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Fragmented marginalities: dispossessed peasantry and migrant labour communities in urban North India

Ritanjan Das^a and Nilotpal Kumar^b

^aFaculty of Humanities, Leiden University Institute of Area Studies (LIAS), Leiden, Netherlands; ^bSchool of Development, Azim Premji University, Bangalore, India

ABSTRACT

Analogous to the Euro-American context, Indian cities are usually conceptualised as socio-spatial forms where communities at the peripheries of ‘development’ constitute ‘urban margins’. However, such conceptualisations rarely interrogate the varied aspects of marginality within those spaces. Drawing from an ethnography with dispossessed peasantry (in ‘urban villages’) and migrant labour (in slums/jhuggis) in Noida, a north-Indian city, we unpack three aspects of marginality. First, the process of marginalisation; second, two communities negotiating their marginality differently; third, evolving social relations within each. We propose a relational framework: supra-sub levels of structural-spatial and economic-cultural marginalisation to better understand the fragmentations within urban margins.

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1. Introduction

Several aspects of the agrarian crisis in the global South – from rural to urban distress migration, informalisation of labour, to sprawling ‘urban villages’¹ – often analytically converge under the lens of ‘urban marginality’ as vast swathes of land are engulfed in processes of city-making, rendering certain communities to the side-lines of ‘development’ (Fairbairn et al. 2014; Akram-Lodhi, Borras, and Kay 2009; Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009). Yet, what constitutes urban marginality remains open to various interpretations, such as the focus on everyday ‘othering’ (Wilson 2011; Wise and Velayutham 2009), margins as excluded and segregated spaces (Wacquant 2008), issues of territorial struggle and governability (Klem and Kelegama 2020; Moore 1999), and relative articulations of socio-cultural relations always ‘in the making’ (Aceska and Heer 2019, 51). Structuralist sociologists and geographers have also defined urban marginality as a macro-economic process whereby falling public expenditures, rising inequalities, unemployment, and

CONTACT Ritanjan Das  r.das@hum.leidenuniv.nl  LIAS, Faculty of Humanities, Herta Mohr, 2311 BG, Leiden, Netherlands

¹An ‘urban village’ refers to residual rural settlements within/adjacent to a city, with somewhat improved services and better connectivity.

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migration have caused an excessive concentration of the poor in certain urban quarters (Davis 2006; Sassen 1999).

Nevertheless, there remains a degree of normative selectivity in most of these interpretations. Inhabited by dispossessed peasantry, poor migrants and a wide array of 'unequal' citizenry, urban margins are often conceived as *deviating* from the 'centre' by planners, politicians and urban dwellers themselves, implying a unidirectional place and power relationality. In other words, the relevance of margins tends to remain limited to their essentiality in understanding the centre (Ong 2006; Tsing 1993; Yiftachel 2009). Despite a plethora of analyses of changing urban landscapes, an understanding of its impact on marginal dwellers' practices – going beyond the structural variables of ethnicity, class, or state welfare policies – continues to lag (Lancione 2016). Taking cognizance of this, more recent academic scholarship has tried to demonstrate how marginal spaces are displaced from the centre by forces of contemporary capitalism, and by locating them 'within broader networks of marginalization, dislocation, subaltern theorization, and contested history' (Cons and Sanyal 2013, 6). Understanding marginality, it is now increasingly argued, requires adopting a relational and negotiated view of margins and centres, alongside local histories and regional politics, embodying, rather than demarcating, a varied terrain of power (Cons and Sanyal 2013). The processual aspect of marginalisation, therefore, navigates across an array of conceptual understandings such as structural critiques of capitalism, politics of spatial geography, identity-making, political economy of regionalism, religious conflict, and so on. There is also a growing acknowledgement of the need to recognise that those living at the city's margins do not represent 'negligible minorities of the urban whole ... [but] constitute and define the city ... as forms of diverse and multiple relations between urban dwellers shaped by processes of political, economic, spatial and social marginalisation' (Aceska, Heer, and Kaiser-Grolimund 2019, 2).

Contributing to this literature, this paper seeks to unsettle urban marginality as a 'unitary phenomenon' (Billson 1988, 183) in the South Asian context by exploring two separate communities that are commonly found in most Indian (and South Asian) cities under development: dispossessed local peasantry residing in residual but urbanised villages, and migrant labourers arriving to the city in search of employment. In doing so, we raise three questions: (1) how are different communities marginalised in different ways by macro-structural processes of city-making? (2) how do marginalised communities stake their claims to the city-space, negotiating with their 'othered' status in distinctive ways? and (3) how do the internal dynamics of each community take shape in the process? Essentially, our effort is to go beyond the 'deviation from centre' thesis and make the *margins our centre* instead, unpacking the fragmentations and multiplicities within those spaces. We build on Aceska and Heer's (2019, 58) argument that 'city dwellers are not passive recipients of a marginalised position in the spaces of the 'others', but they are able to appropriate these spaces to their needs'. In exploring the inner world of these communities in relation to said appropriation, we aim to understand marginal contexts both as relational spaces and as a rhizome of eventful crossroads (Simone 2010) within which multifaceted experiences of the margins are constituted.

This work is based in the north Indian city of Noida, located on the western fringe of the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), and part of the national capital region (NCR) delineated around New Delhi. Noida is among the many 'global' cities (Sassen 2001) in India, a

prime destination for real estate and financial capital. Yet, its gentrified urban landscape is ruptured by two other prominent habitational forms: remnants of erstwhile villages where large sections of the dispossessed peasantry continue to reside, and slums (*jhuggis*) where migrant labourers² have come to reside over decades. While the propinquity of different habitational forms is not uncommon in Indian cities, these two ‘marginal’ communities constitute about half the city’s population, thereby rendering it a unique character (see section 3). But the way mainstream scholarship on urban India addresses such propinquity tends to replicate the centre–margin debate. Structural analyses of residential/professional ‘centres’ and the concomitant peripheralisation of the working and poor classes are abound, especially by several postcolonial urban scholars (e.g. Baviskar 2020; Ghertner 2015; Gooptu 2011). However, this scholarship has tended to elide the diversity and agency of marginal groups (Roy 2011). It also often fails to theorise the interspersion of agrarian and post-agrarian time spaces inside the urban, with stylised trajectories of land dispossession and deaccumulation by a pro-market state (Goldman 2011; Levien 2012) or through markets (Cowan 2015, 2018), and of ‘fractured sovereignties’ in such interstices (Dubey 2018) in which in-situ rural residents seek to subordinate migrant tenants. Exploring the case of Noida, this paper aims to fill this gap by bringing together within one analytical ambit the dialectics of structural and spatial on the one hand and the economic and the cultural on the other.

Methodologically, the paper draws from an ethnographic study and archival work we periodically conducted in Noida between 2017–2020. The mainstay of the empirical data presented here emerges from around 50 interviews with urban villagers and migrant labourers. The former community respondents included erstwhile farmers and landless labourers from the locally dominant castes of *Gujars*, *Chauhans*, *Yadavs* and the scheduled castes (SC). The latter group comprised migrant labourers who have come to Noida from distant parts of UP and other states such as Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, etc., and represents a cross-section of caste and religious backgrounds. A significant proportion of fieldwork time was also spent in collecting archival resources, particularly city Master Plans of Noida,³ as well as court judgements. Data gathered were mostly in the form of field notes, recorded interviews, and archival material (both digitised and physical), which were memoed for textual and conceptual analysis.

The article is organised as follows: we elaborate on our conceptual framework of structural-spatial, economic and cultural marginalisation in Section 2. Section 3 explores the broad structural process of marginalisation of the two communities in Noida through their gradual spatial segregation. The fourth and fifth sections then take up each community in turn and examine their different expressions of marginality, primarily focusing on their economic and cultural marginalisation respectively. The concluding section summarises our broad arguments.

²There is arguably a larger political point about who is a ‘migrant labourer’ in urban India, as a sizeable proportion of urban middle-class residents employed in white-collar jobs are also migrants, and almost entirely so in new cities such as Noida (see Majumder and Naaz 2017). However, for this work, we refer to the low-income workers at the bottom end of the labour hierarchy as migrant labourers, living in slums or temporary housing clusters, and having migrated mostly from rural India where they were peasants, landless labourers or belonged to other historically marginalised communities engaged in menial occupations.

³Only 2021 and 2031 versions are publicly available.

2. Urban marginality: a conceptual framework

The term 'marginality' was first used by Robert Park in 1928 to describe a relatively permanent sense of crisis over conflicting identities (Park 1928). A predominantly cultural notion, it subsequently interfused with the connotations of structural oppression in terms of 'political, social, and economic powerlessness of certain disenfranchised and/or disadvantaged segments within capitalistic societies' (Billson 1998, 185). In this more expansive form, the term was used in the 1960s and 1970s—particularly in the Latin American urbanisation context to describe the mass of workers employed in occupational works outside of the high-value industrial sector in cities (e.g. Nun 1969). Subsequently, such dualistic arguments have been criticised for devaluing the productive and reproductive functions that 'marginal masses' play in capitalist expansion (Caldeira 2009). Such criticisms have also been applied to conceptualisations of American and European urban conditions since the 1980s, such as the theory of 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant 2008), in which specific structural forms of social, political, and economic disenfranchisement and oppression (through class and state-relations) are spatially re-configured, in forms of marginal locations with or without borders, such as ghettos and squatters. While it is true that some of this recent literature tends to reproduce dualism (Caldeira 2009, 849), one of the main values of post-1980s thinking on marginality is that it has increasingly analysed the cultural and structural dimensions of marginality alongside spatial dimension at various scales (e.g. Castells 1983; Davis 2006).

In this paper, we draw on the analytical innovation of interconnecting structural-spatial, economic and cultural dimensions of marginality. Yet, we also acknowledge that the empirical experiences of marginality *on the ground*, mediated as they are by nuanced situational modalities of power, go beyond separable analytical dimensions (Lancione 2016). Therefore, we adopt what Lancione calls a relational or grounded framework, in which micro experiences of urban marginality are analysed as a dialectic process interrelating macro-level operation of structural processes – that is political-economic and spatial mechanisms at national and sub-national scales – with sub-regional and local economic, cultural, and locational dynamics. As such, instead of analysing marginalisation as a top-down or a unilinear phenomenon, we describe it as a recursive process in which local and sub-regional politics both 'respond' to and 'reproduce' supra-level mechanisms. We shall demonstrate this politics of response and reproduction in the two empirical cases in sections 4 and 5. But we first elaborate our framework in what follows below.

