

# The social life of illegality: Suspicion and surveillance against African migrants in urban India

Bani Gill<sup>1,2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Institute for Sociology, University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany

<sup>2</sup>Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany

## Correspondence

Bani Gill, Institute for Sociology, University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany and Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany.

Email: [bani.gill@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:bani.gill@uni-tuebingen.de); [gill@eth.mpg.de](mailto:gill@eth.mpg.de)

## Funding information

UKRI Global Challenge Research Fund, Grant/Award Number: ES/P011055/1; Danmarks Frie Forskningsfond, Grant/Award Number: 1319-00086B; Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship of The European Commission Research Fund (Horizon-MSCA-2021-PF-01), Grant/Award Number: 101062888

## Abstract

The turn of the 21st century has witnessed a rising trend of migration from the African continent to cities across India. Accompanying such flows have been racial tensions and policing spectacles, including incidents of violence, vandalism, and evictions against African migrants and their pathologization as “illegal.” These subtle yet pervasive forms of migrant policing by state and citizen actors constitute what I call the social life of “illegality” that is characterized by distinctive modes of suspicion and surveillance. Based upon ethnography conducted in an “unplanned” settlement of Delhi cohabitated by both African and Indian residents, I illuminate how caste-race-religion informed indexes of difference contribute to the multi-sensorial racialization of African migrants as suspicious. In emplacing such dynamics within changing spatial economies and the moral anxieties accompanying such transitions, I further demonstrate quotidian practice of microsurveillance against African migrants as sustaining their position as rent-paying clients who are nonetheless maintained in their racial alterity. The social life of “illegality” thus refocuses attention on the sensorial and emplaced registers that illegalize migrants, above and beyond documentation, thereby furthering a discussion on migrant “illegality” as enmeshed within racialized imaginaries, urban transformations, and alternate modes of governmentality.

## KEYWORDS

Africa-India, Delhi, migrant “illegality,” policing, race, surveillance, suspicion, urbanism

## Resumen

El cambio del siglo XXI ha sido testigo de una tendencia creciente de migración del continente africano a ciudades a lo largo de la India. Acompañando tales flujos han habido tensiones raciales y espectáculos policivos, incluyendo incidentes de violencia, vandalismo, y evicciones en contra de migrantes africanos y su patologización como “ilegales”. Estas formas sutiles, pero generalizadas de accionar policial hacia los migrantes por el estado y actores ciudadanos constituye lo que llamo la vida social de la “ilegalidad” que está caracterizada por modos distintivos de sospecha y vigilancia. Basada en etnografía conducida en un asentamiento “no planeado” en Delhi cohabitado tanto por

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2024 The Authors. *American Anthropologist* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of American Anthropological Association.

residentes africanos como indios, ilumino cómo índices de diferencia informados por casta-raza-religión contribuyen a la racialización multisensorial de migrantes africanos como sospechosos. Al colocar tal dinámica dentro de las economías espaciales cambiantes y las ansiedades morales que acompañan tales transiciones, demuestro además la práctica cotidiana de la microvigilancia contra los migrantes africanos como sosteniendo su posición como clientes pagadores de renta que son, sin embargo, mantenidos en su alteridad racial. La vida social de la “ilegalidad” entonces reenfoca la atención en los registros sensoriales y emplazados que ilegalizan a los migrantes, por encima y más allá de la documentación, fomentando así una discusión sobre la “ilegalidad” de los migrantes como enredada dentro de los imaginarios racializados, las transformaciones urbanas y los modos alternativos de gobernanza. [accionar policial, raza, urbanismo, “ilegalidad” migrante, India, África-India, sospecha, vigilancia]

On a late Saturday evening in November 2016, I get a call from Christopher, an aspiring musician from Nigeria who is living in Delhi with his family. There's been trouble: his car has been vandalized near his residence, and he asks me to come for help. I reach the location and see several people gathered around a car with a shattered rear window. Christopher stands surrounded by this crowd, distraught and sparring verbally in his smattering of Hindi. Present also is a police constable relaying information over his mobile while asking the occasional question. Christopher, who lives a short distance away, explains that he had been returning home when he decided to make a quick stop for some supplies. He had parked his car by the roadside and was gone only a few minutes. When he returned, he saw that the rear window had been smashed. Christopher is agitated; he points to the metal workshop located across the street and insists it was one of their employees who damaged his car because “he is racist.” The Indian man who runs the workshop is also present. In his version, Christopher almost collided with the workshop employee while parking. The employee retaliated by smashing the window after Christopher left. The workshop manager offers to pay damages, but Christopher says the amount offered won't be enough to cover expenses. Further, Christopher demands police action, as this is not the first time he has been targeted and his car vandalized.

Amid these negotiations, someone in the gathering murmurs, “Tell the Habshi to show his papers.” Today understood as a racialized slur, “Habshi” derives from the Arabic “Al-Habash,” which refers to modern-day Ethiopia. Suddenly, the mood of the crowd changes from one of curiosity to that of suspicion. The manager, who was earlier willing to reconcile, now stands emboldened and refuses to pay until Christopher produces his documents. My presence and attempts at translation come under suspicion too; questions are asked about my relationship to Christopher. The police constable seems uninterested right from the beginning and can't understand why Christopher is making a big deal and not accepting the money. He advises a “compromise” or both parties will be taken to the police station. Christopher eventually furnishes an ID card issued by the Nigerian High Commission, but the crowd is not convinced. After a heated exchange it is decided that, instead of monetary compensation, the manager will get the car repaired. As a guarantee, the workshop manager offers to give some cash as security to be refunded once the car is returned in a satisfactory condition. But he isn't going to give the money to Christopher, who he claims may be “illegal” and abscond, even though Christopher has produced his ID, lives only a short walk away, and has even invited the manager to see the location of Christopher's residence. After further deliberation, a solution is reached. Christopher's landlord, who is neither present nor known to the crowd, will be asked to keep the money and ensure it is returned once the car is fixed. Accompanied by the manager, we walk to Christopher's building, where the landlord occupies the ground floor. A teenage girl opens the door and says her parents aren't home. The situation is explained, and she is handed Christopher's ID card as well as the money for safekeeping.

This altercation over property vandalism in a peripheral urban neighborhood attunes us to the mundane ways in which notions of migrant “illegality,” race, and the in/formal policing of migrants entangle. For Christopher, this event was more than a one-off and reflected his everyday experiences as a Black African man in Delhi. For the crowd demanding his documents, Christopher's phenotypical appearance marked him as not only an “outsider” but a potentially “illegal” one. While the policeman emphasized the benefits of a “compromise,” the crowd's suspicion compelled Christopher to produce his documents even as these were eventually deemed untrustworthy. Ultimately, it was the landlord who was charged with the responsibility of *keeping a watch* over Christopher. Although Christopher was the one wronged when his car was damaged, he was the one who was deemed suspicious.

