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Racializing space, spatializing "race": racialization, its urban spatialization, and the making of "Northeastern" identity in "world class" Delhi

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ABSTRACT
The neoliberal transformation of Delhi into a "world class city" has increasingly attracted migrants from India's North-Eastern/Himalayan borderlands, who are racialized as "Northeasterns" and face racism in the city. This reflects an emergent form of racialization in the Global South and a facet of "new racism" often overlooked within existing theorizations of "race" and racism that stems from Global North contexts. Drawing from urban ethnographic research, this paper provides a spatial analysis of the racialization of "Northeastern" migrants in Delhi. First, it examines the structural racialization of "Northeasterns" induced by Delhi's neoliberal urbanism that constructs them as the city's "service providers". Second, it explores their self-racialization through co-constitutive "race"-making and place-making practices in a distinct socio-spatial formation – the "urban village". Finally, it argues that through racial-spatial processes, the "Northeastern" emerges as a new racialized urban identity; thereby linking racialization, spatialization, and identity formation in a postcolonial, globalizing, Global South city.

Introduction

In the summer of 2016, 19-year-old Clare moved to Delhi from India's North-Eastern state of Mizoram to pursue higher education at the University of Delhi. Like many other students from the region, she lived in *Vijaynagar* near the university's North Campus and had a fairly regular student life. In 2007, Mimo, now 33, also moved to Delhi from another border state of Manipur for employment. She initially worked in the retail sector at South Delhi's Ambience mall, and later started a clothing store in Delhi's *Humayunpur* village

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where she still resides. 40-year-old Raj too moved to Delhi in 2000 from the Himalayan town of Darjeeling for employment. Upon arrival, he worked for a few years at a call centre, from which he eventually quit. Today, he lives with his wife and son in *Humayunpur,* where he also runs a small eatery. While Clare speaks Mizo at home, Mimo speaks Meitei and Raj, Nepali. They come from places that have their distinct histories and identities. Yet, despite their linguistic, religious, and other cultural differences, they encountered something similar upon arrival in the city. They encountered a racialized label – the "Northeastern" – that defined their lived experiences and identity. They also experienced racism for being a "Northeastern" in Delhi. Clare, Mimo, and Raj's experiences reflect a new form of racialization emergent in a globalizing city of the Global South, and a facet of global racism, which is often overlooked within existing social theorizations on "race" and racism that largely stems from Global North contexts (Modood and Sealy 2022).

The above experiences can be situated within the neoliberal transformation of Delhi and the subsequent rise of internal migration from India's North-Eastern and Himalayan regions to the capital city. The "North-East" and Himalayan borderlands refer to those regions of South Asia, which today is crisscrossed by international borders of India, Nepal, Myanmar, China (Tibet), and Bangladesh, and is often described as one of Asia's quintessential borderlands – the stretch of land where the subcontinental regions of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia meet and overlap (Zou and Kumar 2011). Rather than simply being a directional name, the "North-East" is in fact a postcolonial geo-administrative concept deployed by the Indian state to administer this complex border space, which today includes eight federal states of – Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim – constructing them into a distinct geopolitical entity like no other in the country (Baruah 2020; Haokip 2011). While these borderland regions and their citizens have historically had a contentious relationship with the Indian state, the neoliberalization of the Indian economy since 1991 has increasingly fuelled the movement of individuals from these regions into Indian cities for education or employment. This has led to a new wave of migration from postcolonial peripheries to neoliberal urban centres in what is de facto known as the Indian "mainland" (McDuie-Ra 2012; Kikon and Karlsson 2019). Such rise in migration however has also been accompanied by a corresponding rise in discrimination reflected in racial labels like "Chinki", "Chinese", and recently "Corona" (Haokip 2020), thus giving rise to racism debates in contemporary India (McDuie-Ra 2015; Rai 2022).

Driven by the understanding that spatial analysis of racialization allows for the unpacking of previously unrecognized dimensions of "race" and racism (Knowles 2003), this paper explores the intersections between "race" and space that leads to the construction of "Northeastern" as a new racialized urban identity in contemporary India. In particular, it deploys the

racialization-spatialization approach (Lipsitz 2007), which views "race" not as a biological fact but rather a product of socio-spatial processes, thus highlighting the co-constitutive nature of place-making practices and "race"-making processes (Neely and Samura 2011). While existing scholarship has examined varied spatial manifestations of racialized differences and inequalities particularly in urban settings, which has also been examined within wider structures of neoliberal urbanism and racial capitalism (Robinson 2000), much of this literature centres on the Global North. By examining the racialization of "Northeastern" migrants in Delhi through a spatial angle, this paper examines the shifting articulations of "race", urban space, and racialized identity as experienced in a postcolonial, globalizing Global South city. As such, this paper expands the scope of the sociology of "race" and racism beyond the Western world and contributes to the emergent discussions on the tensions between "new racism" (Melamed 2006, 14), identity, and agency in cityscapes shaped by neoliberal urbanisms. It also advances debates on racism in India and other parts of Asia and does so through an urban-spatial approach (Bora 2019; Haokip 2020; Gergan and Smith 2021; Kikon 2022; Rai 2022).

