2 Stories. 2 Themes

This is Ritchie Street

Mapping the street without maps:
Employing history and commercial logic to trace the geography of the street.

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Storyline 1: Following the Tempered Glass

- We wanted to know how a simple Rs. 100 tempered glass made its "complicated" way to Ritchie Street.
- We went to one of the shops to ask for a tempered glass, following which we were asked to wait 5-10 minutes, a norm at many of the shops in Ritchie Street as they had to go get it from the "godown".
- After getting our screens fixed, we asked the *anna*, "Can we see the Godown?" and much to our surprise, there isn't one? Well, not a full fledged dingy godown as you'd expect.
- Just off the main street, tucked in an alleyway is a Marwadi owned shop with a big stock of the same products lining up its walls. What followed was chat with a not-so-friendly owner, thrown off by our quizzical questions, maybe?
- There we found out that our tempered glass makes its way to Ritchie Street from China, through Mumbai.

Storyline 2: Sore nodes in the network

- All's not well in paradise. Speaking to Mr. XYZ, a patriarch of one the important business families operating in Richie Street, the market's overdependence on cheap Chinese products has in recent years turned out to be more expensive, thanks to tariff policies

- But today they not only act as wholesale marketers of a wide range of audio devices, the clique of Northwestern Indian businessmen also own and manufacture their own brands with their factories based primarily around the National Capital Region

- Manoeuvring between manufacturing their own brands within the country and importing goods whose prices keep rising these days, Mr. XYZ and his son dominate the South Indian electronics market despite competition from large multi-retail electronics vendors and the online shopping market

THEMES.

Who owns Ritchie Street?

What are the cooperative synergies between the various stakeholders in Ritchie Street?

How has the immigration of ethnic groups affected existing societies?

