

Militarising Mumbai? The 'Politics' of Response

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Abstract: This article focuses on how urban security has been governed in Mumbai in the aftermath of the 2008 terrorist attacks (26/11). The event was widely cited as a major turning point in the securitisation and militarisation of Indian cities. It also produced significant political upheaval, which in turn generated calls for a major institutional overhaul of the governmental architecture for handling terrorism. This article takes the political and policy repercussions of 26/11 as an intervention into critical debates about the (para-)militarisation of policing and the politics of urban security. Here I shift the focus from the disciplinary and divisive effects of policies towards an emphasis on their spectacular and theatrical dimensions. If we are to make sense of the 'militarised' focus of the policy response to 26/11, I argue, we need to take seriously its populist, aspirational qualities.

Keywords: Counter-terrorism; Policing; Securitisation; Spectacle; Performativity.

Introduction

The 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai – which soon became known simply as '26/11' – were 'scripted' (Kolås 2010) as an unprecedented event that single-handedly transformed the meaning of terrorism in India. Indeed, the most influential narrative situates 26/11 as 'India's 9/11' – that is, as a singular shocking event that suddenly revealed a number of important new strategic realities while highlighting deficiencies in the city's and country's approaches to counter-terrorism. This sense of departure can be seen in two ways. First, the attacks were heralded as the moment marking the coming of 'global' terrorism to India. Second, 26/11 became synonymous with the 'failure' of local agencies to prevent and manage the three-day-long siege. In addition to crucial intelligence lapses enabling assailants to enter the city undetected via the sea route from Pakistan (Rabasa et al 2009), mainstream media coverage and policy analysis focused on Indian authorities' apparent technical deficiencies in responding to the violence. One policy commentator argued that the attacks 'exposed the utter inadequacy, inappropriateness and incompetence of Indian security responses' (Sahni 2008b).

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The event also had important consequences within India. First, it had political repercussions: this was the only instance where the government's response to terrorist attacks forced senior elected officials out of office. While the intense live coverage of 26/11 ushered in vitriolic anti-Pakistan sentiment, this anger soon turned on the domestic political establishment. In the days following the attacks, large-scale protests erupted at the Taj Hotel with protestors bearing placards that read: 'India has woken up. When will the politicians?' (Lakshami 2008). As one commentator noted, 'Never before has a terrorist attack in India brought such raw outrage and calls for sweeping changes in government' (Wax 2008). In other words, 26/11 became an object of public contestation in ways that previous incidents of terrorism in Bombay/Mumbai had not. In particular, the attacks were understood to reflect the Indian state's abdication of the responsibility to provide 'security'. Second, 26/11 was followed by immediate calls for a major institutional overhaul of the governmental architecture for handling terrorism through the adoption of 'hard', 'modern' approaches to security and policing (see Barnard-Wills and Moore 2010).

While commentators have raised alarm over the militarism that 26/11 engendered (e.g. Puniyani and Hashmi 2010), far less critical attention has been directed towards analysing how the government of Maharashtra's policy response to 26/11 has actually unfolded in the years since 2008. This article therefore examines how public demands for 'security' after 2008 materialised into governmental prerogatives and sketches an approach for how these developments might be understood. The immediate policy response to 26/11 involved a series of swift decisions used by state authorities to reassure the public that security was being handled in a competent and 'modern' way. Such developments, I argue, can be seen as an attempt to restore public 'confidence' in local state authorities and should be understood as forms of politics in their own right. In doing so, however, I suggest there is a need to rethink some of the critical debates about the politics of policing and urban security. I shift the focus from the disciplinary and divisive effects of policies towards an emphasis on their theatrical and performative qualities. If we are to make sense of the 'militarised' focus of the policy response to 26/11, I argue, we need to take seriously its populist, aspirational qualities. As I have argued elsewhere, adopting a Butlerian performative framework usefully contests the premise of pre-existing subjects and categories and addresses how policy decisions help to constitute policy problems, rather than simply respond to them (Machold 2016). Building on this work, my focus on the theatrical and the spectacular seeks to emphasise that the authority wielded by material expressions of sovereign power are not reducible to their practical functions. Moreover, a crucial corollary of the theatrical nature of the policy response to 26/11 is that everyday policing within the city has been largely unaffected by these developments.

The article proceeds as follows. I begin with a critical overview of literature on the urbanisation of security, identifying its contributions, gaps, and limitations. I then proceed to outline the key developments of the policy response to 26/11 at the Maharashtra state and Mumbai city level, sketching the key analytical and political questions that these developments raise. Finally, I propose a framework for conceptualising the performative, aspirational qualities of the programme of police 'modernisation' that emerged after 26/11. The paper is based on analysis of English-language policy discourses in India and interna-

tionally, as well as empirical fieldwork in Mumbai from 2012–2013, which involved first-hand observation of policing and security infrastructure on the ground.

The urbanisation of security

Across the social sciences, there has been a resurgence of interest in cities as spaces and sites of security. The scholarship on the ‘new military urbanism’ (Graham 2010) addresses the deepening entanglements between military violence *abroad* and routine police repression *at home*. It has shown how problems of crime and violence are increasingly imagined and governed as matters of ‘security’, with violent and exclusionary implications for marginalised communities in the city (Wekerle and Jackson 2005). As Coward (2009a: 399–400) summarises: ‘One might [...] say that a reciprocal dynamic of urban securitisation is under way in which the security agenda is urbanised and urbanity is – insofar as it induces insecurity and vulnerability – securitised. One could refer to this reciprocal dynamic as the *urbanization of security*’ (emphasis in original).

