H i C N   Households in Conflict Network

The Agency and Governance of Urban Battlefields: How Riots Alter Our Understanding of Adequate Urban Living[1]

Jaideep Gupte[2]

HiCN Working Paper 122

September 2012

Abstract: For the first time in close to 100 years, India reports higher population growth in its urbanised areas than across its vast rural landscape. However, a confluence of vast urbanisation and scarcity of resources has implied heightened levels of localised violence, centred in and around already impoverished neighbourhoods. This therefore has a disproportionate impact in further marginalising poor communities, and is at odds with the notion that cities are incontestably and inevitably the context of sustained poverty eradication. And yet, we know relatively little about the mechanics of security provisioning in Indian cities at large. The central argument in this paper is that violent urban spaces have a profound impact on how safety and security are understood by the state as well as the urban poor, thereby redefining the parameters of adequate urban living. I look in detail at how the 1992-1993 riots in Mumbai unfolded in a group of inner-city neighbourhoods, and find that specific acts of brutality and violence during the riots continue to shape current understandings of the 'safe city'. In doing so, I also find that the nature and form of informal urban space affects the mechanics by which the state endeavours to control violence, while individual acts of public violence function as markers that legitimate the use of, and reliance on, extralegal forms of security provision.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the first time in close to 100 years, India reports higher population growth in its urbanised areas than across its vast rural landscape (Census of India 2011), with its urban population set to reach 600 million by 2031. And yet, India is only 30% urbanised, a rate much lower than China, Brazil or Mexico, leaving much room for further expansion. As in sub-Saharan Africa, only a minor proportion of India's urban growth is due to migration from rural areas as most of it occurs due to natural increases in the urban population as well as the reclassification of rural areas as urban (UNFPA 2011). By 2030, large cities could generate more than 70% of India's net new employment and produce 70% of its GDP. This evidence is consistent with a host of positive contributions urbanisation has had on development on the global scale. "Almost all urbanisation among low- and middle-income nations is associated with economic growth. The world's largest cities are heavily concentrated in the world's largest economies. The more urbanised nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America generally have the highest life expectancies and lowest infant and child mortality rates. The nations with the worst health and living conditions among their urban populations are generally the least urbanised" (Satterthwaite and Mitlin forthcoming: 1).

These positive contributions notwithstanding, we also know that this growth is built upon acute inequality. A third of the world's urban population live in slums, and the urban share of global poverty is increasing (Ravallion, Chen, and Sangraula 2007). In India, 37% of urban households live in accommodation of only one room or are homeless. Such a confluence of vast urbanisation and dense pockets of localised scarcity of resources often implies heightened levels of violence (Rodgers 2010, Tilly 1985). Recent evidence supports this claim: riots in India are persistent and widespread, with an average of over 64,000 riots per year over the last decade and 16 out of 28 states experiencing more than 1000 riots in 2010.[3] Moreover, this violence can be located quite precisely, with a vast majority occurring in urban areas (Varshney 2002), and when large scale rioting breaks out in a particular city, not all neighbourhoods are prone to the violence (Gupte, Justino, and Tranchant 2012). It tends to be centred in and around impoverished neighbourhoods where "insecurity has a disproportionate impact in further marginalizing poor communities" (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2003: 183). That is, the debilitating effects of crime, conflict and insecurity are significant contributors to urban deprivation, while security also implies freedom from persecution and forced evictions, and

---

[3] GoI. various years. *Crime In India*. New Delhi: National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

provides for security of tenure.

Violent urban spaces therefore have a disproportionate impact in further marginalising poor communities, and are at odds with the notion that cities are incontestably and inevitably the context of sustained poverty eradication. I argue that the lingering legacies of violent urban spaces have far reaching impacts, particularly for the urban poor, both over time as well as a result of spill-over into non-violent cities, by redefining the parameters of adequate urban living. This is most evident in terms of how safety and security are understood by the state as well as the urban poor, and as a result, how, and by whom they are provided. I attempt to answer how the presence of urban violence affects formal (i.e. state) conceptualisations of what a slum is on the one hand, and how informal spaces shape the state's efforts in controlling urban violence on the other, by looking specifically at the incidence of urban riots in Mumbai, India. I present a detailed description of how the 1992-1993 riots unfolded in a group of inner-city neighbourhoods, and find that current frameworks within which the state defines and relates to informal settlements fall short in accounting for the entire range of vulnerabilities and insecurities faced by the urban poor.

Dataset and methodology

The analysis is based on a dataset (Gupte 2011b) which includes two categories of data:

1) 41 in-depth qualitative interviews with men (58.5%) and women (41.5%) residents of Nagpada, Madanpura and Kamathipura – three inner city neighbourhoods in south-central Mumbai, conducted during three 5-month data collection efforts between February 2007 and December 2009. The sample is described in Table 1 below. Each respondent is identified in the paper only by his or her Respondent Code (RC). A further 20 declined to be part of the in-depth interviewing. Each interview lasted 120 minutes on average. A non-random purposive snowballing technique was used to recruit interviewees (c.f. Heckathorn 1997, 2002, Patton 1990, Salganik and Heckathorn 2004), which was initiated from 5 respondents (3 in Nagpada, 1 each in Madanpura and Kamathipura).[4] Respondents were screened according to their residential status between

---

[4] The initial 5 interviewees are not included in the dataset to maintain adequate degrees of separation between the

December 1992 and January 1993, when Mumbai experienced its most intense bout of city-wide rioting, and only those who lived in, worked in, or were born into households that lived or worked in the case study neighbourhoods, were selected. Each interview was guided by three questions (alternatives in brackets) – '*What is the meaning of security to you? (Who in your opinion needs security?)*'; '*Who provides security (do you provide security) in this neighbourhood?*'; and '*How is security provided?*'. Respondents were not specifically asked about the 1992-1993 Mumbai riots.[5]

Table 1: Description of the Sample				
Gender	*Male*	*Female*		
	58.5%	41.5%		
Age (years)	*Average*	*Median*	*Oldest*	*Youngest*
	36.7	35.5	72	19
Education	*Illiterate/no schooling*	*Up to primary school*	*Graduate and above*	
	25%	42.5%	32.5%	
Employment Status	*Unemployed*	*Skilled Labour*	*Unskilled Labour*	*Student*	*Housework only*
	22.5%	32.5%	20%	2.5%	22.5%
Religion	*Hindu*	*Muslim*	*Christian/Other*	
	37.5%	57.5%	.05%	

Source: Adapted from Gupte 2011b

interviewer and interviewees.

[5] No monetary incentive was provided for partaking in the interview process. Some respondents, particularly those dependent on a day-wage, could only find time for the interview at night. In accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Central University Research Ethics Committee, University of Oxford, on research involving human participants, prospective respondents were first given a verbal explanation of the research project, and explained that the outcome of the research would result in academic research, and given the opportunity to opt out at any stage of the interview. Because their names had been suggested, in most cases the prospective respondents would make an effort themselves to make contact and fix an interview time. While each interview began by obtaining the informed verbal consent from the respondent, because no direct incentives were provided for participation, as well as the fact that the respondents came of their own accord to the interview site, their attendance was also seen as their consent to participation.

2) The dataset also includes 12 'elite' interviews conducted between 2007 and 2009 with police officers (7), inspectors (2) and constables (3) who were either posted to stations in the neighbourhoods of this study, or had direct knowledge of events during the 1992-1993 riots with specific reference to case study neighbourhoods.

These two strands of data are brought together with a detailed exploration of the historical and current nature of urban form (layout, density, composition) of the case study neighbourhoods.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows: in Section 2, I describe the current nature of the case study neighbourhoods in south central Mumbai, and explore the trajectory of the historical and social processes of segregation which have shaped the area into what it is today. Using primary and secondary data, I then move to describing in detail how the 1992-1993 riots unfolded in this part of the city. I focus on the mechanics of security provision, and how the nature of urban form affects not only how security is provided, but also who provides it, and for whom it is provided. I then conclude by suggesting how these processes shape our understanding of the 'safe city'.

2. WHAT IS A SLUM? A HISTORY OF SOUTH CENTRAL MUMBAI (ERSTWHILE BOMBAY)

Urban areas that show certain characteristics of destitution are often described as a 'slums'. The manner in which the state sees, relates to, and categorises urban impoverished is closely linked with the state's understanding of urban citizenship, what it considers to be 'adequate living standards', and importantly, how it conceptualises physical vulnerability and insecurity. The spatial and material aspects of a slum, namely the "dilapidated and infirm housing structures, poor ventilation, acute over-crowding, faulty alignment of streets, inadequate lighting, paucity of safe drinking water, water logging during rains, absence of toilet facilities and non-availability of basic physical and social services" (Chandramouli 2003: 82) are *static* components – because they each describe the inadequate provision of tangible infrastructure or services, which could conceivably be alleviated by their provision. As I have argued elsewhere however (Gupte 2011a), a slum also possesses several important *dynamic*

characteristics. Firstly, the changing spatial nature of a slum: it can 'come up', grow, or be demolished overnight. In slums, the non-permanence of one's circumstance can be all encompassing, ranging from the uncertainty over one's living space and personal security, to uncertainty over one's livelihood options, and hence, uncertainty over one's life choices. By simply eluding to the material or spatial parameters, like poor construction or non-existing infrastructure for example, masks the high degree of vulnerability caused by this non-permanence.

