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Ahmed, N. orcid.org/0000-0003-0205-0768 (2025) Infrastructure as territorial stigma: labour migrant exclusions in the Indian city. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. ISSN 0309-1317

https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.13313

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– INFRASTRUCTURE AS TERRITORIAL STIGMA: Labour Migrant Exclusions in the Indian City

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Abstract

The city as an exclusionary place for migrants is widely established across global literatures. Global cities—and the infrastructures that animate them—share practices of surveillance and bordering, denial of public services and stratified labour markets that constrain migrants to precarious sectors. Stigma plays a crucial role in perpetuating such conditions for migrants, rendering them 'others' and 'outcasts' that taint cities. Loïc Wacquant's concept of 'territorial stigmatization' can be used to explain the spatial process of such exclusions. This article empirically advances the concept by illustrating the relationship between infrastructures and territorial stigmatization that forms one part of a set of multilayered stigmas, and by arguing that territorial stigma is a relational, mobile and multiscale process. Drawing from empirical research with internal migrants working in the construction sector in one of India's fastest-growing cities, Nashik in the state of Maharashtra, this article illustrates how infrastructure plays a role in processes of territorial stigmatization in three main ways. First, continued urbanization and infrastructural development perpetuate the need for stigmatized labour. Second, infrastructures (such as water, sanitation and public services) are crucial in configuring stigmatized spaces. And third, infrastructure enables migration across space and has the potential to reconfigure territorial stigmatization.

Introduction

The city as an exclusionary place for migrants is a widely established narrative across global literatures (Desai and Sanyal, 2011; Back and Sinha, 2018; Hall, 2018; Burrell and Schweyher, 2019). Global cities that attract and enable mobilities operate through increasingly common infrastructures of surveillance and bordering (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Graham, 2012; Purandare and Parkar, 2020; Sadiq and Tsourapas, 2021), neoliberal and spatial policies of welfare retrenchment (Harvey, 2003; Standing, 2014) and stratified labour markets entrenching migrants into the most precarious sectors (Waite, 2009; Lewis *et al*., 2015; Ruhs, 2018). Stigma plays a crucial role in perpetuating such conditions—rendering migrants interlopers, criminals, racialized 'others' and 'outcasts' that 'taint' urban spaces (Wacquant, 2008). An extensive literature on the social, economic and political dimensions of migrant exclusion in cities exists (Bhatt, 2009; Srivastava and Sutradhar, 2016; Deshingkar, 2017; Rajan *et al*., 2020; Shah and Lerche, 2020), yet the spatial and material functions of stigma are less examined. Wacquant's concept of 'territorial stigmatization' warrants attention due to the distinctly *spatial* focus on exclusion (2008). Focusing on migrants working in India's urban construction sites, I seek to advance beyond this concept by illustrating the role of urban infrastructure in shaping territorial stigmas.

Stigmas in Indian society are deeply historical and widespread, and they continue to drive a violent politics of segregation and sectarianism (Jaffrelot, 2016) that is reinforced in urban settings (Thorat *et al*., 2015; Ganguly, 2018). While scholars continually advance understandings of territorial stigmatization, notably Wacquant's

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive input. The author also acknowledges and thanks Dr Hanna Baumann (UCL) for their initial motivation, support and feedback on a very early iteration of this article, and Dr. Ankit Kumar (Sheffield) for continued peer support and valuable feedback on this article.

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own revisited work with Slater and Periera (2014), the scholarship is largely restricted to Euro-American ontologies (Loveman, 2014; Horgan, 2018; Inam, 2021; Sisson, 2021). This article expands the empirical and conceptual scope of engagement with territorial stigma beyond the global North, by building on the conceptual scholarship on urbanism in postcolonial India (Anand and Rademacher, 2011; Roy 2011a; Sanyal, 2014) and focusing on the role of infrastructures in configuring territorial stigma for labour migrants within and beyond the city.

Drawing on empirical research with internal migrants working in construction in Nashik—one of India's fastest-growing cities—this article presents how territorial stigmatization can be a multiscale (spanning national, rural, urban and neighbourhood scales) and mobile process, enabled by infrastructures, and constitutes one out of multiple and interlocking historical, social and embodied stigmas. This article also expands the literature's articulation of how territorial stigma is relational by empirically illustrating how stigmas of place in India's rural settings *travel across* space and are reconfigured in cities at the urban margins. Territorial stigmas are reinforced by the spatiality, absence and instability of material and social infrastructures such as water, sanitation, social and labour networks, and public services.

– Background: migrant labour in India

Indian cities as manufacturing hubs have historically relied on a 'floating population' of labour from rural areas (Joshi, 2003: 63). The number of Indians who migrate internally constitutes a significant proportion of the population—an estimated 450 million, according to the latest Census data (2011).[1] Rural-to-urban migration has intensified in both scale and pace under an increasingly globalized and neoliberal market regime, where employers prefer cheap migrant labour over local workers and can evade labour regulations by hiring unregistered workers and exploit opportunities to entrench hierarchies of control based on class, caste, gender and religion (Guérin, 2013; Deshingkar, 2017; Deshingkar *et al.*, 2022).