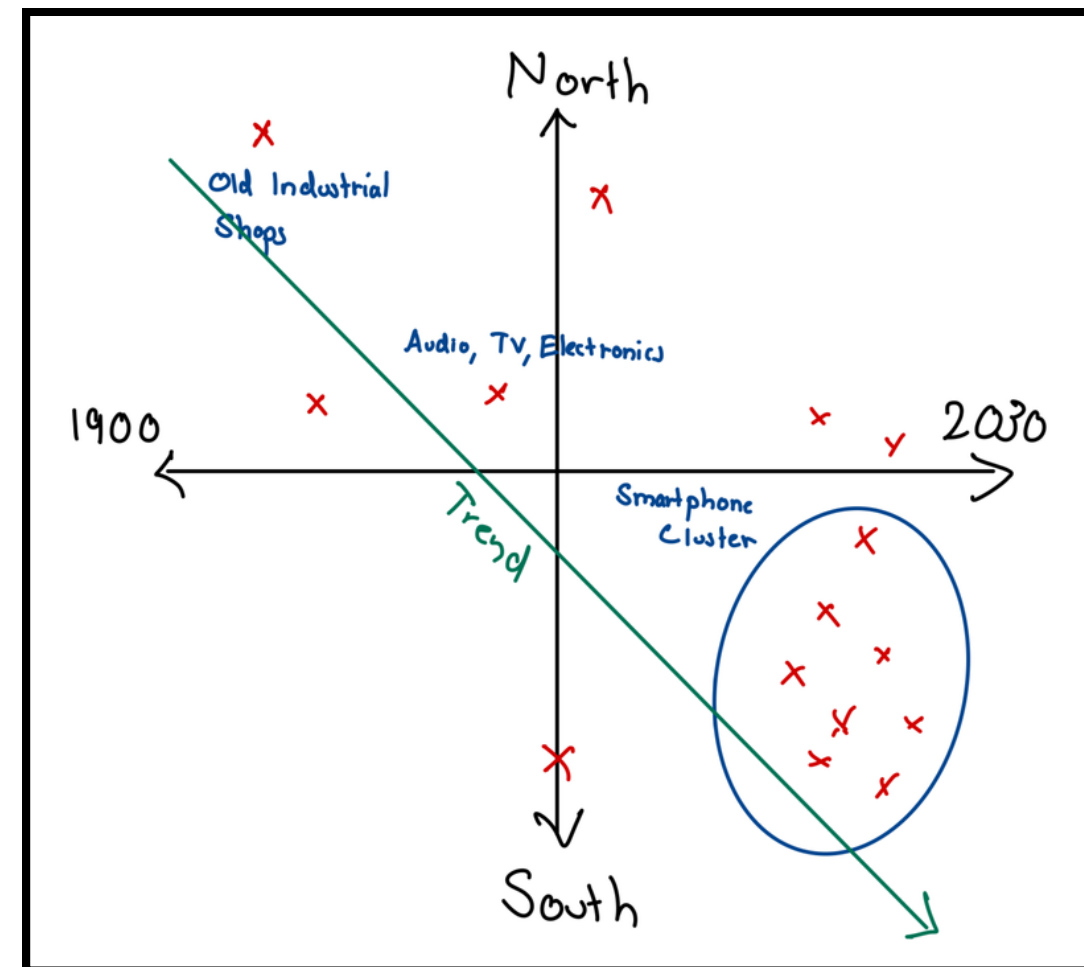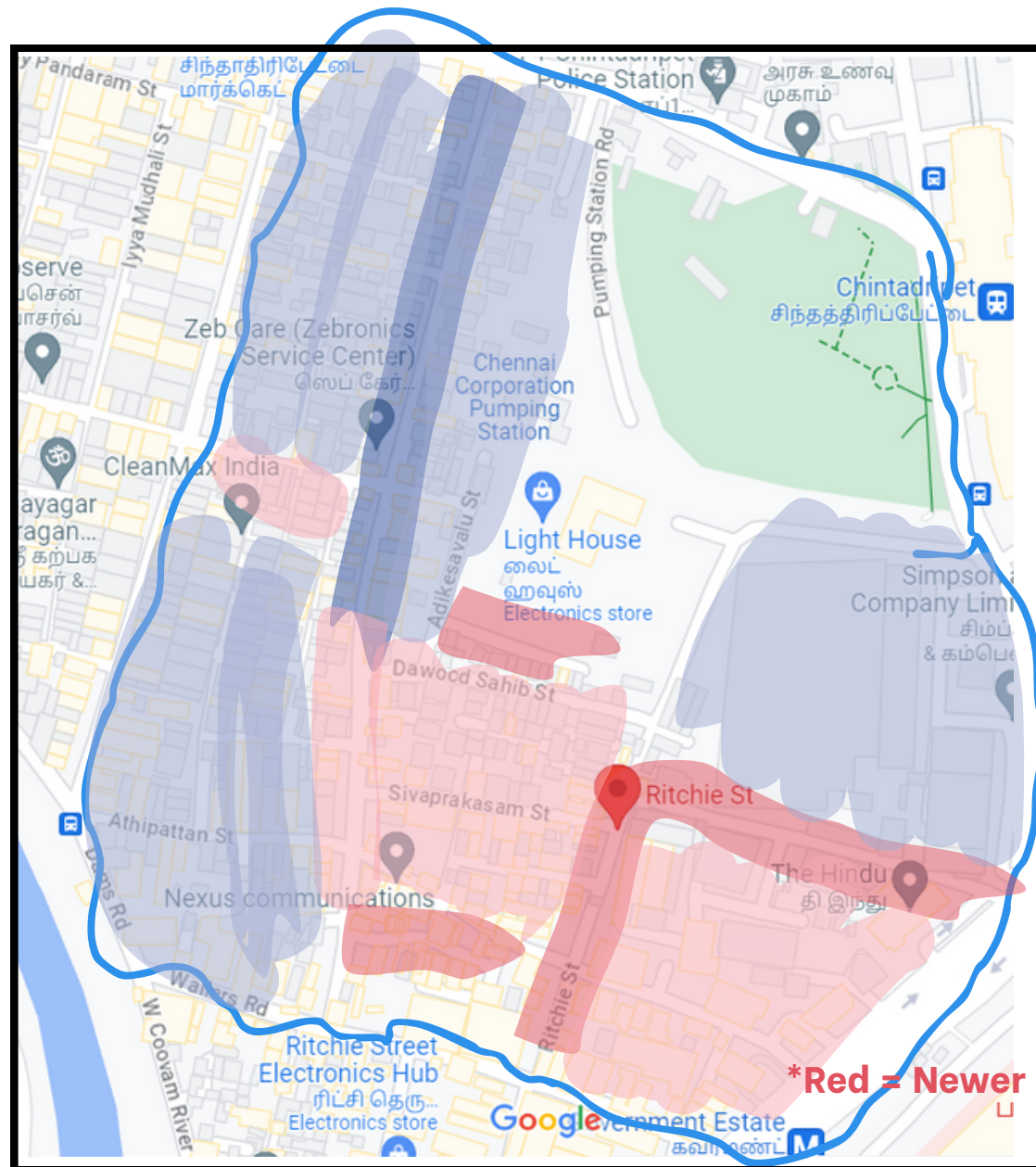What is the ownership cycle of an institution within Ritchie Street?