The most recent census reveals that over 93 million Indians live in slums, and this is projected to increase to over 104 million by 2017 (Census of India 2011). Approximately 22 percent of the population in India's Class 1 cities (with a population of 100,000 or more) live in slums, while 17.7 million people live in slums in the 27 largest cities of India.[6] Out of these 17.7 million, the largest number of slum dwellers in any one city (approximately 6.5 million) are to be found in Greater Mumbai, accounting for an astonishing 54 percent of the city's population (Census of India 2001). Few countries in the world are so blighted by urban deprivation as India is, and this has led to the continued and heavy dependence of urban dwellers on illegal slum settlements where asset and physical vulnerability is typically very high, the heavy reliance on an unprotected informal economy, and therefore the dependence on extralegal means for survival.

While this data on the magnitude of shelter poverty in India presents a bleak picture in and of itself, it is only part of the story. Chatterji and Mehta find that understanding slums based on their spatial and material parameters alone, functions overtly "to impose order and to constitute the slum as a site for legitimate control by establishing clear-cut boundaries between the legal and non-legal" (Chatterji and Mehta 2007: 129). By defining these boundaries, the state distinguishes between urban citizens, who are seen as legitimately possessing rights to which the state is accountable, and the 'population' (as characterised by Chatterjee 2004) which is a vague and heterogeneous grouping without legitimate claims on state provision. This may materialise as the recognition of one area as a slum, and not another, as the recognition of one group of people as slum dwellers, and not others, or most poignantly, as the recognition of one individual as illegal or criminal, and not others. However, I find that the boundaries between what is legal, legitimate or credible and illegal, illegitimate or invalid are blurred at best. Indeed, it is more often the case that the extralegal space between legality and illegality thrives, and local economic, social and political networks operate successfully within it. In these spaces, state imposed boundaries are at best contestable, or at worst, invalid.

---

[6] Cities with a population of more than 1 million.

The central argument in this paper is that violent urban spaces have a profound impact on how safety and security are understood by the state as well as the urban poor, thereby redefining the parameters of adequate urban living. There is now an established consensus that poverty reduction and positive development outcomes are fundamentally constrained by violent conflict (DFID 2009). This finding reaffirms that violence need not be large scale, or even armed, to cause a deep disruption to normalcy (Justino 2007a: 3). Furthermore, because violence often occurs in or in the proximity of impoverished and marginalised neighbourhoods, the lack of legitimate institutions and governance needed to provide citizen security, justice, and jobs, fails break cycles of violence and therefore magnifies the adverse impacts (WDR 2011: 2). In one sense, these vulnerabilities might be partially represented in material and spatial terms – that is, a lack of access to clean drinking water, sanitation or electricity, poor ventilation systems or high cohabitation often in very close proximity to live stock, and so forth, might be indicative of an increased vulnerability to disease. However, these parameters do not fully account for the reproductive and recursive nature of physical vulnerability. Not only is it more likely that disease will occur in a slum, it is also more likely that it will spread. If a slum dweller falls ill, it also means that they will take longer to recover. Injuries also have multiplied impacts. It is more likely that a slum dweller will be dependent on the informal or day-wage sector and if they are injured, they are also more likely to lose their entire daily income, and further deplete their resources limiting access to medicine and prolonging recovery. Such impacts are further intensified during episodes of extreme or protracted violence. The heightened physical trauma of violence affects the most physically vulnerable first, normal day-to-day support structures like clinics, access to medicines and doctors may get suspended during violent episodes, while death and decay also intensify the spread of disease.[7]

Where slums come from

South central Mumbai (erstwhile Bombay) is today a mix of busy inner-city neighbourhoods with an equal mix of residential and commercial buildings.[8] The area is predominantly Muslim, with Hindus and other minorities making up 30 per cent of the residents. There are a variety of businesses based in the localities, ranging from heavy metal and frame works, to tile shops, tailoring and leather works. The neighbourhoods are also populated by *chawls* (concretised 'slum-like' buildings), and a

---

[7] The link between disease and riots is not a recent phenomenon by any means. For example, Chatterji and Mehta document the link in early 20th century riots in colonial India – see Chatterji and Mehta 2007: pp. 37-42.
[8] See maps in Appendix B

mixed population of Hindus and Muslims inhabits some of these. These 'mixed' *chawls* tend to be the most sensitive areas and have seen frequent instances of civil violence such as rioting, arson, and thuggery. In Nagpada, one of the main case study neighbourhoods, there are 21 *masajid* (mosques), predominantly in its northern half, 12 *mandir* (temples), mostly to the south of Belasis Road (now known as Boman Behramji *Marg*), and a handful of churches in the area. Nagpada is also one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the city. By 1835 it was already one of the bazaar localities which "emerged as the heart of Bombay [now known as Mumbai] where residential, commercial, social and religious activities were integrated into a tightly knit urban fabric" (Dwivedi and Mehrotra 2001: 57), and by 1906 it had its own Police Station (Roy, Jaiswal, and Bharti 2007). There is an ancient Hindu *Shiv* temple in the area, and Nagpada derives its name from the *nag* (snake) wound around the deity's neck. By the early 1900s, Nagpada had already been earmarked as a "slum target area" (Hazareesingh 2001: 240) for being 'insanitary' (Kidambi 2007: 76) by the Bombay City Improvement Trust, and slum dwellers were forcibly evicted at the behest of slum clearance programs. It was however, known as a secular place, with Hindus, Muslims and Jews living together in the pre-Partition era.

The classification of 'slum' did not however reflect the income or wealth profile of these neighbourhoods. Despite their dilapidated living conditions, they continued to attract wealthier and more established workers because of its proximity to the mills. In recent decades however, the area has been transformed into a predominantly low-income area. Following the 1992-1993 riots, there has been a steady exodus of business-owning Hindu families from the area, coupled with an inflow of poorer Muslim households who were being persecuted in other localities (as described in Masselos 2007: 176), leading to the further ghettoisation of Nagpada and the surrounding neighbourhoods. Much of Nagpada has already been concretised and is now dominated by high rise residential towers or commercial space, and *zhopad-patti* (shanties) are concentrated in the vicinity of 1st and 2nd Peer Khan Streets, and in the lanes surrounding the *Choti Masjid* and the Mastan Talab Ground. There are also some large *chawl* buildings on Two Tank Road. Recent efforts at clearing shanties and pavement dwellers, primarily from Sofia Zubair Marg have relocated large numbers of people to neighbourhoods in Mankhurd and other relocation sites on the periphery of the city.

Under the banner of neighbourhoods somehow 'unified by Muslims', as one official in the Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) characterised the area, facts and myths serve to glorify and stigmatise the neighbourhoods alike. Inasmuch as the bazaar and street-food vendors along Mohammad Ali road are venerated for their uniqueness, the back-street chawls and dense residential areas of Nagpada are stigmatised as being backward and disconnected from the more affluent, and

Hindu, neighbourhoods in the vicinity. An elevated viaduct that runs the entire length of the Mohammad Ali Road was completed in 2002, allowing thoroughfare traffic an uninterrupted run to the affluent neighbourhoods in Fort and onwards to Colaba in South Mumbai, by-passing nearly all inner-city neighbourhoods. At the time of its construction, the flyover was heralded not only as an ingenious solution to Mumbai's traffic, but also celebrated as the longest viaduct in India.

Much less attention was given to those neighbourhoods that fell under the shadow of the giant concrete structure of the flyover. Rather than be a catalyst to spur on academic interest in the social, political and economic geographies of the areas the flyover runs through, the increased media attention given to the opening of the flyover inadvertently blanketed the neighbourhoods below as homogeneous, dark and congested places. In one interview, an Assistant Commissioner of Police in attempt to convince me of his expertise on Nagpada told me "I visit Nagpada daily, I live in the eastern suburbs so have to take the Flyover everyday to get to the Commissioner's Office [at Crawford Market, at the Southern end of the flyover]". The implication was that just by looking down on these neighbourhoods from the flyover it was possible to understand these 'social black holes' (as in Appadurai 2000). The reality is quite different. The neighbourhoods which come under the flyover, namely Phydhonie, Null Bazaar, Mandvi, Chakla, Bhendi Bazaar, Dongri, Umarkhadi, Nagpada and Madanpura, are "some of Mumbai's most historic, economically vibrant, and culturally distinct neighbourhoods" (Khan 2007, 2008: 325). This vibrancy is a direct reflection of the many different Muslim communities that populate the area, including Shia and Sunni, Deobandhi, Barelvi and Konkani, as well as the Bohra and Memon communities,[9] as well as a variety of Muslim sects including the Aga Khanis and Ishana Asharis (Khan and Ghadially 2009).

The shaping of historical legacies of violence and vulnerability in the neighbourhood

The stereotyping of the neighbourhoods of south central Mumbai as the epitome of congested and undesirable urban living is not a new phenomenon. These negative characterisations stem from what Adarkar terms as the "planned segregation promoted by imperialism" (Adarkar 2003: 4528) of the city under colonial rule. The southern tip of the city, known as the Fort Area, which today

---

[9] As per regional gazetteers and surveys between 1871 and 1901, more than fifteen different categories of 'Muslims' lived in Mumbai (erstwhile Bombay) – See Waterfield, Henry. 1875. *Memorandum on the Census of British India 1871-72*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.

encompasses Colaba and some sections of Mazagon, was fortified in 18th century by the British in order to create a protected and "insulated territory for the colonial rulers" (2003: 4528). Some local elite industrialists and traders also populated the fort area, while the areas beyond the fort walls were where "small native traders, white-collar workers and the working class" (2003: 4528) lived in neighbourhoods further segregated by class and regional identities. "The development of built structures between the early eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, created [the Fort area] as the dominant urban social space and the nucleus of early colonial settlement. [However, the East India Company continued to be reliant upon] native brokers to secure profitable trade transactions with the Bombay hinterland, ensured the granting of property rights to elite merchant communities - Banias, Bohras and, particularly, Parsis" (Hazareesingh 2001: 237). Needless to say, there was a stark contrast in the standards of living either side of the fort walls, and in particular, the areas within the fort walls were associated as safe zones, in which business, trading and colonial rule could flourish. The neighbourhoods that fell outside the sanctuary provided by the fort were denoted as rough and violent neighbourhoods, and the very premise upon which the fort was built was to safeguard colonial English interests from natives in "the Black Town" (Buenell 1933: 27). As Buenell describes it, the Black Town was an area inhabited by natives where the splendour and grandeur of the buildings and avenues of the Fort area gave way to buildings that looked more like 'human warehouses' and stables in a 'dirty irregular labyrinth' (Edwardes 2010). By the early 19th century, this separation between the Fort and "the native town" (Chandavarkar 1994b: 40) was being permanently etched into the social geography of the city.

