether the word should be deleted from the constitution.
- 44 See also Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2007, 28) definition of racism as "the state-sanctioned or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."
- 45 In contrast to ruins, rubble is considered formless material without value (Puff 2010; Simmel 1983), and hence not memorialized. Analysts such as Gordillo (2014) promote rubble as an analytic that highlights forms of destruction that, although invisible, are constitutive of the production of space.
- 46 See Cherkaev (2020) for a discussion of the ethnographic practice of gleaning chance encounters in the field.
- 47 See also my discussion in chapter 5. For a wonderful manifesto of patchwork ethnography that includes a consideration of the patchy process of fieldwork and the fieldworker's personal, social, and labor conditions, see Günel, Varma, and Watanabe (2020).
- 48 Similarly, AbdouMalik Simone (2004, 12) tracks the disparate social worlds that emerge alongside urban institutions—the "emotional fields" that people build to create a sense of physical connection to place. In this sense, changing the materialities of cities also reshapes who gets to flourish, live, and die, altering the meaning of urban life itself (Simone 2016). Simone draws on Mbembe's account of mobile forms of sovereignty to examine

urban practices as “a patchwork of overlapping and incomplete rights to rule” that attest to intertwined agendas, infrastructures, enclaves, and individual ways of making a livelihood by inhabitants of African and Southeast Asian cities (Simone 2010, 306).

- 49 For other ethnographic accounts of the *unheimlich*, see, for example, Ivy (1995) and Stewart (1996), as well as Lepselter (2005) and Masco (2006) on the uncanny in the ruins of Cold War American militarism.

1. Botanical Encounters

- 1 Sticky goosefoot is also commonly called Jerusalem oak, feathered geranium, or ambrosia, the last not to be confused with *Ambrosia artemisiifolia* L., a ragweed that causes hay fever.
- 2 See also Reidl (2005) on ruderal spaces comprising heterogeneous locations including rubble fields, abandoned land, and the edges of streets, train tracks, or canals.
- 3 Sticky goosefoot has pharmacologically active elements. It is anti-asthmatic, anti-catarhal, and has been used to treat headaches in homeopathic medicine (Sukopp 1971, 7). A cultivar called “Green Magic” was developed in the Netherlands and has a delicious nutty flavor. For its uses in Greek mythology and South America, see Small (2006, 300).
- 4 In fact, sticky goosefoot turns out to be a bioindicator of the city’s history and trade and the ecological effects of the war’s vast destruction, including changes in soil, temperature, and urban climate. Similarly, lichen on tree bark has been studied in urban ecology, as its growth differs in response to air pollution. A lichen-free zone in city centers is usually surrounded by zones of increasing lichen growth toward urban peripheries. In Berlin and Leipzig, lichen growth has served as a way to map and document changes in air quality across time (Sukopp 1998, 10).
- 5 Much scholarship on postwar urban Germany, and on Berlin in particular, has focused on the role of architecture and city planning for reimagining the postfascist nation. At the same time, there is a rich body of literature in environmental history that tracks continuities and changes in landscape planning and environmental policy and their significance for reconstructing the nation after the war (e.g., Brüggemeier, Cioc, and Zeller 2005; Lekan 2004; Zeller 2005). An emerging literature unsettles this divide between urban and environmental scholarship (Brantz and Dümpelmann 2011; Dümpelmann 2019; Gandy 2013, 2022; Lachmund 2013).
- 6 Urban aerial bombing did not originate in this moment but drew on techniques tried out by the British and German militaries in World War I (Diefendorf 1993, 4; Lindqvist 2001). In the 1920s, airpower theorists and military strategists, such as Billy Mitchell in the United States and Giulio Douhet in Italy, promoted bombing as a technique of the future with which to destroy the “nerve centers” of their enemies’ urban industrial societies