The turn of the 21st century has witnessed numerous policing spectacles against African migrants in India, including unauthorized raids by public officials on account of allegedly “illegal” activities (Chitlangia, 2014) as well as mob violence prompted by fears and rumors of transgression (Dey, 2017). There is little official data regarding the numbers and demographic composition of African migrants. However, media

reports, corroborated by an interview with an official at the Nigerian High Commission, estimate that Nigerian populations constitute the largest majority—approximately 100,000 across India, with 15,000–20,000 residing in Delhi. Despite these relatively inconspicuous numbers, the pathologization of African migrants has witnessed both mundane and spectacular forms of expression. In Delhi's interstitial neighborhoods, where many African migrants reside, interlocutors spoke to me about their difficulties finding housing; feelings of being surveilled by the stares and rules imposed by landlords; incidents of violence, vandalism, and evictions; and police harassment and threats of arrest. In this article, I explore such forms of migrant policing by state and citizen actors as characterizing the social life of "illegality" through distinctive modes of *suspicion* and *surveillance*. Contributing to an anthropology of migrant "illegality," I illustrate how the suspicion of African migrants as transgressive materializes through racialized and caste-informed sensorial and emplaced registers. Where migrant illegality has been analyzed as a social relation based on documentary exclusion, I build upon Reeves's (2013, 511) provocation of examining the "gray space" of documentary certitude as structuring regimes of illegalization. In exploring illegalization as a process entailing significant social, regulatory, and political dimensions, I explicate the social dimension of illegality in India as informed by caste-raced parameters of difference that manifest through multiple registers. Two of these are ethnographically identified here as *suspicion* and *surveillance*, interlinked, co-constitutive, and invasive forms of social control that operate within and beyond the formal domains of law. Second, in attending to these modes as they unfold in Delhi's interstitial localities—a city aspiring to "world-class" status that has, in turn, produced anxieties of transition for variously placed urban actors—I argue that while the multisensorial racialization of African migrants constitutes them as suspicious, the emplaced dynamics of microsurveillance weaken the legitimacy of their formal documents. The suspicion of illegality, born of social histories and bodily performances (Ghosh, 2019), is simultaneously accompanied by quotidian forms of microsurveillance by "original" residents seeking to preserve social hierarchies in the face of substantial urban restructuring. The question of whether or not migrants are illegal by virtue of documentation becomes secondary in a context where racialization, suspicion, and surveillance weaken even the documentation that they do possess. As I explore in the article, *weakened* documents expose racialized migrants to predatory forms of policing. Yet, they also constitute the uneasy grounds upon which relations of cohabitation are so crafted.

Analytically, I focus on the sensorial and emplaced registers that illegalize African migrants, including and beyond the realm of documentation. While the loose formulation of "African" risks a simplistic collapse vis-à-vis significant distinctions of identity, I use it to foreground the work of race and racialized difference as crucial to various forms of policing. Similarly, even as the term "migrant" does not adequately capture the diversity and heterogeneity of contemporary movements from Africa to India, it highlights the context for the policing of bodies that "look" like easy targets for documentary and regulatory checks.

The article begins by locating contemporary trends of transnational mobility from the African continent to India. Building upon critical interventions on migrant illegality (Ghosh, 2019; Reeves, 2013), I locate illegalization as enmeshed within racialized imaginaries and as (re)produced through sensorial and material modes of suspicion and surveillance in contemporary Delhi. Through engagement with lower-ranking police officials, I explore sensory dimensions of the social life of illegality as constituted within racialized indexes of caste power. Specifically, I illustrate how sensory knowledges—of consumption, sanitation, and sexuality—play a crucial role in igniting suspicion against African migrants. Urban transformations in the neighborhood where I worked shape moral anxieties about the arrival of Others that manifest in the form of quotidian microsurveillance practices. I demonstrate how such practices are legitimated on account of migrants' recurrent construction as illegal such that it sustains their position as rent-paying clients who are nonetheless maintained in their racial alterity and that contributes to broader patron-client relations between African migrants and state/citizen actors. The relations between such actors and agents are, no doubt, unequal (and in favor of "patrons" such as landlords) but are not always coercive (formal actors such as police subinspectors also extract "rents" in the form of bribes). I use this phrasing to reflect on layers of mutuality and reciprocity by way of which racial Otherness becomes the ground for various kinds of bargaining. Where suspicion and surveillance, embedded in racialization frameworks and urban dynamics, diminish the stakes of migrant documentation, they also extend possibilities of cohabitation—albeit uneasy—between migrants, state, and citizen actors. This article is drawn from larger work that is based upon extensive engagement with African interlocutors. Here, I focus largely on the discourses and practices of state and citizen actors to highlight the localized, emplaced, and in/formal stakes of suspicion and surveillance. This focus complements important scholarship on migrant experiences and subjectivities (Coutin, 2005; Reeves, 2015) by highlighting the role of dominant actors and residents in the production and regulation of migrant illegality in Delhi.

The article is based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork with West African migrants, local policemen, and Indian residents located in an unplanned settlement of Delhi (anonymized as Hasnapur) conducted between 2015 and 2017, with regular follow-up visits conducted in 2018, 2019, and 2021–2022. The fraught and fractious politics of emplacement was central even to fieldwork, with my positionality as an Indian female researcher based at a foreign university significant to negotiating questions of access. Some African interlocutors were wary of my national status, and yet, as the opening vignette with Christopher suggests, my interactions with African migrants also rendered me suspect to Indian residents, attuning me to the surveillance that my gendered positionality prompted. Through the course of research, I also engaged with policemen patrolling the fieldsite. In each of these interactions, intersectional identities of race, religion, and gender, combined with my perceived caste and class location, significantly shaped my methods and "appearance" in the field, with documentary assertions about my occupational status often secondary to my embodied positionality.

## THE SOCIAL LIFE OF ILLEGALITY

The history of Africa-India circulations dates back several centuries, including the forced movement of Africans during the Indian Ocean slave trade from the 6th century to the 12th century. The uncomfortable positioning of these older communities within the matrix of “racialized casteism” (Jayawardene, 2016) reflects the convergence of European epistemes of race with localized genealogies of religious, caste, and color-based hierarchies, with Afro-South Asians, such as the Siddis, constituted as the “primitive” and “exotic” internal Other (Khader, 2020). More recently, an increasing number of people from various African countries have been making their way to India for reasons including trade, asylum, medicine, and education. Such trends reflect the diversification of migratory routes spurred by increasingly restrictive immigration regimes of the Global North (Haugen, 2012). India has emerged as a “new” destination due to its educational and medical industries (Modi, 2017) and for its manufacturing capacities that provide opportunities of transnational trade for a range of small-scale traders and middlemen buying goods from India for further circulation. Several of my interlocutors, primarily Igbo Nigerians, identified as “businesspeople,” whether or not their visas reflected this, and most engaged in informal transnational trade. In this sense, even as juridical conditions of legal migrancy—as defined by the type, duration, and terms attached to residency—were successfully negotiated by interlocutors on an everyday basis (Gill, 2021), the social life of illegality significantly shaped their everyday interactions. In the incident involving Christopher, while suspicion of his migrant status prompted policing of his documents, its resolution was by no means accomplished through documentary evidence alone. Livid about having had to furnish his documents, Christopher had directed his anger thus: “The police refused to take action because I’m Black. But if an Indian had made the complaint, they would be the first to ask for my papers. Why should locals or the police demand my papers? They are not immigration.” Christopher articulates how illegality is an uneven terrain for racialized bodies, with suspicion preceding and surpassing the ambit of documentation, thereby suggesting limitations to a legal-judicial understanding of illegality.

De Genova (2002, 424) has persuasively argued for “denaturalizing migrant illegality”, calling attention to the racialized, legal, and socio-historical processes through which the mobility of certain bodies is criminalized, subordinated, and *made* deportable. Critical studies have further complicated normative framings of migrant illegality (Chavez, 2007; Coutin, 2005), highlighting how the juridical status is accompanied by socio-political conditions that hamper access to housing, employment, and health care, while producing embodied modes of being-in-the-world (Willen, 2007). These interventions have largely examined illegality in relation to an absence of documentation. Reeves (2013) focuses instead on the inherent ambiguity of documents, which routinizes suspicion, especially against racialized bodies, and through which illegality emerges as a “space of relations rather than an unambiguous line” (511). Ghosh (2019) further probes the determinants of race/ethnicity in her study of migrant illegality in the India-Bangladesh borderlands. Here, the context of ethnolinguistic similarities, of conflicting claims and identities, and the wide array of actors and institutions embedded in policing contribute to the uncertainty of documents that require multiple social registers of identification to “match” for legal legibility to be confirmed. The possibility of illegality thus rests on several registers of detection—bodily, performative, social—that differentially impact “suspect” populations. Where the paradoxes of detection destabilize the citizen/migrant binary in India’s borderlands, informal regimes of regulation in Angola render West African migrants with weak papers vulnerable to various forms of policing, ranging from deportability to “pregnability” or socioeconomic predation (Gaibazzi, 2017). Contributing to such scholarship that examines illegality as *more than* an administrative status, I suggest that the “pregnability” of African migrants in Delhi ensues through, first, racialization frameworks that position a link between Blackness and illegality, and second, through their location as “newly” arrived urban actors that *weaken* the stakes of documentation.

