LSE Media and Communications

Media@LSE MSc Dissertation Series

Editors: Simidele Dosekun, Zichen Hu

A Very Like-minded Community:

Surveillance Infrastructure in India's Gated Communities

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Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

ABSTRACT

Gated communities are rapidly mushrooming across urban India as the upper-middle class elite seek exclusive access to public spaces, without the intrusion of the working class. However, this project of caste and class-based exclusion is complicated by their dependence on the working class for service labour. This has led to the rise of a booming domestic security sector, where increasingly advanced surveillance technologies are being developed to meet the elite demand for 'safety' from the threat represented by the working class.

Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with residents and security guards in a gated community in Noida, India, this paper investigates how the elite aspiration for 'safety' in domestic spaces is enacted through investment into surveillance infrastructures that target oppressed-caste/class domestic and service workers. Drawing on Jasanoff and Kim's framework of 'socio-technical imaginaries', I centre banal forms of technological surveillance, that have been sidelined by the dominant policy-centric discourse.

In studying caste/class-based surveillance, I argue against the assumption of pre-existing caste/class-based 'collectives', to instead examine how these collectives come into being in the first place through processes of mediation. First, surveillance infrastructures enable the circulation of affects—including fear and care—that construct oppositional collectives of 'criminal Others' and 'like-minded insiders'. Second, fragmented surveillance infrastructures generate systemic ignorances among guards and residents, thus stabilising a socio-technical imaginary of 'safety' that necessitates caste/class-based surveillance as a moral imperative.

INTRODUCTION

The city, in Ambedkar's imagination, once symbolised liberation from traditional practices of caste/class humiliation through its promise of modernity. Today, spatial segregation is intensifying, with the most oppressed-caste/classes[1] and dominant-caste/classes clustering in slums and elite enclaves respectively (Bharathi *et al.*, 2021; Vithayathil and Singh, 2012: 3). The late-20th century witnessed the advent of economic liberalisation in India, alongside the information revolution (Chatterjee, 2004: 143). This led to the growth of the "new middle class" in urban India—primarily through employment in the information technology (IT) sector—who aspired to differentiate themselves from the working class (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2007: 121; Jaffrelot, 2013: 83). Seeking spatial differentiation, the growing new middle class ushered the expansion of fortification by asserting its "right to unhindered access to public spaces, [...] a clean and healthy environment" through the 'gated community' (Chatterjee, 200: 144). Spatially, the gated community comprises houses, streets and other public spaces that are privatised for residents, and enclosed by environmental, man-made or symbolic barriers with a secured entrance (Graham and Marvin, 2001; Low, 2003). Socially, it is defined by social homogeneity, which bolsters its claim to 'exclusivity' or 'community identity' (Atkinson and Flint, 2004; Rivadulla-Alvarez, 2007). Gated communities thus represent "pure space[s]" where the homogeneity of 'good' residents inside facilitates the identification and expulsion of (racialised) "deviants" (Low, 2003: 141).

This project of exorcising 'outsiders' is hindered by the need for imported service-labour. In India, employing domestic workers—predominantly belonging to oppressed-castes—is a common practice among middle-class households, not only for convenience but as an indicator of status. Waldrop (2004: 99) found that domestic workers in Delhi's gated communities occupied hybrid roles of "insider-outsider": they resided within the household's "servant quarters" that were located at the back with separate entrances from back-alleys. This precarious belonging aggravated fraught imaginaries of 'safety', necessitating strict practices of segregation and surveillance.

[1] I use "caste/class" to recognise that these categories frequently overlap; furthermore, caste operates semiotically, such that caste-practices are often directed against those who bear markers of oppressed-castes despite not belonging to them. Ranganathan (2022: 140) demonstrates this through the "casteification" of poor Muslim migrants from West Bengal, who "become the new untouchables of the city" (140).

As Indian cities like Hyderabad and Bangalore have emerged as commercial centres for the global Information Technology industry, the rapid production and adoption of digital technologies has transformed social relations and urban governance (Parkar and Lama, 2023: 2; Vironen and Kah, 2019: 1). Firstly, the 'technologisation' of everyday life has facilitated new mobilities of residents and service-workers alike, with the rise of part-time contractual and platform labour (Annavarapu, 2022: 763). Secondly, demands and expectations for security are increasingly being fulfilled by advanced technological systems, which Gerhold and Brandes (2021: 3) term the 'technization of security'. This holds true for the localised sphere of gated communities: Kamra *et al*. (2023) demonstrate the emergence of participatory platforms like WhatsApp as informal technologies through which residents surveilled and pathologized service-workers during COVID, while Tandon and Rathi (2024) examine the deployment of MyGate, among the numerous "society management" apps that mushroomed post-COVID, to demonstrate how these platforms enable residents to map and regulate workers' movements through a centralized database.

Despite the growing integration of technology in the governance of gated communities, scholarship remains limited to analyses centring on data privacy, financial investment and policy. This risks overlooking the fragmented and fluctuating technological assemblages upholding surveillance regimes, and the social relations and non-rational subjectivities that bring these assemblages into being. To address this gap, this project investigates how shared aspirations of 'safety' in gated communities are mediated through technological surveillance infrastructures. It further examines the social relations that produce and sustain such aspirations, thereby seeking to denaturalise ostensibly self-evident and banal technosocial arrangements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Socio-technical imaginaries

The centralised panopticon has long been ousted in favour of fragmentary and dynamic models of surveillance. Scholars have widely attributed the dispersion of surveillance—from

siloed institutions to the mundane practices of everyday life—to the proliferation of digital technologies, which democratise participation through user engagement and track this as 'metadata' (Lyon, 2016: 369). It is crucial to contextualise these insights within wider histories of decentralised "social surveillance": local elites in rural societies have long policed the mobilities, diets and practices of oppressed-castes/classes (Cherian, 2022: 87; Sonavane, 2023: 56). Building on these parallel histories, I investigate how surveillance is normalised as a crucial dimension of social life by centring the 'imaginary'.

While early anthropologists recognised the role of the imagination in shaping ostensibly self-evident narratives of collective identity, history and aspiration, Anderson (2006: 25) applied this insight to the construction of modern nation-states through participatory media cultures. Extending this, Taylor (2003: 23) conceptualised the 'social imaginary' as the shared, subconscious schema that organises thought and action, by defining not only how social relations operate but how they *ought* to. Imaginaries thus reflect power-laden cultural horizons, and recognise the "quotidian mental work of ordinary people" in driving social life rather than reason or material necessity (Seuferling and Leurs, 2021: 674; Appadurai, 1996: 5). However, in challenging the rationalist bias in accounts of social life, theorists of the 'imaginary' continued to perpetuate a social/material dualism.

This, STS scholars argued, was not the product of a mere oversight but the systemic elision of the 'technical' in the social sciences (Jasanoff and Kim, 2015: 8). As demands and expectations for legibility, security and control are increasingly being fulfilled by technological systems—what Gerhold and Brandes (2021: 3) define as the 'technisation of security'—it is crucial to rehabilitate the technical within our imagination of the social. In doing so, early STS theorists nonetheless encountered limitations: Latour (1996), in positing social and technical elements alike as 'actors' through 'Actor Network Theory', risked drawing false equivalences between their agentic capacities; while Marcus (1995), in centring scientists' imaginaries through 'technoscientific imaginaries', overlooked how laypeople also harbour visions of the future that are fundamentally entwined with their understandings of science and technology. Seeking to redress these lacunae, Jasanoff and Kim (2015: 4) conceptualised 'socio-technical imaginaries' (SIs) as "collectively-held, institutionally-stabilised, and publicly-performed

visions of desirable futures [...] attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology".

SIs fulfill a tripartite function: they envision and execute technological projects (performative), prescribe feasible and desirable futures or "the good life" (utopian), and shape the relationship between individual self-understanding and a shared social and moral order (collectivising) (ibid.: 4). Through their orientation towards the future and grounding in social formations, SIs refute narratives of technodeterminism and unveil, instead, how technological development is *constituted by* and *constitutive of* social and political life (ibid.: 14). This 'co-productive' principle refutes the assumption that the development and deployment of security technologies is inevitable, instead seeking to investigate why communities adopt and *normalise* particular surveillance technologies. Here, the actual capabilities of technologies are subordinate to the collectively-held ideas about them (Gerhold and Brandes, 2021: 3).

SI literature has largely focused on state documents, media coverage, and expert knowledge. While Jasanoff and Kim (2015: 23) initially conceptualised SIs in the context of national nuclear policies, the imagining 'collective' has expanded to encompass local, transnational and private organisations, educational and non-governmental organisations, and social movements (Kuchler and Stigson, 2023: 1). SI scholarship has increasingly begun to mobilise participant observation and semi-structured interviews alongside content and discourse analysis, particularly for locally-held SIs; however, these studies typically privilege key actors and expert stakeholders rather than the public (ibid.). This institutional bias means that the 'performative' function of SIs is largely measured through 'concrete' actions, such as funding or policies. In centring pop culture as sites of SIs, Rudek (2021: 228) argues against the effacement of the laity's role in producing, maintaining and enacting SIs. To contribute to this relatively limited body of SI scholarship, this study employs an ethnographic approach to Sis of 'safety' at the localised scale of the gated community, centring residents and security guards as entry-points.

While Jasanoff and Kim (2015: 11) assert that multiple, competing imaginaries can co-exist in a given spatio-temporal context, SI literature offers limited reflection on how differences may

co-exist *within* a collective that upholds the same SI. Gerhold and Brandes (2021: 1), in their study of SIs of security, examine how the upgradation of security technologies is driven not only by security-related problems (representing governmental bodies and citizens), but also by innovation processes (representing the private sector). However, this variance in rationales is considered extraneous to the constitution of SIs and rarely investigated further. This presumed homogeneity of SIs gestures towards a much larger anxiety: what constitutes the invoked 'collective'? While a growing body of SI literature has sought to answer this across varying scales, with some studies defining the 'collective' and others stressing its definitional ambiguity (Kuchler and Stigson, 2023: 11), the existence of an *a priori* 'collective' is nonetheless taken for granted. Here, I draw upon Jasanoff and Kim's (2009: 124) warning against treating the nation-state—and more widely, the 'collective'—as black-boxed entities that must not remain unquestioned. To do this, we must move beyond Jasanoff and Kim's (2015: 3) notion of 'co-production' that, despite delineating "how things fit together", fails to explain "how they came to be". Here, I attempt to investigate the circulation of affect as a key mechanism through which SIs cohere within putative 'collectives'.