While there was strong evidence pointing towards the "unequal distribution of wealth throughout the Native community" (as quoted in Chandavarkar 1994a) as well, the homogenous conceptualisation of the 'Black Town' as a place to be feared, and therefore defended against, was beginning to be deeply engrained into the manner in which the city was being governed. In February of 1803, an enormous fire ripped through large parts of the town,[10] and the rebuilding exercise that followed was used as an opportunity to further separate out Indian merchants out of the Fort area by allotting them commercial space only outside of the Fort walls. In particular, plans for the renewal of the fortifications decreed that the space between the Fort and the Black Town should be "determined by the range of the [East India] Company's cannons" (Chandavarkar 1994b: 40). Chandavarkar highlights this segregation as happening in three phases, of which the first was the rebuilding efforts following the Great Fire of 1803. From the mid- to late-1800s, the Committee on the Future

---

[10] See Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency, Govt Central Press, 1894: p. 665

Extension of the City of Bombay[11] further reinforced the segregation resulting directly out of the rebuilding efforts. Thus, a second phase of segregation took place as the Committee directed all trades that 'caused danger or offence to the public', like tanning, catgut making, fat-boiling and indigo dying for example,[12] to be moved outside of the Fort walls, and in particular, into the areas just north of the majority of the native settlements, which falls in present day Byculla.

Subsequently, a third phase of segregation was set in motion in the decades following the outbreak of the plague epidemic in the city in the late 19th century (Catanach 1988). The fast expanding cotton mills, built in the 1870s and 1880s, were beginning to attract large numbers of mill workers into the city. Tramway lines laid in 1872 transformed the once rural area to the north of the native settlements into the busy industrial sections of Tardeo, Nagpada, Byculla, Chinchpugli and Parel (Edwardes 1923: 74-76). By the late 1880s, the dynamic of inward migration was placing enough pressure on land value, and particularly the rental market, in the city to price out the newer or less well off workers from Parel, Mazagon, Sewri and Byculla, the areas in the immediate vicinity of the mills. Thus, the neighbourhoods adjacent to the mills, while being more congested than others, did nevertheless house the wealthier and more established residents. When the bubonic plague was discovered in Mumbai (then Bombay) in September 1896 however, the environmental characteristics of these neighbourhoods shaped colonial plague policies to also regard the residents of these neighbourhoods as impoverished and unsanitary.

By the early 20th century, long after the fort walls had been demolished, the framing of urban policies, as well as the practices of city and municipal governance, were continuing to shape the social segregation in the city. Firstly, the spread of Mumbai which already covered areas North till Mira Road, East almost till Thane, and looked to leap beyond the Thane Creek, further south-eastwards from the Island City towards Uran, necessitated a spatial reclassification of the neighbourhoods. Thus the neighbourhoods in Byculla (Dongri, Nagpada, Madanpura, etc) came to be more accurately classified as *south central* Bombay. The grouping of these neighbourhoods with the South, as opposed their earlier avatars of 'outside the limits' of the colonial city, or Central areas soon after, brought about upward pressure on property markets. Compounding this, the supply and control of housing was becoming an increasingly important locus of power, authority and therefore social organisation, not only citywide, but importantly, also at the neighbourhood level. 20th century 'native' Mumbai is often described as a

---

[11] A distant predecessor of the current Chief Minister's Task Force on Transforming Mumbai into a World Class City, Government of Maharashtra, 2003.
[12] See Report of the Committee on the Future Extension of the City of Bombay, 1887, in Government of Bombay, Public Works Department (General), vol. 1162, Compilation no. 4133 W, 1868-89, MSA.

collection of diverse neighbourhoods, in which power-relations were under the fervent control of local 'headmen' or *jamaat*[13] heads, who brought with them their 'village' factions, parochial disputes and authority structures (as in Bayly 1971, Masselos 1976). However, a more careful reading of Mumbai's social organisation shows that the power-relations involved in the 'reconstitution of villages in the urban space' were far from being unilaterally dominated by headmen. Instead, there was a varying spectrum of individuals, particular to the urban space, in whom power structures originated and resided. Chandavarkar finds not only that this ranged from a *mukaddam* (jobber),[14] a landlord, a *dada*,[15] to a moneylender, but importantly, also that the considerable influence each of them exerted on the neighbourhood could nevertheless be "limited by the field within which they operated. Their clients [in a formal or informal sense] could impose effective pressures, demands and sanctions upon them. The exercise of their dominance was marked by tension and conflict, by competition and rivalry. Their leadership and influence operated within parameters in part governed by the choices exercised by their clients" (Chandavarkar 1994b: 174).

The variety of actors exerting influence upon the neighbourhood was most evident in the prodigious and seemingly haphazard growth of the built environment: there were paddy fields and buffalo grazing grounds within a few miles of expensive real estate, while some sections of the city were completely crammed with buildings. The diversity in the various loci of power and authority at the local level flourished greatly in the near complete absence of any consistent, sustained and citywide urban planning. An interesting example is of Nagpada in 1901, where "a ground area of 75,000 square yards was occupied by 168 separate properties" (Chandavarkar 1994b: 176). This neighbourhood was already one of the most overcrowded central wards of the city (Hazareesingh 2001: 244), and by 1921, had an astonishing high building density of over 15 buildings per acre (see Census of India, 1921, Cities, ii-vi). Nagpada and the areas in the immediate vicinity of the mills, which experienced the most direct impact of the vast influx of workers, are of particular interest here. I contend that for the

---

[13] Community group

[14] Some of my respondents used the terms '*mukaddam*' or '*mistry*' interchangeably, referring to an 'old timer'. These are terms that originate from the organisational structure of the cotton mills, where a *mukaddam* was the person in charge of a section of (or all) workers in a mill. "He is primarily a chargeman. Promoted from the ranks after full experience of the factory, he is responsible for the supervision of labour while at work. In a large factory, there may be a hierarchy of jobbers for this purpose, including women overseers in departments staffed by women...So far as the worker is given technical training, the jobber is expected to provide it. He is not, however, merely responsible for the worker once he has obtained work; the worker has generally to approach him to secure a job, and is nearly always dependent on him for the security of that job as well as for a transfer to a better one" - Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India (RCLI), Calcutta, 1931, p 23. As quoted in Sen, Arup Kumar. 2002. Mode of Labour Control in Colonial India. *Economic and Political Weekly* 37 (38): 3956-3966. Pp. 3956.

[15] Literally 'older brother', also refers to the local strongman of a neighbourhood. "*Gulli ka dada*" – the *dada* of the street.

Bombay Police the problems of policing these newly industrialised neighbourhoods were manifold, since not only were the demands of crime detection and prevention increasing rapidly, "the chief problem [for the police] was the proper housing of the police force, in a city where overcrowding and insanitation had become a public scandal" (Edwardes 1923: 76). In these neighbourhoods, it was not only the lack of a consolidated urban plan that led there to be such a high density of building, but this was also due to the adverse effects of a peculiar interpretation of tenurial conditions. As Chandavarkar discusses, most of the buildings in Nagpada were built under leasehold agreements in which the *Fazindar* (freeholder) collected land rent from builders, who in turn extracted rent from tenants. However, there was a popular belief that it was in the *Fazindars'* rights to demand at any time that the buildings were razed and the land returned.

Over the first decade of the 20th century, the uncertainties arising from this belief were greatly amplified by the fast increasing land rents demanded by the *Fazindars*, which in turn was due to the increasing demand for residential and commercial property within close reach of the mill areas of Mumbai. Two specific impacts of this are particularly relevant for the case study neighbourhood and its immediate neighbours – firstly, builders and landlords alike preferred a multi-faceted strategy of renting to an assortment of tenants to maximise rent extraction. Thus, the lower floors in narrow lanes were often split into several shallow-fronted spaces and rented out as small shops, while the surrounding rooms were split up to create one or two room residential units. Such practices created extremely dense urban blocks in which rooms rented out as residential space were often left with no windows, ventilation, or sunlight, and commercial space was often devoid of adequate infrastructural provision such as plumbing for drinking water, drainage or direct electricity connections. Builders also crammed in as many tenants into a single space as possible in order to cover their initial costs as quickly as possible. By the 1930s, 30 to 40 per cent of residents in the mill districts lived in single rooms inhabited by more than six people, while in the inner city neighbourhoods this went up to 99 and 88 per cent respectively (Pradhan 1936 (1989): 12-14).[16] However, the overcrowding of mill workers into *chawls* cannot be understood simply in terms of maximised rent extraction strategies, as in the longer term, this strategy also had a deep impact upon the social make-up of the communities that inhabited the

---

[16] Pradhan found that conditions for the Maharashtrian and Gujarati communities were particularly bad – he found these communities to be using saw-dust and dung-balls as fuel inside chawl buildings. 4,279 Maharashtrian workers lived in 786 rooms, meaning each room had on average 5.6 workers, while each family only had 0.8 of a room. A further 68 families were homeless, using gunny bags to enclose verandas into living spaces. See Pradhan, G. R. 1936 (1989). "The Untouchable Workers of Bombay City - unpublished MA thesis." In *Research in sociology: abstracts of M.A. and Ph. D. dissertations completed in the Department of Sociology, University of Bombay*, ed. Dhirendra Narain. Bombay: Concept Publishing Company. 531.

crowded chawls. As the Rent Enquiry Committee of 1939[17] found, self-selection was fast creating segregated ghettos. The cramped living arrangements caused there to be a reluctance of 'the respectable to live with the rough, the skilled to live with the unskilled, the jobbers to live with ordinary workers and various castes to live with each other' (Chandavarkar 1981).