Since the 1990s, the figure of the illegal migrant in India has materialized as synonymous with the Bangladeshi “Muslim” migrant, fanning concerns about “infiltration” in a Hindutva nationalist imagination (Ramachandran, 2003). Despite this discursive rigidity, concerns of ethnolinguistic similarities and of possible counterfeit documentation have haunted the state apparatus (Sadiq, 2008). Consequently, for Bengali Muslims in India, the intertwining of language and religion threatens to locate them as illegal (Roy & Singh, 2009), with material consequences, such as when poor Muslim dwellers are threatened with eviction, arrest, and detention on mere suspicion of being “Bangladeshi” (Chatterjee, 2020). The recent passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC)—the former of which proposes to confer citizenship to non-Muslim “persecuted religious minorities” arriving in India before 2015, while the latter aims to compile a database of documented citizens—further demonstrates the changing contours of citizenship in India, with sociocultural identities of religion being reinscribed as legislative markers of belonging. Yet, as the actual implementation of the NRC in Assam suggests—a process that left nearly 1.9 million people unauthenticated (Mathur, 2020)—the unknowability of paperwork also complicates such bureaucratic exercises. Embedded within colonial anxieties around authentic paperwork (Mathur, 2020), the NRC exercise embodies the force of suspicion as fracturing liberal frameworks of citizenship, rendering in limbo millions whose erstwhile residence and identification as Indian was called into question. Yet, the costs of such a demanding yet fragile documentary apparatus are not equally shared by all and entail specific burdens for racialized populations. The experiences of indigenous and tribal migrants from India’s northeastern frontier states are a case in point. Violently included within cartographic imaginings of India yet excluded from its “physiognomic map” (Wouters & Subba, 2013), such populations are routinely subjected to violence and racial slurs, discriminated in housing markets, and varyingly disenfranchised as “anti-national,” “promiscuous,” and “backward,” particularly in North Indian cities such as Delhi (McDuié-Ra, 2014, 73).

The stigmatization of Siddis as the internal Other and the racialization of northeastern migrants as suspect and of Bengali-speaking Muslim subjects as illegal speaks to the normalization of a “racialized hierarchy of citizenship” (Kikon, 2021) that has been critical to the rise of Hindu

majoritarianism today. Such racialized hierarchies demonstrate how populations that deviate from normative imaginings of the “ordinary citizen” (Srivastava, 2020), increasingly defined in terms of a caste-privileged middle-class Hindu identity, become objects of suspicion. African migrants occupy a further tense positioning, not least because their noncitizen status limits recourse to a language of rights, however nominal. The very idea of Africa has lurked in the Indian imagination in uncomfortable ways, steeped in stereotypes of backwardness and primitivity (Hofmeyr, 2007) for reasons that include selective amnesias around shared Afro–South Asian histories (Jayawardene, 2016), intersectional manifestations of colorism (Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009), colonial legacies of raced hierarchies (Burton, 2016), insensitive portrayals in media and popular culture (Dattatreya, 2020a), and thorny tropes of caste-based Othering upon which notions of difference are so sedimented (Pandey, 2013). African populations are consequently hypervisible for interceptive control and are also policed by Indian residents cohabiting in residential neighborhoods.

The making of “world-class” Delhi<sup>1</sup> (Ghertner, 2015) has entailed expansion of its territorial borders and the absorption of surrounding agricultural land within the exclusionary folds of developmental planning. Simultaneously, the material opportunities and cosmopolitan imaginaries accompanying such processes have also instantiated instabilities of belonging for residents located at the city’s social and spatial fringe. The question of identity has emerged as central to these negotiations, constituting not only a heterogeneity of lived experiences but also an expansive repertoire of techniques through which diverse subjects, including African migrants, are disciplined (Govinda, 2013). Hasnapur is one such site that is inhabited by dominant-caste agriculturalists who have turned into landlords and for whom the opportunities for urban growth have also generated considerable friction. Owing to the newly burgeoning rental economies of these neighborhoods, African migrants are accepted in their role as rent-paying tenants. Yet, fears of cultural disenfranchisement brought on by their arrival prompt moral panics and microsurveillance measures. Such urban dynamics are critical to examining cohabitation in these neighborhoods, with the racialization of African migrants as illegal embedded within the stakes of predatory policing as well as perceived threats to an erstwhile sociocultural order.

## SUSPICION AND POLICING IN HASNAPUR

As the spatial extension of former rural settlements incorporated within the city, Hasnapur is an “unplanned settlement” (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2015) consisting of “urban villages” (UV) and “unauthorized colonies” (UC),<sup>2</sup> where planning regulations have circumscribed applicability. New construction sites mark its landscape as the former agriculturalists have either sold land or started to build extensively to ward off threats of land acquisition. Yet, these newly built infrastructures have not managed to attract Indian middle-class tenants yet, and several flats remain unoccupied. The recent arrival of African migrants in these areas has set the stage for relational forms of “emerging urbanisms” (Keith et al., 2020) marked by new interactions between sociocultural identities and material environments, hybridized cultural interactions, and innovative refashioning of commercial and entrepreneurial enterprises. Alongside densely clustered grocery stores, gyms, eateries, and salons, Hasnapur’s winding alleyways also host small boutiques selling brightly patterned clothing from African countries, hair salons catering to black hairstyling, grocery stores with specialized ingredients and Pentecostal churches, all of which are operated by African residents. Even as the neighborhood’s “new” political economy has facilitated relatively affordable residential and commercial arrangements, UCs remain within the purview of various forms of policing. For Indian residents, building activity is regulated by the police who surveil the area for illegal constructions. For African residents, the police pose a threat to livelihoods through their targeting of illegal migrants. Engagements with local police, however, highlighted that the force of suspicion, as constituted through sensorial registers, was crucial to the *racialization* of Africans as illegal, independent of their documentary status.

At the police station, Subinspector<sup>3</sup> Rohit tells me that African migrants—all of whom are termed “Nigerian”—are involved in “bad things” in Delhi. Rohit cites his previous work in foreign exchange to estimate that most “Nigerians” are engaged in illegal businesses, trading in commodities like hair and garments or involved in scams and narcotics. “These African hair salons you see here,” Rohit continues, “are just a front. In reality, the women are here to make easy money by selling their bodies.” At this point, our conversation is interrupted by an older policeman, Subinspector Vijay, who shares the office with Rohit. Listening in, Vijay asks somewhat suspiciously if there is an interview going on. Rohit reassures him that he’s met me before, and that I am interested in learning about the “prostitution” and “crime” that “Nigerians” are involved in. As I start to clarify my focus, I’m interrupted by Vijay’s declaration that “their behavior is just like that of Muslims,” as he settles into his desk.

Vijay continues that much like you can tell “one of them” (Muslims) from a distance, so can you a “Nigerian.” “First of all, they are Black, and then they really smell,” he says. Rohit nods in agreement while Vijay elaborates that “Nigerians” are so “dirty” that before you see them, you can smell them. But the stench, Rohit says, is also due to their food, alleging that Africans eat “kaccha mass” (raw meat). Real or imagined, such dietary practices are ranked lowest in the moral economy of food, conjuring images of barbarity combined with a primal desperation for meat.