Affective economies

The recognition that "one person's utopia can be another's dystopia" indicates that 'visions of the good life' prescribed by collectives are fundamentally constituted by power asymmetries between and within collectives. These desirable 'utopias' are entwined with the shared *fears* of harms that must be prevented through innovation (Jasanoff and Kim, 2015: 5), thus gesturing towards the suitability of affect as a methodological tool to investigate asymmetrical social relations in SIs. Affect is indispensable in delineating and maintaining preferred ways of living, moral horizons and social orders that are co-produced with surveillance infrastructures in gated communities. Hughes (2024: 918), in his study of affective investments in fracking technologies in Ireland, demonstrates how 'affect' functions as an apt tool to investigate the ostensibly coherent 'collective' by drawing attention to how social ties are formed, underlying power dynamics and the broader stakes pursued through technological mediation. SIs thus offer rich terrain to examine "how affective-discursive practices spatialize, demarcate and place communities and social groups" within the gated community (Hughes, 2024: 913).

To mobilise 'affect' in my study of SIs, I reject neuroscientific framings of affect as "automated programs of actions concocted by evolution" as well as philosophical approaches treating it as "extralinguistic, asignifying and presubjective sensible experiences" (Ott, 2017: 9). Instead, I draw on cultural theorists who locate affect at "the intersection of the somatic and the social" (ibid.: 13). Wetherell (2012: 19) defines affective practices as "embodied meaning-making" such that biological capacities are entangled with culturally-shared meanings in the body. I locate this in the Indian context of "making-salient" or recognising caste identity through everyday gestures, phrases or other bodily practices in order to assert social control over oppressed-castes (Mosse, 2022; qtd in. Bhoi and Gorringe, 2023: 7). A growing body of work on 'affective theories of caste' demonstrates how dominant-caste/classes exhibit a subconscious yet ideologically-encoded bodily response to indicators of oppressed-caste/class proximity (ibid.: 9). Autoethnographic accounts of embodied disgust exemplify this—with Lee (2015: 30) immediately moving away upon hearing a sweepers' broom, and Chakrabarty's (2018: 8) mother "scrambl[ing]" to prevent their lavatory-cleaner from touching anything in the household [2]. This demonstrates how disgust, manifesting as observable physical behaviours, secures and communicates hierarchical social difference.

While we have established that affect shapes bodies (*the middle-class woman scrambles…*), it is critical to highlight that this orientation is drawn towards or away from other bodies (*…away from the sweeper*). Put simply, affect entails making a claim about a subject by virtue of their belonging to a wider collective. To investigate how affects bind certain bodies into 'collectives' and embed themselves into public life, I draw on Ahmed's (2013) theory of 'affective economies'. Ahmed (2013: 51) contends that emotion [3] does not reside in any particular individual—neither the subject that feels it, nor the object that it is felt towards. Instead, these subjects serve as nodes within a network of circulation wherein certain emotions are displaced or "slide" from an object to another through association, and "stick" to certain 'signifiers'

[2] There is a growing body of scholarship examining how the oppressed-caste body is similarly shaped by affect. However, as this project seeks to scrutinise dominant-caste/class practices exclusively, this is beyond its scope (Satyanarayanan & Lee, 2023: 24; Bhoi & Gorringe, 2023: 2).

[3] Here, I use 'emotion' as individually-experienced feelings and 'affect' for emotions within wider social contexts, though these terms sometimes overlap.

through repetition (ibid.: 8). Writing post-9/11, Ahmed illustrates how the signifiers 'terrorist' and 'Muslim' become interlinked through metonymic 'sliding', such that fear 'sticks' to Muslim bodies and marks them as a 'could-be-terrorist'. This circulation of signifiers and associated emotions creates the effect of "surfaces and boundaries" that distinguish not only between the individual 'self' and 'other' as distinct objects of emotion, but further align the 'other' with a wider collective by constructing resemblance between disparate 'others' (ibid.: 161). The category of 'others' thus produced is integral to producing 'us' as a collective threatened by their existence.

While Ahmed's (2013) framework is undoubtedly a valuable tool, it has been operationalised largely through discursive analysis, thus eliding the embodied and multimodal ways in which affect produces solidarities and imaginaries. Hughes (2024: 920), in his ethnographic study of anti-fracking SIs, demonstrates how emotions are typically portrayed as "self-evident black-boxes" that are presented without interrogation, and in binaries wherein emotions drive collectives either towards or away from an imaginary. Here, we see how engaging with lived practices may visibilise the paradoxical and power-laden affective and embodied manifestations of SIs that are prone to being overlooked. Thus, it is imperative to operationalise Ahmed's (2013) framework through ethnographic methods such that circulating signifiers and affects are regarded not as static, but mutable and fluid entities, thus enabling more nuanced forms of social engagement.

Fragmented infrastructures

Affective practices, however, do not operate at the level of the body alone. As Ahmed (2013: 15, 69) illustrates, affective experiences of fear align "bodily space with social space" by imposing asymmetric mobilities across space. Such (im)mobilities are materially enacted through physical infrastructures that ensure a "certain allocation of people in space, a canalisation of their circulation" (Foucault, 1984: 46). Seuferling and Leurs (2021: 673) document how the active, constant rearrangement of human and non-human actors is enacted through infrastructural production of media technologies which mediate the speed, direction and vulnerability of the flow of goods, people and ideas. Put simply, social control necessarily

requires mediation through infrastructures. Furthermore, SIs' 'performative' function makes infrastructures key sites for investigating how collective ideals are materially enacted. Drawing on infrastructure studies, I centre socio-technical infrastructures in gated communities as integral sites for investigating naturalised yet power-laden assumptions about urban life and (im)mobilities, and the complex social arrangements that enact them.

By virtue of their expanse, there has been a tendency to assume that infrastructures are universal or singular (Guma, 2020: 731). This generalisation overlooks the contexts within which infrastructures are integrated. Star and Ruhleder (1996: 112) contrast this by positing infrastructure not as a set of things, but as a relational practice connecting people, activities and structures. This invites a methodological shift away from centrally-organised, large-scale socio-technical systems towards networks and protocols operating at microscales, typified by the hyperlocal gated community (Parks and Starosielski, 2015: 8). Star (1999: 381) defines infrastructure as: embedded within social arrangements and technologies; co-constitutive of social conventions and taken for granted by members of the community; and generally invisible until breakdown. While a potent means of recognising that infrastructures vary from one spatio-temporal context to another (ibid.: 380), the framework merely gestures towards the heterogeneous constitution and distribution of infrastructure *within* a particular location. To examine this in depth, I look towards debates around Graham and Marvin's (2002) concept of 'splintering urbanism'.

Graham and Marvin (2002: 91) locate socio-technical systems in the period of post-liberalisation, as infrastructural monopolies collapsed to give precedence to market competition over social equity. This led to socio-material fragmentation in cities, such that elite "secessionary" enclaves (typified by gated communities) are created with customised high-tech infrastructure, thus increasing the existing social and spatial distance between social groups (ibid.: 220). These "premium networked space[s]" are populated by "new or retrofitted transport, telecommunications, power or water infrastructures that are customised precisely to the needs of powerful users and spaces, while bypassing less powerful users and spaces" (ibid.: 185). However, two problems emerge with this framework. Firstly, a vast body of scholarship from the Global South has refuted the assumption that urban infrastructure once

offered universal coverage, with Ranganathan (2022: 135) documenting how "postcolonial cities have always been splintered along lines of race, class, and ethnicity" such that this spatial segregation has long organised the unequal distribution of public infrastructure. Secondly, Coutard (2008: 1818) argues that the quality of networked services is determined by which spaces are already considered higher-quality or 'premium' by virtue of the populace they cater to rather than vice versa.

These interjections nonetheless fail to acknowledge that infrastructure within the 'premium networked space' (here, the gated community) is unlikely to be monolithic or homogeneously-enabled throughout. While Graham and Marvin (2002: 13) gesture towards the possibility of acknowledging these differences through their reference to 'retrofitting', they nonetheless fail to read this as an incremental and continuous process rather than an instantaneous one. Guma (2020: 730) argues that this reflects Global North dominance in infrastructural debates, as universalised notions of 'innovation' and 'modernity' that are only capable of imagining 'linear' or technodeterministic paths to progress are imposed upon Global South infrastructures, thus pathologising infrastructural heterogeneity as 'unfinished' or 'broken'. By centring 'incomplete' infrastructures, he draws attention to infrastructures that are innately ephemeral; modulated to serve unintended functions; products of breakdown, makeshift or ad hoc; and not fixed, but produced by irregular and uncertain political, economic and technical negotiation (ibid.: 734). Rather than pathologising infrastructure in the Global South as 'lacking', he understands it as 'always in the making' (ibid.: 729).

Guma's (2020) intervention, while crucial, risks occluding power dynamics inherent in such 'splintered infrastructures'. Studying Nairobi's communal payphones, he insists that residents bear the costs of use and repair collectively (ibid.: 737). However, he does not further investigate how this responsibility is distributed among people. Similarly, while he notes that the need for their repair and protection led to "the creation of community-level and street-level bureaucrats, who became key nodes of power in the community with respect to the systems" (ibid.), he does not examine these emerging social hierarchies in depth. In my study, I will investigate how infrastructural fragmentation organises social hierarchies in gated communities.

Ignorance

Urban infrastructures are physical manifestations of knowledge and power relations co-produced through the technoscientific practices of actors and organisations (Livingstone, 2003). While the city has offered rich terrain to explore the relationship between knowledge, technology and power, it has attended minimally to the equally productive role of ignorance. Pedersen (2017: 91) understands ignorance as "infrastructure in its own right [...] defined as a ground from which both knowledge and lack of knowledge come into being". This is most evident in the digitalised 'black-box city', where urban relations are governed by systems wherein "we can observe its inputs and outputs, but we cannot tell how one becomes the other" due to the concealment of inner workings (Smith, 2020: 3; Pasquale, 2016: 3). As citizens must use technologies without knowing how they function or their underlying power dynamics, technologies simultaneously impose and are maintained by this ignorance. Thus, to study how surveillance infrastructures in gated communities co-produce imaginaries of 'safety', it is imperative to investigate the performance of *not* knowing.

Epistemological scholarship has established that knowledge and social control reinforce each other and are distributed unevenly across society. Foucault (1971) argues that power determines what constitutes knowledge and who is qualified to know, and thereby, upon whom ignorance is imposed. Ignorance, here, does not merely operate as the absence of knowledge but as a complementary form of power that is intentional and systemic in its own right (Das *et al*., 2024). Consequently, ignorance must be studied not as an omission or accidental by-product of epistemological exercise, but as an actively "socially-produced culturally-maintained phenomenon" (Dilley and Kirsch, 2015, p. 5). The interdisciplinary rise of 'agnatology' has produced a vast body of scholarship not only attending to the mechanisms through which ignorance is produced or its social and political effects, but more crucially, the unequal distribution of ignorance and varying intentionalities (Bovensiepen, 2020; McGoey, 2007). These approaches reject the perception of ignorance as homogeneous, making room for studies on the deliberate/strategic and subconscious/partial deployment of ignorance as a tool of governance (Anand, 2015; Graeber, 2015; Krisch and Dilley, 2015). In this study, I extend this agnatological enquiry to examine how surveillance infrastructures in gated communities sustain and are sustained by multiple, unequally-distributed forms of ignorance.