While this literature covers a wide range of empirical trends, in this article, I am concerned with one aspect of these wider discussions in particular, namely the perceived growth of (para-)military styles of policing (Balko 2013; Jefferson 1990; Kraska and Kapeper 1997). This trend is associated with an alleged blurring or breakdown between policing and military functions (Feldman 2004; Kraska 2007; cf. Neocleous 2014; Weiss 2011). As Graham (2012: 141) argues, a core foundation of the new military urbanism ‘is the fusing and blurring of civilian and military applications of control, surveillance, communications, simulation and targeting technologies.’

The urbanisation of security is further linked to a decline in democratic participation, alongside the physical barricading and privatisation of public spaces (Coaffee 2009a; Marcuse 2002; Shapiro 2009). Scholars have suggested that security is becoming increasingly pre-emptive and anticipatory in its urbanised articulations, based on the perceived *inevitability* of future terrorist attacks. As Graham (2004: 15) argues, ‘terrorism and counterterrorism are umbilically connected [...] [and] tend, tragically, to be self-perpetuating’. Moreover, there is a sense that a wide range of cities are developing resonances or even converging around shared visions of security. For Adey (2010: 54), ‘the dream of megacity security strategies is one and the same the world over’. These assertions play an essential role in representations of the urbanisation of security as a *global* phenomenon.

In accounting for the urbanisation of security as an expanding worldwide trend, the prevailing focus is on the economic drivers of policy patterns, focusing on the profit motives and political economies of fear emerging alongside the spread of capital and the rise of ‘global cities’ (Sassen 2001). Security imperatives are seen as closely aligned to neoliberal restructuring as cities compete with one another to gain a competitive edge in attracting foreign investment and global tourism (Coaffee and Rogers 2008b; Mitchell and Beckett 2008), aided by an increasingly ‘aggressive law enforcement’ presence (Wacquant 2008: 71). As Graham (2012: 146) summarises:

It is no accident that security–industrial complexes blossom in parallel with the diffusion of market fundamentalist notions of organizing social, economic and political life or widening social mobilizations against these. The hyper-inequalities and urban militarization and securitization sustained by urban neoliberalization are mutually reinforcing.

Some scholars have even suggested that neoliberalism and (urban) securitisation imperatives represent part of the same historical process (Cowen and Smith 2010).

In addition to these structural considerations, scholars have argued that political crises function as moments of opportunity whereby already existing patterns of urban securitisation are deepened and/or accelerated. As Lyon (2003: 666) argues: ‘What transpired after September 11th is that companies and government departments that already had an interest in [...] surveillance systems now had a rationale – and public support – for installing them [...]. This represents a continuation, albeit at an accelerated pace, of trends that were already strongly present in all advanced industrial (or “informational”) societies.’ In this way, pre-existing forms of urban fragmentation and gentrification are reconfigured and intensified under the auspices of fighting terrorism. As Wekerle and Jackson (2005: 36) put it, ‘already existing neoliberal urban policies focused on law and order, surveillance and exclusion’ associated with Smith’s (1996) conception of the ‘revanchist city’ are ‘readily adapted and expanded to address national security concerns.’ Thus, rather than viewing 9/11 (or 26/11) as starting points for a range of new policy responses to terrorism or other perceived threats, these events may be better understood as accentuating longstanding patterns of urban fragmentation associated with the reclaiming of cities for capital.

Literature on the urbanisation of security represents a rich and diverse field of scholarship. Yet this body of work suffers from three key limitations relevant to the present article. First, we can question the geographic bias within the existing literature by privileging Western contexts and perspectives. While studies of cities in the global South represent an important and growing part of this body of work, the empirical basis for arguments about the scalar re-drawing of security have been derived from the experiences of cities of the global North. Critical accounts of an ‘urban turn’ in logics and practices of security reflect the past neglect of more subtle forms of violence as a constitutive feature of everyday life (see Cowen and Gilbert 2008: 5; Pieterse 2009: 299). These concerns reflect a broader tendency in security studies to privilege the experiences of countries from the global North, stimulating calls for a ‘postcolonial moment’ in security studies broadly (Barkawi and Laffey 2006; Hönke and Müller 2012) and in relation to contemporary policing practices specifically (Hönke and Müller 2016). This prompts important questions about the novelty of any alleged overlaps in policing/warfare as well as their supposed global character.

Second, although critical accounts represent important counterpoints to the popular representation of key geopolitical events as unproblematic starting points of novel historical processes, there is insufficient attention to the political contingency of policy ‘responses’ to so-called ‘global’ terroristic violence (see Closs Stephens and Vaughan-Williams

2009). The idea that counter-terror policies further erstwhile neoliberal projects of urban restructuring and gentrification, often gloss over the conditions of possibility of policy developments in specific localities, particularly in relation to cities of the global South. As Amar (2013: 20) notes, there is a tendency to represent the global South 'as external to the politics of security, as either projections of securitization processes or as victims of repression and war.'

Third, while critical scholars have invested much energy in contesting the premises on which contemporary security approaches rest, they have devoted less attention to understanding *how* new approaches to urban security governance become influential and what forms of political work they do in particular places. More specifically, scholars have overlooked how 'anti-policy' measures are *productive* in ways that go beyond repression (see Walters 2008: 274). In doing they also problematically suggest that the growth of (para-)militarised forms of policing are generally unpopular (see Waddington 1999: 129).

In sum, existing critical accounts have a homogenising tendency. They risk implying that a broad swathe of what might be considered 'militarising' or 'securitising' trends emerge in relation to a uniform set of pressures, always serve similar interests, and necessarily give rise to the same kinds of repressive politics or other negative effects. Following these concerns, this article analyses the policy 'response' to 26/11 through a focus on the local 'politics of order-making' in the context of urban policing (Albrecht and Kyed 2015). Extending scholarship that positions urban security practices as forms of public spectacle (Boyle and Haggerty 2009), I focus on locating the performative, theatrical elements of urban security policies as strategies of governance in their own right.