This paper begins by historicizing the concept of "Northeast" through colonial, postcolonial, and neoliberal contexts. It outlines the centre-periphery power relations between India and its "Mongolian Fringe", and the subsequent rise of internal migration. The "racialization-spatialization" approach that serves as the theoretical underpinning of this paper is then outlined, which is followed by an explanation of the urban ethnographic research that methodologically supports this paper. This is followed by three inter-connected analytical sections. The first situates migration from Northeastern/Himalayan borderlands within Delhi's neoliberal urbanism reflected in the concept of the "world class city" and examines the process of structural racialization of "Northeastern" migrants as the city's racialized "service providers". The second examines "race"-making and place-making through migrants' residential and entrepreneurial practices that lead to their self-racialization, in a distinct socio-spatial formation – the "urban village" of *Humayunpur*. The third analytical section examines the "Northeastern" as a racialized urban identity that becomes constructed through socio-spatial processes, which nonetheless exist in the margins of the city. In doing so, this paper examines the relationship between racialization, spatialization, and identity formation in a Global South urban context through the case of "Northeastern" migrants in Delhi.[1]

Historicizing the North-East and Himalayan borderlands: India's "Mongolian Fringe", centre-periphery power relations, and internal migration

The idea of "Northeast India" can be traced to British colonialism in South Asia, where the colonial regime for the first time demarcated the region

along the hills and foothills of the Eastern Himalayas, as "frontiers" of the British Indian Empire (Baruah 2020; Phanjoubam 2016; Syiemlieh 2014). The epistemological and geo-political creation of colonial frontiers in these regions took shape through the concept of "North-East" coined in 1884 by Alexander Mackenzie, Home Secretary to the Government of British India, to identify a distinct physical and discursive space located on the easternmost edge of the Empire, leading to its demarcation as the "North-East Frontier of British India" (Ray 2019, 606). The colonial administration of these frontiers followed a policy of exclusion, reflected in the "Inner Line Regulation" (1873), alongside the demarcation of parts of the region as "Backward Tract" (1919), "Excluded" and "Partially Excluded Areas" (1935). Such colonial governance followed a racialized logic, where the diverse population of the frontier regions became categorized as "backward" and "primitive" "hill and forest tribes" belonging to the "yellow", "Mongoloid race", who were seen as racially and culturally distinct from the "caste Hindu Aryans" of the plains of India (Gergan and Smith 2021; Rai 2022). In this process, the North-eastern and Himalayan regions became defined through the colonial gaze as the "Mongolian fringe" or the space beyond which the lands of "Mongoloid races" begin, thus instituting the centre-periphery power relations between the racialized frontier and the imperial-colonial centre (Baruah 2013). Gergan and Smith (2021) argue that the "Mongolian fringe" has historically been constructed, through colonial and postcolonial discourses, as a site of India's geopolitical and racial anxiety given its proximity to China and South-east Asia, which continue to shape power relations between the Indian state and its racialized frontiers.

While the "North East" was introduced as a colonial administrative cat-egory, it became further cemented during the postcolonial period. In the wake of Indian independence in 1947, many parts of the region witnessed demands for their independence, given that the communities therein became minoritized within the newly formed nation-state (Baruah 2009). Such claims of self-autonomy were violently suppressed by the postcolonial Indian state, headed by its new political elites, particularly through the implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in 1958, transforming colonial frontiers into contested postcolonial borderlands (Kikon 2009). The AFSPA is a neo-colonial state apparatus operative in certain areas in the region demarcated as "unstable" and "disturbed", and grants security forces unrestricted powers to conduct military operations. AFSPA has been widely criticized for transgressing human rights and creating a permanent regime of exception within an otherwise democratic set-up that further deepens the centre-periphery power relations between the Indian state and its borderlands[2] (Baruah 2020; Bora 2010). Thus, in the postcolonial imaginations, the North-East became (re)framed through discourses of "insur-gency", "militancy", "ethnic violence", and "underdevelopment", leading to

attempts at its integration within the nation through both military hard power and economic soft power (Baruah 2003; Haokip 2011). This is reflected in the creation of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in 1971, which formalized the geo-administrative concept of "North Eastern Region (NER)", alongside the coinage of the informal term "*seven sisters*" (later eight[3]) in 1976 that further homogenized the multi-ethnic eight Northeastern federal states into a single geopolitical entity (Haokip 2011). The majority of the region's population also became categorized within the "Scheduled Tribes" (ST) category due to their tribal/indigenous cultural heritage within the Indian reservation system. Later, with the liberalization of the Indian economy since 1991, the Indian state's strategy towards North-East outwardly shifted from a security-centric approach to an economic-centric one, where the state viewed political instability as a result of "development gap" reflected in the creation of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) in 2001 (Baruah 2007; Haokip 2015). This was nonetheless embedded in state-led attempts at nationalizing the frontiers where military hard power in the form of AFSPA continues to make its presence felt in the region (Baruah 2020).