Over time, the residential chawls of the inner city neighbourhoods suffered a second impact caused by the uncertain relationship between the builders and the *Fazindars*. Since by the late 1950s overcrowding tenants had reached a maximum point while land rents continued to rise, builders started to opt for the cheapest building materials and often disregarded building regulations. For example, cheap timber frames were used for multi-storeyed structures, and inadequate waterproofing[18] meant that these rotted at an alarming rate. Critically, builders also attempted to lower initial building costs by constructing on poorly built foundations and unstable plinths. As Klein (1986) describes, this also had a knock-on effect on the drainage systems, which could not be cleaned due to congestion of houses and quickly became wholly non-functional. So many buildings were built on inadequate foundations that excavation of the pavements to fix the drainage below would almost certainly cause the buildings to crumble, and Nagpada was left to become one of the many "cesspools" in the city where sewage from broken or clogged drains seeped into the sub-soil (Klien 1986: 742). This was also the time when the Rent Act, an enactment meant to protect the interests of the low-rent tenants by maintaining subsidised rent levels, inadvertently put residents of the Byculla chawls in a situation of greater risk and uncertainty. As in other over-crowded neighbourhoods, landlords of the chawl buildings of Nagpada in Byculla increasingly demanded large *pugdee* (or cash advance) payments from their tenants. The rent-levels stipulated by the Rent Act were so low, that in the instance where a *pugdee* payment could not be extracted, landlords preferred to leave the room vacant rather than bear the loss of low fixed rents. The Rent Enquiry Committee also found that the practice of leaving tenements vacant was often part of a strategy to falsely create a shortage of rooms, allowing landlords the freedom to apply the additional levies. The cash advance payment was often as large as one full year's rent, and because it was collected completely informally it was almost never be reclaimed by the tenant when leaving.

In my understanding of the changing social landscape of the city, the physical nature of living in an under-provided urban space has had several direct and indirect knock-on effects. For one, the dilapidated and over congested nature of these neighbourhoods directly affected who could live there. Not only did one need the financial ability to afford living quarters in south central Mumbai, but

---

[17] Report of the Rent Enquiry Committee, Government of Bombay, 1939, Volumes I, II & III.
[18] In the roofing as well as surrounding the washing spaces inside

having the physical ability to withstand the environment was also a necessity. The conditions of work and living experienced in the mill districts in the early 1900s was described as "such a vitiated atmosphere [which] most certainly impaired the health of the operatives, made them susceptible not only to lung diseases but also weakened their resistance and made them prematurely old" (Upadhyay 1990: PE91).

3. RIOTING AS A SOURCE OF LONG TERM VULNERABILITY IN INFORMAL URBAN SPACES

With this framework in mind, I look at a particular episode of rioting in Mumbai, India, which lasted from December 1992 through to January 1993 (henceforth 'the Mumbai riots'). My aim is to highlight how the informal and impoverished characteristics of urban spaces contributed to the nature and extent of vulnerabilities faced by local residents during the riots. I argue that this occurred through a two-fold effect whereby insecure living arrangement heightened the impacts of violence on the one hand, but on the other, it was the flexibility of informal and extralegal arrangements that provided the most accessible and credible form of security. Notwithstanding the temporary nature of these security arrangements, lasting in some instances only for a few days while others were even more fleeting, their impact was far reaching, with entire households migrating across the city to relocate into neighbourhoods where they might benefit from them. Their success also reshaped how safety and security are conceptualised by local residents, leading to a shift in the present understanding of urban depravation in general.

Leading up to the 1992-1993 riots in Mumbai

The Mumbai riots of 1992-1993 were particularly intense in the inner-city neighbourhoods of South Central Mumbai, which are predominantly Muslim. These areas are some of the oldest neighbourhoods in Mumbai (c.f. Chadha 2005). Today, they are densely populated with extremely poor infrastructural provisions in terms of inadequate access to electricity, clean water, sanitation as well as structurally unsafe housing. They also suffer from ghettoised segregation from the rest of the city

(Khan 2008). The local police have always maintained that the force available to them was woefully under-staffed and ill equipped. There were approximately 30,000 police constabulary at any one point in the 1990s in Mumbai, who were vastly outnumbered and perhaps out-trained by the local cadre of the Shiv Sena, a belligerent and right-wing regional party which would later be indicted for several counts of inciting and perpetrating public violence during the riots, who numbered 40,000 spread over approximately 225 active *shakha* (the smallest organisational unit within the Shiv Sena) across the city (Srikrishna vol. II/Chapter 3/3.4). As per the information released by the Mumbai Police in 2009,[19] the Commissioner of Police (the top ranking police officer in the city police), responsible for policing a city of 15 million people, earned Rs. 24,500 (approximately £340) per month, while a newly recruited police constable earned Rs 3,050 (approx. £42) per month. What is even more poignant is that total budgeted expense for Criminal Investigation and Vigilance was a mere Rs. 3.3 per capita per month, more than 90% of which was for salaries.[20]

In the months leading up to the Mumbai riots, senior Police Inspectors from several police stations in the inner city had made complaints to the offices of the Assistant Commissioner as well as the zonal Deputy Commissioner of Police regarding the insufficient resources at their disposal. During this time, the resource constrained were compounded by increased local political activity of the Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Bombay Muslim Committee, who were responding to provocative hooliganism and sloganeering by right-wing Hindu activists of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shiv Sena (as described in Daud and Suresh 1993: 33, Jaffrelot 1996: 458 for example). Several 'public' meetings[21] were organised where leaflets describing the need to mobilise 'Muslim effort' were distributed. There are also accounts of SIMI activists raising blackboards displaying extremely provocative slogans in Urdu, proclaiming a threat to local residents from a growing presence of hard-line Hindu activists as well as an impending threat to the Babri *Masjid* – a 16th century mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, built on land which is claimed by Hindu groups like the BJP, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Samajsewak Sangh (RSS) to be the birthplace of the Hindu deity Lord Ram. The mosque and its surrounding grounds have been under varying degrees of dispute since the 1950s, but the issue had been powerfully revitalised as a mobilisation strategy after the 1989

---

[19] Mumbai Police. 2009. *Information under Right to Information Act*. Mumbai: Maharashtra Police.

[20] Using an estimated city population of 15 million in 2007/2008. The estimated budget under the Mumbai Police 2055 Plan for 2007-2008 was Rs. 5,89,676,000, with Rs. 5,51,496,000 set aside for salaries.

[21] There is some doubt as to the exact nature of these meetings – as has been described in some detail in the Srikrishna Commission Report (vII/23.3-22.5) some accounts portray these meetings as 'in camera', with the organisers insisting all doors and windows were closed, and certain unwanted elements, particularly those known to be police informants, ejected from the audience. Senior Inspector Pawar was also requested to leave the meeting, however, he noted that this meeting was not a secret one, as the doors and windows remained open and passers by could easily listen in. The Nagpada Police therefore did not report anything untoward or suspicious.

election, with Hindu groups calling volunteers (*kar sevaks*) to gather at the site in 1992. It was these volunteers who later that year demolished the mosque, triggering riots across the country.

6ᵗʰ December 1992, the start of the Mumbai riots, and the loss of police control

BJP and Shiv Sena activists organised a series of *Ghanta Aartis*[22] (a ritual where the bell in a Hindu temple is rung continuously) to coincide with the exact time of the start of the *kar sevak* activities in Ayodhya. Though this ritual is not common, right-wing Hindu parties often argue that it should be viewed as the Hindu equivalent of the *azan*, the Muslim call for prayer, and therefore be treated no differently. From the accounts of local residents, the continuous ringing of the bells in December 1992 'at times amplified by loud speakers, reverberated through the narrow lanes…it created a feeling of restlessness. I remember having to shout to the yoghurt seller when he came to my door'. It was a show of strength and a way to 'bring Ayodhya to Mumbai'. Nevertheless, the Nagpada Police did not take any pre-emptive action or make any arrest in connection with the ritual since it was conducted within the premises of temples.

However, there was no immediate outpouring of collective sentiment against the bell ringing, and serious incidents of public disorder began to occur only from early morning on the following day, 7ᵗʰ December: Maulana Azad Road, the main thoroughfare cutting through Nagpada, was blocked with debris, stones and tyres by a group of Muslim youth. The roadblocks were placed primarily to deter the police, who were carrying out swift-searches of the area, from entering the neighbourhood. Their efforts were successful as according to police reports, on several occasions on the morning of December 7, patrols had to be stopped in order to clear debris from the road. At the same time, local accounts describe the same group of youths setting up their own patrols through all inner lanes as well as along the larger roads around the perimeter of neighbourhoods like Nagpada, Madanpura, and neighbouring Kamathipura. Allegedly, this group stopped and questioned anyone they did not recognise as a local resident, and also confiscated items they thought were dubious. Through most of that morning, the police managed to keep Maulana Azad Road clear from the roadblocks thrown in by prowling groups who would then disappear into the back streets. Late in the day however, once tyres and other debris were set alight, the police could no longer keep the road clear, and central Nagpada, including Madanpura and a few adjoining streets of Kamathipura, came to be almost totally

---

[22] Also referred to as *Ghantanaad*.

inaccessible form the outside.

