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VERTICAL GOVERNANCE AND CORRUPTION IN URBAN INDIA
THE SPATIAL SEGMENTATION OF PUBLIC FOOD DISTRIBUTION

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Vertical governance and corruption in urban India:
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To the memory of Jos Mooij.

Abstract: *Analysing the interrelationships between the notions of urban splintering and governance is the goal of this paper through a case study in urban India. Firstly we describe the obstacle race in which each and every poor inhabitant of Mumbai and Hyderabad has to take part in order to get subsidized food rations. The next section explains this situation by the "corruption chain", from the shop keepers to the civil servants to the hidden brokers. All this works under a politically-based patronage system that shapes what we call "vertical governance." As a corollary, an important spatial segmentation occurs at every scale, from the nation to the neighbourhood and the household, with evident consequences on people's mobilisation.*
Keywords: governance, urban splintering, corruption, India, slum, subsidized food distribution

> "…food has become a political commodity because it is a means through which power is exercised" (Mooij, 1999, p. 156).

This article is based on two topics that continue to be highly relevant for urban studies—and beyond. The first is *the urban splintering theory* as proposed by Graham and Marvin (2001), according to which the dense interrelations between technical networks and the construction of urban space are being overturned today by globalisation, liberalisation and the concern for efficiency at the expense of equity. This leads to splintering processes due to which rich, well-serviced districts are made to coexist with poor, neglected areas, or those having recourse to informal, local systems. The purpose of this article is not to make any attempt to evaluate this theory, which has been criticised in France in particular by Jaglin (2005) or Coutard (2007) (in India's case, reference would have to be made to Zérah, 2008). Its ambition is rather to somewhat modify the perspective in three ways. Firstly, while urban splintering is above all habitually considered at the overall city level, throwing the light on neighbourhoods that are deprived of public services, this text is based on the smaller scale of the blocks of houses and households. Secondly, whereas the urban splintering theory underlines the responsibility of decision-makers and urban authorities in the process, in this paper the emphasis is on the place of the "actors from below"[1]—the inhabitants, local elected representatives, lower level civil servants, etc. Lastly, four dimensions of urban fragmentation should be distinguished (Dorier-Apprill, Gervais-Lambony, 2007): in this paper we do not intend to favour the spatial and economic dimensions at the expense of the political and social ones. Rather than favouring spatial economics or economic geography—which tends to skim over social factors rather quickly, although a touch of political science may be present—we wish to give more place to the socio-cultural factors as revealed through an empirical approach in the field at the micro-level—in other words, by raising questions about *urbanity* (Navez-Bouchanine, 2001), that is the everyday life in, and practices and representations of the city.

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[1] "Actors from below" include local residents - in a research concerned with listening to subalterns' voice beside higher decision makers - but also local members of outside institutions (local branch of a national party, etc). On the interest of analysing *local systems* of actors rather than systems of *local actors*, see Landy, Bautès, 2014.

The second theme is that of *urban governance.* We shall not use it in its normative and questionable extension of "good governance" popularized by the World Bank, but as an analytical and descriptive tool for addressing the powers existing inside and outside the formal authorities (Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2009). The notion remains debatable all the same, for several reasons. Its heuristic power is not deniable—it makes it possible to take into account all the actors who participate in a city's life and in its management, whatever their status, formal or informal, government or civil society. As we shall see, it also makes it possible to wipe out some excessively neat oppositions, such as the one between "State" and "civil society". Nonetheless, two limitations can be seen. Firstly, it may conceal the prevailing power relations, instead of placing them at the forefront. Even introducing all the actors taking action and not just the official urban authorities means limiting oneself to those *who are able to* act (Hust, 2005); it means taking stakeholders for a priori *actors*. However, all the groups and persons concerned are not full-fledged actors, if they are deprived of any power to act. It is one concern of this paper to bring light on these stakeholders who in their day-to-day life fight to become real actors instead of being passively impacted by the type of prevailing urban governance.

Secondly, governance is most often defined extremely positively, emphasising negotiation and convergence. Even the rather cautious definition given by UN-Habitat is somewhat ambiguous. "Urban governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests *may* [underlined by me] be accommodated and cooperative action *can* [idem] be taken. It includes formal institutions as well as informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens"[2]. But what happens if "conflicting interests" are not finally met? "Accommodating" may certainly help avoid urban explosions and riots, but not complaints, not despair, and even less resignation.

This article shows how the needs and rights of poor sections in Hyderabad and Mumbai are "accommodated" and how these inhabitants reconcile with it. The aim is to combine the two topics—splintering and governance. We shall try and see how the notion of governance can throw new light on this splintering—a view that is based on actors and policies/politics expands the splintering approach well beyond network issues. Conversely, measuring urban governance through a splintering perspective makes it possible to sound out the notion in all its internal diversity, to break it up in order to avoid the pitfall of describing an "average" governance for an entire municipality, or even an entire urban agglomeration, erasing the disparities specific to each neighbourhood, each block—not to speak of each household and individual. Moreover, as we shall see, our results show that the everyday governance in the urban areas under study is far from what could have been hypothesized given the high level of formal democracy in India. Regular elections and important government programmes of social welfare paradoxically contribute to maintain an important share of the population in poverty. Reasoning in terms of (actual) governance, taking into account all the actors (even the illegal ones) and all the stakeholders (even those too weak to be able to act) allows us to highlight the high degree of a type of urban fragmentation that we call "vertical governance". This term indicates all the practices and relations of the various actors that take part in managing the city, which have a predominantly vertical structure.