Ignorance, however, is not a purely epistemological concept; it is distinctly affective. Writing about Adolf Eichmann's role in the Holocaust, Arendt (1977: 301) attributes his crimes to neither a monstrous nor stupid nature, but his thoughtlessness instead. The cold rationality of bureaucratic processes performs two key functions: it renders people incapable of contextualising actions beyond what is asked of them through "blind obedience", and negates any capacity for deliberation or emotion (156). In doing so, Arendt (1977: 154) underestimates the affective dimensions of ignorance that are key to operationalising violent regimes. Building on Arendt's notion of the 'banality of evil', Bovensiepen (2020: 491) draws attention to the "spatial, emotive and epistemic disconnects between those implementing the project and those affected by it". She argues that scholarly emphasis on *strategic* forms of ignorance has vastly underestimated the internal fragility of ignorance, and the significance of affect in maintaining ignorance regimes (491). Here, she draws attention to the normalised 'way of doing things' that interweave non-knowledge with "infrastructural affects [that] remain unspoken and unknown because certain kinds of questions have not been asked" due to an "intentional abdication of responsibility" (Appel, 2012: 442). To investigate how surveillance infrastructures and their corresponding 'safety' regimes are sustained in gated communities, this study draws on her typology of 'wilful blindness': detachment that occludes reality, ignorance as obfuscation, and the marginalisation of uncomfortable knowledge through reasoning and routine (Bovensiepen, 2020: 502). While this framework aptly maps the affective and epistemic asymmetries fostered by everyday surveillance infrastructures in gated communities, I caution that it unwittingly overlooks how ignorance is *systemically manufactured* rather than a consequence of individual decisions.

Mill's (2014) framework of 'structured blindness' enables us to overcome this lacuna, by drawing attention to how ignorance is structurally produced through and distributed across caste, class and gendered dynamics within the gated community. Mills (2014: 72) argues that racism operates as a 'subjectivity', producing patterns of perception and attention such that evidence of injustice is regularly dismissed to preserve dominant values as stable and rational. As a result, 'whiteness' is not merely an ethnic category but a constructed model of "cognitive norms" wherein membership in dominant groups inculcates certain ways of seeing, thinking

and knowing that "preclude self-transparency and genuine understanding of all social realities" (Mills, 2014: 18). Rather than attributing ignorance to individual lack of experience or motivation (Mills, 2014: 17), this framework demonstrates how social structures implicate everyone in their reproduction by manufacturing certain kinds of 'ignorance'. 'Structured blindness' is therefore key to analysing how social positions like caste, class and gender structure residents and security guards' ways of thinking about surveillance infrastructures—and who they protect against—that may seem incidental but are, in reality, systemic.

Kanti Das *et al.* (2024: 44) define the process of belief formation as characterised by decisions about relevance, plausibility, consistency and credibility, which are, in turn, affected by that which one already knows and believes. While the intricate ties between knowledge and SIs have been long established—with one's beliefs, values and aspirations emerging from that which one already knows, and indeed reaffirming this existing knowledge—there is a need to recuperate the role of ignorance as a similarly contextual and productive force that shapes SIs. The following chapter charts out a conceptual framework guiding my enquiry by synthesising the themes mentioned thus far in relation to each other.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing on the literature discussed thus far, I assert that surveillance exceeds institutional deployment by states, markets and overarching organisations, and embeds itself into the granular logics of everyday life. Rather than examining vast regimes of power in themselves, I am concerned with how they manifest in quotidian ways of thinking, feeling and knowing that are emplaced within material, historical and technical contexts. More particularly, I am interested in how these normalised worldviews about how technology can and ought to be mobilised to animate certain futures that cohere across a variety of actors.

This dissertation attempts to engage in a critical discussion about how the aspiration of 'safety' is produced and sustained through technological infrastructures in the localised site of the gated community. To address this, it draws chiefly upon Jasanoff and Kim's (2015) notion of 'socio-technical imaginary' to examine the shared futures that communities imagine and the

ways in which they believe technological advancement will actualise them. This is crucial because laity are often dismissed as lacking either the intellectual capacity to adequately engage with or imagine technology, or considered blank canvases upon which broader institutional powers are enacted. However, it fails to examine the mechanisms by which these social and technological aspirations for the future that guide our actions and investments in the present become 'common' in the very first place; nor does it account for the power asymmetries that persist within a dominant imaginary. This is a particularly valuable enquiry to advance in the fragmented and paradoxical material realities of the Global South.

Therefore, I pose the research question: **How are experiences and aspirations of 'safety' mediated by technological surveillance infrastructures in gated communities?**

To address this, I suggest mobilising three central concepts to examine how technologically-mediated experiences of 'safety' are constructed in gated communities: affect, ignorance and imagination. While Ahmed's (2013) framework of 'affective economies' explains how 'collectives' are (re)produced by the circulation of emotion through surveillance infrastructures, the 'sociology of ignorance' reveals how omissions, silences and infrastructural gaps stabilise dominant imaginaries across disparate actors. However, rather than treating them as discrete analytical categories, this study approaches them as mutually-constitutive dimensions of socio-technical practice. Surveillance infrastructures in gated communities operate as assemblages that simultaneously coordinate emotional responses, epistemic orientations, and material imaginaries of 'safety'.

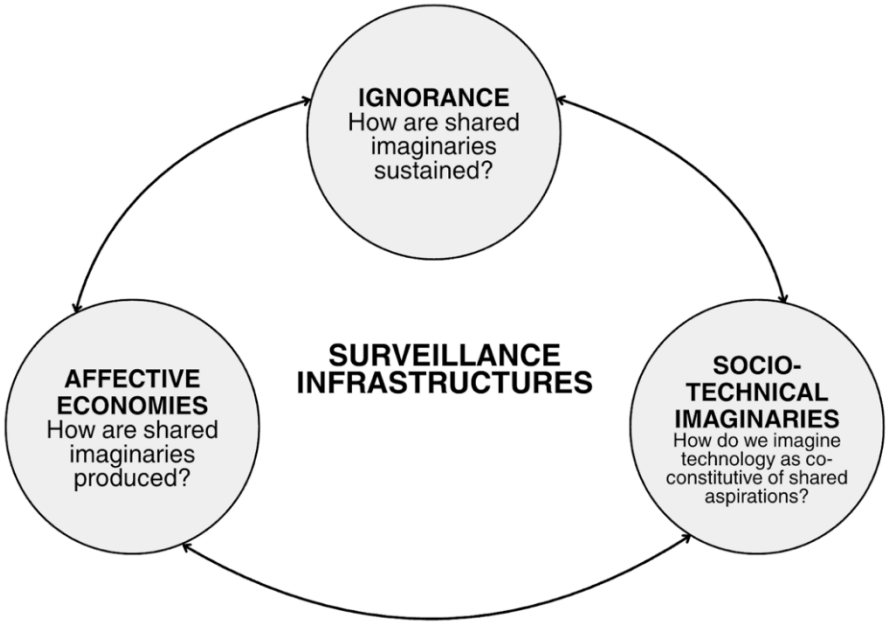

Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

Drawing from the material and multisensorial turn in media anthropology, this study centres embodiment and affective engagements with technological artefacts to grapple with the mediated natures of urban routines and practices. Here, I follow Seuferling and Leurs (2021) in defining 'mediation' as "'enabling environments' [...] organise and manipulate space and time, and thus obtain infrastructural power" (p. 671). While this infrastructural emphasis draws attention to the materialities of media distribution—including technologies, labour, economic investments and social relations—I am concurrently interested in the way "technologies come to represent the possibility of being modern" at a collective scale (Parks and Starosielski, 2015: 5; Larkin, 2013: 7).

While this study recognises the role of surveillance infrastructures as channels that reflect existing notions of 'safety', it further seeks to understand how power dynamics manifest through feelings, desires and knowledges that are fundamentally entwined with such 'media-technological realisation' (ibid.) at the hyperlocal scale of the post-colonial gated community. What it seeks to contribute to the discipline is, then, an examination into how ways of knowing, thinking or feeling through technological artefacts render discriminatory practices banal. I am interested in how surveillance infrastructures performatively constitute their own

user collectives by organising bodies, affects and knowledges through technological mediation.

METHODOLOGY

Our understanding of the world is mediated by competing and interwined culturally-produced knowledged and preconceptions (Patton, 2015: 200). While my pilot study sought to reject the pursuit of empirical and universal truths in favour of "unveil[ing] the lifeworlds [...] that have embedded into the cultural order through naturalisation" (214), I have found this approach to be insufficient as well. This is because individuals do not construct non-contradictory social worlds, but accommodate multiple co-existing and autonomous meanings. Thus, I refute the assumption that lifeworlds are wholly accessible, legible or sensible to researchers. Instead, I sought to "acknowledge the vagaries of affective life and the ambiguous existence of collective affects" through semi-structured interviews with residents and security guards, supplemented by participant observation in the "ABC" gated community (Bissell, 2022: 69).

Participant observation

Guided by the principle that social worlds are interpreted rather than literal, participant observation seeks to "make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar" (Fontein, 2013: 58). As I sought to investigate how surveillance infrastructures are imagined and contested everyday, this proved to be an apt tool. Through its relatively open-ended approach, participant observation enabled me to witness the embodied, improvised and contingent practices and infrastructures engaged in the co-constitution of knowledges, imaginaries and social relations (Irani, 2019: 19). However, while traditional ethnography necessitates sustained periods of fieldwork, I practised 'patchwork ethnography'. Here, research is carried out through short-term field visits and "fragmentary yet rigorous data" (Günel *et al.*, 2020). Patchwork ethnography seeks to work *with* rather than against lacunae and constraints (ibid.), enabling me to recognise how partial knowledges are productive forces in social life.

To understand imaginaries of surveillance, it was critical that I experience the space in which they are produced and practiced. The ethnographic standpoint of "embodiment" enabled me to direct my attention to the ways in which bodily perception and space are co-constitutive, culturally-produced and power-laden (Fontein, 2013: 65). I practiced 'go-along' interviews wherein I accompanied security guards to observe their spatial practices and interpretations thereof.