The first attack in the inner city neighbourhoods occurred at 11:00AM on 7th December – at this time, a mob of approximately 500-600 Muslim men had gathered outside the Suleiman *chowky* (police booth) on Undria Road, and according to police reports, attacked and ransacked the *chowky* without provocation. However, according to respondents RC7, the gathering was first peaceful, "but the surrounding tensions were very high; at some point there was a rumour that the police were about to open fire, and this is when the mob turned violent." Respondents RC60, RC58, RC62 and RC17 described a similar version of events. The mob then allegedly ransacked the *chowky* inadvertently trapping a Hindu constable Pandit Malhari Ahire inside, who was attacked with swords and choppers resulting in serious injuries. While police records claim that Ahire was saved due to police control firing, which managed to clear a passage to safety for him, several eyewitnesses interviewed recalled that it was instead the Muslim residents from the neighbouring building who managed to pull Ahire out of the crowd and also took in the other officers from the *chowky* (also see eyewitness interviews regarding the Suleiman chowky incident in Swami 1998). The news about the police firing and mob violence drew out a crowd of approximately 4 to 5,000 on Maulana Shaukat Ali Marg, who then proceeded to vandalise neighbouring by-lanes. The police now increased their control-fire, which resulted in 7 deaths and 2 injuries, all of whom were Muslim. Less than a kilometre due west on Belasis Road, another group of around 500 Muslim men set alight some busses and pelted stones at the Bombay Central Bus Depot at around noon. This carried on for nearly five hours, during which time the violence got increasingly brutal and came to be centred along Maratha Mandir Road. Here too, the police resorted to control-fire to disperse the crowd, which resulted in the deaths of 3 Muslim men and 7 Hindu men.

By the early evening, close to 3,000 Hindu men from the neighbouring areas like Tardeo had congregated behind the BIT *chawl*, on the south-western front of Nagpada, called *nava* (new) Nagpada. The mob soon turned violent, ransacking and looting Muslim shops and other establishments on Foras Road (now know as R. S. Nimkar Marg). The Srikrishna Committee, set up to investigate police handling of the riots, reported that the mob "systematically attacked Muslim establishments…[they] attacked Good Luck restaurant…and set on fire five/six shops belonging to Muslims. The fire spread to an adjacent bakery resulting in the death of one Gangaram Sitaram Nayee [a Hindu] who was burnt in the fire" (Srikrishna 1998: vol. II/22.12). Around the same time, 4,000 to 5,000 Muslim men gathered in Madanpura, in the northern section of Nagpada, and began looting shops on Maulana Azad Marg (formerly known as Duncan Road) and Mirza Ghalib Marg (formerly known as Clare

Road). Some of the worst hit shops in the looting belonged to Marwaris (Hindus from Rajasthan) who, very soon after the riots, sold off their shops to Muslim traders and moved out of Nagpada. The mob also attacked two Hindu temples in the area – one on 4th Peerkhan Street, where the idols were smashed and the adjoining residence of the priest ransacked, and the other in *nava* Nagpada, where they attempted to set the temple, and consequently a nearby building, on fire. The police reportedly fired approximately 60 rounds of control-fire, but by this stage were beginning to be over-powered by the size and spread of the mob. Notwithstanding the proximity of this mob to the Nagpada Police Station and the Byculla Jail, the by-lanes leading off Mirza Ghalib Marg into the barricaded and debris-strewn Maulana Azad Road were proving increasingly difficult for the police to access or control.

Similarly, in response to the rioting in *nava* Nagpada, the police opened control-fire, some of it through automatic weapons. The Srikrishna Commission continues to record its astonishment that "seventy–nine rounds were fired by police killing one person and injuring seven. Surprisingly, the person who was killed in the police firing was a Muslim, though it is not in dispute that the mob on rampage was a mob of Hindus. What is more surprising, is the low figure of casualties despite the police firing 79 rounds in this incident, some of which were fired from a sten-gun" (Srikrishna 1998: vol. II/22.12). Several other such instances occurred in Nagpada on 7th and 8th December where police response was questionable, either because of the excessive use of force, the apparent partisan nature of the response, or the questionable nature of evidence and pro forma paperwork provided, is clear indication the police leadership had lost control of the situation. Two Muslim bystanders, named as Mohammad Ibrahim Mohammad Hussain and Naseem Ayub Khan by the Srikrishna Commission (Srikrishna 1998: vol. II/22.14), were shot by police bullets, with Mohammad Hussain later succumbing to his injury. Subsequent reports confirmed both as not being involved in the rioting in any way. Another more serious breach of legal procedure occurred on the afternoon of 8th December when, according to Inspector Dhawale of the Nagpada Police Station, he fired at a group of supposedly 100-120 riotous people who, purportedly, were stone pelting the Bohri (Muslim) *chawl*, and injured a two year old Muslim child standing in a balcony above. However, there are several versions of how the episode unfolded, and the version presented by the police does not seem to hold under the scrutiny of the Srikrishna Commission. Not only did the Commission find that the *pro forma* First Information Reports (FIRs) for this incident had been haphazardly tampered with, changing the size of the group from "10-12 people" to 100-120, but under the cross examination it also became apparent that the entire incident might have been fabricated since the log reports from the Police Control Room

and other Mobile Units report the disturbance at a wholly different location.[23]

While the police lost control of the neighbourhoods, the group of Muslim youth described earlier, continued their patrolling. Many later recounted the feeling of security this provided to local residents – they felt protected from the 'marauding Hindu mobs' as well as the partisan police. Nevertheless, the interviewees who referred to this group did not actually name the members, although it was apparent that almost everyone knew who they were. One respondent, RC47, described their actions as "questionable certainly, many of the guys [who were patrolling the neighbourhood] were known to all of us as delinquents, but equally, there was no question of them picking up a wrong person, everyone knows everyone here, so at least we felt safe that they will definitely catch an outsider. And once all the streets were blocked, no one could get in." RC61, a Muslim woman in her thirties, went further and described the group as "young Muslim men, some merely boys, but I felt they were the true protectors of our *quam* (community)."

It is interesting to note that even though these patrols were a fleeting and almost 'ephemeral' display of vigilante activity, which all but ceased after a few days, the actions had long-term impacts. A local *maulvi* (teacher at an Islamic school) drew on Quranic scripture to refer to some of these boys as the '*khadem-ul-quam akhirhuum*', implying they were the last of the 'real men' doing service to the community. This sense of ownership over the provision of security was also echoed more than a decade after the riots by nearly 38% of non-police respondents, who claimed they were, in one way or another, involved in providing security for the neighbourhood. This echoes Thomas Blom Hansen's findings that while musclemen in Mumbai's inner city neighbourhoods derive their social standing

---

[23] "The Commission would have been inclined to pass this off as an unfortunate incident, but a closer examination of the case papers in this case (C.R.No.778 of 1992) (Exh.632–C) disclose peculiar features. In the first place, the proforma of FIR is not even signed by Police Inspector Dhawale. In the proforma against column No.4 "names and addresses of accused if any", the number is shown as "10–12 unknown persons". The statement of Police Inspector Dhawale dated 8th December 1992 is a typewritten statement in which the number of miscreants is typed as "10 to 12 persons" and overwritten in ink to read as "100 to 120". The officer is also unable to say whether the persons in the mob were Hindus or Muslims. In the statement of Police Inspector Dhawale on page 4 there is no correction made and the number of miscreants is shown as "10 to 12". Mr. Solkar, learned counsel appearing for Jamiet–E–Ulema, produced before the Commission a xerox copy of the FIR issued by the police station in which the number of miscreants is shown as "10 to 12 unknown persons". Police Inspector Dhawale, however, maintains that the strength of the miscreant mob was 100–120 and that he had overlooked page 4 of the FIR. In the report submitted to the zonal Deputy Commissioner of Police and Additional Chief Secretary, (Home), Government of Maharashtra, it is mentioned that the unlawful assembly consisted of 'ten to twelve persons' and the reason for firing is mentioned as "stone throwing from the Bohri Chawl and from the stairs of the said and opposite building". A perusal of the Case Diary shows that, for the first time, the number of persons in the mob was shown as "100 to 120 persons". Though the case papers contain a number of statements of witnesses, all of them turn out to be prostitutes carrying on their trade in the red–light area. The nature of their trade does not rule out the possibility of their having been persuaded to give statements in favour of police" – (Srikrishna Commission Report Chapter 22 Section 6).

through an ephemeral association with gangs, their position is nevertheless valued since 'We have to respect [them] in times of crisis who else will fight for us in the street? There the nice advocate or doctor is no good…but that does not mean that we trust them, that is something else' (as quoted in Hansen 2000: 266-267). Not only does this point to an understanding of 'security' that is extremely localised, extending to a multiplicity of actors and meanings (as in Rothschild 1995), and one that can be represented as a collectively owned, but nevertheless excludable 'commodity' (as in Loader 1999) even in moments of such extreme public disorder, it also serves as a reaffirmation that the nature of urban form deeply impacts social structures that form within it (as in Newman 1973).