First, the supra-level of structural-spatial aspects of marginality. We frame this supra-level around a substantial literature that has been the mainstay of urban marginality scholarship in the last few decades (e.g. Perlman 1976; Merry 1981; Castells 1983; Schneider and Susser 2003; Davis 2006; Wacquant 2008; Lancione 2016; Thieme, Lancione, and Rosa 2017, etc.). This scholarship characterises city-making as one of the fundamental mediums of 'restructured' global capitalism since the 1970s, which creates a hierarchy of power through spatial segregation (Soja 1997, 161; Harvey 1989). As cities increasingly compete to attract capital in a global market of production, consumption and command functions, low-income workers who are neither direct beneficiaries of nor able to partake in such processes get 'trapped' in specific localities away from the power centres (Sassen 1999, 86; Harvey 1989). David Harvey (1989) has pointed out a reorientation in urban governance in the second half of the twentieth century from a 'managerial' approach (concerned

with the provision of public goods) to 'entrepreneurial' forms pursued through forceful acquisition of land and public-private partnerships in built-environments, thereby transforming the image and functions of cities from centres of mass production and work to attractive places for local and global investment (Harvey 1989, 2003). Subsequent literature on neoliberal urbanisation reinforces this argument, demonstrating a teleological urban 'revolution from above' to promote entrepreneurial urban policies, while intensifying the exploitation of the poor and working classes (Sheppard et al. 2015, 2). The concomitant spatial politics of such structural forces is also increasingly investigated in the form of a polarisation thesis, i.e. the formation of segregated structural locations via a rise in and concentration of power in specific urban areas (the centre), separate from those with limited power, resources, and restricted to the peripheries (margins) (Massey 1994; Soja 2000; Savage and Warde 1993). Overall, there is now a sizeable scholarship that explores the linkages between such processes of spatial segregation with an array of structural factors such as normalisation of social insecurity (Standing 2011), modalities of state-craft, discourses and technologies of governance (Wacquant 2009, 2016), urban policy (Goetz 2013), techniques of control (Sennett 2006), and other institutional mechanisms characterised by the concept of the 'centaur state' presenting 'a fearsome and frowning mug towards the lower class' (Wacquant 2010, 217; Lea and Hallsworth 2013).

It is not our purpose to produce a comprehensive review of this vast literature. Its overall claim – that structural-spatial factors lead to a wider strengthening of class antagonisms between the dominant and the marginal that becomes heightened in periods of economic crisis (Hancock and Mooney 2013) – is well-established. The 'intersections of spatial and structural perspectives ... are useful in interrogating the complex politics of peripheries at various scales', and especially so to scholars of the global South, for whom 'margins and marginality have been long-standing issues in studying the relationships of racial and ethnic minorities and the urban poor' (Cons and Sanyal 2013, 8). However, such broad categorisations of dominant vs. exploited class, albeit instructive, leaves a lot unsaid, and in its reproduction of the centre–margin binary tends to portray marginal communities as a singular monolith. As Measor (2013, 133–135) argues, this limited knowledge has resulted in marginal communities often being presented 'as one undifferentiated mass, their individual characteristics and differences ironed flat, a colourless uniform group'. We do not have enough knowledge about their daily lives, 'of those caught in the cracks and ditches of the new economic landscape' (Wacquant 2009, xiv). Flint (2019) also claims that not only the lived experiences of those at the margins are less documented, but broad class-centric arguments often neglect the ambiguities of exclusionary and inclusionary impulses, the intra-class diversity, and the importance of individualisation and emotions framing encounters (also see Crawford and Flint 2015; Flint 2012; Lawson and Elwood 2014; Stenson 2013). It is this lived experience and internal diversity that we want to shed light on, showing it to be a fragmented space rather than a homogenised marginal class. Therefore, we conceptualise a further sub-level of marginality with two layers of economic and cultural dimensions. We also posit that the politics in this sub-level – which we describe as the *politics of response and reproduction* – is not only different from that of the supra-level but also within itself, shaping the sub-supra dialectics in very distinctive ways. We elaborate on these conceptualisations next.

First, the sub-level of economic marginalisation. The key aspects here primarily converge on the issue of dispossession and resultant inequality in the scholarship on the

agrarian question of land (Levien 2012; Araghi 2009; Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009). It can be argued that there is a degree of overlap between the structural-spatial supra-level and the economic sub-level, especially in the former's focus on wider political economic variables of class and spatial distribution of social power. We agree with this point but argue further that since we aim to understand the processual aspects of marginalisation that lead to divergent outcomes for different groups, it is imperative to treat economic marginalisation through dispossession as a separate analytical factor within our conceptual hierarchy of supra and sub levels. In the case at hand, dispossession primarily impacts one subgroup (the erstwhile peasant community) over another (the migrant labour community) within the context of a specific urban space, and while the resultant politics of the former coalesces mostly around the prolonged economic impact of this dispossession, it is not so for the latter. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to encounter views among the former group that celebrate the city-making project while challenging their dispossession, but not so much among the latter. Therefore, to develop a better understanding of the multiplicity of processes hidden within the all-encompassing notion of marginalisation, we separate economic marginalisation via dispossession from wider structural-spatial factors. We further argue that the oppositional politics that this dispossession leads to also fragments the affected class internally. The main thrust of this politics takes shape around a 'response' (i.e. legal and political challenges) to the discrimination/exploitation (or a 'misrule of law'; Holston 2008) originating at the supra-level, but it does not question the urbanisation project itself. In other words, economic marginalisation and the politics of response encapsulate how the supra-level impacts the economic lives of those at the margins through the process of dispossession, and how they respond to such situations in turn. But in doing so, who owns or controls that response also becomes a matter of internal contestation and leads to further fragmentation. In section 4, we demonstrate this process by tracing the historically shaped marginalisation of the agrarian rural as it becomes an 'urbanised rural'. We show that against the assumption of dispossession by displacement (Araghi 2009), the dispossession and deaccumulation can also proceed without residential displacement, leading to a hyper-urbanisation of segregated spaces of rural habitation within a city. While the objective conditions of such economic marginality are usually seen by scholars to elicit a response based on the assumed notion of collective class identity, we show that it is only a sub-section of local erstwhile peasants who mobilise based on their superior economic capital and property ownership. This appropriation of class identity by the rich peasants follows their historic domination of those below in the rural social hierarchy and leads to fragmentation among the dispossessed, as voices of the landless and lower castes rarely feature in the collective response.

Second, the sub-level of cultural marginalisation. This is where the dialectic relationship between the 'objective and subjective reality' of marginality in a concrete social context becomes most pronounced (Varghese and Kumar 2022, 30), but also the least interrogated. This is not to claim there is no exploration of the cultural aspects of marginality, but those tend to veer more towards questions of individual agency, emancipatory alternatives, and the 'development of personal capabilities' (von Braun and Gatzweiler 2014, 3). This is not our purpose here. Instead, we posit this cultural dimension of marginality as a relational process of internal 'othering' (Alsayyad 2003). It is important to note that 'othering' is usually seen to be more of a structural process of socio-economic exploitation (e.g. Garrido 2021; Wacquant 2008, 2016), the collective banishment/relegation of

certain 'powerless' groups to the margins (i.e. territorial segregation and stigmatisation) by the powerful centre. However, we posit the notion of cultural marginalisation to be constitutive of the relations marginal communities build internally by reworking boundaries of social, religious, and ethnic identities. In other words, we are interested in what Gramsci described as the 'inner life' of the *emarginati*, i.e. those outside the margin of 'respectable' society (Germino 1986; Zene 2012), their construction of self and other, and their reassessment of social boundaries in the city. We further argue that the dialectics between this inner life and the supra-level as well as the economic marginalisation is shaped by a politics of 'reproduction' in certain (but not all) marginal communities, where everyday precarity and limited collective action possibilities prevent an upward 'response'. The only alternative in such situations is a reproduction of (or even mimicking) the same kind of exploitation/oppression that the supra-level dynamics subject them to, but directed internally towards the even weaker sub-groups. We witness this process in the *jhuggis* (slums) inhabited by migrant labourers (see Section 5), where the territorial segregation brought about by the structural-spatial factors gets reproduced internally via a mimicking the dominant group's marginalising rhetoric, as the subjugated persons shape their cultural identity through interactions with those they can dominate in turn.

Three points need further clarification. First, in the analysis that follows, we shall show that one case (dispossessed peasants in urban villages) primarily demonstrates economic marginalisation and the politics of response, and the other (migrant labourers in *jhuggis*) demonstrates cultural marginalisation and the politics of reproduction. This is not to claim one is exclusive of the other, or that urban villages have no politics of reproduction and the *jhuggis* have no politics of response. Instead, this separation is for analytical clarity, as we have decided to focus on the most prominent and visible forms of relationality in unpacking the supra-sub level dialectics. We are aware that individual or collective actions in the *jhuggis* that challenge the state, even fleetingly, symbolise a politics of response (we briefly explore this at the beginning of Section 5), and that an interdependent but conflictual relationship among the local dispossessed peasantry and a 'reserve army of migrants' as tenants in urban villages reproduces social and cultural boundaries (alluded to in the last part of Section 4). We have elaborated on these aspects elsewhere (Das and Kumar 2023), and only touch upon them briefly here. Instead, we have resorted to a degree of simplification to underline the larger point of how different these two marginal communities and their politics are from each other, i.e. how fragmented the margins themselves are. Accordingly, in the discussion that follows, the next section primarily focuses on the supra-level conditions (in response to the first objective), and the following two sections mostly deal with sub-level factors (elaborating on the second and third objectives).

Second, our conceptual framework adds to a limited but growing literature that stands distinctively apart from the traditional scholarship on structural conditionals of marginality and economic inequality. We acknowledge the latter in the conceptualisation of the supra-level, but our analysis moves away from such largely class-based accounts that tend to reproduce the centre–margin binary. Instead, we build on critical works such as Acesca *et al's* (2019) categorisation of urban marginality as a trilectical interaction of *agency* (marginality as an enabler of innovative potentialities), *spatiality* (territorial segregation) and *diversity* (in lifestyles, attitudes, and activities), or Lancione's (2016) *structural*

analytic (the processes of dispossession, exclusion, etc.), *relational/grounded analytic* (the day-to-day interactions at marginal spaces), and *postcolonial analytic* (a self-reflective account of the 'other'). Another useful framework is offered by Billson (2005), where he classifies marginality into *cultural marginality* (racial, ethnic, and religious hierarchies), *social marginality* (age, social, or occupational constraints), *structural marginality* (the lack of political, social and economic status), *essential marginality* (those with mixed statuses, such as racial or citizenship), and *processual marginality* (marginality being dynamic as people move between categories). Broadly, all of these authors argue that existing scholarship is somewhat siloed, and there remains a need to account for the lives that make up the marginalised 'others' and the many forms of life that construct, sustain, demolish, and rebuild the margins themselves. We take these arguments forward in conceptualising marginality as a dialectic process, with a nested supra-sub level relationality.

Third, a comment about the Indian context. In the postcolonial urbanisation process, a remarkably varied geography of hegemonies and margins has come about in the sub-continent. As Cons and Sanyal (2013, 6–7) observe:

To say that South Asia is ... rife with physical and metaphorical margins is ... an understatement. The projects of both colonial and postcolonial state-making ... have yielded myriad social and spatial exclusions ... and marginalization of citizens ... Understanding marginality ... in South Asia ... requires adopting a relational and negotiated view of margins and centers, broad and local histories, and regional politics - a view which embodies, rather than demarcates, a varied terrain of power.