Migrants from rural areas are employed through a chain of brokers—referred to in northern India as *thekedars*—who link informal sectors with formal employers, such as property developers. Labour migrants in the lowest paid and so-called 'low-skilled' sectors of urban construction predominantly originate from India's poorest states—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. They disproportionally represent marginalized caste[2] and religious groups (Dalits and Muslims)[3] (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005; Mosse *et al.*, 2005; Keshri and Bhagat, 2013), employed for labour that is often stigmatized and precarious in terms of instability, lack of social and legal protections, and health risks. Intra-state migrants—typically *Adivasi*[4] (tribal) groups from drought-stricken rural areas also constitute a major proportion of urban migrant workers. Female labour migrants in the city commonly belong to this intra-state category of migrants (Ahmed, 2020; Parida and Madheswaran, 2020; Ahmed, 2020).

Construction is the second biggest industrial sector in India after agriculture, employing 50 million in the year 2011–12 (Soundararajan, 2013). Labour is often procured by *thekedars* on a seasonal or long-term basis. Construction workers typically borrow

1 Census of India 2011, Government of India: https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/. More recent census data on migration unavailable.

2 Caste refers to an ancient social system that structures society according to 'purity' and 'pollution'. Those rendered at the bottom of the hierarchy have historically been banned from owning land and forced into bonded and/or stigmatized labour. The system was reinforced under British colonial rule (Ranganathan, 2022). Despite post-independence laws against negative discrimination, caste continues to wield stigmas that lodge groups at the margins of society.

3 *Dalit* is a 'politically empowering' term used to (self-)represent groups covering both the government categories of 'Scheduled Caste' and 'Scheduled Tribes' (Ranganathan, 2022: 137).

4 *Adivasi* in Sanskrit translates literally to 'original inhabitants' (i.e. indigenous)–a self-ascriptive term for tribal groups often originally based in remote territories of forest or hills. They experience a distinct form of state violence (Xaxa, 1999; Jaoul and Shah, 2016).

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advance loans from their *thekedars* or family members to finance their initial move. For many, it offers a livelihood option in the face of drought, off-season rural unemployment and, in the most precarious cases, lack of access to land or labour throughout the year (Pattenden, 2012). Wages are stratified along degrees of skill, experience and social factors such as gender, regional background and caste. Among the youngest and lowest-skilled migrant workers (the latter predominately *Adivasis*), wages are low and comparable with other forms of migrant labour in the informal economy. Women are consistently paid less than men across all sectors.

India's post-independence labour laws are poorly enforced largely due to the scale of the informal economy and ineffective municipal governance, characterized by a lack of awareness and compliance among state and local-level officials (EPW, 1979; Ghertner, 2010; Routray, 2014; Breman, 2016). Migrants in cities are thus 'doubly disadvantaged' (MacAuslan, 2011) as they lack legal protection both as labourers and migrants without fixed proof of local address needed to verify identity and access state entitlements. The national Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act 1979[5] stipulated the registration of migrant workers by employers, timely pay and implementation of minimum wages. However, this has historically been neglected, evaded and, at the time of my research, barely known among state-level officials, with informal employers incentivized to evade legal requirements to register and pay fair wages. In the construction sector—which has a large proportion of interstate labour migrants—the national Building and Other Construction Workers Act (BOCWA) was passed in 1996. In 2007, a state-level mandate was passed in Maharashtra, the state in which Nashik is based. Both measures mandate the use of local tax funds to cover welfare costs for construction workers, such as childcare and healthcare on labour sites. However, labour inspections found both a lack of implementation and awareness among state officials (EPW Editorial, 2008).

– The case of Nashik

Nashik city is in the western state of Maharashtra and classified as a 'Tier 2' city in terms of population size (Census of India data, 2011). Developing from a small town (most popularly known in the colonial era as a Hindu pilgrim site) into a key industrial site in the Delhi–Mumbai corridor, Nashik is ranked as the sixth largest urban agglomeration in the state and one of its fastest-growing cities (Dahake, 2022). The city's demand for cheap construction labour redirected significant migrant labour streams from Pune and Mumbai.[6] Historically dominated by elite castes, Nashik's demographic profile diversified and its size changed due to spatial and migrant-led expansion (Natraj *et al*., 2021; Dahake, 2022). Federal investments in the city's infrastructure and the wider district's agricultural economy led the city to become a municipal corporation in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, it has emerged as a strategic industrial site between Pune and Mumbai. The city was targeted by the nationwide Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission scheme in the 2000s, investing in water, sewage, drainage and housing infrastructures as well as developing the Godavari riverfront (ICLEI, 2017).

Nashik's contemporary 'worlding' trajectory as a major city (Roy, 2011b) is driven by its status as India's largest pilgrimage sites (for the 'Kumbh Mela') and also as the centre of India's locally produced wine industry (Dahake, 2022). Despite the city's significance in terms of migrant labour, construction and industrialization, as well as a site of targeted migrant violence (*The Times of India*, 2008), the literature has been inattentive to Nashik. At the time of research, Nashik was a major site for labour migrants in Maharashtra, meeting the demand for construction work outside the more

5 Further information on inter-state migrant workmen can be found on the Government of India Ministry of Labour and Employment website at: https://clc.gov.in/clc/acts-rules/inter-state-migrant-workmen#:~:text=1979%20and%20came%20on%20the,1979%20 (accessed April 2024).

6 Drawn from fieldwork interviews with civil society organizations and municipal officials in Nashik in 2014.

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competitive nearby major cities of Mumbai and Pune. But it has been under researched in terms of labour migrant experiences. The presence of a local NGO focused expressly on migrant rights and specific attention to migrant welfare from a previous district-level official (at the time of research) enabled a pathway and support network for academic fieldwork (by an international outsider) in a smaller and less-researched city.