Theme 1 Networks

How is knowledge used down between multiple generations and micro-societies in Ritchie Street?

How do you conduct field work with a low attention span?

Gamify it!

We set out in 2 groups to find the oldest shop in Ritchie Street

*Red = Newer

Older institutions are generally deep rooted industrial shops in the north; with entrenched multi-generational networks. Smartphone shops in the south have more transactional networks with easily replaceable units.

- We looked at each interview through the lens of age; conducted interviews delving deeper into the golden era of the institution, and meticulously noted the corresponding **"peak ages"** of shops, represented by a heatmap
- 9 coffees, 4 sugarcane juices and a suspicious lassi later we posit that **age and spatiality are interlinked in Ritchie Street; through the medium of networks**

Your network is your… age?

Let's run through the common establishment process of most of the shops in Ritchie Street

| Contact existing shopowner/financier	Function as "godowns" for other shops	Establish customer-facing shop	Build brand, develop relations with suppliers

- Your network is defined before entering the street; in this context Ritchie Street exists as a space outside of its physical boundaries, in the business and social networks it inhabits
- Networks in Ritchie street go farther; the age of the establishment defines the eras, (which we have divided into 3 based on the grouping highlighted earlier), within these eras it is primarily ethnic divides that determine your identity as a participant in these networks
- This lies in stark contrast with public identifiers such as names, owners, etc.

Industrial Suppliers
Primarily old northern business families

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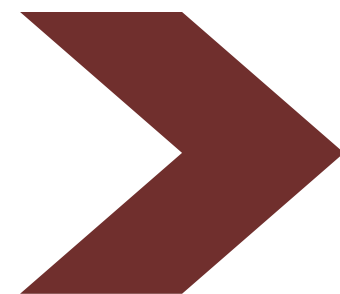
AV & Electronics
Migration of ethnic groups

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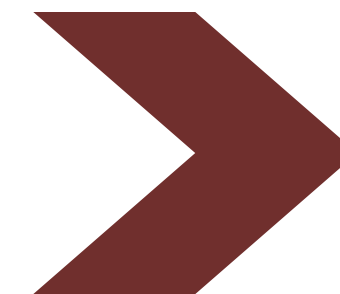
Phones & Accessories
Commodity - based businesses

We posit that Ritchie Street is better viewed as numerous intertwined business and personal networks interacting for mutual gain

"Micro" Ethnic Enclave Economies?
reworking Wilson and Portes

- Ethnic Enclaves generate a pool of social capital through which members can access resources that lower the costs of migration.
- Ethnic enclave economies also provide a method for immigrants who enter at lower wage jobs to rise to the status community entrepreneurs own firms within the community.
- It is a widely contested idea.

