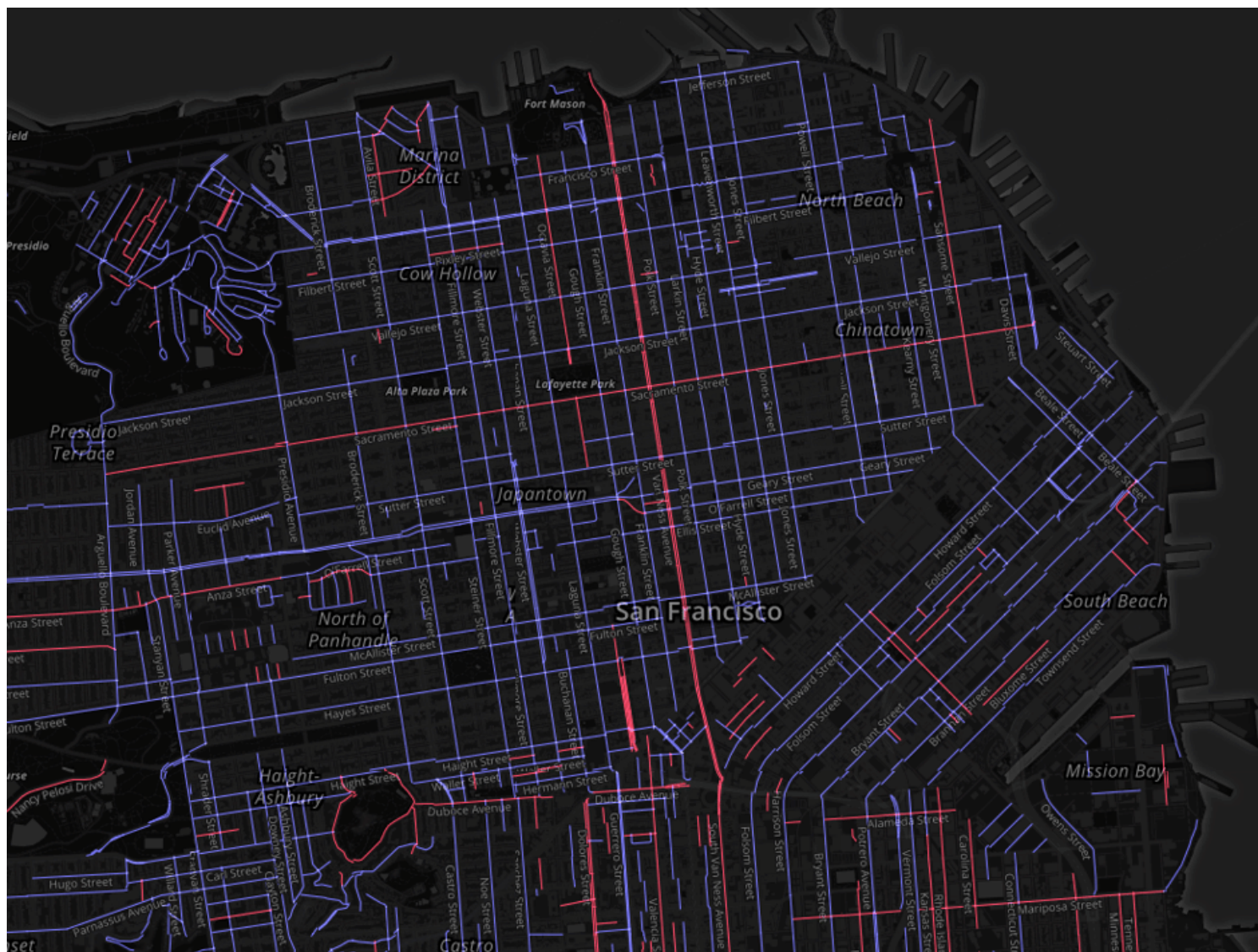


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Map of San Francisco, in which blue lines represent male street names and red lines signify female street names. //