Expanding the concept of territorial stigmatization

The following literature review frames this article's key argument that urban infrastructures in India, and elsewhere in what is understood as the 'global South', play a role in (re)configuring and reinforcing territorial stigmas among labour migrants in three ways. First, the spatial aspect of stigmatization is empirically relevant across contexts beyond the global North (as is Wacquant's focus), despite variations in urbanization and labour market trajectories, in India particularly given the embrace since 1991 of rapid neoliberal urban development reliant on foreign direct investments. Second, in following postcolonial urban scholars' calls to challenge normative urban epistemologies—dominated by global North empirics which are used to explain cities universally—by focusing on urban 'peripheries' of the global South to 'decentre urban analysis' (Roy, 2011a: 231; see also Simone, 2004; Caldeira, 2017). Finally, by bringing the historical, social and governmental practices of stigma embedded within Indian urbanization into dialect with Wacquant's theories, we can conceptualize how urban infrastructures, reliant on cheap informal labour drawn from stigmatized groups within and beyond the city, play a key role in configuring territorial stigmatizations.

– Contextual modalities of territorial stigma

Wacquant's concept of territorial stigmatization as presented in *Urban Outcasts* refers to spatially articulated processes of relational deprivation and marginalization—a 'double entrenchment' of 'social closure and spatial relegation' (2008: 5), resulting in a loss of sense of place due to insecure labour markets and exclusionary urbanization. The concept binds Bourdieu's 'symbolic power' (1991)—in this case that of violence in its material, affective and embodied registers—with Goffman's notion of stigma as a form of social control (1963). The 'distinct logics and dynamics' of territorial stigmatization (Meade, 2021: 194) lie in their *spatial* character, arguing that space defines, or reinforces, the stigma attached to people. Residents who are socially othered, economically abject and politically disenfranchised are confined to a 'bounded and segregated space' (Wacquant, 2008: 169). Such residents are typically unemployed or low-income labourers, lacking stable citizenship status, criminalized and/or racialized. Their neighbourhoods are marked by the absence of state provisions, welfare entitlements or formal markets and the presence of street-level institutions of law and surveillance (Wacquant, 2008).

Conversely, territorial stigmatization is also articulated in elite spaces, resulting from gentrification or 'social cleansing' (Watt and Minton, 2016; Lees and White, 2020) and at an acute scale, gated communities (Atkinson and Flint, 2004; Lemanski and Oldfield, 2009). Such 'geographies of exclusion' (Sibley, 1988; 1995) are predicated on desires for social homogeneity and 'purification' (*ibid*.) from the imagined 'spatial taint' that prevails at the urban margins. In the Indian context, this spatial stigma is layered onto ancient casteist notions of 'purity' versus 'pollution' that are reinforced in the contemporary urban context *in spite* of the reliance on stigmatized labour to develop elite residences.

The notions of urban outcast and territorial stigma are useful starting points for thinking through the multilayered stigmas in urban India linked with abjection (Anand, 2012), marginalization and exclusion. As a mode of social control and spatial relegation, 'slums' have become metonyms for Indian cities, exemplifying the discursive impact of global stigmas (Anand, 2017; Echanove and Srivastava, 2009; Roy, 2011a). Despite

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a marginal decline in the proportion of people living in informal settlements in the past two decades, approximately 27 percent of India's urban population dwell in informal settlements (Yadav *et al*., 2021).[7] However, narrow understandings of informality, housing and urban margins perpetuate global stigmas and dominate stereotypes concerning cities in India and elsewhere in the global South. Urban scholars who take a postcolonial approach have called for an expansion in how we construct knowledge of urbanism beyond dominant narratives based on the global North (Roy, 2011a; Fattah and Walters, 2020; Inam, 2021). Roy (2011a) invokes the concept of 'subaltern urbanism' to challenge dominant and colonial narratives of the 'subaltern' city and the 'underdeveloped' megacity.

As outlined in the Background section, urbanization in India has historically relied on cheap migrant labour.[8] Such labourers lack access to adequate housing and infrastructure and are often forced to live in the most marginalized sections of settlements (Naik, 2015; Deshingkar *et al*., 2022). Ongoing histories of territorial stigmas are evident in the inadequate and disconnected infrastructures that characterize informal settlements as well as the lack of services, formal markets and state entitlements (Wacquant, 2008). The notion of informality itself is subject to imperialist and neoliberal indictment despite its complex—and central—role as a modality of Indian urbanization enabled through governmental and legal logics (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004; Roy, 2005). Informality runs along a continuum of 'power and exclusion' (Roy, 2005: 148) that does not necessarily fall 'outside' legality. In the case of this article, the term informality denotes settlements that lack adequate and formal access to infrastructures, services and in many cases, land rights.

Spaces of migrant dwelling—whether a temporary camp on a construction site, or a designated area within an established settlement—can become relational sites of both freedom and constraint from stigmas (relative to those prevailing in rural societies where migrants travel from), problematizing Wacquant's fixed and single-scale conception of 'territorial stigmatization' (2008). Spatial mobility is an articulation of agency among labourers (Bakewell, 2010; Deshingkar, 2022) who, in moving to cities, can negotiate some stigmas and barriers to livelihoods and entitlements in their places of origin. Labour migrants exercise their constitutional right to traverse and settle across and within states as citizens—enabled by nationwide infrastructures such as the Indian railways and relatively affordable interstate bus services.