Responding to '26/11'

Initial claims that 26/11 represented a paradigm shift in the Indian state's approach to security governance have proven overstated. Yet the attacks did produce some important policy developments. In this article I am mainly concerned with police modernisation efforts at the Mumbai city and Maharashtra state levels. Three dimensions are key to these efforts. First, central to the state of Maharashtra's response was a renewed focus on police procurement. Prior to 2008, various government initiatives at the union level, such as the Modernisation of Police Force (MFG) Scheme and the Mega City Policing (introduced from 2005 onwards) were in place, specifically geared towards equipping Mumbai's police with new weapons and security equipment (Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) 2010; Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) 2010). Although the latest instalment of the MFG Scheme was in place by 2000 (and scheduled to run until 2009), Maharashtra's procurement process was moving slowly, stalled by the highly bureaucratic and poorly defined procurement process and a lack of approved testing laboratories.

Following 26/11, however, police modernisation accelerated rapidly, albeit temporarily. Less than a month after the attacks, a new budget totalling Rs 126 crore (USD approx. 23.3 million) had been sanctioned by the Maharashtra legislative assembly (Agarwal 2008). This budget authorised a range of new purchases including imported weaponry, a fleet of new armoured vehicles, speedboats, amphibious vehicles, and other security

gadgets (Narayan 2014). Shortly after 26/11, the state government also announced a surveillance scheme to cover Mumbai with 6000 CCTV cameras. In addition to the pace of these developments, it is important to draw attention to the nature of the procurements themselves. Whereas the MFG largely focused on basic weaponry and equipment, the response to 26/11 focused on purchasing expensive imported weapons, armoured vehicles, and new uniforms for special operations forces with distinctly militaristic features. One of the most visible examples was the fleet of Mahindra Marksman bulletproof jeeps, ironically painted with desert camouflage. These were stationed at prominent locations across south Mumbai such as the Maharashtra state government headquarters Mantralaya, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station, and the Gateway of India/Taj hotel and are typically manned by police officers carrying automatic rifles.

A second key development was the focus on raising new, locally based commando units, what some termed the 'Rambo model' of response to terrorism (Sahni 2008b). By 2 April 2009, the government of Maharashtra passed an order authorising the creation of the state's own 'crack' commando squad Force One (Swami 2009a) tasked with responding to live terror incidents.² The government also considerably expanded, strengthened, and restructured the Mumbai police's Quick Response Teams (QRTs) through new training regimens, uniforms, weapons, and equipment. These units were permanently stationed at all of Mumbai's five regional police stations, under the command of their local Additional Commissioner of Police. The union government also created a local National Security Guard (NSG) hub located near Mumbai (in addition to other hubs in Chennai, Kolkata, and Hyderabad) and a fifth hub near Ahmedabad was more recently announced. The government of Maharashtra also created the Maharashtra State Security Corporation (MSSC), a force of security personnel to protect private sites including industrial facilities, shrines, and certain public buildings across the state of Maharashtra. The MSSC's guards are outfitted in camouflage uniforms and have the authority to carry weapons and the power to arrest on the premises where they are employed (unlike private security guards in India), though lack many of the legal powers of police officers (Government of Maharashtra 2010).

A third aspect of this programme of police modernisation has been the impulse to emulate so-called policy 'models' from abroad, including the use of foreign trainers for local anti-terror forces. On 11 July 2009, under the auspices of seeking expertise in urban counter-terrorism and homeland security, the government of Maharashtra sent an official delegation to Israel, and Israeli contractors have since become involved in training local commando units as part of the broader emphasis on training after 26/11. I have examined the specificities of some of the gravitation to Israel in greater depth elsewhere (Machold 2016). Later an official delegation was sent to Scotland Yard in 2010 to examine London's approach to surveillance.³ In 2013 a UK trade delegation travelled to Mumbai help situate UK security firms in the local security market.⁴

In addition to accelerating the pace of procurements, there was also a strong emphasis of making this project of police modernisation publicly visible. Once the new wave of weapons, vehicles, and equipment arrived in Mumbai, they were extensively showcased to the media and the public through various exhibitions and in military-style parades on

Marine Drive on the first anniversary of 26/11. Beginning in 2009, the Mumbai police also launched its new English-language police magazine *The Protector*, a media initiative started under newly appointed Mumbai police commissioner D. Sivanandan (see theprotector.in). As some excerpts from the early issues of *The Protector* illustrate, the magazine's purpose is to create an impression of rapid change in the capacities of the Mumbai police, as a 'Pledge to Keep Mumbai Safe and Secure' (The Protector 2009a).

The following passage written by commissioner Sivanandan captures the magazine's approach to public relations nicely:

It has been a year since Mumbai came under the dastardly terrorist attack on 26 November 2008. Much has happened since then. The Mumbai Police has since streamlined its overall preparedness in preventing recurrence of such events in the future. Most important, we have been able to create Quick Response Teams & Force One, an anti-terrorist combat-ready contingent comprising well-trained men armed with the *most modern weaponry and bullet-proof vehicles, complete with the state-of-the art communication equipment* (The Protector 2009b: 6, emphasis added).

The Protector's early issues stress the aggressive, militaristic features of these new policy initiatives. One article emphasises that since 26/11 'the Maharashtra Government and the law enforcing authorities have [...] initiated several security measures *on a war-footing*' (The Protector 2009b: 9, emphasis added) and the pages of *The Protector* feature photos of police officers posing with their newly acquired gadgets and weaponry. There is also a clear aspirational quality to the post-26/11 policy trends in the sense of a desire to assert an equivalence to the 'modern' security strategies of other cities around the world: 'In terms of weaponry, the Mumbai Police have further fortified itself [sic] with more Smith & Weston 9mm pistols, M4 Carbines, MP9 tactical machine guns, M82 sniper rifles, all are universally acknowledged by experts as the best anti-terrorist urban warfare equipment available in the world' (The Protector 2009b: 9). Quoting Joint Police Commissioner (Law & Order) Himanshu Roy, one article emphasises 'a paradigm shift in our thinking, our motivation and our morale and our mindset' noting that '[t]he Mumbai Police is now supported by technology, equipment and training comparable to the best in the world' (The Protector 2009b: 10).