Today, a significant implication of economic liberalization has come in the form of mass migration of mostly young individuals in search of employment and education to urban centres like Delhi. This new wave of migration is driven by several structural features, including the lack of higher education institutions and employment opportunities coupled with several impasses like conflict and militarization in the region (McDuie-Ra 2015). Alongside this, it is also the neoliberal service economy of the cities in the Indian "mainland" that has opened new possibilities for individuals from these borderlands. Karlsson and Kikon (2017) argue that while this form of internal migration does not involve the crossing of any international borders, it is still a movement both geographically and culturally into a very different place, away from predominantly rural or semi-urban spaces to Indian metropolises. Among the major Indian cities, Delhi consistently stands out as a prime destination for this form of internal migration, evidenced by the North East Support Centre and Helpline, Delhi's 2011 report which states that out of the total volume of migrants outside the North East, 48 per cent move to Delhi alone such that Delhi has the largest population of "Northeastern" migrants in the Indian "mainland" (McDuie-Ra 2012). However, the coming of migrants into cities like Delhi has nonetheless been accompanied by a rise in discrimination against them, which has been articulated as racism. This has also led to the emergence of a new identity category – the "Northeastern" – based on shared experiences of racism and racialization (Wouters and Subba 2013). Given this backdrop, this paper analyses the ways in which the racialization of "Northeastern" migrants in Delhi intersects with processes of urban spatialization, and therefore

examines the social construction of the "Northeastern" as a new racialized urban identity in contemporary India.

Racializing space, spatializing "race"

Sociological theorizations have largely moved away from an essentialist understanding of "race" as a static, biological category to racialization or the process through which "races" are socially constructed and made meaningful in a given context (Murji and Solomos 2005). This has also implicated the ways in which we understand the relationship between "race" and space. While earlier, scholars viewed spaces as fixed locations where "race"-relations played out, today scholars across the interdisciplinary fields of sociology, geography, anthropology, and urban studies view space as a dynamic and active agent that plays a co-constitutive and dialectical role in the racialization process (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2018; Delaney 2002; Knowles 2003; Neely and Samura 2011). Feminist sociologists and geographers have examined the co-construction of "race", gender, class, and space, highlighting how racism and sexism intersect spatially (Hernández Vidal 2022). Similarly, Black geographers have highlighted the mutual significance of the material and the symbolic in the manifestations of "race", space, and power, and focussed on oppositional place-making imaginaries and practices employed by subaltern actors (Woods and McKittrick 2007), showing the dialectical role of structure and agency in "race"-making and place-making processes. The emergent field of racial and spatial studies therefore enables us to re-think the ways in which racialization of space and spatialization of "race" (Lipsitz 2007) overlap, and how "race"-making ties to place-making processes. "What about race can we understand better through the lens of space? How is racial inequality organized spatially? How do spaces come to be known and used in racialized terms?" (Knowles 2003, 78). These are some questions a spatial theory of "race" allows us to uncover. Thus, the racialization-spatialization approach offers possibilities for new theorizations and empirical documentation of how spatial-racial relations and processes affect one another.

Within the analysis of racialization and spatialization, urban formations consistently provide a crucial theoretical and empirical lens through which to explore the dynamic links between "race" and space. The urban dimensions of racialization-spatialization have been examined by various scholars through examples of "ghettos", "inner cities", and "ethnic enclaves" as well as development, displacement, and regeneration projects (Danewid 2019; Dillon 2014). For instance, Sassen (2013) shows us how global cities like New York and London reproduce a racialized service class of workers, who then face urban poverty, marginalization, and stigmatization. Furthermore, the analysis of "race" and space concerning the urban has been done

within the wider structuring force of racial capitalism (Robinson 2000) and neoliberal urbanism. By organizing urban policies, labour markets, migration routes, and residential patterns, racial capitalism particularly in its current variant of neoliberalism, produces racialized people, places, identities, and differences within urban contexts (Melamed 2015). This is because, as Roberts and Mahtani (2010) argue, neoliberalism is fundamentally raced and actively produces racialized bodies and spaces as well as impacting the experiences of people making their lives in the city along racial and spatial lines. While existing scholarship on racialization and urban spatialization has largely centred on the experiences of cities in the Global North, recent years have seen a gradual shift in scholarly attention paid to Global South cities. This can be contextualized within the wider postcolonial attempts at provincializing urban theory (Lawhon et al. 2016) through new concepts like "globalizing cities" (Öncü, Oncu, and Weyland 1997) and "world class city" (Ghertner 2015, 1), that aim to unpack impacts of global capitalism in cities of the Global South. For instance, Fluri et al. (2020) show how housing policies in Kabul reflect a manifestation of racial capitalism within the context of development in Afghanistan whereby wealthy, white international aid workers access exclusive spaces while marginalizing poorer Afghan locals. Similarly, Castillo (2014) shows how African migrants in Guangzhou engage in place-making and belongingness within the context of China–Africa relations, and south-south migration. From Cairo to Johannesburg to Singapore, recent studies have thus begun to show how racialization and its urban spatialization manifest in Southern cities (Clarno 2013; Ho and Kathiravelu 2022).