Structurally, ever since the advent of economic reforms in India, both regional governments and the private sector have used tools such as planning methodologies and master plans to acquire farmlands for creating high-value real estate, networked to large infrastructural projects (Gururani 2013; Roy 2009b). The discussion on postcolonial marginality is therefore connected significantly to current debates in critical agrarian political economy (e.g. Akram-Lodhi, Borras, and Kay 2009; Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009). The key questions here are whether the agricultural (and the rural in general) is redundant – in a world-historical sense – to the processes of capital accumulation and transfers at the national or subnational level in the era of manufacturing and services-led growth (Bernstein 2009). Or, is the agrarian rural relocating a reserve army of labour to urban slums due to land-market deregulation, corporate appropriations of rural lands, especially by large agro-businesses dominating agricultural production (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009; Davis 2006)? Some scholars have emphasised a more nuanced regional-historical approach to frame key structural and economic questions, emphasising multiple reconfigurations of peasant classes, rural industrialisation, micro-politics of rural-to-urban migration, and politics in urban peripheries (e.g. Watts 2009). In the case of India, some of these debates complicate discussions of marginality by suggesting different configurations of the agrarian production, consumption, and labour questions (e.g. Dubey 2018; Levien 2012). From our vantage, the traditional urbanisation theories pay insufficient attention to the multiple ways in which the agrarian and non-agrarian rural communities articulate with the urban in India, (i.e. a reverse power relationality; Cowan 2015, 2018; Gururani 2013; Sami 2013). This is even more pronounced in the context of cultural marginalisation, and the heterogeneity in social power and identity therein. Although several critical studies of note demonstrate a 'rule by aesthetics' in these marginal 'geographies of

displacement' (Ghertner 2008, 2015), associational communities of interest (Baviskar 2003; Fernandes 2006; Gooptu 2011; Roy 2009a), 'nuisance zones' and 'hot spots' of infiltration (Ghertner 2011), the fact remains that disproportionately more attention has been given to the urban middle classes in the Indian urbanisation scholarship. To better understand marginalisation, we thus move away from the middle-class urban centres and embed ourselves within the margin instead, making the margins our centre.

3. The formation of two marginal communities in Noida: the supra-level of structural-spatial factors

In our exploration of the peasants and migrant labourers as two distinct marginal communities in Noida, a description of their respective structural-spatial marginalisation is necessary at the onset. Below, we provide a brief historical account of how the supra-level structural forces of city-making gradually led to the spatial segregation of two different communities in distinctive ways.

Noida came into being in April 1976, when the UP government notified 36 villages (120 sq. km) on the eastern periphery of Delhi as the New Okhla Industrial Development Area (NOIDA), and constituted the 'New Okhla Industrial Development Authority' (Authority hereafter) to acquire land and commence development. In a move to decongest Delhi and regulate its speculative land market, the Authority envisioned Noida as a 'new industrial town' where small-medium industries from Delhi would relocate (Master Plan 1976). Within the next decade, the Authority notified another 45 villages, expanding the entire area to 20316 hectares (Master Plan 1976). Though periodic acquisition of notified land continues to date, the city – divided into 163 sectors – has spread over almost the entire area. Industrial and residential zones occupy the central and northern parts, while agricultural fields lay interspersed with rural settlements in southern Noida. Evolving from its industrial past, Noida has become one of India's prime real-estate destinations – a transformation commensurate with the 'global' city-making project (Sassen 2001) – with a predicted net population of 2.5 million by 2031 (Master Plan 1976).

Yet, Noida continues to exhibit the 'paradox of urban malaise' (Gururani 2013, 120). While it stands on acquired farmland, the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) of the time⁴ exempted village habitations from acquisition, thereby leaving residual village settlements somewhat intact. Euphemistically labelled as 'urban villages' by the Authority, these settlements (*abadi* in the vernacular tongue) have become ghettoised within the urbanised sectors. As one approaches a village, the wide and straight roads suddenly become narrower and serpentine, and the gated housing enclaves and glitzy commercial units just a few hundred metres away are replaced by a flurry of unplanned, haphazard construction and dimly lit shops. As the erstwhile farmland surrounding these villages has transformed into high-rising urban sprawls, the villages themselves have transformed from the habitation nucleus of agrarian communities to hidden back lanes of urban Noida. At the same time, realising the economic opportunities from the arrival of migrant workers (see below for a brief historical overview of this migration), many villagers have built numerous low-cost rental accommodations. Several villages – such as *Gejha*, *Atta*, *Chhalera*, *Barola*, *Nithari*, etc. – have also become hubs for unauthorised residential

⁴A colonial-era law of 1894.

and commercial construction, with small-scale, local developers building cheap housing at village peripheries. All of this has added considerably to ever-increasing civic pressure and led to crumbling infrastructural conditions. A report in the *Hindustan Times*, a major national newspaper, observes:

Noida's 81 urban villages are ... home to migrant workers and daily wagers ... Choked sewage system, lack of proper drainage ... narrow roads, unsafe residential structures and thickly populated pockets are common characteristics ... The authority and the state government never considered holistic development in villages. After farmers lost their agricultural land ... they (mostly) depend on income from house rentals ... [they] keep constructing additional floors on their houses and rent them out ... It has increased Noida's population beyond the permissible limit. If it continues, it will further lead to a bigger civic mess. (Rajput 2017)

This structural transformation is neither atypical nor new, as land acquisition and concomitant rural marginalisation are among contemporary India's most common struggles (Levien 2018). However, what is intriguing is the way this spatial segregation is demonstrative of a reconfigured rural-urban relation in urban planning, whereby the villages stand as spatial anomalies and vestiges from the past. Tellingly, the 2031 Master Plan conceives of villages as a threat to the planned nature of the city: '*These villages may create problems for planned development of Noida*' (pg.15). Previous plans also repeatedly use expressions such as a 'clean slate' approach necessary for the city to flourish, villagers expected to 'voluntarily vacate their premises' and that villages cannot be 'permitted' to remain in their 'state of dereliction' amidst a planned settlement (see Das and Kumar 2023). The haphazard growth in the villages remains a planning anomaly in the state's eyes rather than a metamorphosing post-agrarian rural community, an approach that continues to define the relationship between the villagers and both the Authority and the urban middle class and is instrumental in forming a marginalised rural identity.

The other marginalised community in Noida is the *jhuggi* residents. A common site in most Indian cities, these *jhuggis* are unauthorised-unplanned slums/squatter colonies inhabited by migrant labourers, employed mostly in local small-scale industries and construction sites. Having come from states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal as well as eastern parts of UP itself, the journeys of these migrant labourers – some of whom have been residing in Noida for decades – are part of the much-discussed structural transformations of India's agrarian economy and resultant rural-urban migration. While a detailed discussion of the migrant odysseys is outside the purview of this article, some context can be useful here. Historically, the rate of India's internal migration has been quite varied, with an annual growth rate of 4.5 per cent between 1971 and 1981, 3 per cent between 1981–1991, and down to – 1.4 per cent between 1991–2001. However, the next decade saw a significant rise at an annual rate of almost 11% with net migration figures reaching 454 million by 2011, a jump of almost 47% from 309 million in 2001 (Parida and Raman 2020).⁵ Such a stark contrast in migration patterns is commonly attributed to the structural transformations in a post-liberalized Indian economy, namely, a declining agricultural sector, increasing employment in industrial, infrastructure, and service sectors, an (uneven) growth in urbanisation, and the concomitant rise in informal employment sources (Mehrotra and Parida 2017). In particular, the rapid development of

⁵Post-2011 figures aren't available due to no census having taken place since 2011.

urban sites as areas of intense capital growth and expansive activities requires an abundant of cheap labour, a demand met largely by unskilled or low-skilled workers, landless farmers, and other socio-economically marginalised groups such as low castes or tribal population in search of livelihoods amidst an ongoing crisis of decreasing growth and employment in the agricultural sector (Lerche 2011; Mehrotra et al. 2014). Within the overall increase in migration levels, rural-to-urban migration has also been particularly noteworthy between 2001–2011, with an annual increase of 3 million (Parida and Raman 2020), alongside a fall in urban-to-rural or return migration (a trend temporarily reversed during the pandemic [Inamdar and Thusoo 2020]). Official statistics post-2011 are not available, but ground-level reports show limited signs of change (Kumar 2020).

The *jhuggis* of Noida are reflective of such broader trends, as the informal settlements constructed by waves of rural migrants continue to represent a pragmatic response to the dearth of affordable livelihoods.⁶ There are numerous *jhuggi* clusters dotted over the city, prominently visible across the industrial sectors areas but also nestling within the urbanised sectors and at village peripheries. Some of these settlements, particularly in the industrial area, are several decades old. Das (2011, 324) provides a succinct summary of their formation:

The rural poor who came here ... since the late 1970s started by putting up shanties on unoccupied government land. The local expressions for such acts are *jagah ghair lena* (... enclose a space) and the land itself is referred to as *kabze ki zameen* (land that was occupied). Although people did not have legal title to the land ... mutual recognition within the community led to the notion that the land rightfully belongs to those who settled in the area, so that later migrants had to either buy or rent the space.

Gradually, such clusters have transformed from ad-hoc temporary sheds (*kuchha*) to permanent settlements (*pucca*). But despite their rapid growth, hardly any information is available about the people residing in these spaces, though an early study by Lall and Suri (1992) noted that around 47.1% of the sample households were migrants from UP, 34.7% were from Bihar, and 15.8% from other states. In another 2008 survey, the Authority estimated that about 11000 *jhuggis* were in sectors 1–11 alone (Master Plan, 2031), a figure strongly questioned by Das and Walton (2015). Overall, the 2031 Master Plan estimates that 20% of Noida's population resides in *jhuggis*, and informal accounts suggest 0.125–0.15 million people live in the industrial area alone, but there is absolutely no count of those elsewhere. This is hardly surprising, as *jhuggis* are 'illegal spaces' – having been built on encroached public land – thus barely meriting acknowledgement in urban governance discourse. The usual dismissive opinion among Authority officials is evident in the following interview excerpt. Mr Mishra, one of the senior town planners in the Authority, emphatically states:

It is all illegal, all irregular. They want to live like that because it's cheap. The Authority has built alternative accommodations, but they refuse to relocate. All sorts of criminal activities go on inside these *jhuggis*. They give our city a bad name [emphasis added].⁷

Such views are quite common in the urban policy sphere, which 'tolerates' such marginal spaces while subjecting them to derogatory discourses about their putative 'contamination', 'criminality', and 'danger' to the desired 'order of things' (Yiftachel 2009,

⁶A third of the urban population in developing countries lives in such clusters/slums, growing from 100 million in 1960 to nearly 900 million in 2014 (UN-Habitat 2016).

⁷Interview, 7 June 2019, Noida Authority.