The scholarship that extends beyond Wacquant's empirical bases deepens our understanding of factors that either underpin or undo territorial stigmas. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, territorial stigmas are countered through discursive narratives and community-based resistance in place-making (Fattah and Walters, 2020) and such resistance of internalized place-based stigmas is also reflected in ethnographies from Latin American cities (Caldeira, 2015; Husseini de Araújo and Batista da Costa, 2017). Beyond discursive and psycho-social resistance to stigma, however, the *material* and social articulations of such territorial stigmas, enacted through infrastructures as this article argues, warrant further attention, both in the literature and in strategies of resistance against stigma and its resultant abjections (Anand, 2012; Baumann, 2018).

– Stigmas in India—caste, labour and migration

It is impossible to discuss stigma of any form in India—and South Asia more broadly—without engaging with the prevailing social system of caste. Untouchability

7 'Slum' is a legal category in India defined as: 'cluster of hutments with dilapidated and infirm structures having common toilet facilities, suffering from lack of basic amenities, inadequate arrangements for drainage and for disposal of solid waste and garbage'. From: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, India, 2011: https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/9Slum_Report_NBO(2).pdf.

8 Commonly compared with China's floating population of labour where the *hukou* system presents a formal modality of stigma toward rural-to-urban migrants. See Van Luyn (2008) for history and Zhang *et al*. (2014) for a contemporary analysis.

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(based on pollutive qualities ascribed to certain castes) is the system's 'most oppressive practice' (Ranganathan, 2022: 137) and arguably the most violent articulation of Goffman's 'tribal stigma' (1963). B.R. Ambedkar—social reformer, Dalit activist and responsible for co-drafting India's Constitution—on independence envisioned urbanization as a liberatory space and opportunity away from rural caste relations. Despite Ambedkar's optimism for socially progressive cities, caste relations which are indexed to labour sectors remain and continue to structure labour relations, despite migration and urban development (Banerjee and Knight, 1985; Prashad, 2000; Mosse *et al*., 2005; Cháirez-Garza 2014; Ganguly, 2018; Shah and Lerche, 2020; Ranganathan, 2022). Prashad describes how Dalit communities from the Punjabi countryside historically migrated to cities and even overseas (via indentured labour regimes and military), as migration offered one 'path' of 'rebellion' (2000: 39) against rural caste systems. However, in Indian cities, they left one system of oppression to find an urban version in municipal labour sectors such as waste management and sanitation (*ibid*.; see also Gidwani, 2015; Kornberg, 2019). The recalcitrance of caste relations and stigmas within cities has been established in the intervening decades, as evidenced among low-paid, urban migrants in the informal economy (Mosse *et al*., 2005; Ganguly, 2018; Shah and Lerche, 2020; Deshingkar *et al*., 2022). Territorial stigmatization overlaps with urban caste dynamics.

Rural caste-based patron–client relations structure migrant labour recruitment processes: brokers and labour contractors select specific caste groups for typically low-paid and precarious work in cities (Bhagat, 2017; Chandrasekhar and Mitra, 2019; Deshingkar *et al*., 2022), most viscerally in sanitation and waste management (Gidwani, 2015; Kornberg, 2019). Labour migration thus enables a continuum of caste stigmas between villages and cities, rather than an emancipatory route. Guru (2009) describes how stigmas are seen to taint, or in casteist terms, 'pollute', not only at the bodily and tribal level but also spaces inhabited. By this logic, bodies are seen as mobile carriers of stigma and migration offers no emancipatory or destigmatizing route.[9]

Social stigmas also originate from cities themselves, as well as being carried over from villages of migrant origin. Nativist discontent, where 'local' residents scapegoat interstate labour migrants as outsiders and interlopers who steal jobs and resources, is prevalent in cities such as Mumbai (Weiner, 1978; Carswell and De Neve, 2013) and increasingly at the time of my research, in Nashik.[10] India's federalized politics of uneven development (Tillin and Pereira, 2017) feed into the stigmatization of migrants based on regional background, such as migrants from poorer states such as Bihar, stereotyped as itinerant or criminal (Fazal, 2016), or racialization of migrants from India's northeastern or southern regions (Chandrashekar, 2021; Haokip, 2021). Such migrants have been targeted by political movements[11] based on a 'sons of the soil' ideology that foments targeted violence against migrants among local electorates (Bhagat, 2017).

Intersecting stigmas against migrants and 'lower' caste and tribal groups can be traced to colonial-era criminalization of such groups (Mosse *et al*., 2005) codified under the Criminal Tribes Act 1871.[12] *Adivasi* groups were required to register their identities at local police stations (Bhukya, 2007) wherever they moved and in doing so stunted opportunities to escape caste stigmas in negotiating 'access to work, terms of work and residence' (*ibid*.: 155). The institutional stigmas of marginalized groups also marked a colonial attempt to 'settle' and discipline subjects (Singha, 2000). Histories of state-led

9 It falls beyond the timeframe of this article, but recently these stigmas have been articulated in contestations around the conditions of Indian citizenship codified in the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

10 See https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2008/2/18/arrests-in-india-migrant-row (accessed April 2022).

11 For further information on historical nativist politics in Maharashtra, see Verma (2011).

12 The Act was repealed in 1952. It discriminated against tribal caste groups on the grounds of assumed 'innate' and 'hereditary' criminality. An example of legal codified and institutionally implemented stigma (Singha, 2000).