Recent years have also seen a growing scholarly interest in racism outside the Global North, as a way of challenging the Euro-Americancentricity of existing "race" scholarship and broadening its scope by including newer forms of global racisms (Modood and Sealy 2022). Such works have looked into the racialized experiences of minorities such as Rohingyas in Myanmar and Uyghurs in China (Roche and Leibold 2022), that go beyond the dominant whiteness framework through which racism is often understood. Additionally, in the context of the emergent racism studies in India, scholars have engaged in theorizations of "race" and racialization in relation to caste-ism (Kikon 2022; Shankar 2022); North-East and Himalayas (Gergan and Smith 2021; McDuie-Ra 2012; Rai 2022); African migrants (Negi and Taraporevala 2018); Islamophobia and Hindutva (Natrajan 2022); and other modes of differences (Cháirez-Garza et al. 2022; Baber 2022). By examining racialization and urban spatialization of "Northeastern" migrants in Delhi, this paper contributes to these emergent bodies of literature, as it unpacks another facet of "new racism" (Melamed 2006) that extends racializing practices beyond the conventional colour line and shows new ways in which global racism manifests particularly in Southern cities. The paper also develops ongoing

debates on racism in India by providing an urban-spatial approach to the analysis of racialization.

Urban ethnography

This paper stems from my urban ethnographic research, including data-collection methods of (i) participant observation and (ii) informal interviews. For participant observation, ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in the city of Delhi for eight months in 2016–2017, followed by field visits in 2018 and 2019, although connections continue to be maintained even today. Access into the field was gained by taking on the role of a resident in the neighbourhoods of Vijaynagar, North Delhi, and Humayunpur, Safdurjung, South Delhi. The two neighbourhoods became key field sites in this study due to a large "Northeastern" migrant population living therein. Participant observation was also carried out in other city spaces such as the University of Delhi campus, shopping malls, clubs, bars, and restaurants with a large "Northeastern" presence; and fieldnotes were an important part of observation. Interviews were conducted among 40 individuals from different parts of the North-East and Himalayan regions, and a majority were from tribal/indigenous backgrounds. The participants ranged between the age of 18 and 40; and out of the 40 participants, 24 identified as men and 16 as women. The participants were from diverse educational and occupational backgrounds and the participant list included university students, employees working in Delhi's service sector, self-employed, and two were unemployed. The participants were recruited through personal networks initially, followed by a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Since this study involves human participants, ethical approval was gained from the University of Manchester's ethics committee prior to data collection. Participant information sheets were used, and after acquiring consent, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, conversational style, situated within human relationships established over the course of ethnographic fieldwork. For consistency, interviews revolved around five major themes, which included – experiences during and after migration to Delhi; racialized and gendered experiences in the city; participants' understanding of the meaning of "Northeastern"; and their relationship to Indian nation and citizenship. Interviews lasted approximately one hour, which were audio-recorded (except for three) with permission and carried out mostly in English, and sometimes Hindi and Nepali. Interviews underwent translating (where necessary), transcribing and coding (via NVivo). Thematic analysis was carried out by identifying key themes and patterns across the data gathered, which informs the upcoming analytical sections. Finally, this study stems from my positionality as an ethnic minority hailing from the Northeastern/Himalayan state of Sikkim, who has also lived in Delhi previously and is racialized as

"Northeastern" in India. As such, this study is situated within my intellectual and embodied knowledge, which has influenced every aspect of this research, from data collection to analysis. Stemming from this methodological baseline, the next three sections of this paper present its analysis that reflects various aspects of racialization, urban spatialization, and identity formation of "Northeasterns" in Delhi. It must be noted here that this paper uses the term "Northeastern" not to essentialize it but rather to deconstruct this racialized category.

"Service providers" in the "world class city"

The neoliberal turn of the Indian economy since 1991 has significantly impacted the capital city of Delhi. While Delhi initially functioned as the political-administrative centre of the newly formed Indian nation-state, the post-liberalization years saw its remodelling into a key site for the circulation of global financial capital. As such, Delhi today is endowed with multiple economic functions including trade, finance, and service sectors (Banerjee-Guha 2009; Dupont 2011). To understand Delhi's neoliberal transformation,[4] Ghertner (2015, 1) has put forth the concept of "world class city", which can be understood as the hegemonic discourse about the city's governmentality perpetuated by its elite and state institutions, reflected in its aspirational character as it emulates the "global city" model, and attempts at "first-world-ing" the city (Banerjee-Guha 2009, 97). This is most evident in Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) "Master Plan for Delhi 2021" titled, "Vision 2021 to make Delhi a global metropolis and a world-class city" (Dupont 2011, 533). Ghertner (2015) argues that Delhi as a "world class city" primarily operates through a bourgeoisie logic of aestheticism visibly reflected in the proliferation of mega-infrastructural projects like shopping malls, businesses and IT hubs, high-end gated residential and educational complexes, and beautification projects like parks and stadiums. This has consequently resulted in the rise of consumerism and middle-class ideology and lifestyles, accompanied by simultaneous attempts at "cleansing" the city of its "undesirable" elements, further marginalizing the urban poor and exacerbating socio-spatial inequalities as witnessed in other "globalising cities" of the South (Dupont 2011; Schindler 2013).

It is within this context of Delhi's "world class" urbanism that migration from North-East and Himalayan borderlands can be situated. In particular, it is the rise of the service economy in Delhi, including hospitality, retail, and call centres, that has increasingly attracted migrants from the borderlands to the capital city by providing them with new work opportunities in the last decade (Kikon and Karlsson 2019; McDuie-Ra 2012). This was attested by Raj from Darjeeling, who moved to Delhi in the year 2000, and now lives and runs a Himalayan food joint in Humayunpur,

> Back then in 90's and early 2000s, there were a lot of job opportunities, especially in the call centres. So, most of us came to Delhi during that period because of this service sector boom […] Had it not been for this boom, North-easterns wouldn't have come to Delhi.