Interviews

The semi-structured interview was a key tool in inviting residents and security guards to reflect on their experiences, imaginations and engagements with surveillance infrastructures, and seeking meaningful patterns from "thick descriptions" of sensation and memory (Spradley, 2016: 232). Such interviews, according to feminist scholars, are effective in gaining access to the "hidden knowledge" of marginalised populations (Reinharz, 1992: 19). I extend this argument: interviews further enable us to *demystify* these covert narratives that the residents and security guards sustain and reproduce while simultaneously being subjected to them. As I sought to study personal and collective imaginaries of security, it was crucial that I engage actively with the respondents' lived experiences and acknowledge their subjective interpretations as complex, power-laden insights into socio-technical systems (Dunwoodie *et al*., 2022; Kvale, 1996). This was most feasible through the semi-structured interview, wherein I could attend to "domains of affect" or instances where "the body becomes more intrusive than it ordinarily is" or "there is notable talk of emotion and feelings" (Wetherell, 2012: 96).

While interviews with security guards were carried out in-person, given to a predominant lack of availability beyond their twelve-hour shifts and access to smartphones, interviews with residents were conducted online according to their convenience. This often resulted in multiple shorter sessions due to technical difficulties such as network issues or low charge, allowing flexibility. Rather than sites of data collection, the interviews facilitated the co-production of meaning (Pink, 2011: 263). Although traditional approaches recommend refraining from expressing personal opinions and experiences to centre the respondent, I practiced a "participatory model" whereby self-disclosure encouraged rapport and

reciprocity while mitigating the researcher-researched hierarchy (Brennen, 2017: 38). To establish a practice of mutual empathy and comfort, I shared my own anecdotes with respondents when they were hesitant to broach sensitive topics. I conceptualised my interviews as dialogues rather than sites of extraction, wherein I could freely discuss my research objectives and acknowledge participants as "not merely raw, pre-theoretical sources of 'experience', but active producers of their own interpretations, which compete with those of the researcher" (Haritaworn, 2017: 3).

Sampling

ABC, launched in 2003, was among the first residential projects to integrate surveillance technologies into everyday spaces in North India. ABC's labour predominantly comes from Gunjan Village, an informal urban settlement located ten minutes away. This spatial proximity was crucial not only in ensuring the availability of labour, but also in accelerating fears of middle-class vulnerability to crime, making it an apt site for the study.

S. No.	Name	Category	Gender
1	R1F	Resident	Female
2	R2F	Resident	Female
3	R3F	Resident	Female
4	R1M	Resident	Male
5	R2M	Resident	Male
6	RWA1M	Resident (RWA Representative)	Male
7	S1M	Security guard	Male
8	S2M	Security guard	Male
9	S2F	Security guard	Female

Table 1: Participants categorised by their relation to the surveillance infrastructure and gender

Participants were selected through snowball sampling. R1F served as my initial contact and "seed," connecting me to other residents and the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) representative, RWA1M. My acquaintance with the security guards was made through a similar process. As my study sought to delve into the mundane, everyday practices of hard-to-access elite residents, snowball sampling proved to be an ideal tool by enabling me to transform my initial contacts into sampling momentum through its networking potential and flexibility (Gierczyk *et al.*, 2024: 88).

Thematic analysis

Although I was guided by existing literature and my pilot study's findings, I approached the interpretative process with the assumption that there was no single set of categories waiting to be discovered, but "as many ways of 'seeing' the data as one can invent" (Dey, 2003: 110). Employing thematic analysis for interview data drew my attention to the co-existing consistencies and paradoxes in the recurrent use of certain terms or phrases. Thus, thematic analysis enabled me to move beyond cursory descriptions to capture the complexities and nuances in participants' perspectives by attending to the explicit and implicit meanings in my data (Joffe, 2011). It was particularly reliable as it prioritised saturation observed throughout the body of data, following the qualitative tradition of drawing conclusions based on ample justifiable observations (Lowe *et al.*, 2018: 193).

Constructing the field: Caste-as-method

During fieldwork and rapport-building preceding the interviews, I was asked my caste and more frequently, informed of the respondent's caste identity and practices. Despite initially wanting to exclude these details as extraneous, I quickly realised that one moves through the field as a casted body. Caste, in mediating how actors interact with one another and technologies[4], forms a crucial methodological framework.

Modernity has covertly embedded untouchability as a consciousness in the Indian mind, such that caste practices are not always enacted transparently (Guru, 2009: 50). Archaeology, in analysing discourse as an exercise of power and practicing certain dominantly accepted rules,

[4] For literature on Caste Critical Technology Studies, see Shanmugavelan; Ratnamala, 2022; Yuvraj *et al.*, 2022.

has the potential to unveil the persistence of caste (54). A key instance is when a domestic worker was being reprimanded for her entry not being registered on the MyGate app, RWA1M asked her to stand at a distance from his office desk. Recognising such implicit practices of untouchability—including references to caste-surnames and dietary habits—as communicative practices is crucial in the study of imaginaries as it indicates horizons of tolerance (Patel, 2017: 1012).

Furthermore, I was asked my surname, my parents' professions, my region and finally, my caste by a security guard—yet another instance Guru (2009: 55) would term an 'archaeological practice' seeking to assess my social location in comparison to the respondent's. Here, *concealment* emerged as a key methodological tool. Most respondents I engaged with claimed Brahmin identity, many admitting their proximity to the Rashtriya Swamyasevak Sangh, a right-wing Hindu-nationalist paramilitary organisation in India. Admitting my identity as a Dalit woman risked their withdrawal as respondents and potential harm, while deflecting would mark me as 'suspicious' in a context where caste-enquiry is normalised. Thus, I concealed my identity by not only naming a different caste-status but simultaneously *performing* it by co-opting traditionally dominant-caste sartorial, comportmental and linguistic markers. This reveals caste as an "identitarian performance" of arbitrary and manipulable symbols, revealing that the power of dominant-castes is not "held" but "continuously created and reinforced by a variety of "sanctioning" mechanisms" (Satyanarayanan & Lee, 2023: 24; Bhoi & Gorringe, 2023: 20). This methodology further enabled me to recognise how residents and guards similarly concealed and performed their own caste-identities, often exaggeratedly.

While this approach yielded important insights, it raised complex ethical dilemmas about deception in research, and highlighted how caste-based exclusion forces oppressed-caste researchers into complex methodological choices.

Positionality

Rather than being guided by my politics, my study is a deliberate effort to critique them. Studying Brahmin queers, Kang (2023) asserts the need to speak about dominant-castes "the way in which they have spoken about the world—as a specimen." By researching upper

middle-class residents in gated communities, I sought to denaturalise and "inquire critically into hidden presuppositions that shape our thought," and gain a better understanding of my own situatedness (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012: 574; Haraway, 1988: 592). Adopting a self-reflexive approach to my lived reality as an oppressed-caste woman who belongs to the affluent upper middle-class, I occupy a hybrid insider/outsider position (Narayan, 1993: 682). Although I was able to access the exclusive socialities of gated communities due to my shared cultural capital and lifestyle, acquired by my class, my caste identity posed the risk of alienating me from my respondents while encouraging me to think beyond the gated community (Ganesh, 2025: 6). These differences served as fertile ground for the study of society as a heterogeneous assemblage in which one's positionality informs one's "partial perspective" (Haraway, 1988: 586). Consequently, I adhere to this 'situated model of knowing' which asserts that all knowledges are incomplete and subjective, and hence, the researcher must "place remembered events from my life beside those of the interviewees" to make sense of how surveillance infrastructures are experienced and imagined (Haritaworn, 2017: 4).

Ethics

Following institutional approval, informed consent sheets were distributed to participants in English and Hindi as per their requirement, either in person or by e-mail. I repeatedly emphasised that participation was a voluntary undertaking that could be withdrawn at any time. In addition to being assured of their anonymity, participants were invited to convey any segments of the interviews they wished to be omitted from the final body of data. To ensure participant autonomy, I revealed the research objective to the security guards, soliciting their feedback and criticisms on the study itself (Miller & Wertheimer, 2010); however, my objective was conveyed more ambiguously to residents to invite their honest participation. Interviews conducted in-person were recorded via phone, while those online were executed, recorded and transcribed over Microsoft Teams, and stored in LSE OneDrive until the data had been analysed.

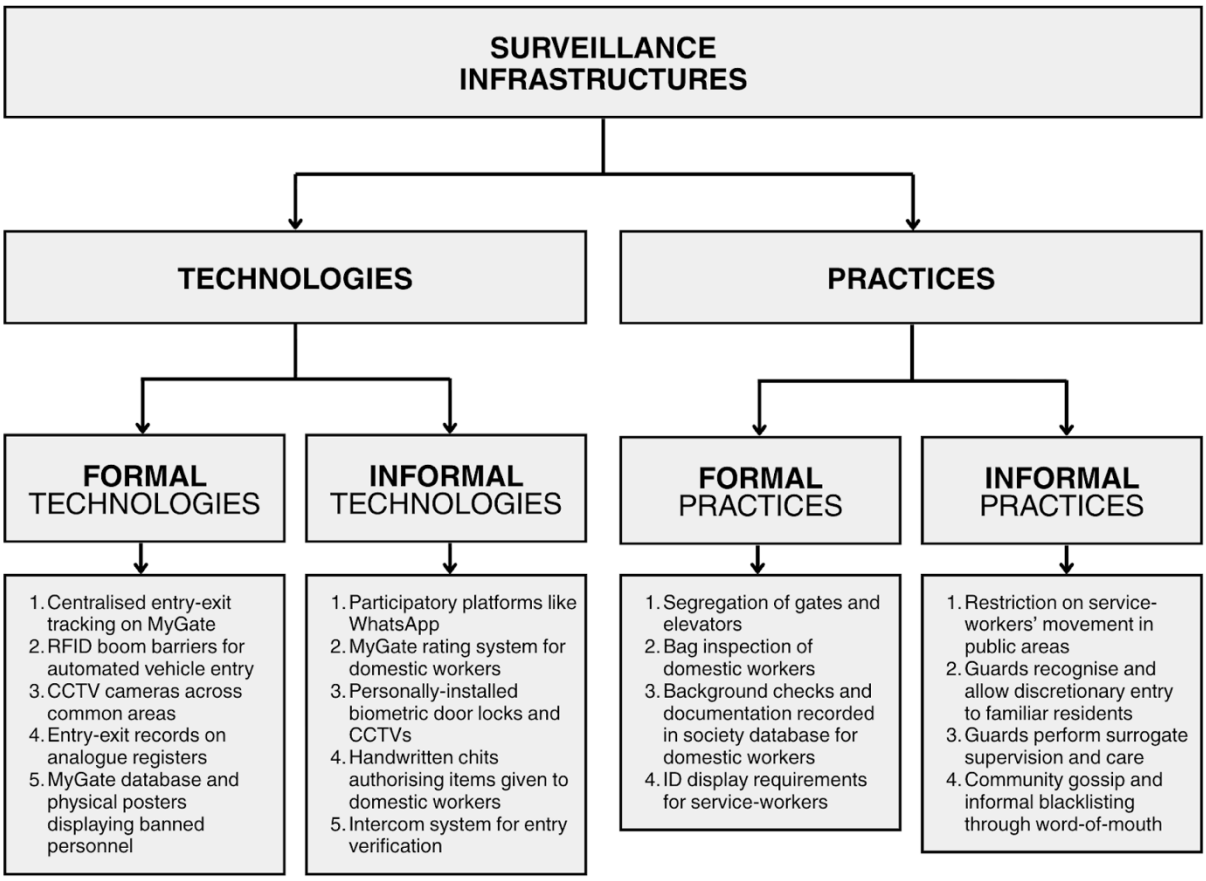

Figure 2: A taxonomy of surveillance infrastructures in ABC

FINDINGS

Following Gitelman (2006), who recognised media as the arrangement of material technologies as well as associated social practices, I have documented the surveillance infrastructures in ABC by categorising them into 'technologies' and 'practices', and then into institutionally-mandated (formal) or emergent (informal) (Figure 2). In this section, I argue that surveillance infrastructures in ABC work to cohere disparate actors into monolithic 'collectives' that aspire and enact safety through investment in surveillance technologies. First, I demonstrate how oppositional collectives of domestic (and service) workers and residents are produced through the circulation of affect, then how security guards and residents cohere into a collective that pathologises and surveils domestic (and service) workers through the exercise of ignorances fostered by a fragmented surveillance