These developments bear a strong resemblance to the critical debates on the urbanisation of security outlined above. A key aspect of the securitisation and militarisation of cities concerns the application of aggressive tactics in policing and security management and the deference to global policing and security 'models'. On the surface, the post-26/11 policy trends also appear to flow straightforwardly from the prevailing reading of 26/11 as a technical 'failure' of local policing capacity, with a kind of symmetry between the attacks and the response. As Kolås (2010: 93) notes, '[t]he Mumbai attacks were carried out 'commando style', and many of the 'solutions' offered followed in the same vein.' However, understanding the policy response as an outgrowth of the experience of 26/11 only takes

us so far. While the emphasis on police modernisation might at first sight appear rather straightforward, upon closer inspection its manifestations become considerably less so.

Despite the global emphasis on 'learning lessons' from the attacks (Elkus 2012; NYPD 2008; Rabasa et al 2009), it is difficult to square many of the most widely agreed upon revelations about 26/11's handling with the specific policy measures instituted since 2008. For instance, while a lack of adequate protective gear was widely cited as a key reason why so many police officers died on 26/11, sufficient numbers of bulletproof vests were not purchased. Yet some of the most expensive procurements that did arrive lacked an obvious purpose. One of the most striking examples of this is the M82/M107, a .50 calibre anti-materiel weapon. A number were purchased by the Mumbai police following the attacks despite the fact that they allegedly could not be tested by local authorities as they exceeded the capacities of local firing ranges (Swami 2009a). Moreover, while media coverage of 26/11 emphasised that local forces lacked sufficient numbers of modern automatic rifles, subsequent stories reported that the Mumbai police had a cache of 247 AK-47s on hand during 26/11 but that these weapons were not made available to Mumbai police officers (Dixit 2009). This raises questions about why the procurement of new (and much more costly) imported weapons took on such urgency within government of Maharashtra's policy response to 26/11. Similar trends can be seen around issues of coastal security. Although the entry of assailants via the sea route into Mumbai on 26/11 generated an impetus for the procurement of costly speedboats and amphibious vehicles, many of them have gone unused due to a lack of trained personnel (Dey 2011) and because sufficient funds were not allotted for their fuel costs (Gangan 2011).

Here the mainstream discussions on the policy repercussions of 26/11 proves highly instructive. There have been some sympathetic news articles about progress in improving Mumbai's security preparedness, often appearing with such headlines as 'A Smart Anti-Terror Force for Mumbai Now' (Menon 2009). However, the overwhelming majority of commentaries on the response to 26/11 have been sharply critical, suggesting that in the years since 2008, the 'Mumbai attack lessons [have been] "unlearnt"' (BBC 2013). Even some very conventional accounts of the policy process from within Indian policy and strategic circles have had difficulty ascribing these trends to a rational calculus, characterising them instead as what some have termed 'arming without aiming' (Cohen and Dasgupta 2010). In other words, even if one accepts the basic premise that police modernisation was a reasonable response to the attacks, its manifestations appear incoherent at best, if not entirely dysfunctional.

In fact, the most pointed critiques of the policy response to 26/11 have been of a conservative rather than radical nature. Their concern is not that (para-)militarised policing strategies will be applied overzealously in ways that increase forms of fear and insecurity but rather that new units and gadgetry may never be 'applied' at all (see for instance Swami 2009b). Indeed, the lack of a radical overhaul of basic police training and technical capability is the principal basis of much of the mainstream criticism of the response to 26/11. For instance, although noting that 'Special Forces and QRTs would appear to have some natural utility', Sahni (2009) argues that 'the strategic success of India's counter-terrorism responses will depend overwhelmingly on the capacities, mandate and effectiveness of its

“general forces”, referencing the alleged success of ‘broken windows’ policing strategies in New York. Much to his dismay, however, the capacities of these ‘general forces’ have received little attention since 2008. This outcome does not appear to be accidental but rather reflective of an active strategy. As Maharashtra’s Anti-Terror Squad chief emphasised in an interview: ‘Every constable does not fight terrorism. We have NSG and Force One to fight terrorism. We don’t expect the beat constable to fight terrorism. He does not do that anywhere in the world. He is the first line of defence, but not the ultimate line’ (Mehta 2014).

It is important to emphasise that the policy response to the attacks has actually been quite conservative in many respects. First, from a tactical perspective, the policies that materialised after 2008 have not acted as replacements for, or alternatives to, pre-existing policing/security strategies in Mumbai. Second, there are other policy patterns that actually have nothing to do with police ‘modernisation’ at all. One of the more noticeable aspects of post-26/11 developments within Mumbai has been the increased physical fortification around strategic sites in the city. These include the Bombay High Court, large railway stations and most police stations in the city, with the use of improvised sandbagged bunkers, typically manned by police officers armed with Indian Small Arms System (INSAS) rifles or vintage British Sterling submachine guns. In addition, security perimeters and roadblocks have been set up at numerous other sites around the city, ostensibly to impede and control movement at sites deemed to be most vulnerable (see Belur 2011: 420–421). These barriers are constructed from crude steel roadblocks seen across India and are of a decidedly low-tech nature. Thus, it would be mistaken to suggest that the influx of new equipment and foreign experts has replaced pre-existing approaches to security and spatial control in Mumbai.