Following this statement, it is an observable pattern to find migrants from North-East/Himalayan regions working in Delhi's service sector in diverse roles such as waiting staff, bartenders, receptionists, and sales assistants, making them highly visible in consumer spaces like hotels, restaurants, bars, and shopping centres. This was further affirmed by Raj who elaborated,

> The majority of the service sector has our people. If you go to any hotel, you will find 'chinkies'. At spas, you will find 'chinkies'. Any retail job, you will find 'chinkies'. We are everywhere in the service sector; they are helpless without us. If we are chased out of this place, this sector will collapse.

Raj's statement highlights the process of structural racialization through which racialized differences are reproduced at the macro-level (Phillips 2011), whereby political-economic structures like the labour market and service industry construct "Northeasterns" as the "world class city's" "service providers", who cater to Delhi's middle-class, upper-caste urbanites. These statements also show the intersections of "race" – and class-making processes inherent in the incorporation of migrants from the North-East and Himalayas into Delhi's globalizing economy, constructing them as the "world class city's" racialized workforce – the "Northeasterns". This was also expressed in the following statement by Clare, an undergraduate student from Mizoram, who moved to Delhi in 2016 to pursue higher education,

> The first time I went to Johnny Rockets, I noticed that most of the waiters were 'Northeasterns', even in Big Chill. I was shocked. I was like, is this some kind of division of labour? Have we become a class of service providers?

In situating these examples within the wider context of the "world class city", they further highlight the larger role played by globalizing Delhi's aesthetic governmentality or "rule of aesthetics" (Ghertner 2015) in the process of structural racialization of "Northeastern" migrants. Given that the "world class city" functions as the dominant spatial and visual discourse aimed at reconstructing Delhi along the frameworks of "global cities", "Northeastern" migrants fit well within the visual criteria of global aestheticism, which functions through the signification of "Northeastern" migrants' physical/phenotypical features as being "un-Indian" and therefore "global". In this context, McDuie-Ra (2012) points out that despite marginalizing other minorities, Delhi's neoliberal service sector desires migrants from the North-East because their "un-Indian" looks and accents provide an exoticized labour force that fulfil middle-class desires to live abroad in India. Kikon and Karlsson (2020, 258) also explain how "light skin and soft skills" make indigenous

migrants particularly appealing to employers, where the phenotypical "Northeastern face" (2020, 270) itself acts as a commodity that recruitment agencies sell to the service and hospitality sectors. This reveals the racialization of "yellowness" (Miyake 2021) and its conflation with "East Asianness" in the racialization of "Northeasterns" in contemporary India, where the phenotypical "Northeastern face" (Wouters and Subba 2013, 127) acts as a floating signifier (Hall 1997) possessing "aesthetic character" (Kikon and Karlsson 2020, 270) that seems desirable within the optic regime of the "world class city". This is so often reflected in "Northeastern" migrants' enactment of East Asian stereotypes as a part of their service sector jobs (McDuie-Ra 2012), which further illustrates the linkages between national and global racial systems, wherein global racial ideas, and discourses on "Asianness" informs racialized formations in "globalising cities" in their attempt at emulating Northern urban settings. Thus, the racialization of "Northeasterns" in Delhi reflects a facet of global racial capitalism as manifest in a specific Southern urban context, whereby neoliberalism not only reproduces but also modifies racialized meanings and subjectivities (Roberts and Mahtani 2010; Goldberg 2008), where the "primitive", "backward", "savage" "colonial Mongoloids" are re-racialized into "hardworking", "loyal", "proficient" "neoliberal Northeasterns" (Rai 2022, 10).

Such structural processes of racialization of "Northeastern" migrants in the "world class city" further inform perceptions and treatment towards them by Delhi's wider population, which directly impacts their lived experiences in the city. In this context, although considered "desirable" within the "world class city's" service sector, where their embodied labour and the "Northeastern face" are used to signify a global aesthetics of multiculturalism, the "Northeastern" migrants are positioned as "undesirable" within the social reality of the postcolonial city based on their perceived "un-Indianness" (McDuie-Ra 2013; Rai 2022). As such, they face discrimination and racism in both direct and subtle forms, ranging from explicit racist slurs like "chinki" and "Chinese", to cultural policing of their lifestyles such as their "smelly food" and "immodest clothing" that go against the hegemonic notions of "Indian" cultural values. Herein, a key basis of racism against "Northeastern" manifests in the form of non-recognition or misrecognition of their nationality, where they are perceived as "foreigners" (from China, Nepal, etc.), which works to withhold equal citizenship status and leads to their "othering" (Wouters and Subba 2013). Delhi's "world class" aspirations therefore do not transcend postcolonial power-relations based on existing hierarchies of caste, class, gender, "race" and nation, but rather intersects with them, such that "Northeastern" migrants oscillate between "inclusion"/"desirability" within the neoliberal service sector and "exclusion"/"undesirability" within the city's wider social structure. Thus, through structural factors like the service industry as well as external factors such as the city's majority

population, migrants from the North-Eastern and Himalayan borderlands become racialized as "Northeasterns" in Delhi.