Mapbox/OpenStreetMap

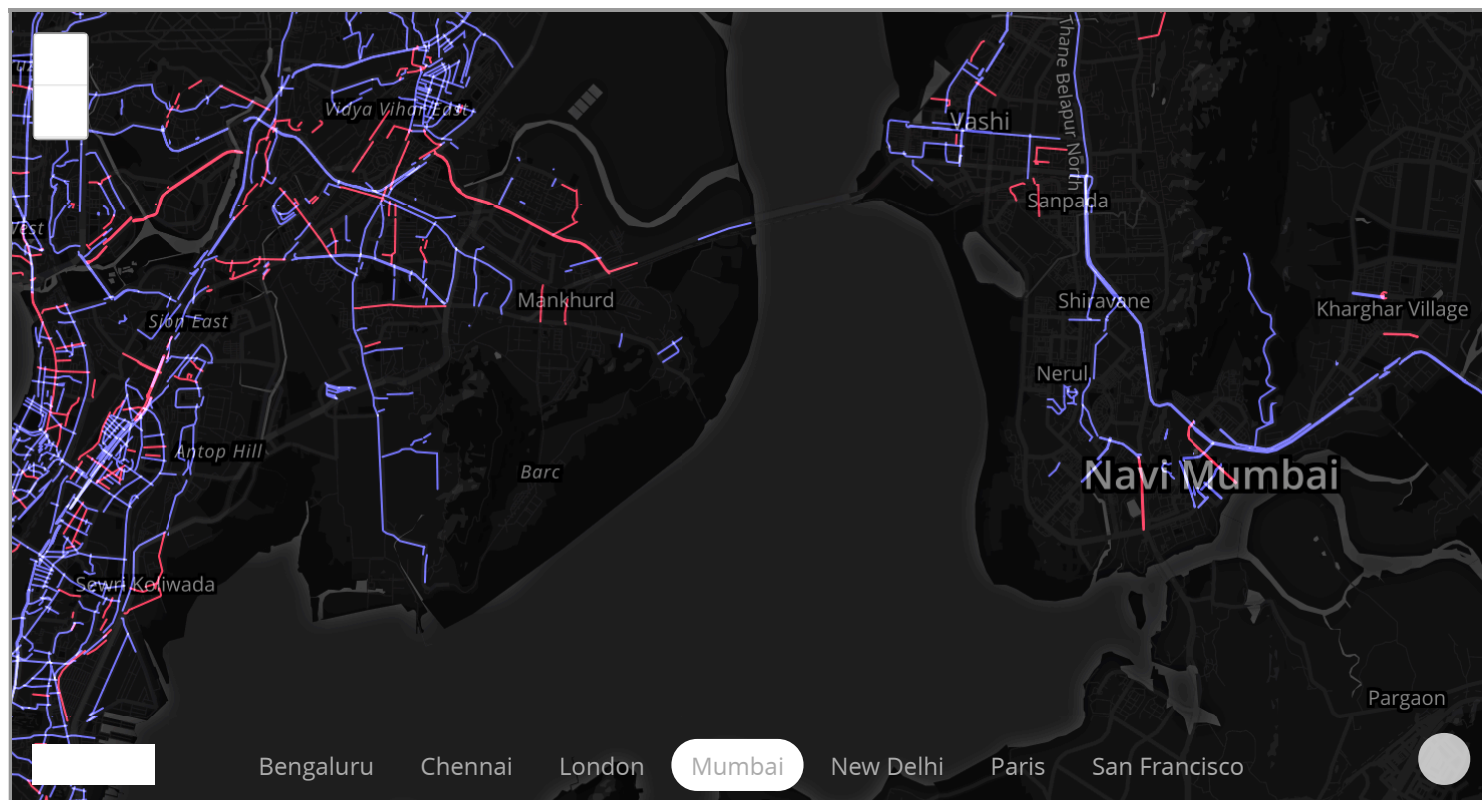
Mapping the Sexism of City Street Names

LINDA POON NOV 4, 2015

A lot of things are named after people: food, theories, diseases, and among the most common, streets. Martin Luther King Jr. alone has more than 900 streets named after him throughout the U.S. Then there are several streets named after presidents like George Washington, scientists like Isaac Newton, and other historical figures.

But there's a glaring problem with how streets get named: few memorialize women. A new [interactive map](#) from Mapbox developer Aruna Sankaranarayanan and her colleagues shows just how scarce female streets are in major cities around the world.