The racialization of Africans through their discursive likening to Muslims and tropes of “dirt” is indicative of the intersections between caste-inflected notions of purity and pollution with exclusionary paradigms of race and religion, producing alterities that are relational in their co-constitutive rules of inclusion and exclusion (Nagar, 1998, 123). Food and sanitation have been historical sites of boundary-making in India, with caste hierarchies imposing rules on touch and proximity through which are regulated relations to impure Others. Labor and consumption practices related to animal hide/meat, in particular, are stigmatized in Hindu Brahmanical imaginaries of “low-status” (Chigateri, 2010), engendering affective states of fear and disgust against Dalit and Muslim Others (Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012). The reference to meat-eating is key in this regard, as a marker setting Africans apart from a (supposedly) vegetarian Hindu majority, while concretizing their affinity to the dangerous Muslim. And yet, it

is not only meat, but raw meat, that takes precedence, the lurid description of “kaccha mass” emphasized to evoke a sense of visceral repulsion at such moral depravity. Meat-eating is also positioned as sensorial excess; the visual of “raw meat” evokes aversion, as does the odor associated with it. Vijay wrinkles his nose at the mere memory of the smell as he describes how, during a raid conducted at a residence occupied by Africans, the stench was enough to make his stomach churn. The foregrounding of odor and the corporeal reaction to its very memory highlight how alterities of caste, religion, and race are constituted as much through material practices and discursive imaginaries as through sensory indicators that draw upon and reinforce Brahmanical norms. Both Rohit and Vijay occupy an intermediate caste position, yet the “graded inequality” (Ambedkar, 2014) of caste power continues to inscribe hierarchies through which caste hegemony is preserved.

Dattatreya (2020b) describes how perceived disruptions to familiar landscapes of sound, smell, and appearance inform the policing of Africans in Delhi in affective and sensorial registers. His account is corroborated by the everyday narratives of difference circulating in Hasnapur, from banal stories of Africans engaging in loud and threatening street fights to phantasmal allegations of cannibalism. Informed by caste differentiation, such forms of sensory policing constitute an important part of formal policing by state actors, with the power of suspicion evident in the stitching together of sensory with legal and regulatory knowledges. For the subinspectors, the suspicion of migrants as illegal went alongside emphatic pronouncements of sensorial Othering—“they eat humans,” “they have beastly strength,” “they smell.” The racialization of Blackness magnifies and renders suspicious the difference accorded to Others, with sensorial modalities playing a key role in how difference is *made* “illegal” (Carruthers, 2017, 249). Such sensorial indicators fragilize legal status, as is evidenced in the police’s characterization of African women as “prostitutes” independent of their legal positioning.

Historical constructions of Black female sexuality as an object of control inform contemporary debates on gendered labor relations, especially the question of sex work. In the context of female migration from Nigeria, complex negotiations around migration as a livelihood strategy are flattened within state-centric discourses on either “victimcy/human trafficking” or “criminality/illegal migration” (Plambech, 2014). Similarly, in India, legislation against public solicitation, brothels, and trafficking that regulate “forced” sex work also obscure the material configurations of class, caste, and race/ethnicity that complicate questions of consent and agency (Shah, 2014). At the police station, Subinspector Rohit describes elaborate circuits of sex trafficking from the African continent while providing commentary on how African women “willingly” perform sexual acts no “Indian” woman would. “The issue of racism would be raised if they are hated. But here they are not hated, everyone wants to have sex with them” mocks Rohit. He describes how the women gather outside of bars at night and solicit those who have consumed alcohol: “These women charge little money, and nobody wants to marry them so it’s just for sex. After getting drunk, even they look nice.” Rohit is quick to clarify that although he has been approached, he finds the thought of sexual relations with an African woman nauseating (*ghinn*).

In the violent hypersexualization of African women and the simultaneous invocation of “*ghinn*” to bodily intimacy, Black female sexuality materializes as immersed in the duality of desire and disgust. Underlying this violent Othering are virgin/whore dichotomies that police the bodies of both African and Indian women, locating the former as morally lax in relation to the latter’s alleged chastity. As Nagar (2000) notes, the “tripartite racial pyramid” placing South Asians between dominant Europeans and subjugated Africans entrenched racialized class hierarchies as well as socioracial boundary-making between Africans and South Asians. Alongside this, the binary construction of (upper-caste) South Asian women as “respectable” and of African women as “sexually available” (671) was crucial to the maintenance of racial, caste, and religious frontiers within South Asian communities. Inflected by colonial legacies and rules of caste endogamy, the relational alterities of race-caste-color-religion informing the delegitimization of Blackness in North India need to be analyzed alongside lines of gender and sexuality. Such gendered intersections were also visible in the infamous 2014 raid led by a minister in the Delhi government that specifically targeted African women of a South Delhi neighborhood. Allegedly a response to “sex and drug trafficking” rackets led by “illegal” African residents, the night’s events witnessed African women being forcibly accosted and subjected to invasive bodily examinations under the glare of the media. This incident was recalled by some of my female interlocutors, most of whom had arrived in India by themselves and worked in the informal sector. In the few instances where sex work was identified as a form of income by them, it was usually described as one among a range of livelihood strategies. In contrast, each of my female interlocutors shared accounts of sexual harassment, of Indian men making lewd comments, of unwarranted offers of money in exchange for sex, or of the police and/or neighbors profiling them as sex workers regardless of their self-identification or even participation in the trade. As the events of 2014 suggest, the suspicion of Black female sexuality as promiscuous and criminal operates beyond the ambit of law and, in this way, constitutes the social life of illegality.

Back at the police station, we talk about the widespread debates on racism that transpired in the aftermath of the 2014 raid, when Rohit declares, “Obviously, there is racism, this is something that comes from within. When a US man comes, everyone stands up. But if a Nigerian comes, nobody will stand. In a country like India, where there is casteism, how can there not be racism. . . . The issue is that nobody respects them here. They are poor, Black, and illegal.” The mundanity of racialized hierarchies, expressed as “something that comes from within” attune us to how global and hegemonic representations of race are mediated through discourses of caste, class, and religion to mold social relations in localized contexts (Thomas & Clarke, 2006). The scales of exclusion enumerated by the police do not interlock in neat ways; the declaration of Africans as “poor” is enmeshed in ideological imaginaries rather than material conditions. But the sensorial assessment of illegality shapes how African migrants are perceived by state actors, with suspicion intensifying the “pregnability” of African migrants to extra-legal forms of predation.

In a later visit, Subinspector Vijay presents before me United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-issued refugee certificates confiscated from African migrants who had been subsequently deported. Despite the valid dates on them, he insists the certificates are “fake,” the products of a thriving industry in counterfeits. For Vijay, it is a matter of common suspicion that several African migrants operating small

establishments in Hasnapur don't have the required authorization to do so and/or have overstayed their visas. But for him, the work of suspicion did not always include formal measures. Asserting the intensive workload of the police, he says, "We can't catch them all . . . if there is an issue we will see." For "minor" transgressions, Vijay opines it is more effective to give Africans a "warning" than to initiate legal action or deportation, with its own bureaucratic, documentary, and economic burdens. Referencing the limited station budget, Vijay states, "in case of a complaint, it is better that Africans give a [informal] fee [ghus] and we lay the matter to rest." The informal exchange of money suggested by Vijay are constitutive of "informal moral economies" (Gandhi, 2012), lubricating the daily functioning of the city, especially for its most marginalized populations. Thus, while the force of Vijay's suspicion weakens migrant documentation, it is as crucial to highlight the informal circulations comprising the stakes of predatory policing.

During fieldwork, several African interlocutors reported being arbitrarily questioned and detained by street-level bureaucrats, actions that were allegedly prompted by monetary demands. Occasionally, such predations and accusations were contested legally, especially when faced with the possibility of deportation. Mostly, however, migrants also deployed informal frameworks of negotiation. These included the assertion of their positionality as rent-paying actors who stimulated local economies; their avid belief in Pentecostal Christianity, through which they "gave back" by charitable acts; their cosmopolitan lifestyles that would bring "exposure" to Indians; and their participation in work identified as "licit" (Abraham & Schendel, 2005). Strategies of urban navigation also included the mapping of alternative spatial and temporal geographies of the city through, for instance, the establishment of work, worship, and leisure constellations catering to African populations. The social life of illegality as constituted through suspicion circumscribes the ambit of formal claim-making for migrants. Yet, the slippery terrain of law and paperwork—compounded by obstacles of language, legal assistance, and finances—also constitute fraught arenas for them. In the intricate entangling of suspicion, caste power, and racialization, with exchanges of predation and permission, the emplaced stakes of African migrants as rent-paying actors shape the social life of illegality, as well as its negotiation, in repertoires beyond that of law and including actors other than the state.