Extralegal governance and security

The loss of formal control as the riots took hold of the inner city neighbourhoods gave way to a sharp increase in extralegal activity during the latter half of the riots. In late-December and January 1993, the Nagpada Police Station recorded 18 'riot related offences', and 7 'deaths due to stabbing' (Srikrishna vol. II/22.18). In one incident, described in detail by the Srikrishna Commission, several eyewitnesses saw a Hindu mob throw stones and empty soda bottles at a building, Dalal Estate, in which nearly all residents were Hindu. Most eyewitnesses agree that the Hindu mob had targeted Dalal Estate as they suspected a Muslim family owned one of the flats in the building. The particular flat in question was ransacked and looted by the mob, but because the Muslim family could not be located, the mob proceeded to lock down the entire building under the assumption that the family was being sheltered in another flat. After locking all the doors from the outside, the mob proceeded to pour petrol in the passageways of the building and throw firebombs into windows "in order to flush out the [Muslim] family". One of the Hindu residents of Dalal Estate, who testified before Justice Srikrishna, managed to break open his front door and let out most of the other trapped residents, as they were on a lower floor. However, an elderly Zoroastrian couple on one of the upper floors could not make it out in time and were burnt alive. Eyewitnesses described that this incident was carried out in the full knowledge of the police, and some of the respondents who had witnessed the Dalal Estate incident (RC9, RC41, and RC60) often referred to it as an example of how the police function in the inner-city by 'letting the situation settle itself.' Similarly, the Srikrishna Commission found that

"…the story of the police [that they had no knowledge of the severity of the incident] is

improbable. Assistant Police Inspector Rathod was on duty on D. B. Marg and according to him he even saw a mob carrying stones, petrol cans, lighted torches proceeding towards Dalal Estate. As long as he was there, he did not see any fire. At 1430 hours he saw the fire and it was reported to him that an aged couple had been trapped inside the fire and that the public had been unable to rescue the couple. Surprisingly, Senior Police Inspector Pawar claims that it was not reported to him by the Assistant Police Inspector who was on duty that the mob had set the building on fire. Senior Police Inspector Pawar says that the only report given to him was that Assistant Police Inspector Rathod saw some people carrying lighted torches and going inside the Dalal Estate and that he had chased the mob away by resorting to firing. The Commission feels that the conduct of Assistant Police Inspector Rathod during the incident is not free from suspicion." (SCR vol. II/22.25)

Around the same time, local police took notice of a sudden and dramatic increase in groups of Hindu and Muslim residents carrying country-made 'katta'[24] pistols. The prevalence of these pistols was so alarming that the Nagpada police later admitted to the Srikrishna Commission that "the entire Madanpura Road along Maulana Azad Road was [left] totally un-policed because the police were afraid of their life" (SCR vol. II/Chapter I/22.26). Such an increase in the number of pistols would generally be evidence of organised criminal networks, however this was not the case as it was later established that the pistols were most likely crafted haphazardly using local blacksmith's kilns with scraps (like the steering rods from trucks) from local ironmongers. While none of the respondents in the dataset claimed to have personally had possession of a *katta*, one respondent acknowledged that they were 'being given out for our protection, how else could we protect ourselves?' The Nagpada police strangely did not make an official inquiry into this sudden rise in the number of small arms. One respondent, R70, praised the guns for having 'saved our life', while describing the act of handing out *katta* revolvers as the most legitimate, moral and tangible form of security received. RC70 says "the *katta* guns were like the night… coming over all of us to protect us from a really bad day… the first two days I remember were really bad, so many dead!" RC70 had left Behrampada, in Bandra (East), a suburb of Mumbai, with his wife and daughter to take shelter in Nagpada during the riots. He became visibly emotional when narrating the details of how and why he moved into Nagpada. "We felt safe here…my daughter was to get married the year before, but that fell through, then we moved, so she

---

[24] Also known as a *Tamancha* in Northern India, such country-made guns were the preferred weapon of choice for most Mumbai gangs. They were cheap, costing the manufacturer roughly Rs. 250 and were sold to the end user for approximately Rs. 1000. They were also easy to produce, experienced craftsmen take under six hours to manufacture a *katta*. See Pande, Mrinal. 2008. "Uttar Pradesh: the land of la tamancha." Livemint and The Wall Street Journal, 16th December. Available from http://www.livemint.com/2008/12/15235804/Uttar-Pradesh-the-land-of-la.html (Accessed on 17th February 2009).

got married very late. But these things happen… at least by the grace of Allah we were protected here, I had a relative here… I came here because I came to know about this gracious protection". He had moved his family into the tiny living quarters of his relative in Nagpada, and recalled how the tenement had now become their home, and it was from there that he got his daughter married.

There were also a sudden spurt of extortion attempts and protection rackets run by local thugs. Several reports from across the city, including Nagpada and the neighbouring areas of Pydhonie, Agripada, Dagri Chawl, Mohammad Ali Road and Nul Bazaar, pointed out that shopkeepers, residents and other local businesses were being forced to pay significant amounts in order to ensure their security through the days of the riots. While extortion and protection rackets are usually carried out by political entities, by members of organised gangs and by police personnel in a well-established system known as *hafta* (Anjaria 2011), during the Mumbai riots, various other agents, working privately, entered the fray. For example, Shiv Sena *shakha pramukh* (local branch leaders) complained that "for every Shiv *Sainik* involved [in rioting and providing protection] there were also 20 anti-social elements involved" (Srikrishna vol. II/Chapter III/4.2 [sic 3.2]). Some of the most detailed accounts for such cases of extortion racketeering have been compiled by Rajdeep Sardesai, a prominent journalist who reported on the riots from several of the inner city neighbourhoods. In his deposition to the Srikrishna Commission, Sardesai notes that "the Shiv Sena had to issue a statement dissociating itself from hoodlums [posing as Shiv *Sainik*] going around demanding "protection money" from minorities and "relief money" from [the] majority" (Srikrishna vol. II/Chapter 3/4.4 [sic 3.4]). Here, the boundaries between who was a 'real' Shiv *Sainik* and who was an 'anti-social element' seem to be purposefully blurred by the Shiv Sena leadership in such a manner that would make it impossible to legally implicated the Shiv Sena for the Mumbai riots.

The extortion attempts became so frequent that in certain Hindu areas, the Shiv Sena felt compelled to put up blackboards with the official party logo on them and displaying messages to warn residents to not pay protection money as the people attempting to extort money were not part of the Shiv Sena. This continued even after Bal Thackeray called for peace in his *Saamna* article (Thackeray 1993), and "Pramod Navalkar [a senior Shiv Sena backed politician felt that] local *tapories* (vagabonds) collecting money for protection given against attacks from Muslims during the riots and for guaranteeing such protection in future…was not a good development and that he was unhappy about this [since this happened] just on the day on which the article was written" (Srikrishna vol. II/Chapter 3/4.5-6 [sic 3.5-6]). But the attempts to minimise the extortion and protection rackets during the riots were few and far between, and residents of the worst hit area had to pay substantial amounts to various

agents for their protection. This operated through a very complex system, where knowing *who* to pay on the day was crucial – several respondents narrated their experiences of having to interchangeably pay Muslim groups, Hindu groups as well as rogue police personnel for their safety, but this was not always successful. Despite large payments, many did bear significant losses during the riots. One respondent rationalised this by pointing out that 'those were very hard times, payments needed to be made'. Another respondent was overawed when recounting the number of protection racketeers during the riots and the amount of money they were able to extort, she exclaimed 'who wouldn't want to be part of something so big!'

Ironically, the gravity and intensity of the violent circumstances were seen to be legitimising the need for extralegal vigilante security provision, even though the provision of that security was itself based on violence, extortion and brutality. As theorised by Black (1976), these instances are examples of civil violence arising to fill a vacuum left by the inadequate provision of state sponsored security; other means of social control rising to fill gaps left by weak, partisan or absent legal frameworks. Another form through which vigilante security provision gained legitimacy was through the use of 'battle-field' and militarised vocabulary. Several respondents referred to local musclemen as 'Generals' or 'Commanders' when describing particular episodes during the riots. Even though this description was in sharp contrast to when the same men were referred to as 'the local thugs' when not in the context of the riots, the characterisation was correct to some extent, in that the musclemen often organised and led groups of other young men around the neighbourhood, directing efforts from 'the front lines'. These groups created perimeters around the neighbourhood, and often saw themselves as 'commando units', fitting into the structure and order of 'riot production systems' detailed by Paul Brass (Brass 2003, 2004). Militarisation is also evident in witness' vocabulary when respondents described the 'road blockades', comprising of burning tyres and other rubble, as the deployment of a purposeful and strategic 'tactic'. One respondent, RC47, was in awe of the efforts of some of his friends when he described Nagpada as being 'a zone of total control, our guys had a full grasp and the tactic gave us complete supremacy in the area. It was a no-fly zone for them.' In much the same vein, research on Dharavi, a different area in Mumbai, reveals a similar use of militaristic vocabulary, such as 'Line of Control' (referring to the de facto border between India and Pakistan) being used to denote roads between Hindu, Dalit and Muslim colonies in Dharavi (Chatterji and Mehta 2007: 69-75).