Below, I critique the reductive analysis offered by some of these leading Indian journalists and security experts. Yet despite their numerous problems, they do get at least one thing right: while the policy response to 26/11 has sought to create an impression of radical change through an acceleration of police modernisation programmes, these developments have had limited effect on the operation of everyday policing in Mumbai. Thus while the policy response to 26/11 reflects some of the broad claims about the urbanisation of security, the ways in which the responses emerged also unsettles some of the terms of these critical debates. Whereas literature on the urbanisation of security has focused extensively on the production of urban fear, threats to civic activity and access to public space, and the blurring in functions between military and policing agencies, the analytical (and political) ‘problem’ of post-26/11 policy trends in Mumbai is less straightforward. It involves less an issue of revealing the negative effects of new police procurements than of understanding the sudden investment measures, many of which appear to lack an overt tactical purpose.

To be clear, this does *not* mean that the policy response to 26/11 has not had any exclusionary effects. Nor does it suggest that violence is not employed by the Mumbai police as an instrument of repression in counter-terrorism policing specifically or controlling political dissent more broadly, a function that has always been core mandates of the Indian police historically and remains so in the present. Rather, it suggests that the focus on police modernisation seemingly has very little to do with crowd control. In fact, this

activity remains very much a low-tech endeavour, based on longstanding approaches dating back to the Indian police's colonial mandate. Following these considerations, in the next section I argue that the policy response to 26/11 calls for a slightly different critical intervention, one that begins to reconsider debates about the 'politics' of responses to terroristic violence in the city.

A 'politicised' response

So how might we begin to make sense of the government of Maharashtra's policy response to 26/11? Perhaps the most obvious interpretation would be to ascribe its outcomes to the systemic corruption of the Indian state. Indeed, the initial wave of new purchases after 26/11 was immediately followed by a host of controversies and charges of corruption and mismanagement surrounding the procurement process (Joseph 2012). The purchase of faulty bomb disposal suits and defective bulletproof vests were investigated (Daily News and Analysis 2012) and there were allegations of bribery around the purchases of speedboats (Unnikrishnan and Shivadekar 2012). Yet we must be careful here. While the issue of corruption might help to explain the purchase of overpriced speedboats and certain forms of defective equipment, it ultimately tells us very little about the specificities of the post-26/11 period.

What is noteworthy about this juncture is clearly not the persistence of corruption in the government of Maharashtra's procurement process for police equipment. Rather it is how this process, which is normally characterised by systematic red tape, suddenly opened up to deliver a new crop of expensive new purchases, albeit temporarily. In fact it is the temporary nature of these developments that makes any blanket deference to 'corruption' rather unhelpful in explaining post-26/11 developments. If officials' willingness to 'invest' in the project of police modernisation was primarily driven by their efforts to enrich themselves, we would expect the emphasis on expensive police modernisation to continue over time. Yet this has not been the case. So while issues of corruption cannot be bracketed off entirely, they need to be decentred. I therefore provide a different interpretation, arguing that the post-26/11 policy process can be understood as a form of public relations used to soothe the elite-led public demands for 'security'.

As Kolàs (2010: 86) argues, '[t]he surreal (or perhaps hyper-real) drama of the Mumbai attacks produced a strong sense of immediacy and urgency in the policy debates that followed'. Contributing to this sense of urgency was the fear of another potential attack. In this context, giving the police everything they requested in the months following the attacks (or at least giving that impression) was the principal strategy politicians employed to address enduring public misgivings about Mumbai's security preparedness. Due to the apparent urgency to procure new weapons, basic testing and competitive evaluation procedures were bypassed (Swami 2009a).

We can further detect an emphasis on building public 'confidence' through these measures. *The Protector* makes this focus on confidence building quite explicit. An article by Sivanandan emphasised that public displays of newly acquired equipment by local forces are 'meant to infuse confidence among the people of Mumbai about the preparedness of

the police force to meet any terrorist attack' (The Protector 2009b: 6). Another article emphasised the increasing physical fitness and agility of the Mumbai police: 'A slow-moving cop with a paunch doesn't inspire much confidence in the public. Which is why Police Commissioner D Sivanadhan places a hefty premium on the fitness of his force. The Top Cop is putting his men through a fitness regime by making available to them the state-of-the-art gymnasiums at most police stations' (The Protector 2009b: 84). In short, '[t]he Mumbai Police is a confident force that inspires confidence in the public' (The Protector 2009b: 10). What changed after 26/11, then, is the appearance that the Mumbai police has sought to project.

Rather than positioning these dynamics in negative terms as a kind of absence of knowledge or lack of foresight on the part of policymakers, this should prompt a reconsideration of how issues of politics and politicisation of urban security policies are positioned. From observing the physical manifestations of the response, is quite clear that these initiatives were at their core matters of public relations rather than a calculus of the threat of terrorism and how it might be managed. It is specifically by drawing attention to their non-tactical objectives and public visibility that these developments become more intelligible.

As I noted above, the majority of Indian security commentators have criticised the policy response to 26/11 as ineffectual and misguided. What is further notable about their commentary is their perpetual frustration with the apparent 'politicisation' of the response (and Indian policing more generally) – i.e. the politicians' tendency to indulge in theatrical displays of power apparently at the expense of addressing what they deem to be 'real' security imperatives. As one such account by Ajai Sahni (2009) argued: 'In the weeks that have followed [...] it seems that politicians are more interested in finding new and theatrical ways of doing nothing, focusing principally on the political and electoral fallout of the Mumbai attacks, rather than on creating capacities to fight the menace [of terrorism]'. As it continued, 'the truth is that, far from offering any 'solution' to terrorism, these proposals simply confirm that India, today, is a country utterly consumed by irrational belief systems and unexamined faiths. What we see here, is a triumph of form over content, a kind of 'strategic *vaastu shastra*' – a symbolic shifting about of doors and windows, a shuffling of spaces, that has no realistic impact on the strength or utility of the edifice' (Sahni 2009).