## CULTURES OF MICROSURVEILLANCE

"This land here, as far as the eyes can see," says Nikhil, gesticulating to the expanse around us, "all this used to be a jungle. Only in the last 10–15 years have these buildings emerged." Nikhil is in his mid-20s. I met him through a Nigerian interlocutor who had described him as a reliable contact for securing housing in Hasnapur. Nikhil's reliability, I learned, was based on him growing up in Hasnapur in a Hindu Jat<sup>4</sup> family that used to own agricultural land. His grandfather was a farmer, but Nikhil earns his living through multiple ventures, including property brokerage.

Today, Nikhil has invited me to see his latest undertaking: a wellness center. Located off a major artery connecting Hasnapur to South Delhi, we are standing in a former residential apartment being rebuilt to house cubicles and massage rooms. This center would not attract much of a clientele inside Hasnapur, he says, but on this busy road dotted with fast-food chains and upmarket boutiques, Nikhil imagines a bright future catering to the leisurely desires of a rising middle class. "Earlier, this entire land was our village," he continues, "stretching all the way to Haryana. Now the village has shrunk, and these shops and housing societies have emerged." Several constructions have ensued informally, notes Nikhil, with the erstwhile agriculturalists having accepted state compensation while dividing and selling off plots. "What will the government do?" he chuckles. "Evictions can occur if it's a matter of one family, but with so many families living here, they can't do anything."

Nikhil is recounting the story of uneven growth and spatial transformation that has marked Delhi's urban trajectory. Since the establishment of the Delhi Development Authority in 1957, Delhi's steady expansion has emerged through the amalgamation of surrounding agricultural land. Yet, city planning has also had unintended consequences in that the "urban time lapse" from notification to acquirement has also spurred land grabs and the growth of informal rental markets (Sheth, 2017, 44). The broad area of Hasnapur, for instance, consists of UVs, exempt from building regulations, and UCs, which have emerged through the subdivision and sale of former agricultural land. The resulting built environment is characterized by densely clustered buildings, narrow streets, and fraught access to civic amenities. Since the 1990s, the transition to urban-rentier economies in the "periphery" of Outer Delhi (Soni, 2009) has become increasingly visible as housing that earlier catered to working-class migrant populations is replaced by multistory buildings designed for rent and space maximization. The construction of prominent malls and specialty hospitals and the expansion of metro lines have further accelerated real estate development and gentrification in several localities. In Hasnapur, the housing needs of a "new" clientele have presented opportunity for young men like Nikhil.

Nikhil started work as a property broker 5–7 years ago and operates exclusively with an African clientele. "They see maximum 1–2 apartments before they are satisfied," he explains, "and they don't complain too much. . . . They also have a lot of money because they are involved in all kinds of illegal activities." For Nikhil, the vibrant presence of African populations in Hasnapur is assessed through the prism of illegality, their trading ventures/shops reduced to fronts for their alleged involvement in narcotics and scams. Nikhil's own work in the property market is sustained by their presence, yet he also blames the police for letting such activities go unchecked. Nikhil recounts our first meeting; a couple of weeks earlier, a Nigerian interlocutor had sought Nikhil's assistance in finding "safe" housing for her friend who had police constables "raiding" his home at regular intervals. These "raids" were ostensibly because her friend had overstayed his visa. Yet, their frequency indicated that the constables were demanding money off him by threatening him with deportation. Nikhil says this is a common occurrence, that the police are aware of the presence of illegal migrants and/or businesses yet remain more invested in extracting bribes.

Nikhil's mistrust of the police is shared by Shekhar, another property broker in Hasnapur. An older man, Shekhar moved to Hasnapur a decade ago due to favorable property rates and now works as a broker. On one occasion, as Shekhar and I exit the premises of a Nigerian barber shop where we had both been, Shekhar tells me that Hasnapur emerged as a favored destination for Africans a few years ago as it offered them reasonable accommodation as well as "freedom." Referencing the barber shop, he explains how such commercial ventures are illegal, since African migrants arrive on a student/tourist visa. Yet, despite legal restrictions, they can run these establishments due to police "corruption." This "freedom" has stimulated the local economy, with landlords profiting from the higher rents demanded off them. But, continues Shekhar, this "freedom" has also caused problems because migrants have brought with them "English culture": noisy parties, promiscuous sexual activity, loud street brawls, and wayward hours. Such a "sensoria of difference" (Dattatreya, 2020b) is positioned as incompatible with the cultural sensibilities of the *gaonwallas* (villagers) of the area. Until now, the situation is in "control" though, as he explains, "We don't feel scared of Africans because if they ever threaten us, we can control them. Here there are Jat people, it is a different culture and a village area. If anything happens, we can call people from the village in a minute. So, we keep check and control of who is coming and going. . . . We maintain order as much as possible."

Echoing this sentiment, Nikhil is more specific about how "order" is defined and maintained: "We raise objection when Africans do illegal work openly, wear provocative clothes, hang in the streets till odd hours." Nikhil posits that if Africans want to live without rules, they should go to the more expensive gated localities because people in the village are "hot-headed" and will not hesitate to take action in case of perceived infringements. "Once we get involved," Nikhil continues, "even the police can't touch us because ours is a tight-knit Jat community, with contacts in Delhi, Haryana, and beyond." Nikhil's confidence in enforcing "order" is intimately linked to genealogies of social control maintained through caste institutions, such as the Khap panchayats operational in several parts of north India. Yet, importantly, Nikhil's threats are also moderated in recognition of African migrants as rent-paying tenants: "As long as we get rent from them, it is fine. Only if they do wrong will we take action."

Recent spatial-material developments in Hasnapur have witnessed corresponding changes in its sociocultural milieu characterized by the selective juxtaposition of rural and urban identities. In their dealings with African clients, Nikhil and Shekhar locate themselves as agents of change within a transforming urban landscape. Yet, the same actors also claim caste identities and positioning as "gaonwallas" to ensure social conformity. Here, a distinction is drawn between the commercial viability of an urban positioning and the disciplinary imperatives of a "traditional" one through which is negotiated their own standing in a rapidly transforming Delhi. For Nikhil and Shekhar, the documentary status and/or work performed by Africans is described as illegal, evoking the regulating imperatives of law. Yet, in the suspicion of formal institutions as "corrupt" and the acknowledgment of Africans as rent-paying tenants, the emerging norms of cohabitation have less to do with the infraction of law than with the suspicion of threat to an established sociocultural order. In contrast to the 2014 raid, which Negi and Taraporevala (2018) analyze as a form of "ordinary gentrification" aimed at the ejection of African migrants, the political economy of Hasnapur tempers a different relationship between African tenants, Hindu landlords/property brokers, and the police embedded in albeit uneasy relations of cohabitation. Instead of eviction, the sanctity of "community" is maintained through regulations that transect sociocultural boundary-making with legal codes and include quotidian practices of microsurveillance.

Positioned at the intersection of moral vigilance and informal policing, microsurveillance here references banal practices of *keeping a watch* on Africans by Indian landlords and neighbors. As rural villages transition to UVs and UCs and new urban actors enter the landscape, concerns of morality and security animate such alternate governmentalities performed by a range of local actors, including women like Vineeta, whose family acquired land in Hasnapur a few years ago and who is now the landlord of a building constructed in 2015.

During winter, Vineeta likes to pull a *khatiya* to the patio of her building and bask in the sun. She lounges there for much of the day, occasionally joined by her daughter-in-law and grandchildren once they return from school. Her eldest son returns from work around 6 p.m., and it is then that she retires to their apartment on the first floor of the building. At 10 p.m., one of the household's male members locks the gate to the building complex, which houses 16 apartments over four floors and has parking space for their SUV. Her younger son plays truant sometimes and has the key. Her other tenants, mostly African nationals, must be home by 10 p.m., or if there are special circumstances, should call her husband to open the main gate. This is a security measure, she tells me, so they can prevent theft from and by her tenants.