  We are postulating:
  - The presence of smaller enclave economy systems of different ethnicities providing a network within themselves for better business
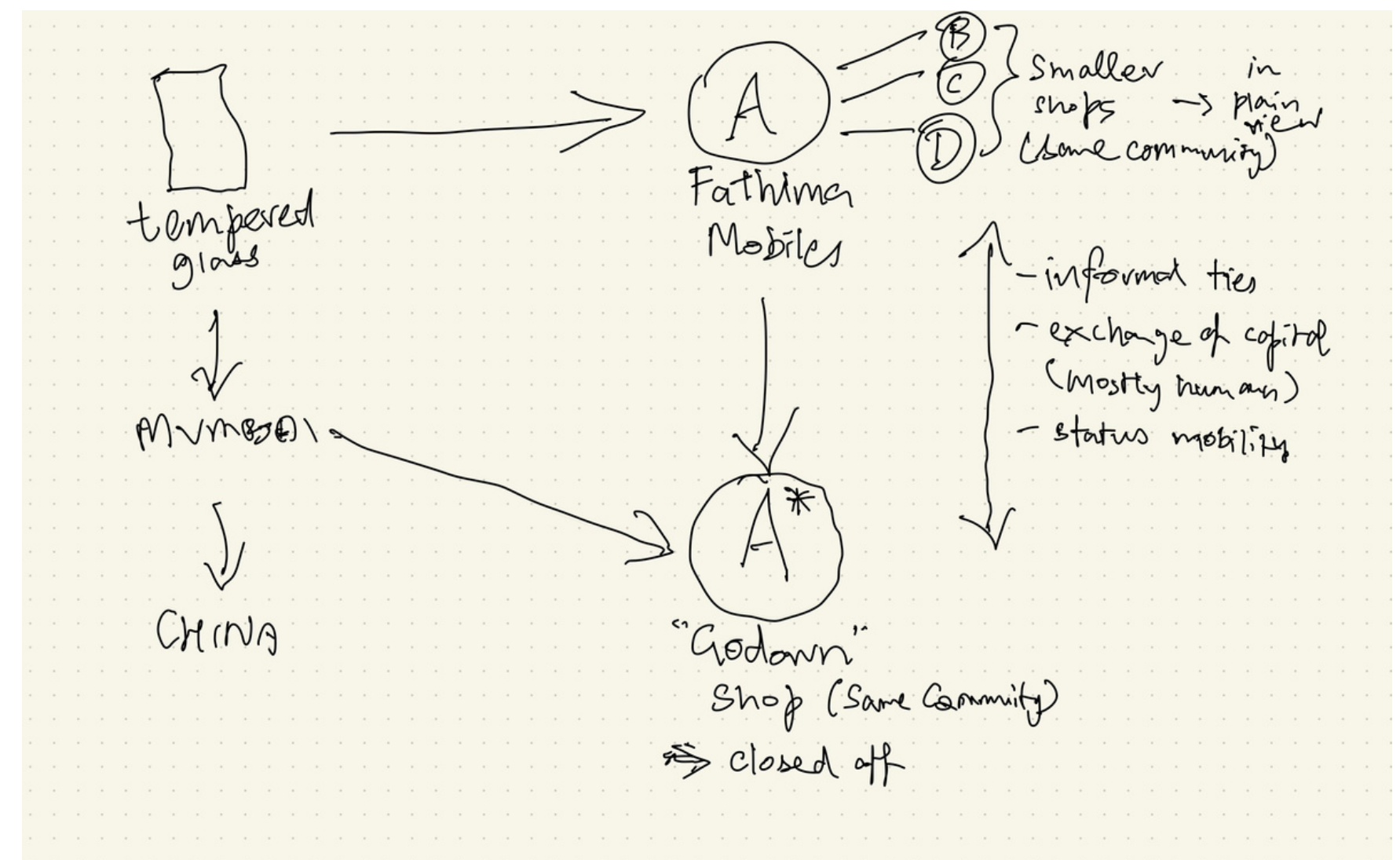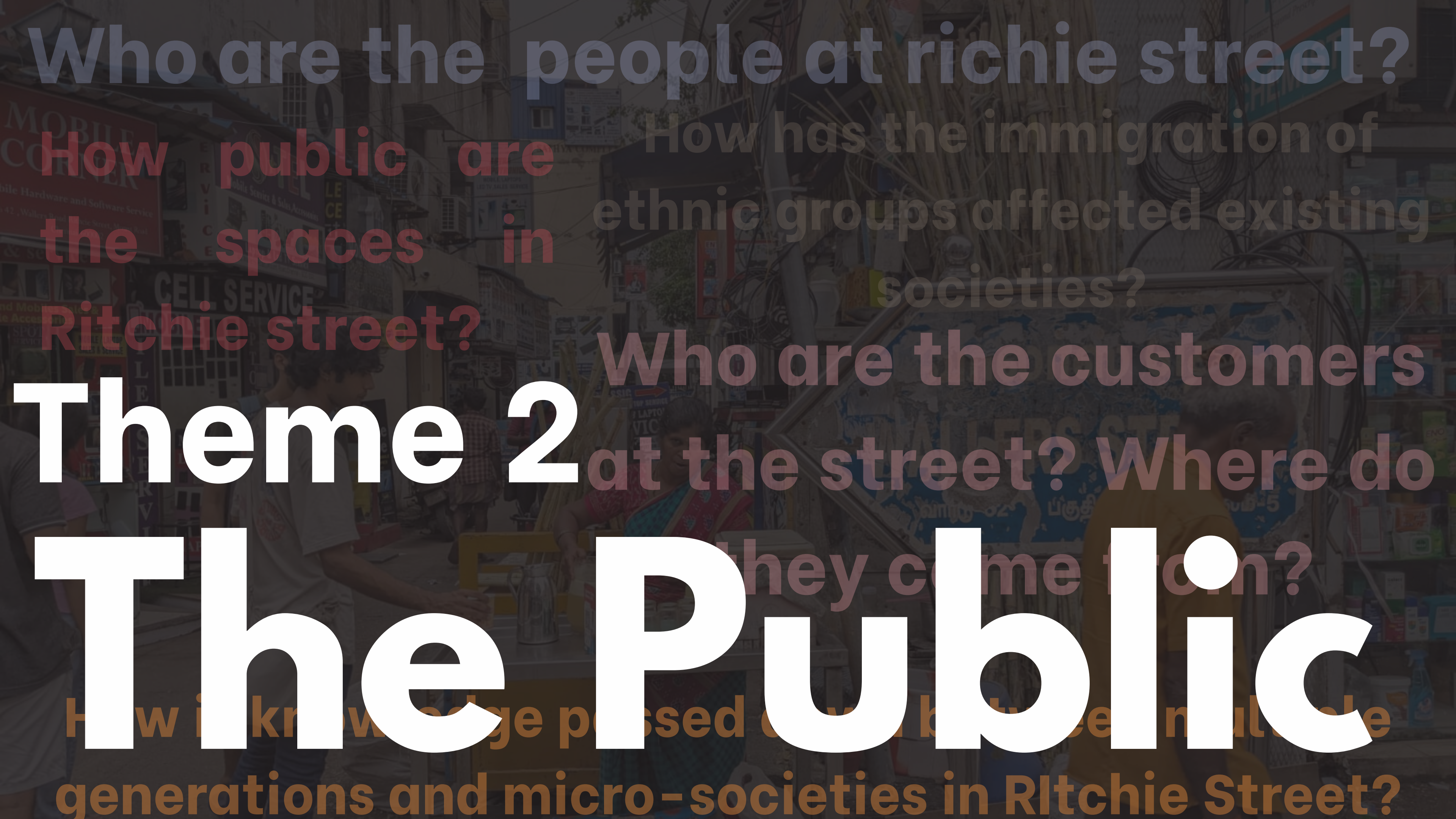
Who are the people at richie street?