The efforts to display newly required procurements were ridiculed along similar lines. As a well-known Indian journalist and policy commentator argued, these attempts to reassure Indians through the public showcasing of new gadgets and weapons simply revealed the hollow nature of post 26/11 claims of progress. As he recounts: 'Mumbai police commandos drew spanking new automatic weapons to eye-level, aiming at imaginary enemies in the distance – a visual metaphor evidently intended to signal to Indians that the government is working to make them safe. But experts who watched the same programme saw in it a graphic illustration of all that is wrong in the ambitious police modernisation programmes underway across India. The laser sights fitted to the police's new weapons are designed to eliminate the need to raise the weapon to eye-level before taking aim – a lesson the Mumbai police instructors had evidently neglected to tell their students' (Swami 2009b). According to these critics, then, nothing has fundamentally changed about the

Indian state's willingness to take security 'seriously' post-26/11: it is all 'politics', no substance. In pursuing this line of critique, such accounts have the tendency to situate these 'irrational' tendencies in orientalist terms, attributing them to the mindset of the 'uneducable Indian' (Sahni 2008a) and thereby implying that officials are somehow blind to the response's tactical limitations in 'solving' the issue of terrorism. This position is clearly untenable. Nevertheless, the focus on 'politicisation' cannot be so easily dismissed either because these commentators importantly locate the policy response to 26/11 as a form of public relations.

So how might we more critically rethink the role of politics in urban security practices? While essentially agreeing with mainstream commentators like Sahni and Swami that the response must be understood as fundamentally misguided from a tactical point of view, I want to suggest that we need to address the issue of 'politicisation' not as some kind of pathological tendency but as an intelligible and productive force. Instead of invoking it as a convenient catchall to explain why security imperatives are perpetually diverted from their would-be aims, we must take seriously the capacity for theatrical displays of power to act as forms of governance in their own right.

For your eyes (only): police modernisation as public spectacle

The suggestion that policing operates a form of public spectacle is hardly a new idea (see Goldsmith 2010: 917). A focus on spectacle has long been used to frame the political stakes of the rise of (para-)military styles of policing in particular. Nearly two decades ago Parenti (1999: 135) argued: 'If there is a parable to be drawn from the story of paramilitary policing in the US, it is that the political theatrics of terror are by no means dead.' More recently, Boyle and Haggerty (2009) have shown how forms of spectacle work in conjunction with forms of discipline and surveillance, arguing that the significance of spectacularised approaches to urban security 'is not confined to their ability to reduce threats, but also involves an effort to ease public anxiety' (Boyle and Haggerty 2009: 271). As they further point out, spectacularised approaches to urban security have limits that, when breached, serve to disrupt the very circuits of capital they are designed to protect.

I do not seek to challenge these approaches in some generalised sense. Yet we can see that a focus on (re)production of urban fear and (in)security in the service of gentrification proves inadequate in making sense of the post-26/11 response, particularly because of its conservative nature. As I have noted above, despite its pretences to radical reform, police modernisation has not reconfigured the core practices of the Mumbai police. More specifically, the policy response to 26/11 has not resulted in a blurring between counter-terror imperatives and 'ordinary' police functions. Thus contra Parenti, the key concern in relation to the 'political theatrics' of police modernisation after 2008 is not that displays of military-style equipment reflect an overall shift in the nature of policing to war-like objectives and tactics. Rather, it is trying to make sense of the enthusiasm for a range of expensive purchases, many of which have never been 'applied' at all. In contrast to Boyle and Haggerty's emphasis on the limits of spectacularity in terms of the potential overproduction of (in)securities, my focus on the spectacular is to highlight how superficial but

also fleeting the emphasis on police modernisation proved. As noted above, despite a sudden accelerated focus on purchasing 'military-style' equipment, this emphasis has waned in significance as a political priority in the years since 2008. If police modernisation was primarily about a revanchist re-taking of the city for capital, we might well anticipate a radical overhaul of 'general forces' along the lines that mainstream commentators like Sahni recommended. Yet this is not what happened.

So how might we make sense of this outcome? To some extent, it reflects certain particularities of the relationship between the police and the rulers of postcolonial India. One of the central paradoxes of Indian independence is that the colonial policing system endured following decolonisation largely unchanged. The institutional longevity of the colonial police apparatus brings with it a number of complicated legacies, including the fact that the authority that the contemporary Indian police wield is deeply fraught and ambiguous. On the one hand, the police continue to be capable of immense repression. On the other, the police are viewed as ineffectual in investigating and prosecuting crime and widely disliked. As in many postcolonial polities, this "weakness" of everyday stateness is often countered by attempts to make state power highly visible, meaning that 'issues of security, crime, and punishment occupy a privileged arena for performance of sovereign power' (Hansen and Stepputat 2005: 29). This would suggest that the Indian state would have an almost boundless appetite for highly visible projections of power, and in the aftermath of 26/11 this was the case. Yet despite the initial attempt to restore public confidence through displays of modern weapons and gadgetry, as public pressure receded, the focus of policing largely returned to its everyday roles.

Rather than dwelling on these issues here, however, I want to instead suggest that close reading of the post-26/11 policy developments should prompt an alternative analysis of how these policy measures in the name of urban security actually work politically. Here Wendy Brown's (2010) account of the global growth of 'walling' provides fruitful avenues for thinking through the theatrical nature of the response to 26/11. Brown grapples with an underlying paradox, namely that although walls do not perform the functions that legitimise their growth, they remain widely popular. Reconciling the tension between walls' lack of efficacy and their popularity, she argues, requires taking seriously the theatrical and performative nature of borders. According to Brown, the fact that walls do not prevent or interdict flows is significant, not simply because these barriers fail to perform their stated goals, but rather because they performatively stage the very function which they are fundamentally incapable of ever achieving. As Brown (2010: 5, 26) argues, 'walls often function theatrically, projecting power and efficaciousness that they *do not and cannot actually exercise*,' thereby revealing 'nation-state sovereignty's theological remainder' (emphasis added).