infrastructure, and lastly, how the surveillance of domestic workers is framed as a moral imperative to ensure the 'safety' of residents.

Producing collectives

This section refutes the assumption that coherent collectives that need to be protected or excluded pre-exist in the gated community. Instead, I argue that affects circulate through surveillance infrastructures to produce ostensibly coherent classes of 'criminal Others', comprising the working-class labour, and 'like-minded insiders' in opposition to one another.

'Criminal Other'

All participants in my sample identified domestic workers—and occasionally, service workers like personal drivers—as the primary risks that surveillance infrastructures protected them against. In opposition to 'strangers' who are likely to lose their way in as expansive a locality, domestic workers who are familiar with one's routine were considered greater threats. Embedded within these proclamations were legitimate confessions of fear, vulnerability and suspicion experienced by the residents. These emotions were not detached or discrete but upheld by a vast assemblage of surveillance infrastructures. When enquired about how conversations around safety among ABC residents occurred, R1F highlighted the frequent use of WhatsApp to highlight security threats:

People keep putting security concerns on the WhatsApp group. People have often posted, "Please don't employ this maid. She has stolen money from my house. If she tries to enter the neighbourhood, don't entertain her." Because MyGate has all their details, she was flagged there and banned from entering the society.

The rapid circulation of such incidents through instant-messaging platforms encourages the reproduction of associations between 'criminality' and the 'oppressed-caste/class' worker. Here, surveillance technologies like MyGate and WhatsApp do not just operate to control bodies already identified as potentially harmful, they further reproduce their pathologisation, transforming individual incidents into collective narratives. The fear of damage experienced by residents 'sticks' to the body of the domestic worker (Ahmed, 2013: 65). Such

communication generates fear and distrust against domestic workers as a class. Indeed, when asked to describe how she would identify a 'threat' within the locality, R3F stated:

We are a very like-minded community of people. If someone is dressed shabbily, walking around aimlessly, you will be cautious.

Although R3F had not exhibited any distrust towards her own domestic workers earlier in our conversation, she now identified potential perpetrators in strikingly caste/class-marked vocabularies of appearance and gait—that her own domestic workers are likely to share (Mosse, 2020: 29). This semiotic identification of 'threats' is perhaps exemplified by colour photographs of women taped to the checkpoint walls by the gate, large enough to catch the attention of passerbys. When I asked S1F who these women were, she explained:

They are banned from the society. They were caught stealing.
Did you find the stolen materials on them, or have these images been here a while?
Do you think a poor person will steal? He considers himself fortunate to have what he already has. Suppose I do not want you sitting here. Will I tell you to your face to leave? No. I will tell RWA1M, "She came here and she stole my pen. Please don't send her here again."

In arguing that domestic workers are, in fact, *framed* as 'criminals' by residents, S1F articulates a drastic shift from residents' narratives of victimhood. The wall of photographs literalises her claim by constructing domestic workers as the *likely* perpetrators through the repetition of caste/class-marked appearances in the context of criminality.

The circulation of domestic workers' likeness in public spaces—whether through static infrastructures like posters, or digital communication—attaches 'fear' to the bodies of disparate domestic workers (Ahmed, 2004: 66). As the notion of the 'domestic worker' is increasingly associated with 'fear', an imagined resemblance is constructed between *all* domestic workers (ibid.). Therefore, the 'criminal Other' does not exist as an *a priori* collective

but is *produced* through the systemic circulation of fear across media artefacts, transforming individual domestic workers into a unified 'threat'.

Domestic workers, however, are not monitored solely as 'threats'. R3F explained the value of the security infrastructures in ensuring the safety of her full-time domestic worker, who resided in the 'servant quarters' of her home:

She was going out around 10 pm for a birthday party. Immediately, the security guard called me and asked, "It's late, is she allowed to go out?" I hadn't given it much thought but then, I reconsidered. She's a young girl. Who knows who she's hanging out with and what might happen?

By placing herself as the custodial guardian of her domestic worker while actively exploiting her labour, R3F demonstrates how her expression of care—far from being an exception to the caste/class-based pattern of control discussed so far—merely reaffirms it through a different affective vocabulary. Qayum and Ray (2009: 93) conceptualise the 'rhetoric of love' as an ideological strategy that sustains structural inequalities by "reinterpreting relationships of servitude in terms of mutual trust, affection, obligation, and loyalty." While 'care' may appear to promise unification and empathy across socially-antagonistic caste/class boundaries, here, it further entrenches power asymmetries. 'Fear' and 'care'—far from being self-evident and antithetical affects, as Hughes (2024: 911) criticises—here, reinforce one another. By recognising that emotions do not neatly correspond to particular social functions, I am drawing critical attention to how the everyday mobilisation of emotions is conflicting and dynamic.

The complex relationship between the very real fears of personal or property harm and broader collective structures of feeling is perhaps exemplified by R1M. While he expressed no suspicion towards his own domestic worker, he did not extend this trust to other service workers in ABC. Regardless of their personal beliefs, the participants in my sample nonetheless echoed shared ways of thinking about potential 'criminals'. In this context, domestic workers indeed emerge as socio-spatial 'insider-outsiders' in the gated community, occupying hybrid positions of tentative belonging and anticipated expulsion (Waldrop, 2004:

99)—a status now drastically amplified by the deployment of technologies capable of ubiquitous and perpetual surveillance. Rather than challenging the divisive logics of socio-spatial control in gated communities, these affective personal bonds reinforce them by demonstrating that distrust is selective and therefore, rational, thus obscuring its systemic and categorical nature.

'Like-minded insiders'

While all residents in my sample expressed fear of petty theft, the female residents were particularly alarmed by the pervasive threat of assault. When asked to cite a particular incident when R1F was concerned about her safety, she instead cited an incident when she feared her daughter's safety:

My daughter would go down for classes. She told me one day, "There's a driver who stares at me." We tried to track him down with RWA1M but we couldn't. [...] You have to be careful with these people. They're not educated. Who knows what they will do?

Although R1F's anxiety about her daughter's safety stems from the material realities of crime rates and sexual violence—with Noida and the neighbouring capital, Delhi, both ranking in the top 110 most crime-prone cities in the world in 2025 (Times of India, 2025)—they are nonetheless rooted in a caste/class-based rhetoric that underpins the exclusionary logics of the gated community. By pathologising "these [uneducated] people", R1F is actively engaged in collective-making where the oppressed-caste/class man, referred to by his lack of education, emerges as the "ideal criminal" to the dominant-caste/class woman, whose vulnerability constructs her as the "ideal victim" (Das, 1996: 2418).

Here, R1F's fear does not merely signify the potential of domestic workers (typified as 'criminal Others') to affect—or more specifically, harm—other bodies. It moreover signals the residents' capacities to *be affected* or harmed (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 184; Ahmed, 2013: 50). The circulation of media artefacts that direct suspicion against domestic workers

simultaneously impresses upon the residents, producing them as a 'collective' that is vulnerable to crime. Put simply, the construction of a homogenous class of 'criminal Others' concomitantly produces an oppositional collective that is endangered by their existence. R2F articulates this co-production of collectives:

What also matters is the gentry of the people living in the society. ATS is not a big society. It's 700 houses. So, what we have is just very like-minded people. [...] Your friends are here, your family is here. Once you're within it, you're safe, you're fine. But right outside the society? I don't think it's safe.

Here, R2F believes ABC gated community to be "safe" due to the presence of "very like-minded people" as a collective, implicitly posited in stark contrast to the aforementioned 'criminal Others'. ABC thus emerges as a 'collective' by "'feeling' the presence of others as the cause of injury or a form of intrustion" (Ahmed, 2013: 49). R2F articulates this affective formation of collectives in spatial terms: inside(rs) and outside(rs). This "outside" is not an ambiguous construction in the residents' imagination. Gunjan Village, the slum housing most of ABC's working-class labour, is located a mere ten-minute walk away. R3F articulates collective anxieties about this spatial proximity:

I have two part-time help. They come from outside.
Would that be Gunjan Village or elsewhere?
Most from Gunjan, yeah. Because that is the cesspool we have.

R3F attempts to delineate the separation between the slum and the gated community by deeming Gunjan Village a "cesspool", dehumanising the space of the very labour she depends upon daily. This dehumanisation of working-class spaces and labour justifies the egregious exploitation of domestic workers. Furthermore, it exemplifies how affects like 'fear' and 'hatred' seek to simultaneously organize spaces and reorganise bodies across spaces through gestures of 'moving away' (Ahmed, 2013: 49). However, her continued dependence on this very "cesspool" for working class labour demonstrates that such an exorcism cannot be achieved in ABC (Maher, 2003: 751).

Having demonstrated how oppositional collectives of 'criminal Others' and 'like-minded insiders' are constructed through the circulation of affect, I propose that surveillance infrastructures are mobilized by ABC to contain "shared fears of harms" and consequently, preserve 'the good life' in the gated community (Jasanoff and Kim, 2015: 5).

Technological collectives

As we sipped tea together, the security guards seated in the women's checkpoint informed me that domestic workers must submit personal documents—including Aadhar card and photographs—along with a police verification form within three days of employment to generate ID cards and MyGate profiles that enable entry-exit into ABC. When asked why these documents are collected, they explained that these details ensure that the domestic worker can be easily traced should they commit a transgression. Far from simply seeking to make domestic workers wholly legible to their employers (Scott, 1999: 2), these analogue technologies *presume* the potential criminality of the domestic worker, evident most obviously in the demand for police verification.