How has the immigration of ethnic groups affected existing societies?

How public are the spaces in Ritchie street?

Who are the customers at the street? Where do they come from?

Theme 2
The Public

How is knowledge passed down between multiple generations and micro-societies in RItchie Street?

Entering Ritchie

The one who enters the marketplace from the north after using the local train is only met with dingy, abandoned buildings and haphazardly parked two-wheelers

A customer who enters through Anna Salai is greeted by a pani puri waala and a sugarcane juice vendor in addition to freshly painted, multi-storeyed electronics shops with A/C

Entering Ritchie

- Preconceived notions of customers (Gullible Chennaiites and amicable out-of-staters) 'help' shopkeepers change their strategy when conducting business
- The design of Ritchie Street shapeshifts in accordance with who it thinks the likely customer is
- The customer is reduced to a typecast of what 'category' they could likely be
- The customer who walks into Ritchie street is overwhelmed by the shops, variety and color- an incomprehensible abundance of everything

Entering Ritchie

- By growing as a labyrinthine maze, the design of the system evolves to keep one within for as long as possible- the customer never leaves empty-handed
- The customer is shuttled between shops through **unseen networks that tie the latter together**, leaving the former's freedom of movement at the mercy of the shopkeeper
- In contrast to the idea of a **public space**- that seemingly grants absolute authority to the public- Ritchie Street manages to effectively shift this power to the business owners, without displaying any hints of this transfer

"Eavesdropping"

"Chill Maar-ing" around the street every visit, picking up pieces of everyday conversations with the little tamil/hindi we know.

- The customers are all shopkeepers, their conversations (and gossips) hovering around the shop or their families.
- No designated seating spaces at these shops, people sit on scooters or the stairs; **the crowd often spills over into the streets at tea-time.**
- Linguistic boundaries are blurred at tea time, everyone flaunting a fluent Tamil.

The "common" and the "public" at Ritchie.

Ritchie Street shoppers park on Anna Salai, hinder traffic flow

Lanes leading to the electronics hub have been barricaded

May 27, 2020 11:47 pm | Updated 11:47 pm IST – CHENNAI

Chennai police tighten vigil over city's electronics hub, Ritchie Street

Entry points have been restricted and the police, along with Chennai Corporation staff, are patrolling the area in order to ensure all safety measures are followed to prevent the spread of COVID-19

July 08, 2020 05:11 pm | Updated 05:11 pm IST – CHENNAI

The beachside presence of fishing communities is the strongest reminder of the ambiguous nature of public spaces in a postcolonial setting. Their villages (*kuppams*) and their everyday practices embody the use of open spaces based on an understanding of 'commonness' rather than 'publicness'. Thus, the beach is seen by the fishermen as a ==common space where they can park their catamarans, dry their nets, fish, wash clothing and utensils on the sands, dig shallow wells for water, and even use the wet sands as open-air defecation areas==. In the postcolonial years, a growing reliance on the beach as a prominent public space — a rare lung in a city starved of open spaces — has meant a clash between the bourgeois sensibilities of a large section of the city residents and the common-space activities of the fisherfolk. The state has mostly sided with the former,

(Aurobindoo 2018, p. 12)

- Cramped, 'unruly,' vehicle-laden, narrow streets.
- The customer "crowd" at Ritchie is hard to distinguish from the businesses, thanks to the network system of exchanges and a predominantly B2B commerce ecosystem

- **The streets of Ritchie are better described as a "Common" terrain**, not deliberately seen as a space distinct from the private, but defined by the common pursuit of livelihood, the logic of business, and economic sustenance. (See [Kaviraj, 1997] for similar thoughts on Kolkata's urban spaces)
- This space is not the result of a state-led move to create a universally accessible space but is the product of organic growth.

Who owns Ritchie Street?