I do not engage with Brown's broader theorisation of the relationship between changes in state sovereignty and neoliberalism. However, her account is crucial to my argument in two ways. First, I concur with her claim that the theatrical qualities of contemporary borders need to be taken seriously for what they *are*, namely performative, aspirational projections of sovereign power. Second, Brown's approach directs our attention to the popular appeal of contemporary borderings, despite their lack of technical efficacy and ex-

traordinary costs. Here her focus on the theatrical nature of borders articulates an explicit distinction between the political authority that borders command and their actual ability to interdict movement, meaning that the wall carries a 'political standing independent of its material functions' (Brown 2010: 38). This is not to deny the violence that contemporary walls exert on the individual bodies and populations they attempt to govern. Yet drawing attention to this violence is not sufficient to explain walling's global proliferation.

Following Brown, I want to suggest that the focus on police modernisation can be best understood as an attempt to 'arm' the Mumbai police against charges of weakness and incompetence. It reflects the prerogatives of 'keeping up appearances' of police competency in the face of perceived failure (Brownlow 2009). More specifically, the post-26/11 experience shows the need to locate the development of urban security policy in terms of its relation to specific publics, namely the English-speaking constituencies that protested in front of the Taj after 26/11. In this sense, the post-26/11 experience reflects the importance of grasping the 'affective dimensions of state power' in the Indian context, rather than focusing exclusively on its disciplinary roles (Gupta 2012: 38). Throughout the pages of *The Protector* there is an emphasis on 'Reaching out to the people' to 'encourage participation of people towards the security of the state' (The Protector 2009b: 16). This emphasis reflects an attempt to soothe bourgeois demands for 'security' *without* a radical transformation of the overall police structure. Indeed, we can say that one of core objectives of police 'modernisation' was the preservation of the status quo of colonial policing. What is critical to grasp here is how the core role of the Mumbai police (i.e. the policing of the poor and the suppression of popular dissent) was secured politically through a series of highly theatrical and temporary measures in the name of counter-terrorism. Yet despite its undeniably conservative character, the response has been productive in particular ways.

Here Neocleous (2000: 5) notes 'the centrality of police to not just the *maintenance* or *reproduction* of order, but to its *fabrication*' (emphasis in original). This emphasis on fabrication is important in two critical senses: both on terms of the productivity of policing and its illusory nature. My point here is not to ascertain whether or not these performative gestures or attempts at public 'dialogue' were successful in asserting claims to modern security competence. Despite frequent pronouncements since 2008, the policy response to the attacks in Maharashtra continues to be treated with considerable scepticism and even indifference in many quarters. As a news article's title sums up, the Mumbai police remains '[a] force that has little firepower, even less skills' (Indian Express 2014).

Whether or not the policy response to 26/11 'worked' to reassure Mumbaiers that their government would secure their city, however, is not essential to my argument here. The key point is that in the immediate aftermath of 26/11, Maharashtra officials clearly *believed* that a rapid programme of police modernisation was their best hope of doing so. The theatrical nature of the response further suggests that these policy measures cannot be readily understood by seeing security policymaking as an insulated 'technical' matter somehow uncontested – either internally within governmental bureaucracies or in terms of the wider relations with security publics. Rather it emphasises the importance of grasp-

ing the securitisation of the urban as a contentious and locally contested process (Cowen and Bunce 2006; Raco 2003; Coaffee 2009b).

Yet we can go a step further. The attempt to build confidence through the highly visible spectacles suggests that these gestures can be understood as forms of politics in their own right. As Thompson (2005: 49) argues, '[t]o achieve visibility through the media is to gain a kind of presence or recognition in the public space, which can help to call attention to one's situation or to advance one's cause'. Such mediated forms of visibility are not simply the mediums through which social and political issues are given voice but have instead 'become a principal *means* by which social and political struggles are articulated and carried out' (Thompson 2005: 49, emphasis added). Following Thompson, we can see that the parading of military-style equipment was not merely a manifestation of political prerogatives of leading Maharashtra politicians but also a kind of 'politics of permanent performance' (Hansen 2001: Ch. 8) through which the postcolonial Indian state 'comes into view' – to be *seen* by certain publics in mediated ways (Corbridge et al 2005: 7). Indeed, the bold claims about major improvements in Mumbai's security preparedness since 2008 were clearly not *for everyone*. They were not a response to a general 'public' but rather to members of India's urban 'civil society' (see Chatterjee 2011). Yet while the demands were elite-driven and the attempts to restore public confidence were clearly not *for everyone*, the policy response to 26/11 nevertheless took place through a series of populist, gestures in the name of protecting 'the people'.

Recognising this helps us move past the binary division between what Marcuse (2006) calls 'legitimate and sensible' versus 'false and manipulated' responses to terrorist threats – or what Schneier (2003: 38) has termed 'security theater' – to draw attention to the importance of security measures to 'provide the feeling of security *instead* of the reality' (emphasis in original). While these distinctions seem straightforward, they retain the rationalist assumption that security policymaking (in general) reflects some dispassionate 'apolitical' attempt to calculate and manage the threat of terrorism and that the provision of 'security' is, in fact, achievable under the right circumstances. In doing so, they problematically imply that the manipulation or politicisation of urban security planning represents some kind of aberration, thereby reinforcing a liberal ideal of politics as the consensual resolution of technical problems (Mouffe 2005).