I first meet Vineeta one afternoon as I am attempting to locate my Congolese interlocutor Simon's apartment, and she calls out from her *khatiya*, asking who I want to meet. She seems confused about Simon, insisting she knows all her African tenants and doesn't recognize that name. Vineeta is conversational, walking me over to the building next door in case I had the address mixed up. Vineeta is also curious as she sizes me up, asking where I live and who I've come to meet. As Simon arrives at the patio, she greets him warmly, recognizes him by the name Sami, and explains the confusion. Later, as I am exiting, she once again calls out to inquire about my visit. We walk to the street as I explain my research and ask to meet her sometime. She agrees and, from the corner of her eye, sees a young Indian woman walk by. While conversing with me, Vineeta had been standing in front of the building, the entrance to which was outside her vision. Upon seeing the woman, however, Vineeta terminates our conversation abruptly to turn around and ask the woman whether she emerged from her building and who she had come to meet. The young woman is confused, as she had only been walking down the street unconnected to Vineeta's building or her tenants. Satisfied with her questioning, Vineeta returns to her *khatiya*.

The next time I meet Vineeta, her younger son Nishant is also present, and we sit in a large room on the ground floor facing the main gate to their building. Nishant explains that their tenants are mostly African, but their documents have been verified by the police and they are "good Africans"



who respect that theirs is a “family building.” Documentary verification is a legal prerequisite, but the social life of illegality also constitutes this as an insufficient modality of security, especially when at stake is the propriety of “family-oriented” residents. Nishant continues that Africans are known for their “bad” lifestyles that he describes in languages of excess and vice. Despite these trepidations, his family continues to rent them apartments with certain extra-legal measures in place, neither mandated in law nor specified in contracts. Vineeta asserts that with her daughter-in-law and grandchildren living in the same building, they must ensure that the “family” atmosphere is not disturbed. She confides she would have preferred to rent to Indians, but with increased construction in the area, they have had to open their doors to tenants available on the “market.” The rules of cohabitation, however, entail restrictions on promiscuous sexual activity, the consumption of intoxicants, and the 10 p.m. curfew that, she insists, is as much for their tenant’s security as it is for their own. Visitors to the building are additionally monitored, with Vineeta herself occasionally taking on this responsibility. While the men go to work and her daughter-in-law tends to the children, it is she who sometimes sits on the patio and keeps a physical check, asking questions of all those who enter her building. Her questioning of me and the young woman was prompted by similar concerns, I come to understand. Vineeta and her family are Hindu Jats, and while they do not restrict meat consumption, African migrants are charged a higher rent and deposit since they “keep their house very dirty.” Despite the stories Vineeta has heard about Africans, she admits her own experiences have been largely unexceptional. Nishant, the young man dressed in branded clothing who drives their SUV with confidence through the locality’s narrow lanes, interjects that even as their tenants are “good,” the same cannot be said of other Africans. Even if they possess legal documents, paperwork constitutes only a partial safeguard and ultimately it is the “gaonwallas” who bear responsibility for the neighborhood. Nishant makes mention of the underlying tensions between Indian and African residents, a particularly violent manifestation of which transpired in 2016—a few months prior to our exchange—when a Congolese man was murdered in South Delhi (The Wire, 2016). In the aftermath, mob violence against Africans was reported in several localities, including Hasnapur. These events garnered strong reactions, with African envoys threatening to boycott “Africa Day” celebrations scheduled in Delhi and reports of Indian communities being attacked in Kinshasa. Subsequent damage-control measures by the Indian government included the launch of “sensitization” programs in select neighborhoods with a high density of African migrants.<sup>5</sup>

For Simon, enrolled as a student in one of Delhi’s private educational institutes, the misgivings of his Indian neighbors are attributed to them being “uneducated villagers” who are oblivious to the “foreign exposure” his own migrant status affords. His relationship with Vineeta, he says, has been largely cordial, facilitated in part by the informal bar/restaurant he operated where he would often spend his evenings. Such sites, colloquially referred to as “African Kitchens,” are integral socio-material infrastructures through which migrants navigate the fraught urban landscape. Operating under precarious arrangements made with landlords and brokers, “kitchens” are usually open at night, inside apartments located in nondescript buildings. As sites of leisure where different African nationalities gather to partake in a range of il/licit activities—food, news, gossip, entertainment, trade—kitchens operate through word-of-mouth knowledge that regulates access for an Indian clientele. Simon used to operate one such establishment that he, because of recent events, has temporarily shut down, not least because the police have been especially active in the area. Simon remains wary of the “sensitization” meetings, citing discomfort in visibilizing himself to the police through attending such gatherings. Even as his visa is in order, his kitchen activities have involved frequent run-ins with authorities, and in these uncertain times, he prefers to maintain a low profile. Beyond the realm of law and procedure, microsurveillance and the social life of illegality is thus negotiated by migrants in several ways, which include their characterization of Indian co-residents as provincial, their avoidance and caricaturing of state-led “sensitization” programs, and their pursuit of alternate city-making practices, such as African kitchens.

These dynamics indicate how everyday policing is performed by a range of actors including the state and beyond it (Ibrahim, 2021). At the neighborhood level, surveillance has been theorized as key to the maintenance of social order through collaborations between formal authority and citizens (Akarsu, 2020) or through extra-formal institutions, such as Khap panchayats, that regulate caste and gendered orders in line with dominant interests (Chowdhry, 1997; Kaur, 2014). There are evident continuities in Hasnapur, with young men like Nikhil and Nishant seemingly invested in modern forms of self-making in their branded attire and SUVs, even as they disparaged the “English culture” of African nationals, or in Vineeta’s watchful eyes as she maintains the respectability of the “family building.” Yet, even as such informal policing has longer precedents, and frequently intersects with state policing in its objectification of Others (Jauregui, 2016), microsurveillance practices as enacted by Hasnapur residents did not necessarily constitute a feedback loop of information prompting police action against migrants. On the contrary, Indian residents also negotiated a tense relationship with the state. While most residents occupy a dominant caste position, their spatial location also renders their social positioning as uncertain; alongside caste power are also experiences of marginalization as manifested through state interventions in the form of land acquisitions, demolitions/restrictions on built forms, and irregular access to civic amenities often funneled through alternative repertoires of authority. The stakes of microsurveillance have then to be analyzed in accordance with localized exigencies of urban change for residents concerned less with the curation of an “active, vigilant, and responsible citizenship” (Akarsu, 2020, 38) than with negotiated strategies of cohabitation with rent-paying Others. This is not to suggest that policing by residents is at odds with the police but rather to trace the tensions and convergences that ensue as the police are accused of taking bribes rather than “action,” and co-residents seek to enforce “order” through informal policing rather than eviction/legal measures. African migrants here represent rent-paying subjects for both the police and residents, where the social life of illegality, embedded in racialization frameworks and changing urban dynamics, makes arrangements of microsurveillance and cohabitation simultaneously possible, if not required.

## CONCLUSION

With De Genova's influential call, several works have explored the *illegalization* of migrant bodies, particularly in Euro-American contexts. In shifting focus to lesser-studied South-South migration, this article has explored suspicion and surveillance as modes of illegalization materializing beyond the purview of documentation. The amorphous charge of illegality—ranging from suspicions of visa overstays to criminal activities and illicit socio-cultural conduct—pathologizes Black life in India and has underpinned violent attacks against Africans. But the suspicion of illegality also has less-dramatic manifestations, such as when Africans are denied housing, charged high rents, or subjected to predations by state and citizen actors that engender effects akin to legal dispossession.