A few days later, over a Zoom call, R1M emphatically asserted that it is mandatory for all service workers in ABC to wear their ID cards at all times. While residents argue that this enables them to distinguish verified domestic workers from potential 'threats' who have invaded the gated community without permission, it concomitantly distinguishes domestic (or service) workers from residents themselves. The ID cards—along with other digital and analogue technologies constructing ABC's surveillance apparatus—actively produce the boundaries separating 'criminal Others' and 'like-minded insiders'. Having been attached by notions of criminal alterity, ID cards do not locate and contain 'fear' within the domestic workers' bodies as residents may claim; they, instead, *reproduce* it.

The personal information of domestic workers is stored along with continuously updating data on their time-stamped entries and exits from ABC and attendance on the centralised database of MyGate, a society-management platform. At registration, MyGate sorts non-residents based on their employment (delivery worker, domestic worker, service worker, and

so on), collectivising heterogeneous individuals into coherent 'threat' categories. Most crucially, only residents (including RWA members) and security guards have access to these profiles, enforcing epistemic and representational asymmetries upon workers. Far from being able to control what aspects of their lives are being projected on the platform for everyone to see, they cannot even *access* what is being said about them. In stark contrast, R3F explains how workers' profiles cannot only be accessed freely by all residents, but *modified* as well:

The maid that I have hired, I can check which house she was working in, the rating, the issues with the person. If you're removing her, you can write why you're doing that and no one can erase it. That's why the help don't like it. I know maids who have gone and fought when they didn't get a good rating.

MyGate allows residents to arbitrarily rate and review their domestic workers, which future employers can refer to for guidance on hiring decisions. Individual experiences and decisions are thus organised by the knowledges and values of the wider community, which circulate through shared technologically-mediated practices of surveillance. This establishes a shared moral order by 'collectivising' residents (Jasanoff and Kim, 2015: 5), such that they emerge as active producers of 'safety' that ABC promises. This demonstrates how socio-technical infrastructures of surveillance in ABC are affectively intertwined with "imagined preferred ways of living, value structures, and social order", here, 'safety' (Felt, 2015: 2014).

In this section, I have demonstrated how the circulation of affects—'fear' and 'care'—produces binary notions of 'the good life' (safety) in opposition to the fear of potential harm posed collectively by domestic workers (Hughes, 2024: 924). Participants in my sample believed that surveillance infrastructures contain these shared fears by establishing control over the movement of domestic workers, thus realising the pursuit of 'safety'. My data reveals that surveillance infrastructures instead reproduce these affects that they were deployed to contain, thus collectivising heterogeneous actors into 'criminal Others' and 'like-minded insiders'.

The socio-technical imaginary of 'safety' is thus affectively-invested due to shared fear of harms that must be curtailed—and yet, are simultaneously reproduced—through surveillance infrastructures. However, this imaginary depends not only on what residents know and feel about surveillance technologies, but crucially, on what they do not know and choose not to feel.

Producing ignorance

Having demonstrated how seemingly coherent and oppositional collectives are formed through the circulation of affect, this section demonstrates how epistemic gaps sustain collectives across disparate actors and traditional caste/class boundaries.

Fragmented infrastructure

When residents of ABC were asked to identify the surveillance infrastructures they interacted most frequently with, the participants made no distinction between technologies, practices and personnel. While responses spanned from platforms like MyGate or sensor technologies like RFID stickers, the overwhelming majority identified security personnel as their primary surveillance interface—stationed at the main gate or on the ground floor of their buildings, mediating every entry and exit. This finding illuminates what Parks and Starosielski (2015: 9) term as "soft systems" of infrastructure: the practices and rituals that are learned through membership into a community and naturalised over time, thereby translating technical systems into social realities. Surveillance infrastructures thus emerge not through technical deployment alone, but social arrangements that render it invisible and inevitable (Star, 1999: 382). R1F draws attention to mandatory protocols underlying intercom calls with the security guard, regulating the arrival of a delivery worker:

As soon as somebody's entering, there's going to be a call at the gate that, "Ma'am, this person has arrived. Do I allow him in?" And I'm supposed to say yes, because he has given the flat number. [...] These calls are compulsory.

The everyday performance of such scripts produces socialities of custodial care and trust that integrate residents and security guards into ABC's surveillance infrastructures. Simone (2004: 419) coins 'people as infrastructure' to elucidate "residents' needs to generate acts and contexts of social collaboration inscribed with multiple identities rather than in overseeing and enforcing modulated transactions among discrete population groups". Indeed, social collaboration between residents and security guards—actors belonging to vastly different caste/class locations—is imperative to sustain ABC's security infrastructure and its ostensibly seamless functioning. R1M illustrates this:

The [technology] that is seldom talked about because it often fails is RFID. Some issue with the sensor, boom barrier maybe, I'm not sure. But I will wave my hand and the guard recognises me, "Oh, it's sir," and she opens the door. It's convenient.

Here, the social relation of familiarity between the guard and R1M works to bypass and even conceal the uneven operation of the underlying technical infrastructure in ABC's ostensibly uniform 'premium networked space'. While Graham and Marvin's (2002: 249) concept of infrastructural 'splintering' assumed coherent elite enclaves, ABC proved more heterogeneous. R1F and R2M, despite institutional mandate by the RWA, did not use MyGate for entry-exit verifications, finding its notifications to be disruptive. Instead, they were notified through intercom calls. However, while R1F attributed the comfort of the intercom to the availability of full-time domestic labour who could verify entries in her stead, R2M—who only employed part-time domestic workers—expressed his desire to switch to MyGate:

There were so many notifications on MyGate, so we uninstalled it. Now, we use the intercom but I think the app would be better, especially now that the number of deliveries has increased. They call us once at the main gate, and then again at the ground floor of the building. We get two calls for every delivery, which is annoying.

While it had appeared to me as though MyGate had been implemented across the society as blanket-surveillance, its reach was, in fact, fragmented—due to the individual preferences of households. Here, we see that the adoption and upgradation of technologies does not follow a linear trajectory but a dynamic process of trial-and-error. Surveillance infrastructures in ABC were thus fundamentally fragmented, not only due to the varied adoption of security technologies across households, but also due to the practice of 'retrofitting'. S1M mentioned how the installation of CCTV cameras in elevators, due to concern over construction workers sharing the space with vulnerable children, had been underway for weeks. Due to the vast spatial expanse of ABC, technological upgradations in surveillance infrastructures could not be made at once. Instead, they had to be carried out through "modular and incremental changes" (Star, 1999: 382). In highlighting this, I draw attention to the inherently fragmented nature of infrastructures, contrasting deterministic models from the Global North that pathologise infrastructural heterogeneity (Guma, 2020: 734).

Residents were required to notify the guards at the main gate if they gave something to their domestic workers via MyGate notifications. This meant that security guards would assume that any cash or belongings found in domestic workers' bags as they screened them during their exit at checkpoints would be assumed to be stolen unless specified otherwise. Residents who had not installed the app (like R1F) made use of paper chits—delineating the item that was given, the quantity, and signed by the resident—to sanction the domestic workers' receipt of any items, including their salaries. Here, the informal paper-chit functions as a "mobile portable device of identification, storing and authenticating information, realised imaginaries of sorting, controlling and administering people in time and space" that is not replaced by digital technologies but functions alongside them (Seuferling and Leurs, 2021, p. 678).

As I sat beside the female security guards at the checkpoint, domestic workers poured in after another, furnishing their bags for scanning in a queue, eager to retire home as the sun set and another long day of work came to an end. An elderly woman, offered up a signed paper-chit and a packed box of sweets. S1F eyed her suspiciously, picking up the telephone to call her employers for confirmation as procedure necessitated. The woman rushed to stop her, "Madam will be asleep at this time." For a moment, S1F and the woman were at an impasse—

and I held my breath, hoping that it wasn't an excuse but unable to suspend my suspicion—until she spoke up, "Call the tower guard. He will know." S1F spoke on the telecom for a few minutes and then allowed her to pass, moving onto the next domestic worker in the line.

Here, digital (MyGate) and analogue (paper-chits, telecom) technologies co-exist and more crucially, overlap with each other—requiring telephonic confirmation despite paper evidence. Furthermore, they are frequently negotiated and amended, as the woman suggested confirmation with the tower guard as an improvisational workaround. This episode thus exemplifies the fragmented or 'incomplete' nature of ABC's surveillance infrastructures, characterised by makeshift, ephemeral or uncertain natures (Guma, 2020: 729).

Ignorance

The gates were frequently lined by queues of domestic and service workers, spelling out their 6-digit ID numbers to security guards, who rushed to enter them into the MyGate app and mark their attendance. On the guards' tables were multiple registers—titled 'SWIMMING POOL', 'GARAGE' and 'GATE B' among others—each page drawn into neat columns, separating the name of the person on duty, their role in ABC and the time of their entry and exit. During my conversations with the security guards and RWA1M, I was unable to unearth a consistent rationale guiding how records were distributed between digital platforms and such analogue registers. S2M explained the rationale behind maintaining parallel databases, noting that MyGate data would expire within a few months, while physical registers provide permanent records that could be accessed at any time. However, the actual practice remained inconsistent, with guards sometimes marking their entries on one system, sometimes both. When asked about data practices, governance of security measures or partnerships with private security vendors, the security guards were unable to give me uniform answers. In fact, when asked about precautions taken to preserve data privacy, RWA1M claimed:

We don't give third-party access to data to anyone. It stays only with us, and it is deleted after three months.

At first, I found this claim frustrating in its impossibility. ABC relied on third-party platforms like MyGate and Park+ to manage the entry and exit of people and vehicles respectively into its enclosures, inherently giving them access to the data collected—including workers' and residents' registered details. However, upon closer inspection, I realised such obfuscation in the functioning of ABC's surveillance infrastructures was not merely an aberration, but fundamentally built into the socio-technical system. Indeed, several guards I observed did not understand the interface or rationale of MyGate. Instead, they simply enacted the prerequisite physical steps to operate it, exemplifying the 'black-boxed' character of surveillance platforms.

This technological opacity intersects with the deliberate organisational fragmentation of vast surveillance infrastructures into discrete, atomised components. In addition to a vast assemblage of institutionally-mandated and emergent technologies and practices (Figure 2), the management of 'safety' was also divided across various actors. This included security guards, each assigned a small role in maintaining 'safety' across ABC, such as marking workers' time of entry, and patrolling ABC to ensure that no workers are loitering; RWA members, who determined how the surveillance infrastructure had to be maintained or upgraded; in consultation with the residents. This fragmentation stripped individual practices of broader contexts and implications, enforcing 'ignorance' upon the actors sustaining the surveillance infrastructure through obfuscation (Bovensiepen, 2020: 502). Illustrating this, when I asked S1F what she thought about the monitoring of domestic workers, as well as the storage of potentially vulnerable personal data, she said:

What will I think about it? [...] I don't think about these things. My job is to input their entry, input their exit—I do that. The rest is up to the society.