- As a marketplace, it is technically owned by the state, and has to abide by the same building codes, road rules and regulations.
- At first view, the area behaves as more of a **Vienna-style street market,** entirely through organic growth of markets, streetside stalls and parking systems.
- There are no apparent organised parking norms, accepted in exchange for a thriving business place that causes minimal public hindrance.
- The lack of oversight is probably forced by the cultural significance of the street market (similar to Ahmedabad's Manek Chowk) which is propagated by the "true owners" of Ritchie Street; the ethnic groups which form the shop-owning majority of the street
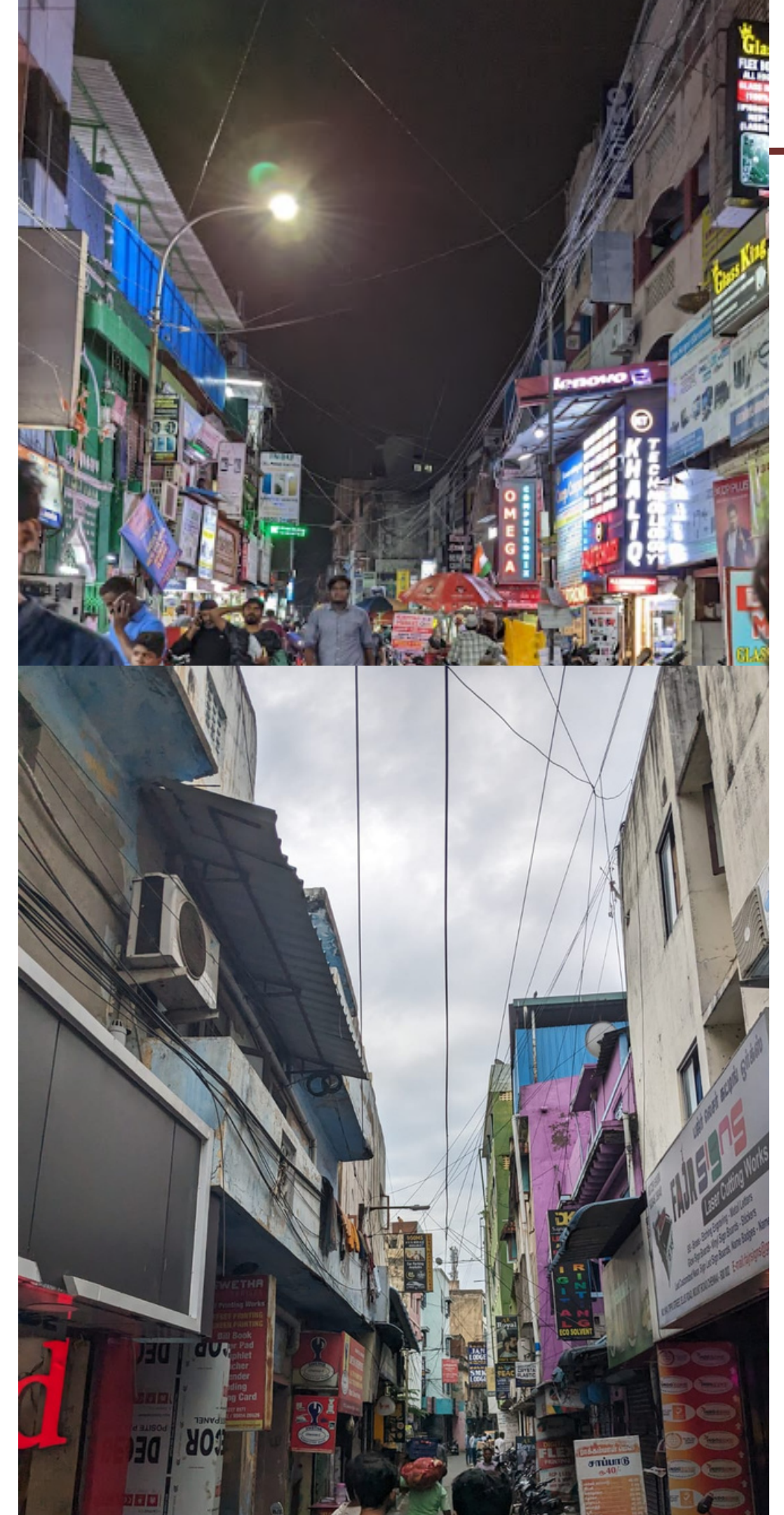
Asides

Life at the boundaries

The sharp turns at Ritchie can soon get one into a totally new territory, and the area right outside the commercial space shows some important deviations from the business buzz within. We were curious to explore how residence, religion and social life work for the people who live right outside this commercial hub It also raises the question of **boundaries** are laid out in settlements like these.

The bodily experience of the street

Upon entrance the first time, the clustered, crowded, seemingly chaotic appearance of the Ritchie street evokes a bodily reaction in us. Throughout the visit, the scent, the noise of business talk, the casual (often rough) brushes of hustling bodies, can all be explored through a phenomenological lens, drawing on the curious ideas of Merleu Ponty.

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Thank You