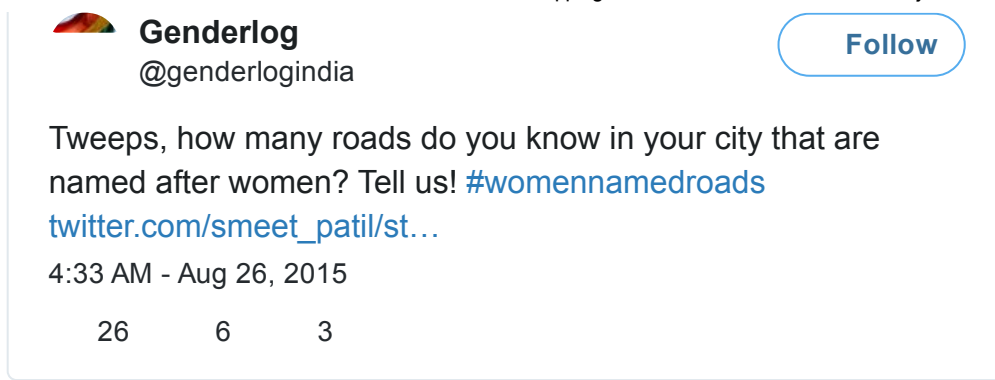
The group mapped seven cities: London, Paris, San Francisco, Mumbai, New Delhi, Chennai, and Bangalore. They found that, on average, only 27.5 percent of the studied streets had female names. (The Mapbox team tried to filter out all neutral names so they could get a clearer sense of the true gender balance.) The difference within each city, when mapped, was visually striking—with blue lines (indicating male street names) far outnumbering pink ones (representing streets named for women).



The gender gap made headlines in August when a feminist group in Paris [renamed 60 streets](#) in honor of women. They were protesting the fact that only 2.6 percent of the city's streets were named after prominent female figures. Even worse, many of the 166 women honored in Paris were wives and daughters of famous men.

The stunt turned quite a few heads, but the lack of female street names isn't unique to France. In 2012, a geography teacher in Rome painstakingly traced the history of the city's 16,500-plus streets and found only 580 streets—a mere 3.5 percent—named after women. It's because "men made history," Maria Pia Ercolini, the teacher, [told the BBC](#).

For the new maps, Sankaranarayanan says it all started with a tweet from [Genderlog](#), a crowd-sourced website that focuses on gender and gender violence in India.



That got her and her team, based in Bangalore, wondering about the gender imbalance among street names. They used crowd-sourced data from OpenStreetMap and plugged different street names into NamSor, a name recognition software that pulls information from a name and predicts its associated gender.

For example, based on a sample of nearly 9,000 names in the U.S., the software predicted San Francisco's McAllister Street, named after American attorney Matthew Hall McAllister, as male and Octavia Street, named after a woman identified as the sister of a politician, as female. (The program isn't perfect; it incorrectly labeled streets like Van Ness Avenue and Starr King Way—both named after men—as female.)

**Bangalore has the highest proportion of female street names among the Indian cities mapped.
(Mapbox/OpenStreetMap)**

At 39 percent, Bengaluru had the highest share of female street names among the Indian cities mapped. But even that is less than half of all the city's streets included in the analysis. And most of the female street names were located far from the city's center, a common pattern among the seven cities. "Generally the streets in the center of the city are older than the ones in the periphery because [of how] cities grow out," says Sankaranarayanan.

The project's main goal is to show the uneven distribution of gendered street names, but Sankaranarayanan hopes the maps might spark more movements like the ones in Paris. "Street names sort of define the identity of a place," she says, adding that the more people see the imbalance, the more they'll start to think consciously about the affects of male dominance.

**Pink lines, indicating streets named after women, are sparse throughout Mumbai.
(Mapbox/OpenStreetMap)**

Like Bangalore, streets named after men in London tended to be located close to the city center.
(Mapbox/OpenStreetMap)

**en in Paris who had a street named after them were wives and daughters of
famous men. (Mapbox/OpenStreetMap)**

About the Author

<https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/11/mapping-the-sexism-of-city-street-names/414094/>

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