S1F's role in ABC's surveillance infrastructure is disturbingly concise. Crucially, the atomisation of surveillance infrastructure works to decontextualise these actions from the violence of tracking the vulnerable bodies of domestic workers by rendering them minute, banal, and even necessary. Here, the vast surveillance infrastructure imposes a form of

ignorance on S1F that Arendt (1977: 301) conceptualises as 'bureaucratic rationality'. S1F's integration into the bureaucratic apparatus by executing isolated tasks produces "thoughtlessness and distance from reality" in the form of obedience that enacts regimes of control without registering them.

What stands out in her articulation, however, is her refusal to "think about it". S1F, as an employee at ABC, is driven by self-preservation regarding the source of her livelihood. It thus necessitates emotional detachment from her participation in a surveillance system that not only exploits her labour—as she earns a meagre Rs. 16,000 (160 £) per month for 12-hour workdays, 7 days a week, with no paid leaves—but also simultaneously subjects her to its pervasive gaze. Far from being representative of Arendt's (1977: 301) 'thoughtless' bureaucratic rationality, S1F's ignorance represents the marginalisation of uncomfortable knowledge—or here, a desire to alienate oneself even from its pursuit—through reasoning and routine to protect not only her livelihood, but also her mental and emotional wellbeing. Ignorance is thus not an incidental by-product of fragmented surveillance infrastructures, but systemically manufactured as an indispensable component in upholding the violent caste/class-based regime enacted by them. Indeed, as Appel (2012: 442) notes, the refusal to ask such questions ensures that "infrastructural affects"—here, of caste/class-based surveillance—"remain unspoken and unknown".

Residents similarly echo this disengagement with the logics of the surveillance infrastructure in place in ABC. When asked about data governance through surveillance infrastructures in ABC, R1M articulated his lack of interest in learning about them:

I don't know, but I could find out if I wanted, and it'd probably be the RWA. But I'm just not interested in knowing it. That's not how I'm spending my time. There's nothing worrying me about it to make me want to invest my time in it.

Surveillance infrastructures in ABC have been naturalised to such a degree that R1M finds no need to invest any attention to them or the processes through which they are deployed. In

stark contrast to S1F's disengagement that emerged from a desire for emotional self-preservation, R1M's emerges from a desire for comfort. This lack of interest is not incidental; it is a product of caste/class-based 'cognitive norms' that determine what R1M pays attention to by dismissing all potential evidence of injustices as extraneous (Mills, 2014: 19). Finding out about the surveillance infrastructures is framed as a waste of his time and effort, because the absence of this recognition is crucial to maintaining the continued exploitation of working-class labour.

I do not mean to say that ignorance is a conscious choice made by residents; on the contrary, it is fundamentally systemic, and an inescapable consequence of their caste/class position in the gated community. This pattern of avoidance in acknowledging the obstacles surveillance infrastructures may pose to domestic workers persisted across participants, with R2M arguing:

They just probably see it as a process they have to go through. Sometimes I'm sure they get a bit frustrated with it. But it's just so widespread. Every society has something like this.

Despite recognising the adverse impacts of surveillance infrastructures on domestic workers, R2M refused to engage in-depth with this concern, instead diverting his attention to the potential benefits of such technologies. This demonstrates that although evidence of injustice is not particularly hard to access, residents dismiss it to preserve dominant ways of seeing, thinking and knowing that, in turn, preserve their positions of privilege (Krisch and Dilley, 2015; Mills, 2014: 18). Produced through a caste/class-based tacit "agreement to misinterpret the world", ignorance works to naturalise surveillant regimes of power in their favour (Mills, 2014: 18). Here, residents' 'structured blindness' is upheld by an affective investment into caste/class-marked notions of 'the good life' (here, 'safety' from the criminal Other), which does not merely allow disengagement from the implications of surveillance but demands it.

This section demonstrated how ignorances are produced systemically by fragmented or 'incomplete' surveillance infrastructures, and are fundamentally underpinned by caste/class-based modes of seeing. While security guards refrain from knowing due to self-preservation

in an exploitative job, residents do so for their own personal convenience. As a result, the social control of domestic workers is rendered too banal to even attend to, thus fortifying residents and security guards as a united surveilling 'collective'. Most crucially, it argues that aspirations and SIs of 'safety' are shaped by shared non-knowledges. The next section seeks to examine the SI of surveillance operating in ABC, and the role these affective and epistemic processes play in its production and sustenance.

Producing imaginaries

Surveillance infrastructures, as we have established, are not merely functional but fundamentally entwined with the way participants imagine and enact 'the good life' within ABC. Although the participants in my sample describe highly varying and inconsistent experiences with surveillance infrastructures, these diverse encounters nonetheless coalesce into a uniform consensus (Jasanoff and Kim, 2015, p. 22): technology makes life in ABC *safer*. The promise of 'safety' through technological mediation is expressed by R1F:

I hadn't thought about [security technologies] so much before this interview, but I think at the back of my mind, I've always thought "Oh, I can leave the house unlocked because there's a CCTV right outside".

Here, we see that the assumption of efficient, technologically-mediated safety forms the bedrock for R1F's everyday practices, disguising itself as 'reason' rather than 'belief'. This aptly demonstrates how artefacts of technological surveillance integrate themselves into quotidian modes of thinking, seeing and imagining the world. However, it is crucial to resist the assumption that this sample represents passive consumers of technology.

While WhatsApp served as the primary platform for the communication of governance decisions by the RWA, all residents in my sample found that its participatory model enabled residents to express their concerns or desires regarding existing or potential safety measures to the RWA and other residents. In doing so, residents came together (collectivising) to

identify shared goals of 'safety' in ABC (utopian), and enact the technological projects necessary to achieve them (performative) (Jasanoff and Kim, 2015: 4). Resident participation was not just restricted to digital platforms. R3F and R1M were both involved in drafting plans for how residents were expected to live and behave during COVID, when 'safety' was more closely associated with fear of contagion rather than criminality[5]. The surveillance infrastructure, during this period, was expanded to include masks, handheld thermal screening devices, and protocols regarding social distancing, particularly in small spaces like elevators.

Rather than merely technical objects emplaced by the RWA as a governmental body, these surveillance infrastructures are a "fluid expression" of collectively-negotiated power-laden aspirations towards 'safety' (Gerhold and Brandes, 2021: 2). The "collectively-held, institutionally-stabilised, and publicly-performed" nature of aspirations of the 'good life' in the ABC gated community—here, the promise of 'safety'—is *collectively actualised* by the monthly deposit (calculated by per-cubic area of each apartment) paid by every household to the RWA for the maintenance and development of ABC, including continuous technological upgradation of surveillance infrastructures.

Having demonstrated how disparate actors across ABC—the 'collective'—cohere in the pursuit of 'safety', I now seek to de-essentialise this very notion of 'safety' in ABC itself. To do so, I deploy Jasanoff and Kim's (2015) framework of socio-technical imaginaries to examine the co-productive relationship between technological surveillance infrastructures and ostensibly-coherent dominant imaginaries of 'safety' operating in ABC. In this section, I argue that through affective circulation and epistemic gaps, 'safety' is produced as a moral imperative that may be efficiently achieved only through ever-upgrading technological surveillance infrastructures.

[5] This is not to assert that 'safety' is no longer tied to anxieties around 'contagion' any longer. Particularly in India's caste context, notions of 'contagion' and 'criminality' are closely entwined and located in the oppressed-caste/class body as the site of hereditary pollution.

Social control

When asked to define 'safety', all residents identified freedom of movement as a key constituent. R3F particularly defined a "safe environment" as one where "you can go out at 12 am because you know the CCTVs are working." Here, 'safety' and 'mobility' are entwined promises of CCTVs, demonstrating how surveillance infrastructures are intricately intertwined with shared values about "how life ought to be lived and what constitutes the 'good life'" (Tutton, 2021: 419). This consistent framing exemplifies how surveillance infrastructures operate—not as individual preferences but as 'collectively-held' aspirations towards an ideal future of 'mobility' as 'safety', facilitated by certain ways of imagining the role of surveillance infrastructures in social organisation (Sovacool and Hess, 2017: 719).

This utopia of free mobility is, however, not promised, but contingent. R1F articulates this anxiety as:

How are you supposed to go out with your only child in the house when there are all kinds of people roaming about?

Residents, therefore, identify service workers' mobilities as intrinsically harmful and constraining to their own (and of those like them), due to their construction as a monolithic class of 'criminal Others' antagonistic to their safety. 'Fear' as an affect, therefore, locates individuals vis-à-vis a wider social and moral order. This moral order ascribes cultural horizons wherein residents' safety *requires* workers' surveillance through technological mediation. The social control of working-class mobilities is therefore not an incidental byproduct but a fundamental moral imperative to the achievement of 'the good life' or 'safety' in ABC. The mobilisation of surveillance infrastructures towards this 'moral' end is articulated by S2M as he explains the project of tracking service workers:

You know which houses [the domestic worker] works in, so you can call their tower guard. "Is she in at this time?" Suppose he says, "No, she walked out at this-and-this time. You can check at Tower 13." You call there. The time of entry-exit is recorded at the main gate and then, at every tower, so you can

always trace where she is. Say, if there is too long a gap between her entry and exit from the two towers, you will know she is loitering around.

Here, SIs do not merely reflect but further *normalise* a 'way of seeing' the service-worker through surveillance infrastructures that render them wholly legible and governable by their resident employers (Scott, 1999: 2). Perhaps more crucially, however, S2M's tracking system reveals what constitutes tolerable presence within ABC's privatised public spaces. The moral horizon delimiting workers' mobility extends beyond straightforward inclusion/exclusion binaries, to the way they occupy space. While workers may move between towers, they may only do so for work. Loitering, here, is met with punitive action, varying from penalties to social humiliation, as a breach of the social and moral order in the gated community.

The aspiration of 'safety' relies on the moral imperative of workers' continuous legibility. As I spoke with RWA1M in his office during my first field session, S1M brought a domestic worker to stand before him.