I therefore find that the actions of the mob, the police, as well as a wide variety of private agents together present a complex taxonomy of extralegal vigilante activity (as in Sen and Pratten 2007) during the Mumbai riots in 1992-1993. The illegality or outright criminality of some elements in this taxonomy

is clearly evident, like the stone pelting that later devolved into looting, ransacking and then arson for example. However, this is less clear for other elements – police inaction could have arisen out of the genuine lack of capacity, or have had a more malicious intent, while private agents banding together to patrol their neighbourhood could be perceived as protective and defensive actions by some, or as aggressive gestures by others. The complex taxonomy of vigilante activity also encompasses the very understandings of security and insecurity, which can vary drastically depending not only on one's ethnic, lingual or group associations, but also on highly localised, time-sensitive and individualised characteristics (Gupte 2012), like for example which street or even which floor of a building you reside in.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The primary line of inquiry in this paper was to unpack whether violent urban spaces change our understanding of what a 'safe city' is, and whether this in turn alters what we perceive as adequate urban living standards. These, I argue, are lines of inquiry that are critical if we are to fully understand urban vulnerability in the current context of rapid urban expansion. To this end, I have looked in detail at the nature of urban form of a group of inner city neighbourhoods in Mumbai and how the 1992-1993 riots unfolded in them. I qualify this using unique qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews of victims, perpetrators and witnesses of the riots, as well as interviews of police personnel of varying rank.

My findings are two-fold. First, is a reassertion that the urban built up environment interacts with the social forms within it in a non-benign manner. This is not to view space in an essentialist manner. To the contrary, vigilante activity can be prevalent in all forms of urban space, while residents of a concretised multi-floor building are just as likely to be victims of riots as are residents of informally constructed shacks. Nevertheless, I find the nature of urban form (whether the streets are crowded, dense or sparse for example) does affect *how* security is delivered, both formally and through informal agents. This can often happen in non-obvious, 'ephemeral' ways and through long chains of events, which go unnoticed until they suddenly come into focus during moments of extreme public disorder. Alternatively, the nature of space can interact more overtly with the mechanics of security provision in such a way that certain strategies are rendered unsuccessful, like police swift-searches for example, while other strategies become realised, like blocking off street with burning debris for

example. This not only impacts who is secure and who is insecure, but importantly, also alters local perceptions of who *needs* security. Here, notions of criminality, illegality or even whether a person or household is poor have little impact. Instead, I find that notions of security are more closely linked to the physical form the urban space takes, and this has the potential to reinforce structural exclusion and segregation.

To this end, frameworks that define urban deprivation based on material and spatial dimensions are therefore meaningful. However, I find that such definitions of urban deprivation are nevertheless static, and cannot take into account the fluid character of slums. More poignantly however, material and spatial parameters of urban deprivation are also unable to accurately represent the changing nature of insecurity, as they do not recognise that security itself shares a close and varying relationship with urban form. It is clearly wrong to assume that a particular type of urban form, multi-storeyed tenement blocks as opposed to shacks for example, is inherently more or less secure. Indeed, as I have shown in this paper, while security does have a distinct spatial element to it, urban spaces are far from static in that they experience constant ebbs and flows in control between state, non-state, legal, illegal and extralegal actors. Moreover, how groups, households and individuals relate to urban space introduces a critical variation at a very local/micro level, and I find that it is this variation that is highly significant in determining outcomes.

Second, I find that the highly localised variation in how insecurity is perceived or experienced, is reflected by an equally high degree of fluidity in terms of *who provides* security, *how* they provide it, and *to whom* it is provided. Furthermore, I find that security can be represented as a collectively owned, but nevertheless excludable 'commodity', in that acts of public violence perpetrated by vigilantes function as markers that legitimate not only their own standing in the community, but in turn, also legitimate the long-term use of and reliance on extralegal forms of security provision. However, the institutionalisation of security, whether formal, informal, public or private, is *not* needed for this to occur. Rather, the commoditisation of security can occur in moments of extreme public disorder, through fleeting systems of extralegal and opportunistic activity.

Such a relationship between security, informality and extralegality in urban impoverished areas presents a challenge for formal (state) security providers. The slum *panchayat* system, a Mumbai Police initiative to involve slum dwellers in basic community policing, for example, would be at odds with this complex taxonomy of security, where ephemeral vigilante activity defines core notions of legitimacy. Broadly speaking, this reformulates the channels through which state and society respond to the challenges of urban poverty. Areas previously not regarded as slum areas on account of their tolerable

spatial and material parameters could conceivably be classified as slums owing to heightened levels of vulnerability and insecurity. As a consequence, where the responsibilities of housing provision traditionally fall under the purview of national planning boards, city municipalities and the legislature, with non-governmental organisations and private sector actors also involved in various capacities, directly including vulnerability and insecurity parameters within the framework of adequate living conditions would imply the direct involvement of the police (or other private agencies providing security) as well as the judicial, punitive and correctional systems within urban poverty alleviation efforts. As we move towards an ever more urbanised era, where vast amounts of development resources are diverted towards cities, accurately understanding agency and governance in violent urban spaces is therefore important in achieving safe, sustainable and inclusive urban development.

—

Adarkar, Neera. 2003. Gendering of the Culture of Building: Case of Mumbai. *Economic and Political Weekly* 38 (43): 4527-4534.

Anjaria, Jonathan Shapiro. 2011. Ordinary states: Everyday corruption and the politics of space in Mumbai. *American Ethnologist* 38 (1): 58-72.

Appadurai, Arjun. 2000. Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millenial Mumbai. *Public Culture* 12 (3).

Bayly, C. 1971. Local Control in Indian Towns — the case of Allahabad 1880-1920. *Modern Asian Studies* 5 (4): 289-311.

Black, Donald. 1976. *The Behavior of Law*. New York: Academic Press.

Brass, Paul R. 2003. *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Brass, Paul R. 2004. Development of an Institutionalised Riot System in Meerut City, 1961 to 1982. *Economic and Political Weekly* 39 (44): 4839-4848.

Buenell, J. 1933. *Bombay in the Days of Queen Anne*. Edited by S. T. Sheppard. London: Hakluyt Society.

Catanach, I. J. 1988. "Plague and the Tensions of Empire: India 1896–1918." In *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies*, ed. David Arnold. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Census of India. 2001. "City wise Total Population and Slum Population in Million Plus Cities (Municipal Corporations)." In. Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner.

Chadha, Monica. 2005. "Inside Mumbai's dilapidated sprawl." BBC Online, 23rd August. Available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4176738.stm (Accessed on.

Chandavarkar, Rajnarayan. 1981. Workers' Politics and the Mill Districts in Bombay between the Wars. *Modern Asian Studies* 15: 603-647.

Chandavarkar, Rajnarayan. 1994a. *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Bombay 1900-40*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chandavarkar, Rajnarayan. 1994b. *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business strategies and the working classes in Bombay 1900-40*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chandramouli, C. 2003. "Slums In Chennai: A Profile." In *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Environment and Health, Chennai, India, 15-17 December, 2003*, eds. Martin J. Bunch, V. Madha Suresh and T. Vasantha Kumaran. Chennai: Department of Geography, University of Madras and Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University. 82-88.

Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. *The politics of the governed : reflections on popular politics in most of the world.* of *University seminars/Leonard Hastings Schoff memorial lectures*. New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press.

Chatterji, Roma, and Deepak Mehta. 2007. *Living With Violence: An Anthropology Of Events and Everyday Life*. New Delhi: Routledge India.

Daud, Justice S. M., and Justice H. Suresh. 1993. *The People's Verdict: An Enquiry into the December 1992 and January 1993 Riots in Bombay*. Mumbai: Indian People's Human Rights Tribunal, Indian Human Rights Commission.

Dwivedi, Sharada, and Rahul Mehrotra. 2001. *Bombay : the cities within*. New ed. Bombay: Eminence Designs.

Edwardes, S. 2010. *The Rise of Bombay: A retrospect*. BiblioBazaar.

Edwardes, S. M. 1923. *The Bombay city police; a historical sketch, 1672-1916*. London etc.: H. Milford : Oxford university press.

GoI. various years. *Crime In India*. New Delhi: National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

Gupte, Jaideep. 2011a. "Extralegal security and policing for the urban dispossessed in Mumbai." In *Urbanizing Citizenship: Contested Spaces in Indian Cities*, eds. R Desai and R Sanyal. New Delhi: Sage.

Gupte, Jaideep. 2011b. "Linking urban civil violence, extralegality and informality: credibility and policing in South-central Mumbai, India." DPhil, Unpublished Thesis, University of Oxford.

Gupte, Jaideep. 2012. *What's civil about intergroup violence? Five inadequacies of communal and ethnic constructs of*

urban riots. Brighton: MICROCON. Research Working Paper 62.

Gupte, Jaideep, Patricia Justino, and Jean-Pierre Tranchant. 2012. *Households amidst urban riots: The economic consequences of civil violence in India*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. Microcon and Households in Conflict Network Working Paper Series.

Hansen, Thomas Blom. 2000. Predicaments of Secularism: Muslim Identities and Politics in Mumbai. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6 (2): 255-272.

Hazareesingh, Sandip. 2001. Colonial modernism and the flawed paradigms of urban renewal: uneven development in Bombay, 1900-25. *Urban History* 28 (2): 235-255.

Heckathorn, D. 1997. Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations. *Social Problems* 44: 174-199.

———. 2002. Respondent-Driven Sampling II: Deriving Valid Estimates from Chain-Referral Samples of Hidden Populations. *Social Problems* 49: 11-34.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. 1996. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement In India*. English ed. New York: Columbia University Press.

Khan, Farida, and Rehana Ghadially. 2009. "Empowering Muslim Youth through Computer Education, Access, Use: A Gender Analysis." In *International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies and Development*. Doha, Qatar: Carnegie Mellow Qatar.

Khan, Sameera. 2007. Negotiating the Mohalla: Exclusion, Identity and Muslim Women in Mumbai. *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (17): 1527-1533.

Khan, Sameera. 2008. *Under The Over: Life Below Mumbai's Longest Flyover. Urban Design Research Institute Working Paper #29*. Mumbai: UDRI. 29.