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stigma in India are linked to the discouragement of mobility, both spatial and generational (through the hereditary assignation of caste) (Singha, 2000). Identity verification—through documents or *Aadhaar*, a nationwide platform for biometric identity verification launched in 2009—continues to play a central role in surveillance of those most marginalized (Dattani, 2020).

– Infrastructures and stigma

Within geography's 'infrastructure turn', scholars have predominately focused on the urban margins and unjust distribution of infrastructure resources (Anand, 2012; Appel *et al*., 2018), and the extraction and dispossession of racialized groups (Kornberg, 2016; Deitz and Meehan, 2019; Ranganathan, 2022). This article follows the 'infrastructure turn' and understands infrastructures in the following ways: as 'both relational and ecological—it means different things to different groups and it is part of the balance of action, tools, and the built environment, inseparable from them' (Star, 1999: 377), as a tool or proxy of the state (Easterling, 2014) and, particular to postcolonial cities, as provisional and embodied in the absence of state-led infrastructures (Simone, 2004; Fredericks, 2014).

Inequalities in the distribution, access and quality of infrastructures render them visible (Star, 1999) in disruptive, unjust and violent ways for marginalized groups. These inequalities affect household and city-wide systems of sanitation, waste management, energy use, telecommunications, transport and access to public space for those at the urban margins in the 'global South' (Anand, 2012; Fredericks, 2014; Truelove, 2019; Datta and Ahmed, 2020). The links between infrastructures, urban inequalities and territorial stigma in its discursive, cultural and political modes have also been explored in global North contexts (Kornberg, 2016; Pulido, 2016; Ranganathan, 2016; Horgan, 2018; Deitz and Meehan, 2019). Recent scholarship tracing the colonial impetus for planning cities and nations through divisionary infrastructures (Cowen, 2020; Niranjana, 2021; Ranganathan, 2020; 2022) establishes that 'splintering' (Graham and Marvin, 2001) of cities long precedes the advent of neoliberalism and networked cities. The role of infrastructure in perpetuating norms of race, gender and caste through systematic violence, abjection, neglect, injustice and, as this article contends, stigma is historically embedded and continues through ever-evolving material forms.

Having contextualized the multilayered stigmas that are carried across space and time and are reinforced through spatial processes in the case of India and more widely, the global South, the following empirical sections illustrate the ways in which infrastructure plays a role in these processes. Internal migrants are often relegated to the margins of cities as both labourers and 'others'. Despite no change in citizenship, they negotiate new spatialities and restrictions in accessing infrastructure and services, as well as labour bargaining power and rights. Their mobility within cities is facilitated by infrastructures for labour, though not much else. The role of social infrastructures such as brokers, contractors and trans-local kinship ties (Sabhlok, 2017; Shah and Lerche, 2020; Deshingkar, 2022) and nationwide physical infrastructures of transport, roads, bridges and railway systems in mobilizing citizens contrasts with those that lodge them as labour migrants within the city.

Premier City: stigmatized bodies and space in infrastructure

– Methodology

This article is grounded in original empirical material drawn from interviews with rural-to-urban migrant labourers working in Nashik's construction sectors in 2014, the peak of the city's 2010s construction boom. I present an amalgam of accounts from a diverse range of migrants: interstate migrants—predominantly from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal–and intra-state migrants (mainly *Adivasis*) from Nashik's drought-stricken surrounding districts. My overall study engaged with both migrant and

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local labourers in two major cities in India, working in different sectors and contracts to compare their experiences of exclusion from state entitlements. But here I draw exclusively from thematically relevant data from one major construction site in Nashik. Premier City was a mega-sized residential development project owned by a local construction company in Nashik. Ostensibly the construction site complied with state and sectoral labour laws—the developer was a member of an industrial group mandated to comply with BOCWA and Maharashtra laws covering environmental clearance, safety and health in the construction sector. For example, they stipulated all sanitary and hygienic measures for construction workers should be in place before any development commenced, and required housing for construction workers to be provided onsite with adequate infrastructure for cooking, toilets, safe drinking water, healthcare and childcare.

Premier City was based south of Nashik's city centre in a rapidly developing area. At the time of my fieldwork, the development was approximately halfway through construction. According to the proposal, it was projected to cover almost 60,000 square metres and cost over Rs 80 crores, to build almost 300 flats. The migrant workers at Premier City resided in an adjacent labour camp behind the construction site. At the time of my visit, there were approximately 500 resident workers, a mix of labourers living jointly as households of families, groups of lone male migrants and individuals. The migrants were typically engaged in fixed-contract labour arrangements lasting approximately twelve months at a time. The site hosted a select few resources, provided by the local NGO that had introduced me to the site and shared background information, including a small on-site *anganwadi* (creche) which also served as an informal community centre and meeting place.

My fieldwork process was initiated by mapping labour sites and adjacent residential settlements (either labour camps or local settlements) and a survey to identify and approach migrants (and differentiate from local labourers) to engage with. This phase was supported by a local NGO and carried out in consultation with activist groups and local trade unions in Nashik and elsewhere in Maharashtra. The temporality and spatiality of labour migrants I engaged with was diverse, ranging from long-distance and intra-state to seasonal and long-term settlement. On finalizing sites for my study, I spent a further three months in Nashik conducting ethnographic interviews and observations with labourers in their work sites, including Premier City. This article's empirics bring together accounts drawn from observations and semi-structured and then conversational interviews with 15 labourers (some of which are quoted directly in this article) in Premier City. After visiting on-site group meetings held by the local NGO, I approached individuals to introduce my study and then started a process of regular visits, eventually accompanying participants to community meetings, medical appointments and visits to local government offices as a participant observer.