RWA1M: How did you enter the society without getting your entry done?
WOMAN: It was a mistake. There was a storm, and a huge crowd [of domestic workers] at the gate.
RWA1M: You are not the only one who came during the storm. There are at least 1000 women who enter every day.
WOMAN: I was wet and cold in the rain. When I went to the gate—
RWA1M: Then, I should fire all the security guards at the gate, because they don't know how to do their jobs. They have compromised our system.
WOMAN: No, no. This is my fault. It is all my fault. It will never happen again. I have been here for a year; this has never happened before.
RWA1M: What grade have you studied till?
WOMAN: I haven't studied.
RWA1M: Okay. Go.

Here, RWA1M escalates an incidental oversight to sufficient evidence to "fire all the security guards" and doubt the entire surveillance infrastructure—a performance that is deliberately

manufactured to extract the woman's self-blame and servitude. This indicates two crucial things: foremost, her error did not pose material danger but exceeded the moral horizon of tolerance by entering ABC untracked as a body already marked as 'criminal Other' by virtue of her caste/class identity (indicated by RWA1M's question regarding her education). Secondly, the surveillance infrastructure functions by making the woman absorb the culpability as a moral rather than logistical error. Thus, social control over domestic workers as the class of 'criminal Others' is a foundational principle of the SI of 'safety' in ABC. Surveillance technologies, by enabling this control, become morally valorised as instruments of 'the good life', as articulated by R1F:

[CCTV] makes me feel very secure. Even though I'm not in my house, it's being watched. It gives you the feeling that you're not so vulnerable because you're able to control things even if you're not around.

R1F does not simply use CCTVs functionally; she attributes moral significance to the control they enable. Crucially, the CCTVs R1F is referring to here were personally-installed on her floor, as opposed to those installed by the RWA in public spaces in ABC—such as roads, parks, lobbies and elevators. This demonstrates that the SI of 'safety' does not merely shape the worldviews of the participants in my sample, but it further encourages them to 'perform' these visions by investing in surveillance technologies and infrastructures (Sovacool and Hess, 2017: 719). In addition to regular monthly fees paid to the RWA for the upkeep of surveillance infrastructures, residents also purchase surveillance technologies—either on their own for their homes, or collectively for their floors with their neighbours. This envisioning and execution of technological projects demonstrates the 'performative' character of the SI of 'safety' in ABC. R1M articulates why CCTVs are so important in maintaining 'safety' in ABC:

We don't know what [the security guards are] up to. Are they sleeping during night-shift? Who knows? Suppose you have taken a diamond ring. It's so small. Even if the guards are checking bags, how will they find it? So we need CCTV.

Here, R1M draws attention to the paradoxical nature of 'safety' in ABC wherein the very labour that perpetuates surveillance is simultaneously subjected to it. I find it imperative to note that although the guards in my sample were dominant-caste, they nonetheless shared the casted space of Gunjan Village. While the slum itself is not a monolith and undeniably contains caste/class-based socio-spatial segregation, its designation as a "cesspool" nonetheless 'sticks' to the guards in the residents' imagination as well (Ahmed, 2013: 65). However, their role in the surveillance infrastructure—symbolised by their uniform—integrates them as critical agents within the wider SI of 'safety'. Thus, the techno-utopian sentiment is echoed by guards, with S1M saying:

If there's technology available, why shouldn't we use it? People who want to come in, cause ruckus will not think twice before using all the technology at their disposal. We have to be at the same level.

By "we", S1M refers to the very 'collective' that performs this of 'safety'. This 'collective' does not merely include the residents and their representatives but the guards as key actors in the surveillance infrastructure as well. Thus, the dominant SI of 'safety' extends beyond caste/class borders by fostering affective relations and epistemic gaps. It is not merely Jasanoff and Kim's definition of the 'collective' that is "indefinite and evolving" as Kuchler and Stigson (2024: 11) note, but the SI's 'collective' itself that expands and contracts to reproduce itself. The deployment of technology within surveillance infrastructures to enable the efficient production of 'safety' thus plays a 'collectivising' role across disparate actors.

When residents were asked if a high-tech security environment impacts how they see themselves, responses—although vague—indicated that technological use was closely tied to status. R3M said, "I do see myself as a consumer of technology," which was elaborated upon by R2F:

Being very honest, I do feel like I'm part of a niche because I'm living in ABC, because we have good security. If I install those—um—fingerprint locks… I would definitely feel more like I'm one of the people who's more "with it" [laugh].

The SI of 'safety' manifests yet again through the performative act of investment (or desire thereof) in newer technologies, here constructing R2F as part of an in-group or community of 'like-minded insiders'. While echoing this desire for innovation, R1M complicates these straightforward imaginaries through his opinion on facial-recognition CCTV, when asked if he sees it as a valid potential investment for ABC's security:

I think facial recognition is a good idea. But I don't know if I'd want to be recorded. Maybe if they could make a distinction between outsiders and us, I would definitely be willing to pay more for it.

Here, we see these manufactured 'collectives' of 'criminal Other' and 'like-minded insider' are reproduced in how participants in my sample imagined technology and its capacities, and its role in producing 'safety'. Thus, what is key here is not the actual capabilities or limitations of technological systems but what residents, as investors, *imagine* they can do (Gerhold and Brandes, 2021: 3). This reveals that the expanding deployment of surveillance technologies is neither inevitable nor solely rational (Gerhold and Brandes, 2021: 2), but intimately entwined with fantasies, desires and speculative futures constructed by paradoxical and fluctuating affective and epistemic dynamics. This is essential to denaturalising the socio-cultural assumptions underpinning routine technological practices while reproducing dominant regimes of power.

While the SI framework is a critical tool to investigate how imaginaries that gain institutional sanction come to express themselves through technological aspirations, it does not recognise that these aspirations are shared by heterogeneously-constituted communities. Thus, this study proposes that SI 'collectives' are not self-evident but actively produced through two key mechanisms: affective circulation that creates imagined resemblances through technological mediation, and systemic ignorance enabled by infrastructural fragmentation. Rather than

assuming coherent communities develop shared technological visions, we must therefore examine how shared technological visions *create* communities by binding disparate actors together into performing a moral order wherein the safety of caste/class-privileged bodies is prioritised at the expense of all else—particularly caste/class-vulnerable bodies.

CONCLUSION

Gated communities represent a rapidly-expanding global phenomenon where affluent residents employ high-tech surveillance infrastructures to systematically exclude and monitor oppressed-caste/class service providers (Kumar, 2025). Understanding how residents construct technologically-grounded justifications for this social control reveals how modern technologies reproduce historical inequalities while claiming neutral rationality. These dynamics extend far beyond Noida's gated communities, reflecting broader patterns of urban segregation, labour exploitation, and technological control that shape contemporary cities.

This study represents an exploratory attempt to understand the mechanisms by which technologised surveillance infrastructures mediate experiences and aspirations for 'safety' amidst localised power-laden social arrangements. By accessing the tempestuous and dynamic lifeworlds of actors engaged in perpetuating the surveillant regime in the ABC gated communities, I have demonstrated that collective desires for 'safety' are both reflected and reproduced by surveillance infrastructures. Seeking to move beyond policy-driven investigations of urban governance and surveillance, I identified the non-rational mechanisms that drive aspirations for high-tech surveillance infrastructures. Thus, I probed my research question: How are experiences and aspirations of 'safety' mediated by technological surveillance infrastructures in gated communities?

My findings reveal a three-part process through which the SI of 'safety' is produced and sustained in ABC. First, surveillance infrastructures enable the circulation of affects—here, fear and care—which constructs oppositional collectives of 'like-minded insiders' and domestic (and service) workers as 'criminal Others'. These affects do not simply reflect pre-existing categories but actively *produce* them technological mediation, as digital (platforms like MyGate and WhatsApp) and analogue (ID cards and banned workers' photographs)

media transform individual domestic workers into a unified class of potential risks to the residents' safety. Secondly, fragmented surveillance infrastructures—characterised by retrofitting, parallel analog and digital systems, and organisational atomisation—engender systematic ignorances among both guards and residents. These ignorances, sustained by the desire for self-preservation and forced obfuscation among guards, and the systemic erasure of evidence of injustices or 'structured blindness' among residents, enable the moral order of surveillance to persist despite routine system failures. Third, these affective circulations and epistemic gaps coalesce into a coherent SI of 'safety' wherein social control over working-class bodies emerges not only as an instrumental necessity but a fundamental moral imperative to ensure the safety of the caste/class-privileged residents. However, rather than being sequential processes, these operate recursively: affective circulation necessitates epistemic gaps which stabilize shared imaginaries, while dominant SIs generate new sites for affective investment and structure what can be known or ignored. Rather than linear causation, affect, ignorance, and imagination constitute each other through ongoing technological mediation—each mechanism producing conditions for the others to operate.

Based on these findings, I argue that the 'collective' invoked by SI scholars are not self-evident or pre-existing entities. Instead, the putative 'collective' emerges through two key mechanisms. First, affective circulation creates imagined resemblances and oppositions across individual actors through technological mediation. Second, systemic ignorances enabled by infrastructural fragmentation work to align disparate actors (here, security guards and residents) with each other. Thus, rather than assuming coherent communities develop shared technological visions, this study demonstrates how shared technological visions are underpinned by mechanisms of affect and ignorance that work to create the definitional 'collective' by binding disparate actors into performing a moral order wherein technological upgradation promises 'safety'. This de-essentialises the presumed homogeneity within SI 'collectives', and unveils the technologically-mediated SI of 'safety' in gated communities as a constructed social and moral narrative rather than an inevitable necessity.

This study opens several directions for future research. While this study was informed by conversations with domestic and platform-based delivery workers, these conversations were

concise and thus could not represent how service workers navigated, negotiated and potentially participated in these surveillance regimes. Along similar lines, access to RWA members, security plans and RWA guidebooks was hindered by bureaucratic red tape, and ought to be investigated for an institutional approach to SIs in gated communities. Furthermore, while I have attempted to demonstrate that residents do not share personal values, I have nonetheless resorted to excluding political affiliations that undoubtedly impact definitions of 'safety'; thus, I invite scholars to extend the study of SIs in domestic spaces beyond categories of labour into ideological and electoral leanings. Future studies would also benefit from examining how surveillance infrastructures differentiate between categories of 'service workers'—domestic workers, delivery workers, drivers, sweepers, gardeners and so on—due to their entanglement in "graded" or relational power structures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Dr. Philipp Seuferling, whose guidance has long preceded his appointment as my supervisor. Thank you for always catching my breath with the way you think, articulate and imagine research.

Thank you to Saumyadeep Mandal whose faith in me has remained unwavering even when I faltered. Your generosity with your time, guidance and friendship has anchored me throughout this year.

I am humbled by the kindness and criticism Dr. Shakuntala Banaji has offered to me; this is the greatest gift any aspiring researcher could ask for.

Lastly, thank you to my brilliant friends—Zainab, Ritu, Patrick, Lekha, Sakshi and Vismaya—and my family (and Ishaan) for listening to me ramble on endlessly.

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