250). Examining the growth of cities and towns across India in the last three decades – a development that spans from major satellite cities (like Noida, Gurgaon, Ghaziabad in the NCR, Gandhinagar in Gujarat, Kolkata New Town in West Bengal, Navi-Mumbai in Maharashtra and so on) to the much celebrated ‘renewal’ of older metropolises into smart cities (Sharma 2022) and the mushrooming of numerous ‘census towns’ across the country⁸ – the scholarship on neoliberal urbanisation in India⁹ is broadly in agreement on its unplanned and exclusionary character (Kundu 2014). Owing to a blurring of the boundaries between urban and rural areas and the lack of institutional capacity, Indian urban theorists have long stressed the planning failures on the part of the state to accommodate displaced rural residents and migrants into urban areas, thereby pushing population growth into city peripheries. Migrant labourers, attracted by the employment prospects in urban areas but prompted by rising costs and lack of affordable housing inside the cities, settle in these peripheries without basic services and in an unplanned manner. Consequently, urban areas are not limited to the administrative boundaries of cities and towns but are spreading over these (Bhagat 2014). Another similar effect is caused by in-situ urbanisation, whereby rural activities are replaced by urban activities without substantial migration between the settlements (Pradhan 2013). This merging of the rural with the urban is a process where the rural-urban relationship has largely been internalised, that is, the rural is no longer separate from urban (Jain and Korzhenevych 2020). In this process, the socio-economic linkages and infrastructural networks that used to lie in erstwhile rural areas have become integral parts of urban areas. It is not that the non-urban realm disappears, but rather that it becomes thoroughly engulfed within the variegated patterns and processes of urbanisation (Brenner and Schmid 2014; 2015). Such developments are not restricted to a bounded space; instead, it connects the separated geographies of wealthy urbanites and slums (Roy 2011), thereby creating a physical juxtaposition of communities where urban residents, slum dwellers as well as displaced rural populations jostle for the same space. In doing so, the disjuncture between actual tolerated reality and its ‘intolerable’ legal, planning, and discursive framing – evident here in the case of both the urban villages and the *jhuggis* – creates a process of marginalisation that is always in the making, where the boundaries between ‘accepted’ and ‘rejected’ constantly shift, trapping whole populations in a range of unplanned urban zones, lacking certainty, stability and hence development (Yiftachel 2009). Yet, these are two different communities and negotiate with their ‘othering’ in different ways, thus leading to very distinctive forms of urban relationalities. This is what we explore next.

4. Land dispossession and misrule of law: economic marginalisation and the local politics of response in urban villages

As mentioned above (Section 2), discussions of the structural dimension of marginality have emphasised processes of economic exploitation and exclusion of social groups at

⁸Census towns are agglomerations with urban characteristics, population above 5,000, more than 75% of the male workforce engaged in non-agricultural activities, and a minimum population density of 400 per sq. km, but without an urban local administrative body; see Jain and Korzhenevych (2020).

⁹See Batra (2009) for an excellent review of post-independence urbanism in India, alongside Roy (2002); Baviskar (2003); Chatterjee (2004); Fernandes (2004, 2006); Gandy (2008); Anjaria (2009); Banerjee-Guha (2009); Weinstein (2009); Ghertner (2010, 2011); Srivastava (2015); Cowan (2018).

macro and micro scales (Billson 1998; Lancione 2016, etc.). In Marxist theoretical traditions, despite Marx's observation that 'the expropriation of the peasant from the soil' was the basis of the 'whole process' of capitalistic transformation (Marx in Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009, 16), scholars such as Harvey have theorised urban marginality in terms of the degree of economic exploitation of labour within the production process, without any special reference to the relation of peasants to urban space (e.g. Harvey 1985). It was Lefebvre who saw class exploitation in and through space by underlining that built urban spaces represented historically specific forms of 'appropriation of rural peripheries' (Lefebvre 1991, 84–85). The widespread appropriation of rural lands – a fictitious commodity (Polanyi cited in Jessop 2002) held under different tenures in the global South – through exchanges and coercion, has attracted a great deal of attention in critical agrarian studies (e.g. Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009). Arrighi has theorised a specific structural and spatial process of 'dispossession by displacement' at the world-historical level, wherein small and marginal peasants are forced to cede farmlands to agro-export corporations of the North de-regulated land market and relocate to informal wage work and low-income squatters in sprawling urban centres (Arrighi, 2009 in Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009; Davis 2006). In this section, we first attempt to demonstrate how these structural processes of urban space production have entailed prolonged economic marginalisation of the local peasantry through coercive *misrule of law* by the state (Holston 2008). We shall show, subsequently, how a contradictory politics of response has emerged among the dominant caste peasants as they have made use of overlapping economic and cultural identities of being dispossessed peasants and landlords in urban villages to further marginalise their poorer migrant tenants.

Whereas several new Indian cities – Gurgaon, Lavasa, suburbs of Pune, and many more – have experienced land acquisition for urban purposes by private capital since their inception, Noida has involved a comprehensive public land acquisition process. Farmlands of 81 villages were notified under the LAA, but the actual acquisition unravelled in three stages (Dubey 2018): of the 47 villages notified in 1976–1978, only seven ceded lands before 1980s (stage one); a further five were notified in 1989 and ceded lands through the 1990s and 2000s alongside remaining stage one villages (stage two); 29 additional villages were notified in 1997–1998, actually ceding their farmlands between 2000 and 2010s (stage three). Despite this staggered timeline, more than 80% of all farmlands acquired until 2018 (approximately 9900 hectares) involved the application of section 17 of the LAA – commonly referred to as the 'urgency clause', which enabled the state to take 'immediate possession of any lands', abrogating landowning farmers' statutory rights to register objections to the process (CAG 2021, 28). The application of the clause throughout was inconsistent with the prolonged gestation of the 'public purpose' of industrial development, and, with the fact that in many cases Authority changed land-use from industrial to residential purposes even before notices for acquisition were served to farmers.¹⁰

The Authority has appropriated land in a way that recalls to mind Holston's (2008, 19) analytic of a *misrule of law*, which refers to a 'system of stratagems and bureaucratic complications, by the state and the subjects, to obfuscate problems, neutralize opponents, and above all, legalize the illegal'. The Authority transferred ownership of farmlands to itself – from the full or substantial private rights in property given to the farmers

¹⁰See Gajraj and Others Vs. State of UP and Others, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/195081303/>; accessed 4th October 2020

under the 1952 and 1960 land reforms – for industrialisation. This was not quite a ‘roll-back’ of land ownership among the subaltern caste-class peasants (Akram-Lodhi et al, 2009b, 217), and nor did the process of dispossession follow the precedence of industrial urbanisation in western UP since the 1950s (Brass 2011; Singh 1992). Middle class in nature (Brass 2011), the local peasantry has hailed from the castes of *Gujars*, *Yadavs*, *Ahirs*, *Dheevars*, and *Nais* – all backward castes in the statutory sense – and from the upper caste *Rajputs* and *Brahmins* (Das, Manna et al. 1979). Incidentally, the land reforms of the 1950s could not reduce landlessness among the *Jatavs* and *Valmikis* from among the scheduled castes in the region, who historically comprised about 20–25% of the population (Etienne 2010). Through its mandatory land acquisition since 1978, the state was forcing these middle class-caste landowners to cede their farmlands to meet growing economic and spatial needs of the two urban ‘dominant classes’, namely, the small-scale industrialists whose numbers and role had begun to grow through the 1970s and 80s regionally and nationally (Bardhan [1984] 2004, 43–44), and of the urban ‘middle classes’ manning higher public and private bureaucracies since the 1990s (Bardhan [1984] 2004, 51). The obfuscation used by the state for this purpose was the inclusion of ‘industrial township’ among the purposes warranting *urgent* acquisition of farmlands under the LAA (CAG 2021, 28), while the actual process of acquisition was anything but urgent. Peasant households were forced to either approach the courts or accept compensation awarded at pre-decided rates until 1997; since 1997, they had to accept the award that the Authority was willing to pay them bilaterally (under LAA 11:2). The principal economic motive of the state behind pressing ‘urgency clause’ is to keep its land acquisition costs as low as possible.

The second aspect of this misrule of law causing economic marginalisation was the micro-level deaccumulation effected through low monetary awards given by the Authority to landowners in contravention of the statutes and the Indian Constitution, both of which mandate justifiable or ‘market value of the land’ as (LAA Part 3; Article 31a of the Indian Constitution). For seven villages in stage one, monetary compensation ranged between Rs.2–9 per square yard (Rs.9,683–43,572.96 per acre) (Singh 2011), which was 8–10% of the lower range of the rate at which the Authority was leasing out ‘developed’ plots for industrial and residential uses between 1979–1981.¹¹ For these villages, the monetary compensation seems to have ranged between Rs.50 and 225.75 per square yard,¹² which was adjudged by appellate courts to be lower than – sometimes only 20% of – the actual market rates prevailing in the vicinity.¹³ Similarly, for stages two and three village farmlands that were acquired in the 2000s, the compensation rate remained 8–10% of the basic rate on which Noida was leasing out developed plots (CAG 2021).¹⁴ By the mid-2000s, given the surge in the real-estate sector, the actual lease rates commanded for residential and industrial usage were often 1–4 times higher than this basic floor rate (CAG 2021, Appendix 4.1). Therefore, some major implications of the misrule of law were as follows: (a) original monetary awards received by a majority of

¹¹Source: Anil Kr. Sharma vs. The Union of India, 2000; <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1800521/>; accessed 3 September 2021.

¹²See Noida vs. Bahadur and Others, 2014; [https://www.casemine.com/judgement/in/56b49318607dba348f00496a](https://www.casemine.com/judgement/in/56b49318607dba348f00496a;); accessed 8 September 2021

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Also see Gajraj & Others Vs. State of UP & Others, 2011; <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/195081303/>; accessed 9th November 2021.

local peasantry remained paltry compared to actual market prices, leading to their economic marginalisation; (b) landless scheduled caste households did not receive any compensation for losing out as tenants or farm wage labourers;¹⁵ (c) only a small section of well-informed landowners could successfully challenge awards in appellate courts. A perception of having been economically exploited (*loote-pite log* in local lexicon) by the coercion of the state is still rife among landowning peasants.¹⁶

Moreover, the misrule of law also applies to the non-monetary part of compensation. Faced with stiff political resistance from farmers on low compensation awards from the 1980s onwards¹⁷, the Authority sought to provide housing plots – to households that accepted the monetary compensation – under a ‘villager quota’ (17.5 percent) in planned residential schemes (Singh 2011). But eligible farmers were now required to pay ‘allotment rates’ for ‘developed plots’, ranging from Rs. 3,700–29,000 per square metre *if* their applications were successful. Such schemes were hopelessly delayed and limited in availability. Other modes of compensation included a 5% quota for locals in all industrial employments, preferential employment within the Authority itself (Rajput 2019), and a 10% ‘*kisan* [farmer] quota’ in local educational institutions (CAG 2021). However, the Authority rarely maintained compliance with any of these stipulations (CAG 2021). The villager quota in the housing plot scheme was abrogated after March 1997; for all acquisitions after this timeline, the Authority agreed to give developed plots measuring 5% of total lands acquired from a household (Kaushika 2011).