"Race"-making and place-making in an "urban village'

While the "Northeastern" is a product of top-down racialization enabled by structural and external forces such as the service industry of the "world class city" and the wider population of Delhi, it is simultaneously a bottom-up construct driven by migrant agency. To explain this, Parker and Song (2006) have utilized the concept of reflexive racialization or self-racialization (Garner 2017; Rai 2022), which illustrates how minorities categorize themselves along racialized lines, often reproducing existing racial categorizations, albeit to exert agency and negotiate power. Here, we see that "race"-making through self-racialization intersects with migrant-driven place-making practices, thus signalling the simultaneity in social construction of "race" and production of space that centre subaltern actors (Woods and McKittrick 2007). "Race"-making through place-making involves those socio-spatial practices and imaginations through which raced categories, meanings, identities, and subjectivities are simultaneously constructed as place itself is produced in the material world (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2018). This section specifically examines residential and entrepreneurial place-making practices to explore the "race" making of "Northeastern" migrants, which is done by focusing on a distinct postcolonial socio-spatial formation – the "urban village" of Humayunpur in Safdarjung, South Delhi.

"Urban villages", like Humayunpur, are small pockets of rural settlements existing within the perimeter of Delhi that became engulfed by the city in its process of urban development in the years after independence. As a result, while agricultural lands surrounding these settlements became acquired for infrastructural projects like residential complexes, educational centres, and shopping malls, these settlements themselves were exempted from building byelaws to safeguard rural identities and community land ownership practices, leading to their demarcation as "urban villages"[5] (Pati 2015; Raina 2018). "Urban villages" are thus products of postcolonial state planning, conceived since Delhi's first Master Plan of 1962, to categorize complex urbanized rural spaces that often-lacked clear property ownership status (NP Narayanan and Véron 2018). Given the laxer building regulations, these once-agrarian villages have undergone significant physical and functional transformations, often emerging as dense, compact urban clusters with poor planning, unregulated construction, and multiple functions including – residential, industrial, and commercial (Raina 2018). Today, within the framework of the "world class city", urban villages have transformed into enclaves for lower-middle-class migrants and students; or have encountered market forces in the form of gentrification and hyper-commercialization (Pati

2015), and play a key role in the production of contemporary Delhi (NP Narayanan and Véron 2018).

The urban village of Humayunpur is seen as "Delhi's North-East outpost" (Masoodi 2018) as it houses a large population of migrants from North-East and Himalayan borderlands, who mainly live as tenants in properties at comparatively cheaper rates rented out by older residents. These rented living arrangements often involves sharing one-, two- or three-bedroom flats with friends or relatives who are also migrants from these regions. In this context, Rajesh who moved to Delhi from Manipur for education and employment, and is a resident at Humayunpur, explained,

> I came to Delhi in 2010. My cousins had been here since 2005, so I lived with them in Humayunpur.

He also explained why he chose to reside in Humayunpur,

> See, when you move out of your home, you feel vulnerable, and you need to rely on people who make you feel comfortable. So, you look for someone who looks like you, who is from your place, nd who wouldn't betray you because they also must rely on you. So that's what keeps us together … It's not just with Northeasterns living in Humayunpur. Every community feels this way.

Rajesh's statement encapsulates the experiences of a new migrant and shows that urban villages like Humayunpur act as spaces of arrival through which migrants access the new urban setting, also enabling them to find education and/or employment in the neighbouring malls, call centres, and other educational and consumer spaces. This mirrors Naik's (2019:, 47) argument that urban villages in India, much like other urbanized traditional settlements such as *chengzshongcun* and *kampungs* in China, Vietnam, and Indonesia, act as "arrival cities" for new migrants, offering them a foothold in the city and allowing them to tap into the vibrant labour market in a range of sectors and job profiles. Rented living in Humayunpur is characterized by high level of socio-spatial proximity, that further enables migrants to carry out various everyday place-making practices ranging from cooking traditional meals to celebrating festivities together. These practices facilitate formation of social networks, face-to-face interactions, and chance encounters, thus leading to the consolidation of "Northeasterns" as a distinct migrant community in Delhi (McDuie-Ra 2012; Smith and Gergan 2015).

Not only is Humayunpur a residential enclave for migrants from North-Eastern and Himalayan borderlands, but it has also become a key site for migrant-driven entrepreneurial activities that cater primarily to the "Northeastern" migrant population in Delhi. Cafés and restaurants like Le Himalaya, Hornbill, Lha Kitchen, Mizo Diner, Oh! Assam, and Kori's that serves Tibetan, Naga, Nepali, Mizo, Manipuri, Assamese, Bhutanese, Chinese, Korean, and

Burmese cuisines are therefore a discernible feature of Humayunpur village. Humayunpur also has some of the only shops in Delhi that sell commodities like ghost pepper, fermented soybeans, pickled meat, and other indigenous food and other items from the region. There are also clothing and fashion stores like Runway NE, Selective, and Urbanatic; and beauty parlours and salons that cater to the city's "Northeastern" clientele. As such, place-making through emplaced entrepreneurial activities further leads to the self-racialization of "Northeasterns" in Delhi. This is explained by Mimo from Manipur, who moved to Delhi in 2007 for employment, and is a resident and entrepreneur in Humayunpur village. Having previously worked in Delhi's retail sector, Mimo explained why she left her job and started a fashion/clothing enterprise in partnership with her husband Swadhin from Darjeeling, who also followed a similar trajectory,

> Because we both had a background in fashion retailing, we got the idea that once we leave our jobs, we could start a business here. So, I left my job first, and we opened this thing, and then he left his work to do this too […] We are the ones who started these shops. Earlier, Safdarjung (Humayunpur) was entirely different. There was not even a single shop for Northeasterns.