Kidambi, Prashant. 2007. *The making of an Indian metropolis : colonial governance and public culture in Bombay, 1890-1920. of Historical urban studies*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Klien, Ira. 1986. Urban Development and Death: Bombay City, 1870-1914. *Modern Asian Studies* 20 (4): 725-754.

Loader, Ian. 1999. Consumer Culture and the Commodification of Policing and Security. *Sociology* 33 (2): 373-392.

Masselos, Jim. 1976. Power in the Bombay "Moholla", 1904-15: An initial exploration into the world of the Indian Urban Muslim. *Journal of South Asian Studies* 6 (1): 75-95.

———. 2007. "Formal and Informal structures of power in Mumbai." In *The Making of Global City Regions: Johannesburg, Mumbai/Bombay, Sao Paolo, and Shanghai*, eds. K Segbers, Simon Raiser and K Volkmann. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 168-185.

Mumbai Police. 2009. *Information under Right to Information Act*. Mumbai: Maharashtra Police.

Newman, Oscar. 1973. *Defensible space : people and design in the violent city*. London: Architectural Press.

Pande, Mrinal. 2008. "Uttar Pradesh: the land of la tamancha." Livemint and The Wall Street Journal, 16th December. Available from http://www.livemint.com/2008/12/15235804/Uttar-Pradesh-the-land-of-la.html (Accessed on 17th February 2009).

Patton, M. 1990. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.

Pradhan, G. R. 1936 (1989). "The Untouchable Workers of Bombay City - unpublished MA thesis." In *Research in sociology: abstracts of M.A. and Ph. D. dissertations completed in the Department of Sociology, University of Bombay*, ed. Dhirendra Narain. Bombay: Concept Publishing Company. 531.

Ravallion, Martin, Shaohua Chen, and Prem Sangraula. 2007. *New Evidence on the Urbanization of Global Poverty*. Washington, D. C.: World Bank. Policy Research Working Paper 4199.

Rodgers, Dennis. 2010. "Urban violence is not (necessarily) a way of life: Towards a political economy of conflict in cities." In *Urbanization and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Jo Beall, Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis and Ravi Kanbur. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 235-250.

Rothschild, Emma. 1995. What is security? *Daedalus* 124 (3): 53-98.

Roy, A. N., S. K. Jaiswal, and Deven Bharti, eds. 2007. *Mumbai Police: Urbs Prims In Indis*. Mumbai: Office of the Commissioner of Police.

Salganik, M., and D. Heckathorn. 2004. Sampling and Estimation in Hidden Populations Using Respondent-Driven Sampling. *Sociological Methodology* 34: 193-239.

Sen, Arup Kumar. 2002. Mode of Labour Control in Colonial India. *Economic and Political Weekly* 37 (38): 3956-3966.

Sen, Atreyee, and David Pratten. 2007. "Global vigilantes: perspectives on justice and violence." In *Global Vigilantes*, eds. David Pratten and Atreyee Sen. London: Hurst.

Srikrishna, B. N. 1998. *Report of the Srikrishna Commission Appointed for Inquiry Into the Riots at Mumbai During December 1992 and January 1993: Volumes I and II*. Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra.

Swami, Praveen. 1998. Riot Victims: Living down the trauma. *Frontline* 15 (18).

Thackeray, Keshav Sitaram. 1993. "A lesson has been taught." *Saamna*, 12th January.

Tilly, C. 1985. "War-Making and State-Making as Organized Crime." In *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. P Evans, D Rueschemeyer and T Skocpol. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT. 2003. *The challenge of slums : global report on human settlements*. London: Earthscan.

Upadhyay, Shashi Bhushan. 1990. Cotton Mill Workers in Bombay, 1875 to 1918: Conditions of Work

and Life. *Economic and Political Weekly* 25 (30): PE87-PE99.

Varshney, Ashutosh. 2002. *Ethnic Conflict And Civic Life: Hindus And Muslims In India*. London: Yale University Press.

Waterfield, Henry. 1875. *Memorandum on the Census of British India 1871-72*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.

Appendix A – Dataset description

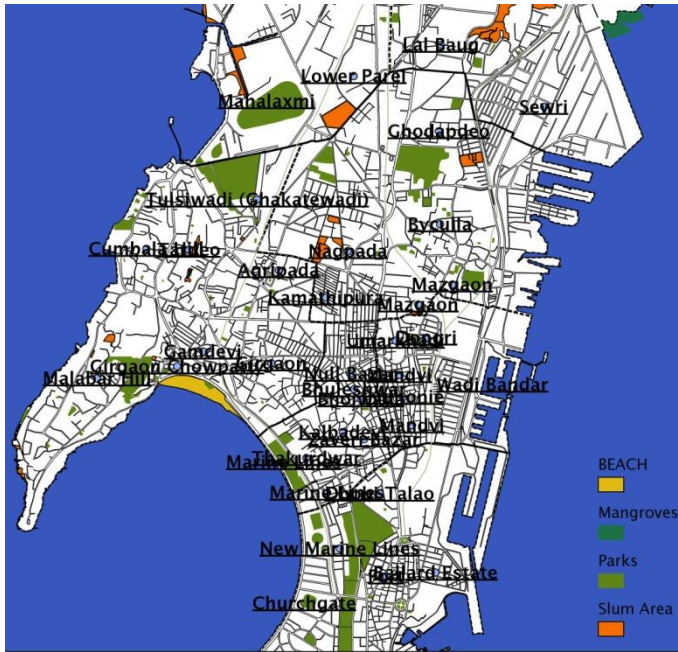| Respondent Code	Number of interviews completed	Age	Profession SL – Skilled labour; UE – Unemployed; ST – Student; HW – housework; US – unskilled labour;	Religion H – Hindu; M – Muslim; C – Christian	Education IL – illiterate; PS – secondary; GE – graduate and above	sec_providor
32	1	19	SL	H	IL	y
53	1	19	UE	M	IL	y
30	1	20	ST	H	PS	n
33	1	22	SL	H	PS	n
28	1	23	HW	M	PS	n
17	1	24	HW	M	PS	n
3	1	26	UE	H	PS	y
20	1	28	UE	M	GE	y
54	1	28	US	M	IL	n
13	3	30	HW	H	PS	n
14	2	30	SL	H	GE	n
56	1	30	SL	M	GE	n
61	1	30	HW	M	GE	n
23	1	32	HW	M	GE	y
49	2	32	SL	H	GE	y
10	1	32	SL	M	GE	y
42	1	34	SL	M	GE	y
26	1	34	SL	H	GE	n
15	2	35	US	H	PS	y
60	1	35	US	M	PS	n

6	2	36	HW	H	IL	n
35	1	36	HW	H	PS	n
55	1	37	UE	H	PS	y
7	1	38	UE	M	GE	n
41	1	39	US	M	IL	n
8	6	40	US	C	PS	y
19	1	40	US	C	IL	n
47	1	40	SL	M	PS	n
29	5	42	SL	M	GE	y
58	1	42	HW	H	IL	n
9	-	45	SL	M	IL	y
27	1	45	HW	M	PS	n
59	1	46	UE	M	PS	n
48	2	47	US	M	PS	y
2	8	50	SL	M	GE	y
46	-	50	UE	H	PS	n
62	2	50	US	H	PS	n
1	3	55	SL	M	GE	n
5	2	55	UE	M	IL	n
70	1	72	UE	M	IL	n

Mumbai

South Central Mumbai
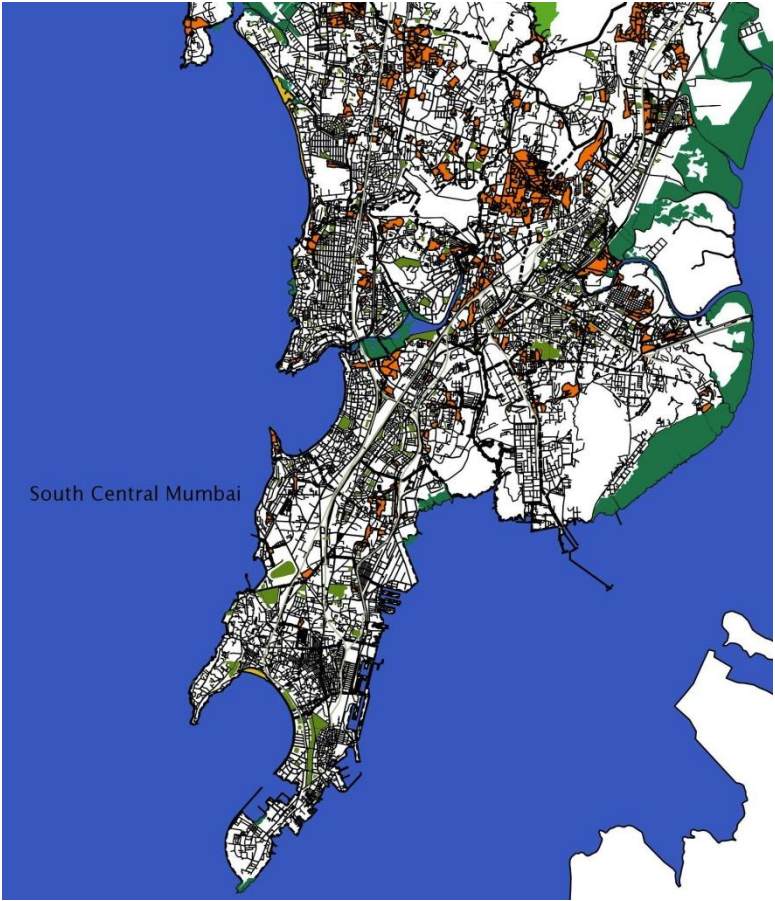
Zoom of south central Mumbai:

Zoom of case study area