We now turn to socio-political aspects of this phenomenon of economic marginalisation. Several analyses of Indian urbanisation in critical agrarian and urban studies have documented rural marginalisation in terms of de-peasantisation through forced land acquisitions (e.g. Goldman 2011; Levien 2012). However, the largely economic substance of such analyses seldom allows them to theorise accompanying social and cultural exclusions – which are emphasised in the analytics of relationality (Lancione 2016), terms of mixity (Massey 1994), or difference/othering (Soja 2008) in theories of marginality. Space as an analytical category is often under-theorised in the agrarian questions on labour and non-farm work (Watts 2009 being an exception) and when it is introduced, the standard structural assumption is that peasant dispossession leads to outmigration to urban slums (e.g. Araghi 2009). In India, this lacuna is conspicuous in the treatment of the residual category of ‘urban village’, which is still a peripheral object of attention (exceptions include Datta 2004; Cowan 2015, 2018; Sheth 2017). In Noida, dispossessed peasants still recognise their villages as caste spaces of demographic and social eminence; for instance, *Barola*, the largest village of the township since the 1970s, is a ‘Gujar village’; Sarfabad and Sorkha are ‘Yadav villages’, and Chhalera is a ‘Chauhan village’. Yet, being a case that partly redefines Araghi’s observation of a global scale ‘de-ruralisation’ linked to ‘hyper urbanization’ through out-migration (2009, 113), approximately 40% of the million-plus population of Noida is reportedly living in such villages (Nath 2016).¹⁸ Much like the other towns in the NCR, Noida’s hyper-demographic growth is due to the large-scale in-migration of rural residents from poorer peripheries. The influx of migrants from

¹⁵Interview; 24 June 2019, *Sarfabad*; Interview; 22 June 2019, *Nithari*

¹⁶Singh (2012) offers a similar conclusion based on his analysis of 525 judgements by appellate courts in Delhi.

¹⁷On political protests against land acquisition and compensation, see Noida’s Journey to Hell and Back, *India Today*, 22 January 2014; Noida Authority to Award 5% Land to Farmers, *Indian Express*, 26 August 2011.

¹⁸However, others have estimated this figure to be 48% by the early 2000s (Potter and Kumar 2004).

rural hinterlands has taken place in phases and forms, representing the arrival of various ethnic and cultural groups in the changing economic geography of the township. Evidence of in-migration has been available since 1976 (Das et al. 1979) when such migration was restricted to villages close to the industrial units and transportation hubs in Sectors 1–10 (Dubey 2018). Villages such as *Nayabans*, *Harola*, *Atta*, and *Bhangel* were the first to attract migrants from the nearby districts of UP. More sizeable in-migration to local villages began in the late 1980s. In Nithari village (sector 31), for example, Gujar and Brahmin landlords recalled that their first tenants were migrants from North Bihar and eastern UP who trickled in by 1986–1987 and worked as tractor-drivers or labourers in housing construction in the nearby residential sectors. But by 1998–2000, this village saw the second wave of migration involving Bengali-speaking poor migrants, who worked on construction sites, street hawking, and as domestic helps.

In Holston's study of Jardim das Camélias, the misuse of law around land often involved 'a search for a group's origin to justify and debunk claims on lands', that is, 'struggles over the meaning of history' (2008, 204). Hansen (2005) has also argued that political contestations of authority and sovereignty in urban India involve struggles over local histories and cultures. In Noida, the land-acquisition process has spurred a politics of response in the form of a struggle between the state and local peasants over the epistemology of separating 'farmland' from the 'non-farm/habitation lands'. Since 1908, the colonial state circumscribed rural habitations in and around Delhi (i.e. *abadis*) through a red line (*lal dora*) on cadastral maps¹⁹ and granted residents exemptions on (land) revenue, house tax, and building regulations applicable in urban areas (Lewis and Victor 1958). *Abadis* were usually not surveyed in Haryana, Delhi, and UP, but *lal dora* was often extended in the first two states for burgeoning villages (Chandhoke 1990; Cowan 2015; *The Pioneer* 2013). Statutorily, once notified, 'urbanisable villages' are embedded into the urban Master Plan/Development Plan (ECLD 2007, 14–15). The Authority insists that under the 'original notification' of 1976, all local villages are vested in Noida, and hence villagers cannot enjoy the customary exception of unplanned auto-construction inside *lal doras* (Noida Building Regulation 2010).²⁰ Villagers from across class-caste divisions have legally challenged this regulatory claim successfully²¹ because *abadis*, which were neither mapped nor circumscribed in 1976, have always been outside of the industrial development area for which their farmlands were acquired. In other words, the *abadis* are a hybrid space now wherein the state's *de jure* sovereignty is resisted by ex-peasants through auto-construction and land use claims (following Hansen 2005); there were over 4000 cases of *abadi* litigations before 1997, including those on auto-construction and encroachments (Singh 2010). This politics of response has made villages cramped socio-spatial and cultural enclosures, with inadequate social goods including banks, schools, and open and recreational spaces, within a planned urban-industrial city.

Now we turn to describe the third key aspect of economic marginalisation, that is, how this politics of response against the local state has generated, in turn, an inner

¹⁹Report of the Expert Committee on Lal Dora and Extended Lal Dora in Delhi (ECLD), Ministry of Urban Development, January 2007; <https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/laldora.pdf>; accessed 1st November 2021.

²⁰Available at https://www.noidaauthorityonline.in/site/writereaddata/siteContent/201902021236542020NOIDA_Building_Regulation_English_1.pdf

²¹See Ajit Singh Chauhan vs. State of UP, 2018, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/103972184/>; accessed 12 December 2020.

world of economic informality and social and cultural exclusion. Holston insists in his study that ‘in a misrule of law, all parties – dominant and dominated further their strategic interests’ (2008, 4). A primary reason for the contradictory logic in the agency of villagers is a novel cultural premium that they have come to place on their property-based native identity vis-à-vis the ‘outsiders/in-migrants’. The rich substratum of former peasants from the dominant castes in the area (*Gujar, Yadav, Brahmin, and Rajput*) and some OBC (other backward castes) members, owning 50 *bighas* or more land (1 *bigha* \approx 0.23 hectares), have historically formed the nucleus of the *abadis*. Non-dominant caste clusters have often been set outwards from this core of the village according to their status closeness or distance from the dominant caste. But members of the dominant castes have now turned into ‘petty-rentier capitalists’ (following Kumar 1996) by constructing on their homestead land parcels multi-room hostels with shared toilets (Rs.1500–2000 or \$20–25 per room per month) to lease to in-migrants. A larger group of hitherto small peasants from the scheduled and lower castes are now ‘petty bourgeois’ landlords, constructing 5–10 room set hostels on their homestead parcels.²² *Kuchha* (temporary) and semi-*kuchha* rooms (50–75 square feet) with asbestos roofs form the bottom of this rental market, with rents between Rs.500–1000 (\$6–12) per month per room. Colloquially called the *nichala tabka* (lowest strata of middle class), migrant workers earning between Rs. 10,000–15,000 per month live in such spaces. High demand for affordable accommodation and vending spaces – with land rates ranging between Rs. 15,000–1,00,00/yard in villages (in 2019) – shapes the relationship between migratory workers and their landlords on one hand and the latter’s conflictual relation with the Authority on the other. Any regulation by the Authority of informal housing market and vending spaces in urban villages is against local owners’ interests. Further, although all migrants are ‘outsiders’ to the locals, richer landlords are likely to recognise and hierarchise (in Bourdieu’s classificatory sense) poorer migrant tenants as culturally ‘defiling’ their villages. Connecting structuralist conceptions on race and class-related marginality with the post-structuralist notion of ‘othering’ and ‘abjection’, the geographer David Sibley has shown how naming ‘abject others’ as threatening group-based consciousness of purity and order, and distancing ‘others’ from oneself enables claims of social distinction (1995, 8–9). Evidence of this cultural logic to separate oneself spatially from that of one’s tenants is to be found in many local testimonies through the frame of ‘lifestyle’. Mr. Ambavat, an affluent *Gujar* landlord was explaining his reasons for shifting out of his native village as follows:

The village was not suiting me at all. Just opposite where I lived, my neighbours were renting 20 rooms in a 200-yard plot. All the heat from those rooms, the pungent smell of tenants frying spices; those people from outside are from lower strata, squabbling among themselves every day. Their lifestyles are different: I want you to experience that *mahaul* [ambiance]—that smell from the drain, people emptying things right into the drain. Even when cleaned, the smell continues. Anyone willing to pay Rs. 6000–7000 or more, why would he stay in the village? In that *gandaji* [filth]?²³

²²For instance, in Nithari village, an informal market has sprung up in the settlement area occupied by potter-caste households. Many lower and scheduled caste villagers seem to have gone into self-owned petty businesses, such as tailoring, and grocery shops to bamboo-wood selling.

²³Interview; 27 June, 2019, Nithari village.

The legal and urban planning processes, Lefebvre's 'representations of space', with which the state acquired most farmlands in Noida have involved deviations from the law through the last four decades, reproducing an uneven economic space of legal and extra-legal practices and social divisions. Experiencing expropriation, a section of richer local peasants has mobilised their officially 'assigned otherness' in terms of local domicile, occupational and property-based homogeneity to challenge the state's misrule of law and everyday regulations legally and politically. We have conceptualised this challenge as a specific 'politics of response' of the peasantry to its economic marginalisation. The structural conceptions of power and margins (Araghi 2009; Lancione 2016; Soja 1996) serve us well in understanding how the coercion of the state has shaped experiences of economic dispossession, deaccumulation, and territorial enclosures of urban villages as a 'marginal space'. It is in this sense that we think of local farmers' resistance to their dispossession as 'counter-hegemonic' (following Soja 1996, 87). Thinking with Lancione's concept of 'relationality', the spatial politics of the local farmers belies a simple division of 'centre-periphery', 'urban-rural' and 'conservative-radical' politics (pace Araghi 2009). At the same time, within the peripheries of urban villages, expropriated rural landowners themselves seek to make the most of their locational advantages for re-accumulation, while attempting to marginalise poorer tenants culturally and spatially. Therefore, we do not think that the nature of their marginalisation approximates the experience of 'precarity' (Varghese and Kumar 2022, 29). Instead, it is a more layered process with the juxtaposition of an extractive state apparatus dispossessing peasants economically, the resultant politics of response led by a section of the rich peasantry, who are also monetising their remaining property in hyper urbanised villages, and a teeming migrant lower middle-class tenants from whom the resident-peasant class differentiates through distinct cultural classifications. Taken together, it is a more nuanced process that produces graded internal marginalities and its own form of varied politics.

5. An inner world of segregation: cultural marginalisation and politics of reproduction in the *Jhuggis*

Moving away from the economic marginalisation and politics of response in the villages, the Noida *jhuggis* portray a very different expression of marginality, which we have conceptualised as another sub-level of cultural marginalisation and a politics of reproduction. However, as indicated in Section 2, we do not claim this to be the only form of marginalisation. Therefore, we will begin with a brief description of the spatial segregation of the *jhuggis* that the structural processes of city-making have brought about, and a fleeting politics of response (though much subdued compared to the villages), before turning to cultural marginalisation aspects.