The labourers I met at the *angawandi* who hailed from within Maharashtra introduced me to the better-resourced areas at the front of the labour camp and located closest to the construction site entrance. I then approached areas of the camp where predominantly lone male migrants from northern and eastern India resided. My engagement was restricted to the most well-resourced half of the settlement, which was well-lit, comparatively less crowded and easily accessible, and to those who were available and willing to speak and off-duty. Due to the time constraints of the labourers—working either on the site or attending to care duties made more burdensome by the lack of easy infrastructures (such as water and sanitation facilities), I would visit each participant multiple times and check availability. Over the course of two to four meetings, I conducted in-depth interviews. The interviews were a fluid process, with neighbours, fellow labourers and family members drifting in and out of the conversation.

My own access to the field site was mediated through my positionality and its attendant stigmas and privileges. My identities as a foreign academic researcher, with diasporic ties to India, a link with the local NGO working with the on-site labourers

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and my own practitioner background of working with NGOs in informal settlements 'intersect[ed] with historical, geopolitical and material aspects' of the researchers' positionalities (Nagar, 2002: 182). The degree to which NGOs, activist and advocacy groups could engage with often heavily securitized construction sites such as Premier City was itself a measure of the stigma and resultant isolation experienced by the labour migrants.

– Infrastructure as stigma—embodied, spatial and collective modalities

The Premier City labour camp was organized as a grid of lanes of cramped shelters constructed from canvas and corrugated metal. Water and sanitation facilities, including toilets, were disconnected from the rows of housing, and could only be accessed at the area of the labour camp furthest from the construction site itself. Observations of the construction site itself showed how the interrelationship between stigma and material infrastructures was most viscerally represented in the absence of wholly mechanized labour sites and resulting reliance on stigmatized and often risky manual labour. These ranged from manually managing sanitation and waste collection, to carrying and mixing building materials without safety gear and to mechanized equipment both on the ground and above on multistorey constructions. The absence of enforced health and safety protocols compelled labourers to be in constant and intimate contact with the materialities entailed in constructing, maintaining and embodying infrastructures. Women labourers on the site manually carried bricks and raw materials, such as sand and mud for mixing concrete, on their heads rather than using wheelbarrows, and all the labourers navigated loose electricity cables and precarious scaffolding on multistorey structures without appropriate, or in many cases any, safety gear or protective clothing such as hard hats.

The very materiality of infrastructures is embodied in the precarious processes involved in constructing them. Stigmas drive these processes to modify and shape the everyday lives of migrants in both slow and instantaneous ways. For example, long-term health effects from continuous and physically demanding labour on long-running construction projects, alongside the risks of sudden on-site accidents and injuries. Disruptions to construction projects caused by delays and challenges with supplying raw materials (sand for cement, bricks, timber, etc.) and labour strikes in other sectors that produce such materials have a domino effect on the livelihoods, reliance on *thekedars* and opportunities to return home or find alternative work.

The bodily consequences of hostile infrastructures are highlighted in the fact that for all the labourers I spoke with, hospital visits appeared to be the most common destination for labourers and their families beyond Premier City's site. One of Nashik's district-level officials at the time of my fieldwork highlighted health as one of the 'main social issues' facing labour migrants and their families in the city. Consistent with findings on the urban poor overall (Rogaly *et al*., 2002; Pattenden, 2012), private medical care tends to be preferred over public facilities, plunging labourers into debt for longer-term and more costly treatments. On speaking with labourers in Premier City, a lack of awareness, time and money for transportation to state medical facilities in the city centre were the main limitations to access adequate subsidized or free medical services. A malarial check-up and treatment session was organized by a local NGO for Premier City inhabitants following an outbreak in the site months before my arrival. I observed a crowd of people crammed into the relatively small space of the *anganwadi*. However, they seemed to represent a small fraction of the workforce. The NGO themselves reported a relatively low response rate. The malaria outbreak exemplifies the type of health risks faced by the Premier City labourers. While the outbreak prompted a visit from local government doctors for a health check-up at the camp site, such interventions were reactionary rather than preventative and further highlight the remoteness of the labour camp, even within the city and the embeddedness of migrant labourer lives within

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the making of such cities. In addition to the health and safety risks associated with poor and inadequate on-site sanitation, the lack of mandated safety requirements within the construction site also poses not only bodily risks (of injury) but also existential threats incurred by the debt of treatment costs and loss of livelihoods.

In addition to disease and illness, risks of accident and injury are common across construction sites such as Premier City, where the bulk of labour is informally employed and thus regulations are unenforced. Most construction workers I observed during my research lacked safety helmets and harnesses. The people I spoke with described the constant risk of injury and previous experiences of on-site accidents they had either directly experienced or witnessed. Injuries and illness—common in the poorly ventilated and overcrowded working and living conditions—elicited exorbitant and devasting medical costs for labourers and were not fully covered by employers (or were deducted from wages by brokers). Aadir, from Bihar, described his experience of going into further debt after paying for hospital treatment while working on a construction site in Mumbai (before he migrated to Nashik) and didn't receive any support from employers or brokers although almost unconscious at the time. A loan from another labourer enabled his admission for treatment. As Aadir mused, private versus public healthcare was not always relevant: 'Wherever I can pay, I can get the service. If I have money, I will get service quickly'. The historical relationship between stigmas and disease and impurity, codified in casteist doctrines and embedded in wider cultural norms, is perpetuated by the *absence* of adequate, consistent and available healthcare infrastructures for the labourers in Premier City. The distance from Nashik's resources spatially reinforced this absence and perpetuation of stigma within the site.