Conclusion

This article has taken a close empirical reading of the policy response to the 2008 Mumbai attacks as a way into broader discussions about the 'politics of response' to terroristic violence (Closs Stephens and Vaughan-Williams 2009). While a rapid programme of police modernisation may first appear as a largely inevitable trend that was simply accelerated by the events of 26/11, I have contested this claim by showing the various tensions and contradictions embedded in these developments, as well as their limitations. These dynamics thereby return us to questions about how to situate the political and historical contingencies of policy change. As critical scholars have argued, the urbanisation of security can be understood as inflections in pre-existing trends rather than as entirely novel

processes. This is certainly true of the policy response to 26/11. Yet while clearly driven by the concerns of Mumbai's urban elite, the demand for more 'security' post-26/11 notably came from outside the state. Thus in contrast to Lyon (2003), it is not simply that political actors were given a new pretext for pursuing their longer-standing agendas. Rather, the anti-political sentiments acted as a form of pressure on state authorities to demonstrate that something was being done to protect (certain) residents. This distinction might seem trivial. However, it is important in two ways. First, it helps to contest the determinism of the discourse that surrounded 26/11 as an unproblematic 'global' event with obvious policy consequences. It is a reminder that these policy decisions were *choices*. Second, this distinction is crucial in understanding urban policy shifts while at the same time charting the limits of changes that particular events put into motion. Indeed, as I have argued, despite its pretence to radical transformation, the policy response to the attacks has been superficial, fleeting and illusory.

I began by noting that 26/11's policy repercussions were interpreted as a radical re-drawing of security governance in Mumbai and across Indian cities. As we have seen, to frame the significance of these policy developments in this way would be to considerably overstate their practical consequences. This owes, in part, to the particular ways that colonial forms of governance have endured into postcolonial Mumbai and continue to shape the parameters of how issues of order and security are imagined and managed in the city. Yet rather than reading this as some anomalous 'case' that proves the general rule, this example is more instructive as a partial corrective to the ways in which we understand the politics of urban security. While providing important critiques of policy trends, critics seem to conflate spectacular displays of military-style equipment by domestic policing authorities with a radical re-drawing of police power in general. These accounts are not simply problematic because of their Eurocentrism, ahistoricism and totalising global pretensions; they also crucially misread the political significance of these spectacles and in doing so divert attention away from the quotidian character of police violence. As Wilson Gilmore and Gilmore (2016: 352) point out: 'The righteous outrage against [...] extra-heavy equipment enables a strange displacement (often unintended, yet also often cynically co-opted) of political focus from the necessarily systemic character of organised violence.' As they go on, 'While dramatic objects such as Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles command attention, what matters more in terms of police legitimacy and power are more subtle objects such as standard-issue handguns, or out-of-sight capacities such as computerized profiling,' noting that 'To kill, police use ordinary weapons – guns, batons – and weaponise ordinary things – hands, forearms, flashlights, trash bags, vans.' (353-4) Indeed, an undue focus on spectacular 'militarised' police equipment can divert critical attention away from police violence in its quotidian forms, thereby reinforcing a liberal idea of the police as a benign 'civil' institution (see Neocleous 2014: 13). I have, therefore, sought to counter this tendency by proposing a way for how to make sense of the spectacular and theatrical dimensions of urban security practices without losing sight of the core foundations of police power and state violence.

Notes

- 1 Title of 2009 'Security Summit' organised by lobby group and policy think tank Mumbai First
- 2 There are media reports about the creation of Force One as early as December 2008.
- 3 These developments are not entirely unprecedented. For instance a version of the City of London's Project Griffin called Project Sayhog was allegedly instituted in Mumbai in August 2008 (just before 26/11) as well as in other Indian cities like Bangalore (see Coaffee 2009b: 278).
- 4 The delegation was organised in partnership with the Mumbai lobby group Mumbai First, which hosted a closed-door policy conference entitled 'Collaborating for Security'.

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tion explored how local actors use policy transfer to negotiate public controversies surrounding policing capacity and security preparedness in the city. This work was based on multi-sited empirical fieldwork conducted in Israel/Palestine, India and the United Kingdom. His articles have been published in *Environment and Planning A*, *Antipode*, *Security Dialogue*, and *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*.

Militarizando Mumbai? A 'Política' da Resposta

Resumo: Este artigo trata da forma como a segurança urbana foi governada em Mumbai após os ataques terroristas de 2008 (26/11). O evento foi amplamente citado como um importante ponto de virada na securitização e militarização das cidades indianas. Também produziu uma grande agitação política, que, por sua vez, gerou clamores por uma grande revisão institucional da arquitetura governamental para lidar com o terrorismo. Este artigo toma as repercussões políticas do 26/11 como uma intervenção em debates críticos sobre a (para-)militarização do policiamento e das políticas de segurança urbana. O foco nos efeitos disciplinares e divisivos das políticas é deslocado aqui para suas dimensões espetaculares e teatrais. Argumento que, se quisermos dar sentido ao foco "militarizado" da resposta política ao 26/11, precisamos levar a sério suas qualidades populistas e aspiracionais.

Palavras-chave: Contraterrorismo; Policiamento; Securitização; Espetáculo; Visibilidade.

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ERRATUM

On page 477, **where it reads:**

“Militarising Mumbai? The ‘Politics’ of Response
Mumbai Must be Secured. Now!”¹

Should read:

“Militarising Mumbai? The ‘Politics’ of Response”

On page 477, **where it reads:**

“The 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai – which soon became known simply as ‘26/11’ – were ‘scripted’ (Kolàs 2010) as an unprecedented event that single-handedly transformed the meaning of terrorism in India.”

Should read:

“Mumbai Must be Secured. Now!”¹

The 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai – which soon became known simply as ‘26/11’ – were ‘scripted’ (Kolàs 2010) as an unprecedented event that single-handedly transformed the meaning of terrorism in India.”

On page 498, **where it reads:**

“Militarizando Mumbai? A ‘Política’ da Resposta
Mumbai Must be Secured. Now!”

Should read:

“Militarizando Mumbai? A ‘Política’ da Resposta”

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