Broadly, three types of *jhuggi* clusters can be found in Noida. First, large settlements in the industrial areas, covering sectors 4–10, 12, 14, and 16–19. These clusters are among the oldest, some even dating back to the 1980s, and house industrial labourers. Second, relatively smaller and newer clusters in several urbanised sectors or at the peripheries of villages, providing comparatively low-cost (than the industrial area clusters) residences for construction labourers. Over the decades, both types have transformed into *pucca* (permanent) housing. On average, a single cluster of the first type typically has

1,000–1,500 individual *jhuggis*, accommodating around 5,000 people, whereas the second type would have 500–700 *jhuggis* accommodating 2,500–3,000 people. A single *jhuggi*, in either cluster, is usually occupied by a family of four or five, sharing a public toilet with at least six to seven other *jhuggis*. The third type, however, are rudimentary *kuchha* (temporary) living sheds put up by those relatively new in the city, who engage mostly in menial and/or completely unskilled work and cannot even afford a *jhuggi* elsewhere. These clusters are relatively less common, usually put up just on the side of a road or pavement.

Given such differential degrees of segregation, fleeting instances of a politics of response can be occasionally discerned, subject to an assemblage of factors such as a cluster's age and type, numerical strength, and evidence of residence. E.g. in the industrial area, the *jhuggi* clusters are numerically dominant (anecdotally amounting to over 0.1–0.15 million residents), are *pucca* sites dating back to the 1980s–1990s, have a veneer of legitimacy upon receiving electricity bills (i.e. proof of residence), and most long-term residents have other identity documents registered in Noida as well. As Chandrama Prasad, a migrant from Bihar living in Noida since 1983, asserts:

Maybe the *jhuggis* stand on *kabze ki zameen* [occupied land] and are illegal. But are the people illegal too? It is us who vote, and elect the MP/MLA. The Authority has recognised us by installing electricity metres and issuing ration cards. How can we be illegal?²⁴

The type of each cluster – *pucca*, *semi-pucca*, or *kuchha* also shapes this response. Having a *pucca jhuggi* and associated recognition from the state translates to a sense of permanency, security, and an assertion of a claim to the place of residence. Rakhee, a housemaid, who lives in the cluster adjacent to *Barola* village, asserts:

Things were really bad when we had *kuchha jhuggis*, but we made them *pucca* almost a decade back. The situation has been a lot better since then. Now everyone has electricity meters and receive electricity bills. Once a *jhuggi* is made *pucca* and has an electricity connection, chances of the Authority demolishing it are remote.²⁵

Alongside, the extent of 'exposure' (Garrido 2021), i.e. the degree to which a *jhuggi* cluster is interspersed in different (rural or urbanised) surroundings, is also a determining factor. Consider the defiant response of Madan Prasad, a migrant from Bihar, living in the industrial area clusters that are largely self-contained and independent with minimal 'exposure'. Prasad asserts:

Today the Authority calls us encroachers. But where was the city when we came here? It has grown around us; we are its original inhabitants. It is the city that has separated itself from us. We never separated from it.²⁶

Prasad indicates a sense of being marginalised in the eyes of the state but challenges it by invoking an 'original' association, a claim of having made the city their own through hard work and contribution to its development. Yet, it is a claim tempered by 'exposure' elsewhere. For example, despite living in a *pucca* cluster with address proof, Rakhee (quoted above) continues:

²⁴Interview, 17 June 2019, Sector 6.

²⁵Interview, 28 June 2019, *Barola* village.

²⁶Interview, 19 June 2019, Sector 8.

Our *jhuggis* are on one side [of an open drain that separates the *jhuggis* and the village]. But the land on which our *jhuggis* stand today used to be a *shamshan* (funeral site) and is considered inauspicious by the villagers. They consider our presence to be cursed just because we are on this land. We will never belong to the city.²⁷

Contrast this further with the roadside *kuchha* clusters, which are completely 'exposed' to the urban surroundings, house a smaller number of migrants who are relatively new to the city, and hardly allow any scope for response politics. Lakshmi, living in a *kuchha jhuggi* on a public road in Sector 62, laments:

Today I am on this road, being shoved from here to there, fleeing from the Authority. I can't even say I live here, as my *jhuggi* can be demolished tomorrow. My *jhuggi* is a *kuchha* one. It has no security; demolishing it takes no time. There is no privacy either, I have to bathe in full public view, just behind a tin sheet. The city people say we are filthy and spreading dirt in their neighbourhood. But can we even say?²⁸

These are not entirely new observations. In fact, poor migrant communities' state of 'temporary permanence' (Das 2011) – i.e. long-term search for some degree of legitimacy in the state's eyes – have come to be seen as a durable feature of the urban landscape in 'global' cities (Garrido 2021). What further complicates this search is the paramount material attribute of their marginality. Fed by the fragmentation of wage labour (Bernstein 2006), i.e. the diffusion of unstable, part-time, short-term, low-pay, and dead-end employment at the bottom of the occupational structure and concomitant exploitation and domination through insecure, informal, and oppressive forms of reproduction (Pattenden 2018), the migrant communities' temporal horizon is shortened as their social horizon is occluded by the twin obstacles of endemic unemployment and rampant precarity (Wacquant 2016, 1082). In this sense, there is an observable overlap between the class and spatial characters of the *jhuggi* dwellers, simultaneously associated with individuals' perceptions of residential reputation, economic precarity, and territorial stigma. This reputation, as authors such as Otero, Méndez, and Link (2022) have demonstrated in the context of Latin American urbanisation, represents a symbolic dimension of class stratification that can amplify preexisting socio-spatial inequalities. The scholarship on urban marginality (particularly in the global North and Latin America) is also broadly supportive of the argument that spatial structure reinforces class inequality, occasionally mitigated by state structure and policies (Otero, Méndez, and Link 2022).

However, there remains a further degree of complexity embedded in these structural characterisations of marginality. This is particularly indicative in the *variations* evident in the above-presented accounts of Noida *jhuggi* residents about their individual experiences, ranging from a rejection of the 'othering' in the eyes of the state (and other dominant groups) to a hapless submission to the same, i.e. gradations in the politics of response. But these gradations cannot be just assumed as different degrees of economic precarity, i.e. how an individual's social class leads to differential perceptions of residential reputation and stigma. Instead, we argue that there is something inherent to the spatial structure and organisation that surpasses individuals' class positions; specifically, in their social and ethnic positions which, perhaps, goes beyond class composition. Arguing so is neither to say that the spatial structure in itself produces favourable or unfavourable living

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Interview, 12 January 2020, Sector 62.

conditions nor is it to use the language of space to help recast socio-economic problems as ethnic problems and class antagonism as cultural tensions. Rather, as authors such as Tissot (2007) and Slater (2013) have argued elsewhere, on top of the supra-level structural segregation, the spatial organisation can reinforce residents' prior 'good' or 'bad' social positions. This is what we turn our attention next to, demonstrating the (rarely examined) internal reworkings of social boundaries amongst the migrant communities, which we have conceptualised as cultural marginalisation. Such reworking internally reproduces the 'othering' that dominant social groups inflict on marginal communities, meted out to weaker sub-groups within the latter itself. The key distinction is, however, that while there usually is a spatial separation between the dominant and marginal communities within a city space, there are no immediate spatial distinctions inside the *jhuggis*, and yet layers of cultural marginalisation via a politics of reproduction shape everyday lives. The reproduction takes shape via four overlapping axes: *family*, *region/ethnicity*, *caste*, and *religion*.

The family is the most fundamental unit of separation, as family members tend to occupy around six to eight adjacent *jhuggis* in most lanes in each cluster. These family-based mini clusters reflect the earliest settlement patterns (especially in the industrial area), as migrant labourers constructed makeshift sheds upon arrival and, once somewhat settled, brought their immediate family members over. With time these families grew and spilled over into adjacent plots by building separate *jhuggis*, thereby giving rise to mini-family clusters. Money lending among family members is a common affair, as is sharing of food and other resources. Vikhu Prasad, a Bihari migrant and resident of sector 8, tells us:

Today my *jhuggi* is *pucca* and has three floors, my son stays on the floor above with his family, and my grandson is on the top floor. The *jhuggi* behind is my brother's, but it is still *kuchha*. The two *pucca* *jhuggis* on either side are my in-laws' and my cousin's. My cousin's daughter and her husband live in the *kuchha* *jhuggi* behind my in-laws, having rented it from them a few years back. This is just like our village, where we all stayed together as one big family, and helped each other in times of crisis.

While not every *jhuggi* is part of a family cluster – especially those built recently, rented out, or sold – they are very common across the entire industrial area. Relations between adjacent or nearby family clusters can range from cordial to acerbic. Families that are bigger and/or are economically stronger tend to dominate their immediate neighbourhood, facilitating access to resources for one another (e.g. reserving places in queues to collect water or ensuring family members get priority access, collecting ration for each other, etc.). Other nearby families, especially if smaller in size or economically weaker, maintain a cordial relationship with the dominating family for the occasional preferential treatment. On the other hand, nonadjacent family clusters usually have a more suspicious attitude towards one another; fights commonly break out over a multitude of everyday issues. Lakshmi Yadav, a septuagenarian migrant lady from Bihar, explains these family cluster-based struggles rather evocatively, emphasising how her family *owns* the space they live in:

I have lived in Noida for three decades, having joined my husband in the 1990s. There was no dearth of space then, and jobs were also available. We brought several relatives over, and all the *jhuggis* around ours belong to them. I know almost everyone in this cluster but hardly interact with anyone outside my family. I'm proud to see this lane belonging to our family.

Many of the other residents are intimidated by us. They sometimes allow us to collect water first, hoping to be in our good books, or just avoid us as they can't win a fight with my family. *Yeh humari jayga hain* [this is our place].²⁹

The family segregations commonly scale up to village or even regional levels. Regional/ethnic segregation, in fact, is the starkest among all the four axes, as lane after lane in every cluster is associated with the residents' original place of domicile. At the highest level, the segregation is state-specific: *Bangali mohalla*, *Bihari mohalla*, *Odiya mohalla*, etc. [*mohalla*/locality of people from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa]. Depending on a *mohalla's* size, the segregation can be *zilla* [district], sub-*zilla* [block], or village-based. The following is a conversation with *Ananda Sarkar*, a Bengali migrant, giving a meticulous description of the numerous intersecting narrow lanes within a Sector 10 cluster.

We are sitting in Sector 10 *Bangali mohalla*, which stretches from the eastern edge of the cluster to the *bazaar* near the main road, comprising of 600–700 *jhuggis*, all occupied by Bengalis. But there are many sub-divisions. For example, the two parallel lanes starting from behind the medicine shop belong to people from *Malda*, the next lane to people from *Dinajpur*, and the one behind to *Kochbihar* people. So, this entire area is a concentration of north Bengalis. On the other side, there are lanes for people from *Midnapore* and *24-Parganas*, the latter being the largest, where every five to ten *jhuggis* refer to themselves by their block or even village names – *Baduria jhuggi*, *Aamdanga jhuggi*, *Mirhati jhuggi*, *Jirat jhuggi*, etc.³⁰

Madan Sharma, a Bihari migrant, provides a similar description of the *Bihari mohalla* in Sector 4.