Mimo's statement shows the role of migrants as agents of place-making and self-racialization. By identifying, catering to and constructing shared needs of "Northeastern" migrants, place-making through entrepreneurial activities further consolidates the "race"-making of "Northeasterns" as an emplaced community in Delhi. This affirms Nayak's (2011) argument that emplacing "race" involves inscribing signs, symbols and representational practices that assign layers of racialized meanings in a given place, thus concretizing "race" in society and space. As such, the restaurant signboards using ethnic names, shopfronts using images of indigenous food; or posters of K-pop celebrities architecturally and aesthetically encodes space with cultural signifiers thus symbolically and materially marking Humayunpur as a "Northeastern" place, while simultaneously constructing "Northeastern" as racialized community in Delhi.

Furthermore, "race"-making of "Northeastern" migrants through residential and entrepreneurial place-making practices in Humayunpur also highlights another crucial element in the understanding of racialization-spatialization. Here, the socio-spatial formation of urban villages themselves play an active role in racialization since they function not only as passive sites where racialization occurs but also as a constituting agent in the construction of "Northeastern" category. In other words, urban villages' fluidity, flexibility, and informality of land-use regulations, coupled with a mixture of residential and commercial functions within the same physical and social space, enable migrants to engage in meaningful place-making practices which may not have been possible or followed the same trajectory in the more formally

planned residential – or commercial-only localities of the city. It is this informality of "urban villages" that has enables the "race"-making of "Northeasterns" and place-making of Humayunpur into a "hub for all Northeastern people" in Delhi. This was expressed in the following statement by Choden who moved to Delhi from Kalimpong in 2010 and now lives and runs a restaurant in Humayunpur village,

> Safdarjung (Humayunpur) is the hub- the hub for all Northeastern people. You get all the food you want, all the types of clothes and everything, you get all that in Safdarjung!

"Northeastern" as a racialized urban identity

Speaking of the "Northeastern" identity, Baruah (2020, 1) states that, "One rarely hears anyone saying: 'As a Northeasterner, I … ', though people would say 'as a Manipuri', 'a Naga', 'a Khasi', implying that the directional term has historically never been a form of social identity in the region, which is instead characterized by local tribal, indigenous, and ethnic identities. Yet, Baruah (2020, 1) observes that, "there is, however, some evidence of an incipient Northeastern identity coming into existence in the recent years". Following this, this section examines the emergence of "Northeastern" as a new racialized mode of identification, showing that a key social consequence of racialization and spatialization is the construction of racialized identities like the "Northeastern" in Delhi (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2018; Neely and Samura 2011).

This emergence of the "Northeastern" as a new identity category was experienced first-hand by Khonin from Nagaland, who moved to Delhi in 2008 for undergraduate education. Based on her personal experience of living in the city for a little less than a decade, Khonin narrated,

> I have lived in Delhi for 9 years and what I have noticed is that initially, Northeastern was non-existent. People did know that we're from the Northeast, but we were never 'Northeasterns' back then. It is only within three to four years of living here that it became so strong.

Khonin further commented on the "making" of "Northeastern" identity,

> I don't think this Northeastern is our making. It's the making of the mainland, like clubbing us together as 'Northeasterns'. To be honest, I didn't even know that North-East comprised of 'eight sisters' (states). It was only after coming to Delhi that I realised what North-East actually is. And the funny thing is that after coming here we become 'Northeasterns' but at home, we're all fighting among ourselves. So that's the irony of this whole Northeastern thing – we are not united unless we come to Delhi.

Khonin's statement shows that rather than being a stable, ahistorical identity that individuals possess prior to migrating, the "Northeastern" is a re-

articulation of a post/colonial geo-administrative category – the North-East – into a racialized mode of identification that becomes constructed only after migration, and in Delhi's new urban setting (Gergan and Smith 2021; Rai 2022). While Khonin's statement shows that the "Northeastern" is an external label, Subi, another undergraduate student from Arunachal Pradesh, who moved to Delhi in 2017 shows that the "Northeastern" is also a form of self-identification,

> I call myself "Northeastern" because it's easier … I don't have to explain my clan, tribe and all of that … no explanation needed!

This shows that the "Northeastern" is also an instrumental identity that positions racialized minorities within the socio-spatial contours of the city, which may allow them to momentarily transcend their tribal, indigenous, and ethnic affiliations without necessarily blurring them (Rai 2022).