Suspicion as a mode of disenfranchisement has a long history in India, not least through ambivalences apparent in legislation itself. For instance, as per the 1946 Foreigner's Act—a central instrument concerning migration—even as the burden of proof rests on the person accused of being a “foreigner” or illegal noncitizen, there remains considerable ambiguity concerning which documents can allay such suspicion. Amid concerns of forgery, the state exhibits a paradoxical reliance on documents that are yet rendered suspicious, producing a documentary apparatus that is both fragile and exacting, particularly for racialized bodies. In this sense, material histories of colonial and postcolonial governance, the routinization of suspicion, caste-gendered-raced parameters of exclusion, and predatory policing by citizen and state actors constitute the larger constellation within which I have illustrated the *weakening* of documents by sensorial and emplaced dimensions. For the subinspectors, the suspicion of African migrants as illegal materialized through performative and sensorial registers, specifically through tropes of sanitation, meat consumption, and gendered hyper-promiscuity that further indicate how paradigms of anti-Black racism in India draw upon caste- and religion-inflected discourses of exclusion in their intersection with global and transnational flows of racial knowledge. The suspicion of illegality thus draws upon multisensorial forms of racialization and works to fragilize the importance of documentation in relation to as well as independent of legal status. Beyond the context of African migrants in Delhi, this finding more broadly demonstrates how racialization is key to policing. Here, suspicion and surveillance entangle to undermine even documents that are held by racialized migrants, and in this way constitute lived experiences of the social life of illegality.

In contributing to anthropological literature on migrant illegality that attends to suspicion and surveillance as cohered through historically informed and spatially embedded sensorial, moral, and material registers, I have highlighted the intersection between vernacular grammars of alterity and the flux of transitioning urban economies through which the racialized body is constituted as illegal. As localities in transition that offer affordable accommodation, UCs and UVs have emerged as favored residential destinations for African migrants to curate discrete constellations of residence, work, worship, and leisure through often-informal and reciprocal arrangements with landlords, property brokers, and state actors. And yet, as these former agrarian settlements are usurped by the promises of urban development, local inhabitants find themselves negotiating the anxieties of transition through languages of “order” and “control.” In a context where the police are identified as “corrupt,” allegations of migrant illegality legitimate quotidian forms of microsurveillance against racialized Others. Such a dynamic attends to the precarious configuration of sovereignty in postcolonial societies, attesting to how law is one among several “repertoires of authority” through which modern cityscapes and its diverse residents are disciplined, with the “community” asserting informal sovereignty through claims that both compete with and complement state imperatives (Hansen, 2005, 169). The “community” in this imagination defines the contours of illegality as also ways and modes of policing, especially when at stake is membership and inclusion in a rapidly evolving urban order. The social constitution of Africans as illegal—through surveillance, curfews, restrictions, documentary policing—are then as embedded in racialization frameworks and threats of cultural disenfranchisement as they are in spatial politics of city-making and suspicion of the police itself as “corrupt” that, together, diminish the stakes of migrants' legal status and formal documentation.

The particular case of African migrants racialized as illegal in Delhi illuminates postcolonial dynamics and urban politics pulsating in many parts of the Global South, as colonial legacies of legislation articulate with inherited hierarchies of race and contemporary scripts of South-South solidarity fracture through deeply embedded structures of oppression and inequality. The allegation of migrant illegality that emerges through these interactions substantiates itself less on documentary regimes than on the imaginaries of Otherness that underpin the (re)making of world-class cities and, in turn, saturate policing imperatives of states and citizens to lived consequences along the same continuum of legal dispossession. It is through a discussion on migrant illegality as enmeshed not within the anxieties of legal dispossession alone but within changing spatial economies and alternate modes of governmentality that we can attend to the specific dynamics shaping contemporary imaginations of *racially* illegalized migrant bodies.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research and writing of this article were supported by grants from the Independent Research Fund Denmark (Grant Number: 1319-00086B), Augustinus Fonden, Oticon Fonden, Asian Dynamics Initiative, and the PEAK Urban program, funded by UKRI's Global Challenge Research Fund, Grant Ref: ES/P011055/1. The writing stage was also supported by Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship of The European Commission Research Fund (Horizon-MSCA-2021-PF-01, Grant Agreement 101062888). My deepest gratitude to all participants and interlocutors in Delhi for their generous and candid insights, and for their patience and support of this project. I thank Michael Keith, Ravinder Kaur, Bhawani Buswala, and Birgitte Stampe-Holst for their comments on earlier drafts. I am especially grateful to the anonymous reviewers and editorial team of *American Anthropologist* for their thoughtful engagement with this work, their comments and support have been immensely valuable.

Open access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

## ORCID

Bani Gill  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0678-2667>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Published in 2007, the *Delhi Master Plan 2021* outlines the vision of Delhi as a world-class city (Ministry of Urban Development, 2007, 1). Broadly construed as an aspiration to urban modernity through infrastructural expansion, slum clearance, beautification initiatives, and middle-class consumption, Ghertner locates land commodification, speculation, and privatization as pivotal to the aesthetic and material processes underpinning the making of world-class Delhi. My subsequent use of the term “world-class” is precisely to foreground such imaginaries of a global lifestyle and the land-based transformations through which these desires are proffered and routed.
- <sup>2</sup> UCs and UVs constitute two of eight settlement types in Delhi defined as per various policy and planning documents (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2015).
- <sup>3</sup> Organizationally, the Indian police comprises the Indian police service, the provincial police service, subinspectors, and constables (Jauregui, 2016, 20).
- <sup>4</sup> Hindu Jats are a powerful caste community across northwest India. In Delhi, they comprise a dominant caste that has historically engaged in agriculture and today are significantly invested in land and rental markets.
- <sup>5</sup> Under instructions of then Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, sensitization meetings were subsequently organized by the Delhi police. Ostensibly aimed at initiating dialogue between African and Indian residents, the meetings were also accompanied by other initiatives such as a dedicated helpline number for African populations.