During my observation at a collective meeting run by a local health NGO, women complained of the lack of safety in availing toilet facilities after dark and all the labourers complained of the lack of functioning waste management—thus conflating 'spatial taint', gendered stigmas around women's mobility in public space and accessing toilets (Datta and Ahmed, 2020), and historical caste assumptions of pollutive spaces. The camp's lanes were themselves broadly structured by territorial stigmas related to the migrants' origin, and in doing so reflected the social order between labourers, from those native to Maharashtra and who spoke the local language of Marathi, to those derogatorily referred to as '*bhaiya lok*'—mainly Hindi-speaking migrants from northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and Bengali-speaking migrants from West Bengal. Many of the latter group were from Muslim backgrounds and thus stigmatized on religious grounds and conflated with stigmas of so-called 'illegal' Bangladeshi migrants. Migrants from Maharashtra were generally located at the most convenient end of the camp, closest to the construction work, the *anganwadi* and the site's main exit road. The lanes where mostly lone male migrants lived were relatively more cramped and less sanitary—material conditions that generated gendered stigmas of male-only spaces. Lone male interstate migrants, typically from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, shared shelters to save on living costs. Many of those I spoke with said they felt such spaces were unsuitable for bringing their wives and families due to perceptions and stigmas regarding safety and gendered norms. Those women who did live and work on the site were predominately from Maharashtra and migrated as households.

The space within the site that seemed most available and accessible for women and community-building was the *anganwadi*. The space was roughly 20 square metres across and constructed from precarious material. It served as a vital and multipurpose resource in the 'community', though it faced difficulties in accessing resources and in remaining consistently open. Parents, particularly mothers, engaged with the space and with the local teacher, Manvi. It also served as hosting space for local NGO interventions and other visiting agencies. Manvi often acted as 'community' liaison between the parents and agencies who came to visit. She acted as a proxy, fulfilling requirements

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missed by *thekedars* or the site owners. The labourers, particularly the women and children, were mostly (self-)contained within the residential camp in the local area.

In addition to the spatial configurations within the camp itself (i.e. the lanes representing different regions and variations in stigma and precarity), at the broader urban scale the spatiality of Premier City overall also represented a territorial stigma, marked off from the city's resources and infrastructure. The camp internally was a crowded and conflated space of residence and work for the labourers, but spatially remote from the wider city's social infrastructures and resources such as adequate hospitals and the local municipal office where social protection entitlements such as subsidized food could be accessed. The site's spatiality played a role in limiting opportunities to overcome social and spatial stigmas within which the labourers—particularly women—were enmeshed, and to develop wider social networks beyond the camp. Intra-site social networks were shaped by nativist stigmas and affinities of regional (and linguistic) background, which dictated the spatial organization of the camp itself and access to available resources for different migrant groups.

In a lane toward the front of camp, some way from Aadir's residence, Kamala, Manu and their family stayed near the entrance of the construction site itself. They hailed from Washim, a drought-stricken region of Maharashtra, and first arrived three years before our meeting. According to Kamala, once they entered, they had never left the Premier City site, apart from occasional visits to the government hospital in the city centre (again highlighting the difference in access to public resources for interstate migrants). While located in a relatively privileged area within the camp, the couple described a range of stigmas they faced in the city at large, rooted in a lack of social capital and kinship networks, as well caste and migrant status, despite being from the same state.

> We face so many problems as we are outsiders. We don't know where to go for [the local public] hospital … so we had to visit the private one for illness. We even face problems when we don't have money to purchase food or groceries, we ask the shopkeeper if we can buy on credit, and only as we come to know him, we gain trust, so we can buy on credit (Manu, from Washim, Maharashtra).

The labourers also faced a lack of mobility, particularly along gendered lines, beyond the site, with the *anganwadi* providing a rare communal space. Opportunities to venture into central Nashik seemed limited to healthcare visits. In family-based households, men usually took charge of shopping duties and any household errands overall. Access to both urban infrastructures, such as bus stops, public space and reliable waste management, energy and water systems, as well social networks—beyond the individual lanes and life of the construction site—were restricted and remote. A lack of awareness regarding the location of municipal offices (where citizens can lodge complaints or query access to welfare entitlements) recurred throughout conversations with workers based in Premier City. The city at large, the state and its resources and infrastructures such as healthcare, education for children, government services and transport remained inaccessible to labourers and were compounded by a parallel lack of access to sanitation, childcare, medical and household fuel (such as firewood needed for cooking) *within* the campsite. The stigmas perpetuated and represented by the absence of material infrastructures were contingent on the stigmas of labourer class, regional background, caste status and gender, and rendered the 'social control' and 'symbolic power' of stigmas as material and territorial. In these ways, social stigmas shaped the internal organization within Premier City, as well as its overall position within the cityscape. Territorial stigmas re-spatialized—and re-stigmatized—migrants not only at the urban scale, remote from access and amenities, but within the labour camp site itself.