Furthermore, the spatial analysis of racialization also reveals that racialized identities like the "Northeastern" are not simply about mental categories or discursive markers, but also involve materiality, and can be understood as an urban "assemblage" (Saldanha 2006, 194) where heterogenous elements like bodies, spaces, things, and symbols assemble together into racial formations, thus creating tangible racialized differences (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2018). In other words, it is the selective bundling of human and non-human agents such as bodies of migrants like Khonin's, Raj's, and Mimo's, in spaces like Humayunpur, encoded with signifiers like ethnic shop names, indigenous food and East Asian aesthetics, that work together to discursively and materially constitute the "Northeastern" as a meaningful racialized identity. However, the socio-spatial construction of "Northeastern" as a racialized urban identity cannot be divorced from the wider postcolonial centre-periphery power relations that have historically structured the relationship between the Indian nation and its borderlands, which continue to inform migrants' experiences in the capital city. This was illustrated in the following statement made by Mimo who explained the meaning of being "Northeastern" based on her experience of living in Delhi for over 10 years,

> See no matter how much you're earning or how big your name is, "A 'Northeastern' will always be seen as a 'Northeastern' – outsiders!"

Mimo's statement reiterates the point that, despite being incorporated within Delhi's neoliberal economy, or exercising agency by making a place for themselves and forging a collective identity, the "Northeastern" is ultimately a peripheral and marginalized identity. This implies that bodies, spaces, cultures, and things racialized and identified as "Northeastern" are positioned on the margins and peripheries of the city's symbolic geography, as the historical centre-periphery power relation between India and it's Mongolian Fringe"

become reproduced rather than disrupted after migration and in the new urban environment. This shows that "world class", "globalising cities" like Delhi operate through a racialized, postcolonial logic that physically and symbolically reinforces racialized borders and frontiers within the city's local urban geography (Danewid 2019), thus positioning "Northeastern" migrants, who have historically been constructed as India's "internal others" yet again as "outsiders" (to the idea of the nation, and therefore) in the city. This asymmetrical power-relation thus informs everyday racism (Essed 1990) against "Northeastern" migrants, which continues to shape their lived realities and experiences in Delhi.

Conclusion

This paper examines the links between racialization, its urban spatialization, and racialized identity formation in a postcolonial, neoliberal, Global South city through the case of "Northeastern" migrants in Delhi. It draws from the racialization-spatialization approach, and urban ethnographic research, to make three inter-connected arguments. First, it situates migration from North-Eastern/Himalayan borderlands within Delhi's neoliberal urbanism reflected in the concept of "world class city". It highlights the process of structural racialization of "Northeastern" migrants as the city's racialized "service providers", revealing an aspect of racial neoliberal capitalism in a Southern urban context. It shows that through top-down external forces, both at macro level like the service industry as well as micro level such as the city's wider population, migrants from the North-Eastern and Himalayan borderlands become racialized as "Northeasterns" in Delhi. Second, the paper examines the "Northeastern" as a bottom-up product of minority agency by exploring migrant-driven residential and entrepreneurial place-making practices, that leads to the self-racialization of "Northeasterns" within a distinct socio-spatial formation – the "urban village" of Humayunpur. Crucially, the paper highlights the role of the informality of the urban village itself in the racialization of "Northeasterns" as a distinct racialized community, showing the co-constructive nature of "race"- and place-making practices. Finally, the paper argues that through such racial and spatial processes, the "Northeastern" emerges as a new racialized urban identity and shows that the "Northeastern" is a rearticulation of a post/colonial geo-administrative category – the "North-East" – into a new racial/social identity – the "Northeastern" – that occurs within the postcolonial, neoliberal urban setting of Delhi. Through a spatial analysis of racialization, the paper argues that racialized identities like the "Northeastern" can be understood as an "urban assemblage", that incorporates both discursive and material elements like bodies, spaces, symbols, and things to create tangible racialized differences. The paper argues that the "Northeastern" migrants are nonetheless positioned

as "outsiders" (to the nation and therefore) in the city as the historical centre-periphery power-relation between India and its "Mongolian fringe" is repro-duced after migration and in the new urban context, resulting in their "other-ing" and experiences of racism. Thus, through the case of "Northeastern" migrants in Delhi, this paper explores a facet of "new racism (Melamed 2006), and contributes the emergent debates and theorizations of "race", racialization, and racism in India and other parts of the non-Western world (Modood and Sealy 2022) and does so through an urban-spatial approach.

Notes

1. Preliminary ideas of this paper were presented at a conference at the University of Birmingham, see: Rohini Rai (online, Brunel University London, UK): Racializa-tion, its urban spatialization and the making of "Northeastern" identity in "world class" Delhi. In Conference, Looking back to look forward: Celebrating 10 Years of Research on Migration, Forced Displacement and Superdiversity (14–16 Sep-tember 2022, 20).
2. Although AFSPA hasn"t been operative in the Himalayan borderlands of Dar-jeeling hills and Ladakh, these regions have nonetheless experienced racialized ethnic identity assertions in the post-independence years, centring on demands for federal autonomy (Gergan and Smith 2021).
3. After its annexation in 1975, Sikkim became categorised as India"s eighth North-Eastern state in 2002, mainly due to its regional and developmental (and racia-lized) proximity to the neighbouring borderland states.
4. It was through the National Urban Renewal Mission (2005) that neoliberal urbanism was officially set into motion in India under purview of the Ministry of Urban Development (Banerjee-Guha 2009).
5. The term *Lal Dora* (red thread) is often used to refer to "urban villages". "Lal Dora" was first used in 1908 to define those habitable segments of the villages around colonial Delhi, when officials from the land revenue department tied a 'red thread' around the village extension area to differentiate settlements from surrounding agricultural lands (Pati 2015).

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