## REFERENCES

- Abraham, Itty, and Willem Van Schendel. 2005. “Introduction.” In *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders and the Other Side of Globalization*, edited by Willem Van Schendel and Itty Abraham, 11–37. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Akarsu, Hayal. 2020. “Citizen Forces: The Politics of Community Policing in Turkey.” *American Ethnologist* 47(1): 27–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12879>.
- Ambedkar, Bhimrao R. 2014. *Annihilation of Caste*. Annotated critical edition. New Delhi: Navayana.
- Burton, Antoinette. 2016. *Africa in the Indian Imagination: Race and the Politics of Postcolonial Citation*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Carruthers, Andrew M. 2017. “‘Their Accent Would Betray Them’: Clandestine Movement and the Sound of ‘Illegality’ in Malaysia’s Borderlands.” *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 32(2): 221–59. <https://doi.org/10.1355/sj32-2a>.
- Chatterjee, Syantani. 2020. “The Usual Suspects.” *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review website*, September 7, 2020. <https://polarjournal.org/2020/09/07/the-usual-suspects/>
- Chavez, Leo R. 2007. “The Condition of Illegality.” *International Migration* 45: 192–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2007.00416.x>.
- Chigateri, Shraddha. 2010. “‘Glory to the Cow’: Cultural Difference and Social Justice in the Food Hierarchy in India.” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 31(1): 10–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400701874692>
- Chitlangia, Risha. 2014. “Khirk Extension Locals Don’t View Bharti’s Act in Black and White.” *The Times of India*, January 20, 2014. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/khirk-extension-locals-dont-view-bhartis-act-in-black-and-white/articleshow/29071585.cms>.
- Chowdhry, Prem. 1997. “Enforcing Cultural Codes: Gender and Violence in Northern India.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 32(19): 1019–28. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4405393>.
- Coutin, Susan B. 2005. “Being En Route.” *American Anthropologist* 107(2): 195–206. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2005.107.2.195>.
- Dattatreyan, Gabriel E. 2020a. “Desiring Bollywood: Re-Staging Racism, Exploring Difference.” *American Anthropologist* 122(4): 961–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13463>.
- Dattatreyan, Gabriel E. 2020b. “Policing the ‘Sensible’ in the Era of YouTube: Urban Villages and Racialized Subjects in Delhi.” *Television & New Media* 21(4): 407–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419870511>.
- De Genova, Nicholas. 2002. “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 419–47. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085432>.
- Dey, Abhishek. 2017. “As Noida Student Dies, Five Nigerians Are Accused of Cannibalism By Locals, Charged with Murder.” *Scroll.in*, March 27, 2017. <https://scroll.in/article/832898/as-noida-student-dies-five-nigerians-are-accused-of-cannibalism-by-locals-charged-with-murder>.
- Gaibazzi, Paolo. 2017. “From Expulsion to Extortion: Deportability, Predatory Policing and West African Migrants in Angola.” *Citizenship Studies* 21(8): 969–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2017.1380604>.
- Gandhi, Ajay. 2012. “Informal Moral Economies and Urban Governance in India.” In *Urban Informalities: Reflections on the Formal and Informal*, edited by Colin McFarlane and Michael Waibel, 51–66. London: Routledge.
- Ghassem-Fachandi, Parvis. 2012. *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ghertner, Asher D. 2015. *Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ghosh, Sahana. 2019. “‘Everything Must Match’: Detection, Deception, and Migrant Illegality in the India-Bangladesh Borderlands.” *American Anthropologist* 121(4): 870–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13313>.
- Gill, Bani. 2021. “Dead Papers: Migrant ‘Illegality,’ City Brokers, and the Dilemma of Exit for Unauthorized African Migrants in Delhi.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48(9): 1961–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1940891>.
- Govinda, Radhika. 2013. “Introduction: Delhi’s Margins: Negotiating Changing Spaces, Identities and Governmentalities.” *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 8: <https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.3646>.
- Hansen, Thomas B. 2005. “Sovereigns beyond the State: On Legality and Authority in Urban India.” In *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World*, edited by Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, 169–91. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Haugen, Heidi Østbø. 2012. “Nigerians in China: A Second State of Immobility.” *International Migration* 50(2): 65–80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00713.x>.
- Hofmeyr, Isabel. 2007. “The Idea of ‘Africa’ in Indian Nationalism: Reporting the Diaspora in The Modern Review 1907–1929.” *South African Historical Journal* 57(1): 60–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470709464709>.
- Ibrahim, Farhana. 2021. *From Family to Police Force*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Jauregui, Beatrice. 2016. *Provisional Authority: Police, Order, and Security in India*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Jayawardene, Sureshi. 2016. "Racialized Casteism: Exposing the Relationship between Race, Caste, and Colorism through the Experiences of Africana People in India and Sri Lanka." *Journal of African American Studies* 20(3–4): 323–45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-016-9333-5>.
- Kaur, Ravinder. 2014. "Sex Ratio, Khaps and Marriage Reform." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49(31): 18–20. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24480445>
- Keith, Michael, Neave O'Clery, Susan Parnell, and Revi Aromar. 2020. "The Future of the Future City? The New Urban Sciences and a PEAK Urban Interdisciplinary Disposition." *Cities* 105: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.102820>.
- Khader, Sana K. 2020. "Translocal Notions of Belonging and Authenticity: Understanding Race amongst the Siddis of Gujarat and Hyderabad." *South Asian History and Culture* 11(4): 433–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2020.1827598>.
- Kikon, Dolly. 2021. "Hello Chinky." *Hot Spots, Fieldsights*. March 16. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/hello-chinky>
- Mathur, Nayanika. 2020. "'NRC se Azadi': Process, Chronology, and a Paper Monster." *SAMAJ*: 24–25. <https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.6917>.
- McDuie-Ra, Duncan. 2014. *Northeast Migrants in Delhi. Race, Refuge and Retail*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Ministry of Urban Development. 2007. "Master Plan for Delhi—with the Perspective for the Year 2021." *Gazette of India*.
- Modi, Renu. 2017. "Migration, Successes and Liminal Spaces: A Contemporary Perspective on Africans in India." In *Mobility between Africa, Asia, and Latin America: Economic Networks and Cultural Interactions*, edited by U. Rösenthaller and A. Jedlowski. London: Zed Books.
- Mukhopadhyay, Partha, Subhadra Banda, Sheikh Shahana, and Patrik Heller. 2015. "Categorisation of Settlement in Delhi." Center for Policy Research.
- Nagar, Richa. 1998. "Communal Discourses, Marriage, and the Politics of Gendered Social Boundaries among South Asian Immigrants in Tanzania." *Gender, Place & Culture* 5(2): 117–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663699825241>.
- Nagar, Richa. 2000. "Religion, Race, and the Debate over Mut's in Dar es Salaam." *Feminist Studies* 26(3): 661–90. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178645>.
- Negi, Rohit, and Persis Taraporevala. 2018. "Window to a South-South World: Ordinary Gentrification and African Migrants in Delhi." In *Migration and Agency in a Globalizing World*, edited by Scarlett Cornelissen and Yoichi Mine, 209–30. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. 2013. *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Parameswaran, Radhika, and Kavitha Cardoza. 2009. "Melanin on the Margins: Advertising and the Cultural Politics of Fair/Light/White Beauty in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 11(3): 213–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/152263790901100302>.
- Plambech, Sine. 2014. "Between 'Victims' and 'Criminals': Rescue, Deportation, and Everyday Violence Among Nigerian Migrants." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 21(3): 382–402. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxu021>.
- Ramachandran, Sujata. 2003. "Operation Pushback: Sangh Parivar, State, Slums, and Surreptitious Bangladeshis in New Delhi." *Economic and Political Weekly*: 637–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9493.00133>.
- Reeves, Madeleine. 2013. "Clean Fake: Authenticating Documents and Persons in Migrant Moscow." *American Ethnologist* 40(3): 508–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12036>.
- Reeves, Madeleine. 2015. "Living from the Nerves: Deportability, Indeterminacy and the Feel of Law in Migrant Moscow." *Social Analysis* 59(4): 119–36. <https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2015.590408>.
- Roy, Anupama, and Ujjwal K. Singh. 2009. "The Ambivalence of Citizenship: The IMDT Act (1983) and the Politics of Forclusion in Assam." *Critical Asian Studies* 41(1): 37–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710802631137>.
- Sadiq, Kamal. 2008. *Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shah, Svati P. 2014. *Street Corner Secrets: Sex, Work, and Migration in the City of Mumbai*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sheth, Sudev J. 2017. "Historical Transformations in Boundary and Land Use in New Delhi's Urban Villages." *Economic and Political Weekly* 52(5): 41–49. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44166148>
- Soni, Anita. 2009. "Urban Conquest of Outer Delhi Beneficiaries, Intermediaries and Victims: The Case of the Mehrauli Countryside." In *Urban Studies*, edited by Sujata Patel and Kushal Deb. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Srivastava, Sanjay. 2020. "Hindu Majoritarianism, Forms of Capital, and Urban Politics: The Making of a New Ordinary Citizen in India." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10(3): 742–49. <https://doi.org/10.1086/711894>.
- Thomas, Deborah A., and Kamari M. Clarke. 2006. "Introduction: Globalization and the Transformations of Race." In *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*, edited by Kamari M. Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Willen, Sarah S. 2007. "Toward a Critical Phenomenology of 'Illegality': State Power, Criminalization, and Abjectivity among Undocumented Migrant Workers in Tel Aviv, Israel." *International Migration* 45(3): 8–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2007.00409.x>.
- The Wire. 2016. "Twenty-Three-Year-Old Congolese Man Beaten to Death in Vasant Kunj." *The Wire*. May 21, 2016. <https://thewire.in/uncategorised/23-year-old-congo-man-beaten-to-death-in-vasant-kunj>
- Wouters, Jelle J. P., and Tanka B. Subba. 2013. "The 'Indian Face,' India's Northeast, and 'the Idea of India.'" *Asian Anthropology* 12(2): 126–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2013.849484>.

**How to cite this article:** Gill, Bani. 2024. "The social life of illegality: Suspicion and surveillance against African migrants in urban India." *American Anthropologist* 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13979>