Most people in this cluster are from the Darbhanga area [a district in northern Bihar]. Even some of the lanes are commonly referred to by the village name where the residents originally hailed from, so there's *Baheri basti* [slum], *Kiratpur jhuggi*, etc. Near the outer edge, there's an *Odiya* colony and some families from *Jharkhand* too. People from the same region tend to stick together. It is quite common to treat others with suspicion.³¹

Next, as the entire industrial area sectors are mostly Hindu-dominated (barring Sectors 8 and 9), caste segregations also overlap with family and regional segregation. The continuous cycle of family members occupying adjacent *jhuggis* or renting out to people from their village community has reproduced the caste networks of their erstwhile domicile. Individual alleys within a *jhuggi* cluster are also commonly referred to by caste names. For example, Ananda Sarkar (quoted above), continues:

In sector 10 *jhuggis*, especially the central part, you will find mostly *Haldars*; on the left, it's the *Mandals*. On the main roadside are several lanes of high caste *kayasthas* – *Sarkar*, *Ghosh* and *Pal*; the rest are *Naskars*.³²

In Sectors 3 and 7, there are several clusters of migrants from Orissa, and those areas are commonly referred to as *Kansari* and *Karua mohalla*;³³ a cluster of migrants from

²⁹Interview, 3 July 2019, Sector 3.

³⁰Interview, 26 June 2019, Sector 10. *Malda*, *Dinajpur* and *Kochbihar* are central/northern districts in West Bengal, whereas *Midnapore* and *24-Parganas* are southern districts. *Baduria* and *Aamdanga* are blocks in North 24-Pargana district, while *Mirhati* and *Jirat* are villages.

³¹Interview, 30 June 2019, Sector 4.

³²Interview, 26 June 2019, Sector 10. *Mandals* and *Naskars* are usually scheduled castes. *Kayastha* is an upper caste group, and *Halders* can be *Kayastha* or *Brahmin*. Though it's highly unusual to find a *Brahmin* among the migrants.

³³*Kansari* is an upper caste, while *Karua* is a scheduled caste.

Jharkhand in Sector 5 is known as the *Mochi basti*,³⁴ a few lanes in Sector 2 as the *Sardar basti*³⁵ and so on. Broadly, lower caste clusters are usually found concentrated on one side and are openly referred to by their caste names. However, the largest and most well-defined caste segregation is maintained with the *Valmiki*³⁶ *basti*, which occupies almost half of Sector 9. The *basti* has a few hundred *jhuggis* and a population more than a thousand, with most residents working as cleaners/sanitation workers. It is physically separated from the rest of the Sector 9 cluster by an intersecting thoroughfare, thereby creating separate entry and exit points. Hardly any *jhuggi* has more than one floor; a larger proportion is still *kuccha*, and even the *pucca* ones are sparingly painted or are just bare brick constructions (compared to the rest of the area). The concentration of the *Valmikis* and their starker segregation is not atypical and conforms to a broad social trend of *Valmikis* having a high migration rate to urban areas due to their historical background of being employed as cleaners/sweepers in municipalities and the railways since colonial times (Suzuki 2023). The extent of their spatial segregation (alongside other low castes such as *Harijan* and *Chamar*) has also been widely noted in other parts of UP (e.g. in the cities of Lucknow and Benaras; Lee 2017) as well as in several other Indian cities (Deshpande and Newman 2007; Dupont 2004; Ganguly 2018a, 2018b; Thorat et al. 2015; Thorat and Attewell 2007; Vithayathil and Singh 2012). Furthermore, The *Valmikis* historically have also been known to experience the poorest circumstances even among the lower castes, especially in terms of education, employment, and housing (Suzuki 2017).

The *Valmiki basti* segregation is again reproduced in the Muslim *mohalla*, covering a large part of Sectors 8 and 9. The cluster has taken shape around a big mosque, one of the oldest in the area, and is separated by an intersecting road on one side and a main road on the other, along with a string of meat shops and restaurants dotted along the edges. Like the *Valmiki basti*, it also has its separate entry-exit points. However, the Muslim *mohalla* is economically better off than the *Valmiki basti*. Most *jhuggis* are *pucca*, have multiple floors, and television and other household goods are commonly found. Based on anecdotal conversations, it would also seem that comparatively more residents here are self-employed, running meat shops, small eateries, and tailoring businesses. At least anecdotally, Muslim migration to Noida seems to be among the oldest, as several elderly respondents recall the first wave of migrants to be largely comprised of Bihari Muslims. There also seems to be a particularly higher concentration of Muslim OBCs in the *mohalla* which replicates the broader trends of Muslim migration in UP-Bihar (Alam and Kumar 2019). Occupationally, Muslims formed a large proportion of the rural marginalised groups in the region such as peasants, landless labourers, and artisans (Ali and Sikand 2006), who were disproportionately affected by both the increasingly neoliberal economic policies as well as communal violence (Varma 2015). Given such historical migration patterns, it is not surprising to see the Muslim *mohalla* to be among the oldest and relatively well-organised settlements. Though not as large, Muslim quarters in other parts of the industrial area also replicate similar segregation from surrounding Hindu quarters.

³⁴*Mochi* is a low caste.

³⁵*Sardar* is another low caste.

³⁶A *Valmiki* is a *dalit* [untouchable], also known as *bhangis* (a racial slur). Traditionally, they have been confined to working as manual scavengers.

These spatial boundaries stand out in the industrial area *jhuggis* compared to the other two clusters, given the overall size and longevity of the former. However, albeit not as distinct, all four axes of segregation are discernible there too. In both clusters, the family and regional divisions are less prominent owing to the already restricted space and high demand. However, scattered pockets of family members or regional concentrations are quite common. On the other hand, the caste and religion profiles are much more homogeneous here. It is uncommon to find more than a handful of low-caste households in these clusters, usually pushed towards the edge; alternatively, there would be exclusively low-caste clusters. Finding a Muslim household is even more uncommon, and while there might be a few in the bigger (second category) clusters, there are hardly any in the roadside ones.

These spatial codings permeate into everyday social relations by mimicking the ‘othering’ usually meted out to minority groups in wider society, thus further intensifying the internal politics of reproduction. This phenomenon is aptly expressed by two frequently heard expressions in the *jhuggis*: *bhai-chara* [brotherly co-existence] and *bhed-bhaw* [discrimination]. *Jhuggi* residents, across all clusters, are eager to point out their *bhai-chara*, a peaceful cohabitation, as a mark of solidarity. Upon closer examination, it appears to be a survival strategy to sustain in a harsh and debilitating environment. There is significant cooperation and co-dependence among residents, ranging from sharing resources (including financial assistance), taking care of each other’s children, a shared camaraderie (particularly among women) to impromptu solidarity – i.e. a politics of response – in the face of any external threat (such as demolition drives). However, it is co-dependence out of necessity (as opposed to mutual acceptance) on which the *bhai-chara* is founded. This becomes clearer as one starts to unpack the layers of *bhed-bhaw* along all four axes of segregation, masked by the *bhai-chara* discourse. A *Valmiki* community figurehead, Bholeji, astutely captures this distinction:

Everyone talks of *bhai-chara*, but purely out of self-interest. If there is a demolition drive, they [upper-caste residents] need the *Valmiki* community to protest alongside. But such cooperation does not mean they treat us as equals. *Bhed-bhaw* is rampant, and you have to understand someone’s *sur* [tone] and *swabhab* [nature] to realise this. For example, they rely on me to speak to my community members on any issue, but they are never polite and speak to me in a commanding tone, and that too from standing outside my *jhuggi*. No higher caste person will ever step in.³⁷

Understanding the *sur*/tone and *swabhab*/nature lies at the heart of the complex and continuous *bhed-bhaw* cycles that impact *jhuggi* lives. Large family clusters can be discriminatory, but the other three dimensions run much deeper. For example, caste and religious segregation stay implicit in the readily offered narrative about cleanliness everywhere. The following conversation with Sanaka Devi – a resident of the roadside *jhuggi* cluster in Sector 62 – aptly encapsulates this sentiment:

A few low-caste families are here, mostly from the *Harijan* and *Valmiki* communities. Neither do they keep themselves clean, nor their *jhuggis*. Their food habits are dirty too. After all, we are *Hindus*, but they are *as dirty as the Muslims* [emphasis added]. We prefer to keep away from them and never enter their *jhuggis*.³⁸

³⁷Interview, 30 June 2019, Sector 9.

³⁸Interview, 2 January 2020, Sector 62.

Bholeji offered a more detailed account:

We will never be invited to upper-caste weddings or any social functions, even by those we meet daily. Their children will not be allowed to play with ours. The few upper-caste people who are friendly with us will be treated with suspicion too. Our only strength here is in numbers, but in most other clusters outside the industrial area, there are only a handful of low-caste families, and their situation is even worse. That's why there are some low-caste-only jhuggi clusters in the city.³⁹

The segregation experienced by Muslim families is no different. Shabnam Begum – a sexagenarian Muslim woman in Sector 17 – narrates her experience that resonates across the city:

We are Muslims. We might be living next door to a Hindu for 20 years, but that does not change anything. There is some cordiality in everyday dealings, but it ends there. We do not attend each other's festivals, or social occasions or share food. At least in the industrial area, there is a big Muslim cluster around the mosque, but it is even more difficult in clusters like ours. There are very few Muslim families, and we are always looked at with suspicion. My family has been living here since the cluster was formed, but these days no Muslim family will even find a place here.⁴⁰

Within the Muslim community, the *bhed bhaw* seems relatively subdued, but it does take a regional form, whereby Bengali Muslims are conspicuously seen as Bangladeshi infiltrators. The discourse is often about the rightful Muslims vs. the unlawful Muslims, with the latter being seen as giving a bad name to the former. This mirrors a larger sentiment against the Bengalis. As the majority of migrants – especially in the industrial area *jhuggis* – are from Bihar and eastern UP sharing similar linguistic and cultural dispositions, regional factionalism is relatively subdued amongst them. But it assumes a much starker form against the Bengali migrants (who tend to be relatively newer to the city compared to their UP-Bihar counterparts). Sentiments against Bengalis are predicated on a multitude of elements – language, music, festivities, food, etc. Rukmini Devi, a migrant woman from eastern UP – residing in a Sector 77 cluster for almost fifteen years – complains about her Bengali neighbours:

Some of them have been here as long as I have. But still, they don't belong here. They always talk in *Bangla* amongst themselves, which we do not understand. They also always eat non-vegetarian food. We are *shuddh* [pure] Hindus, and cannot tolerate the smell of fish and meat. Some of them also sing or play music in the evening. their instruments are strange. But above all, they just keep amongst themselves. I don't trust them.⁴¹

Interestingly, a juxtaposition of the regional, caste, and religious marginalisation also takes shape with the Bengali identity at its centre. In Sector 10, several Bengali residents claim the space as *no different from their high-caste Hindu neighbours*. Nikhil Haldar, a daily wage labourer, passionately argues:

Yes, Bengalis are looked at with suspicion. But we belong here just like everyone else. The problem, actually, is the Bhangis [the Valmiki community]. The Bhangi basti is adjacent to ours; they are all alcoholic, dirty people. But this gives us Bengalis a bad name. I sing

³⁹Interview, 30 June 2019, Sector 9.