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The collective stigmas of people from 'other' territories—reconfigured and intensified in the camp and enabled through both the demand for infrastructure (i.e. commercial housing) and national infrastructures that enabled long-distance migration—show how movement does not necessarily result in a shedding of stigma. The lanes where migrants from West Bengal, predominantly lone male migrants from Muslim backgrounds, were situated toward the middle of the camp space were among the most inadequately resourced. The people I spoke with there described how they were subject to institutional stigmas that target racialized groups—as codified under law in the colonial era—through policing, surveillance and identity verification (Routray, 2014). Interstate migrants are constantly asked to produce verification of Indian identity (Abbas, 2016; Sadiq and Tsourapas, 2021). Zahir, a young lone male labourer from West Bengal, first left his hometown a decade before our meeting and had been based in Nashik for a year when we met. Zahir's wife and young children remained in his home village. In place of documents such as a government ration card, which required proof of local fixed address and enabled access to subsidized food and household fuel, Zahir relied on his voter card as proof of identity—which heightens in value for migrants as a tool of survival and protection while 'away from home', particularly for those from West Bengal who are often stigmatized as criminals and are suspected of being 'illegal' Bangladeshi immigrants (Sadiq, 2010; Abbas, 2016).

> We have an election card here only whenever we migrate to a place, when we arrive, people always ask, are you from Bangladesh or India? In these cases, the identity card—the election card—is very necessary (Zahir).

The Muslim Bengali migrants I spoke with commonly faced multilayered stigmas based on nativism, targeted by hostile authorities that routinely hassled and demanded identity documents to prove their Indian citizenship. The stigmas were attached to their home region (which shares a porous border with Bangladesh, where 'illegal' migrants are commonly targeted), religion as well as class. Others in the same 'West Bengal' lane at Premier City echoed the tensions expressed by Zahir and experienced at the hands of authorities but faced an initial layer of stigma due to their conflation with 'illegal' Bangladeshi migrants. While initially reticent to share their place of origin and what documents they owned in our conversations as part of my study, over time they revealed this was due to an ongoing sense of fear and insecurity. This insecurity related to stigmas of place of origin is materially reconfigured in the spatial arrangements of the labour camp, highlighting the multi-sited, multiscale relationality of territorial stigmas While the Bengali migrants all lived together, shared resources and informally organized themselves to protect against stigmatizing and criminalizing forces, they were at once rendered hyper-visible in terms of surveillance but invisible in terms of the city's infrastructure and resources.

Conclusion

By exploring urban India, where unequal access to infrastructures defines unequal cities, we see that territorial stigmas, as Wacquant described, can be more expansively understood as a multiscale, mobile process that can be relational across place within and outside the city, and enabled in part by social and material infrastructures. Territorial stigmas are not restricted to one site and scale. Mobility itself, migrating across territories, does not enable a shedding of certain stigmas, which are instead reconfigured. The intersection of multiple roots and manifestations of stigma—labour, caste, religion, gender and so on—are embodied and thus portable and re-spatialized in the migration process. In India's case, territorial stigmas are layered onto historical embedded stigmas around caste, religion, patriarchy, as well as class and regional background. The stigmas are derived from above (the state and capital) and below

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(nativism), but also stem from horizontal relations within categories of labourers and migrants, riven by intersecting stigmas (Carswell and De Neve, 2013).

Though the empirics are from 2014—in the run up to a pivotal landslide election in India's history—the government's continually divisive and surveillant policies, exclusionary citizenship laws, urban expansion and the role of stigma in creating abject conditions for urban migrants under the Covid-19 lockdown (Deshingkar *et al*., 2022) highlight the continuing relevance of territorial stigma around urban migrant labour. Migrants are subject to both isolation and surveillance. They are both 'footloose' and anchored into places of labour; stigmatized *within* construction sites by labourers of different caste, class, gender or regional background, as well as by nativist stigmas originating from those considered 'local' to the city, predominately middle-class groups who feel threatened by the sight and sites of migrants; and finally, through governance that further embeds stigmatization through hostile policies and infrastructures.

Returning to the central question of how infrastructure (a material proxy for both state and capital) plays a key role in configuring territorial stigmas, the case of Premier City shows this in three main ways. First, by driving the demand for cheap embodied labour and resultant precarious working and living conditions in the process of urbanization. Second, in determining access to urban resources and services, and in doing so creating the conditions of territorial stigma in areas lacking access to adequate infrastructure, such as water, waste management and transport links, each of which add to spatial taint and spatial relegation in specific ways. And finally, in enabling the initial movements involved in rural-to-urban migrations, through social infrastructures of kinship networks and labour relations and material infrastructures of railway and bus systems that enable labourers to move back and forth across space and place, navigating different sources and types of place-based stigmas.

This article shows how multilayered stigmas remain impervious to Goffman's theory of concealment and passing as ways of managing stigma (1963). Alternative modes of resistance are required, whether it is openly naming and reclaiming stigmatized identities or advocating for state recognition of migrant status within India, and implementing, through legal means and political will, the portability of rights and entitlements of labourers across internal borders and within cities. The West Bengal migrants most subject to surveillance in Premier City demonstrated strategic use of official documents available to them to prove (rather than conceal) their identity to authorities, gain employment and build solidarity in their place of work and residence with other migrants from the same region.

Resistance also lies in migrants' continuing mobilities, employing strategies that allow for multilocational lives that enable the survival of their families and assets (if any) in their villages of origin and access to livelihoods in cities. Mobility can offer a form of freedom (Sheller, 2008) and while national and global infrastructures of transportation, trade, communications and digital technologies can enable migrants to navigate and even forge paths of resistance to stigmas of place, it remains imperative to attend to how such opportunities are denied to those confined to the most stigmatized forms of labour.

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