⁴⁰Interview, 3 January 2020, Sector 17.

⁴¹Interview, 27 December 2019, Sector 77.

keertan [a form of devotional music] in the *Kali* temple. Who is a better Hindu than me? It pains me to be neighbours with the *bhangis*.⁴²

In other pockets of the Bengali community, the blame is squarely put on the Bengali Muslims. Ajay Naskar, a resident of the Sector 5 cluster, is rather explicit and acerbic in his characterisation:

We are the proper [Hindu] Bengalis. But we get a bad name due to the Muslim Bengalis. They are traitors, thieves, robbers, drug addicts, women traffickers, and even terrorists. We, the Hindu Bengalis, do not want to have any relation with them; there is no intermixing of any kind. But still, they give us a bad name.⁴³

Essentially, the politics of reproduction takes shape around the *jhuggi* residents deflecting the indifference and insults from the state and dominant classes to their weaker (i.e. caste, ethnic, and religious minorities) neighbours. This symbolic boundary construction (Bourdieu 1984) by *jhuggi* residents via the cycles of *bhed-bhaw*, *sur*, and *swabhab* – does not aim at the oppressor, symbolically mimicking the dominant groups' distinctions instead, hurling the same insults and slurs that had made them suffer too. As Contreras (2017, 670) points out elsewhere, 'these deflections try to accomplish two goals ... first, to redirect attention away from themselves; second, to blur the boundaries between themselves and the dominant group or oppressor. In this way, defectors can perceive their rise on a moral plane, a rise that dissociates them from the blemished space'.

Lastly, while we primarily posit this inner world of segregation as a process of cultural marginalisation, the dynamics of material reproduction in these spaces – especially given the economic precariousness – also raise questions about the politics of class relations and possible routes to improving labour's conditions through collective action (in the way Pattenden 2018 has demonstrated in case of southern India). It is a question we have taken up in detail elsewhere (Das and Kumar 2023). It is also imperative to understand that the shortened temporal horizon of the *jhuggi* residents provides limited opportunity for a class formation as distinctive as in the villages. However, it is also their precariousness that has led to some degree of response-politics – especially around the demand for rehabilitation and regularisation from the Authority – resulting in periodic attempts at unionising the residents, albeit with limited success. Das (2011) has described these attempts in detail, the earliest of which dates back to the 1980s and several subsequent ones, especially post-2000, but all of which are now defunct. However, in the last decade or so, the *Noida Jhuggi-Jhopdi Samyukta Punarvas Manch* (Noida Jhuggi Jhopdi Collective Rehabilitation Association) – a CITU⁴⁴-led platform – has emerged as a (somewhat) collective front. It periodically organises demonstrations in the city and submits regular appeals to the Authority about rehabilitation matters, regularisation of electricity connections, water supply, etc.⁴⁵

Overall, such conditions of everyday socio-economic precarity, the absence of any concrete rehabilitation policy, regular eviction threats, and the wider structural-spatial segregation have contributed to the homogeneous characterisation of *jhuggi* communities as a marginal class in mainstream Indian urban studies literature. We do not counter such

⁴²Interview, 29 December 2019, Sector 26.

⁴³Interview, 21 June 2019, Sector 5.

⁴⁴Centre for Indian Trade Unions, the trade union wing of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPIM).

⁴⁵See Das and Kumar (2023) for further details on these aspects, as well as other instances of class solidarity in the *jhuggis*.

portrayals of a class boundary but argue that there is a more nuanced process of internal cultural 'othering' that an economic lens alone is insufficient to capture. Such a conceptualisation, on the one hand, has a parallel with Bernstein's (2006, 455) 'classes of labour', which demonstrates the fragmentation of labour across multiple sites of reproduction ('urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural wage employment and self-employment') as well as along lines of 'generation, gender, caste and ethnicity'. On the other, our portrayal of cultural marginalisation and politics of reproduction also concurs with an emerging scholarship that demonstrates caste-based residential segregation to be more pronounced than socio-economic segregation in urban India (Sidhwani 2015; Singh, Vithayathil, and Pradhan 2019; Vithayathil and Singh 2012), as well as recent findings by urbanism scholars elsewhere in the global South such as Otero *et al.*, who argue that: 'although individuals' social class produced significant differences in perceptions of residential reputation and stigma, the differences between social classes were not as marked as expected. Indeed, our ... estimates indicated that social class loses statistical significance as a predictor of perceived residential reputation and stigma' (2022, 650). The nuanced mediations of spatial organisation is thus a critical process, a continuous production of *marginality at the margins*, whereby Lancione's (2016) 'relationality analytic' and Soja's (1996) postmodernist critiques find newer expressions via fluid displacement-replacement of the centre-periphery politics.

6. Conclusion

As many postcolonial scholars have argued, to define *a priori* what margins are (from the centre) without a committed engagement with the people and spaces therein ends up containing the heterogeneity of the margins into exclusivist theoretical siloes (Lancione 2016; Rose 1997; Spivak 1990). In this paper we have tried to describe how urban margins emerge in a graded form due to their mediation by an overlapping set of supra – (structural-spatial) and sub-level (economic and cultural) relationalities. Specifically, we see these relationalities taking shape around two kinds of politics at the margins: a politics of response (challenging the misrule of law originating at the supra-level) and a politics of reproduction (replicating or even mimicking supra-level hierarchies internally). We see a strong expression of the former among the erstwhile peasant communities of Noida, who have experienced prolonged economic marginalisation through land dispossession effected by the state and associated structural forces that have used land for a real-estate and service sector-driven urban economy instead of the purported goal of industrialisation. On the one hand, our analysis confirms views of Lefebvre (1991), Akram-Lodhi *et al.* (2009b) and others who emphasise on how land distribution has emerged as a key resource for neoliberal capital accumulation through urban forms. But on the other hand, even if we assume that agriculture is redundant for capital accumulation at the world-historical level (Bernstein 2009), processes of rural land transfer at controlled rates remain at the centre of capital formation in non-farm sectors at national and regional scales, contributing to a prolonged process of economic marginalisation through gradual dispossession. Landowners in Noida (which comprises a significant number of prosperous OBCs and upper castes) have thus *responded* to their marginality by remobilising ascribed identities of castes, domicile, and property-ownership – in ways that are reminiscent of the 'new farmers' movement' (Brass 1995) – to resist the Authority's land and urban governance

policies. But this is only one expression, as we witness a much different and graded process of cultural marginalisation in the *jhuggis*. These spaces are marked by an *inner world of segregation*, whereby exploitative social hierarchies are *reproduced* against those who are non-kinsmen, low-caste Hindus, Muslims, etc. The intersectional underpinnings of such spatial coding can effectively designate specific sub-communities as ‘unequal citizens’, such as the *valmiki/bhangis*, the *chamars*, the Bengali Muslims, and the Bhojpuri speakers. The relationalities involved in this process is much intriguing, as the structural-spatial forces that had originally brought about the marginalisation by pushing away the poor to the periphery, are being once again spatially reproduced amongst the marginalised – albeit in a much more condensed manner – whereby each sub-group claims the central position of power and pushes away their weaker sub-groups even further.

The vastly diverse and fragmented socioeconomic niches increasingly seen to constitute capitalistic forces in the global South – moving away from binary formulations of industrial capital vs. agriculture or formal vs. informal sector – are related by dialectical processes of surplus production, appropriation and investment, state regulation, and labour and self-exploitation (Bremen 2007; Corbridge et al. 2005). Describing these dialectics as a process of ‘graded informality’, Aga (2019) stresses that the ‘vulnerability to exploitation and oppression associated with different niches are not the same but are graded i.e. they map onto a gradient’ (Aga 2019, 1460). Similarly, the intense fragmentation within the margins can be seen to have been brought upon by a dialectical relationship between capitalist accumulation and social segregations, where each articulates the other; the structural-spatial marginalisation of the *jhuggis* exacerbates their internal fragmentation via a politics of reproduction on the one hand and has morphed into a response politics with new rural elites at the helm in the urban villages on the other. Aga further argues that such a graded experience makes it difficult, if not impossible, to presume a unity of interest within any given group, whether ascribed or emergent; nor does it necessarily presume a conflict of interest between different groups. Our analysis supports this formulation, though as we see in the differential experience in the rural villages and the *jhuggis* – the degree of collective action being much stronger in the former – the potential for any serious radical politics at the margins in itself is thus also graded.

These relationalities also hint at a wider set of dynamics, as the politics of response and reproduction become intertwined with issues such as class divisions, urban policy, and state power, but *not subsumed under them* as urban theories tend to argue (Yiftachel 2009). Instead, it is a new politics of recreating subjectivities ‘from below’ rather than solely orbiting state power. This distancing from the state remains a project in making with its contradictions and tensions. Yet, there is a point when ‘citizenship, integration, and equality – emphasised by key scholars in the field ... – are no longer the dominant goals, but are intertwined with efforts to create autonomous ethnic spaces of development and identity’ (Yiftachel 2009, 248–249). Aceska and Heer (2019, 58) make a similar argument: ‘a focus on the everyday encounters shows us that the people in these cities – much like in any other city – have ‘ordinary’ lives that are often not congruent to the ‘big’ arguments about identity and belonging’.

In closing, we argue that research on contested cities, such as Noida, is often preoccupied with structural inequality and segregation on a larger scale without adequately dealing with the heterogeneity of life *inside* the spaces deemed *a priori* ‘marginal’. In

doing so, accounts of how urban marginality comes together and evolves remain subdued or even completely missed. There is a need to ‘recontextualize marginalization through the careful analysis of the multiple capacities’ (Lancione 2016, 13) that are always shifting, resembling a patchwork more than neat cartography of exclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), and are ‘founded on the blurring of boundaries rather than their repeated delineation’ (Gandy 2005, 29). The experiences at urban margins are neither sole outcomes of broader economic causes, nor a matter of lack of collective action or personal culpability or lack of will. It is equally an ongoing process of subject formation via contextual arrangements of social distinctions.

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Notes on contributors

Ritanjan Das is a university lecturer in contemporary South Asian politics at Leiden University Institute of Area Studies, Netherlands. His primary area of interest is in the political economy of development in India and South Asia. His most recent work explores aspects of political illiberalism, urban development, identity politics, postcolonial citizenship, and political dynasticism.

Nilotpal Kumar is an Associate Professor at the School of Development, Azim Premji University, Bangalore, India. His works have sought to examine the terms on which the political economy of agrarian transitions interact with cultural frameworks of identification and meaning-making in rural India. He is currently researching the relationship between horticultural transformation and emerging technologies of neoliberal rural governance in dry regions of South India.

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