Our empirical, fieldwork-based research is focused on the Public Distribution System (PDS) of food in India. This vast mechanism claims both to encourage the intensification of agriculture by guaranteeing outlets to farmers, and to provide food security for Indian households by ensuring them their quotas of subsidized items (Landy, 2009). This programme, however, is known for its leakages and corruption: some products are diverted and sold at the market price, while many consumers have a difficult access (or no access at all) to the subsidized network. Our research has been done within the framework of the project *Actors, Policies and Urban Governance* which

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[2] www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=25&cid=2097

was aimed at reporting how changes in the management and access to public services in India correspond to a new urban governance borne by decentralisation and liberalisation (Ruet, Tawa Lama-Rewal ed., 2009). The PDS is one of the services examined in Hyderabad and Mumbai, with surveys having been conducted in 2006 and 2007—updated for Mumbai in 2013[3]. In Hyderabad, 60 households were surveyed in the Sultan Shahi district—a consolidated slum in the Old City. In Mumbai, two slums were selected: Gilbert Hill in the suburban Andheri West (31 households surveyed) and Antop Hill in the more central Matunga East, as well as the well-off estate of Parsi Colony (Matunga) (49 interviews). Most of the houses in the slums were permanent structures thanks to the age of the settlement: these neighbourhoods were far from looking like those clusters of destitute huts that can be seen in some other Indian slums. Hence our hypothesis was that their access to urban services was probably satisfactory, or at least better than the situation of poorer slums. True, such limited studies as compared to the immensity of two megalopolises of 8 and 18 million inhabitants respectively (2011 census), that are the capitals of the states of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, cannot claim to be statistically representative. But their primary aim was qualitative, for bringing out rich descriptions that made it possible to empirically highlight some aspects of Indian-style urban governance. A more quantitative survey, on larger samples, would not have brought much more information on our topic.

True, the PDS can appear as an odd case for addressing the links between urban splintering and governance, for two reasons. Firstly, it is not a "technical network" such as water or electricity supply—sectors that are usually selected for assessing urban splintering. Yet under the PDS, a flow of food runs along formal channels (roads, railways…) or secret rivulets (leakage by corruption). It is our ambition to study the downstream part of that network at the level of the final "taps", the ration shop and the rationing office. In this way the PDS shall appear as an original but efficient tool for bringing new insights on the notion of urban fragmentation and the process of "territorialisation" (Jaglin, 2005) of urban policies. Is this the result of a deliberate will of the urban authorities, or the outcome of a complex game where many unexpected actors are playing?

Secondly, the PDS can seem to be a less than obvious candidate for investigating issues of urban governance since, as we shall see, it remains managed by the State and not by the civic authorities. Yet this is the very interest of the notion of "urban governance" not to be restricted to appraising the role of municipal institutions, but to encompass all the other institutions and actors as well. The management of the Indian cities, more than many others, is marked by the important role of the State (the provincial, and even sometimes the Central government). Hence analyses limiting themselves to matters officially coming under municipal institutions have rather low relevance for engaging with the ways the urban governance is actually working in its everyday dimension.

The first part of this text describes the obstacle course poor citizens have to go through to try and obtain (a small portion of) the subsidized food to which the Indian State entitles them. I shall then show the whys behind this situation: widespread corruption across the entire "chain", from shopkeepers to officials, including hidden intermediaries, with most of it being done under a politically-based patronage system that could be described as part of a "vertical governance". The corollary is a segmentation that the third part of the article analyses at all scales, from the national to that of the neighbourhood and household, with obvious consequences for the mobilisation of the population.

I. The Public Distribution System—social assistance and obstacle race

Managed upstream by the Indian Union government, then by the regional states, for consumers the PDS takes the form of a shop in their neighbourhood, called a "ration shop" or a Fair Price Shop, where they are registered. Every Indian household theoretically has a "ration card" in which the family members are registered, with their name and age, and in which the ration shopkeeper writes down the quantities purchased each month. The prices and quantities of wheat, rice, oil, sugar and kerosene (the latter being sold in Hyderabad in separate shops) being offered vary according to the estimated household income: up to 35kg food grains per month today in most of the states, with a subsidisation rate that can go as high as 90% (case of rice in Andhra Pradesh). Apart from the well-off households, which in fact do not have access to the ration shops (what would they buy here in any case, given the bad quality of the products sold?), the population is divided into two groups: those *Above the Poverty Line* or the "non-poor", and those *Below the Poverty Line* or BPL—i.e. the "poor". During our 2006 survey, almost no "non-poor" household in Hyderabad used to buy rice since the prices were similar to those on the market, and for a poorer quality product. The situation was almost the same in Mumbai, at a time when market prices for cereals were relatively low; the ration shops did not offer sugar and many households only used them to buy kerosene (whose distribution was not limited by quotas depending on the type of ration card). In 2013, the situation had worsened further in Gilbert Hill, since the ration shops had stopped selling cereals or sugar!

A good part of the malfunctioning is due to the system's cost or the bureaucracy (after all, for the State, the less the products sold, the lower the cost of the PDS subsidies—at least theoretically). But other reasons can be sought in illegal practices. It has long been condemned by the media (cf. the weekly TV comedy, *Naya Office Office*) and by research scholars working on India's food policy (Mooij, 1999) although the situation may have slightly improved recently (Khera, 2011a). All these are factors that explain the obstacle race Indian households have to run in order to purchase these precious products. The race is composed of at least three stages.

- *Obtaining a ration card*

In Hyderabad, 15% of our sample did not have one. The situation was worse in Mumbai, with one-third of the Gilbert Hill households in the survey not having one. In Antop Hill, all the families living in "notified" (rehabilitated) slums had a card (but a card for "Above Poverty Line" households), while less than 5% of those living in the neighbouring, more recent slum had cards (sometimes expired). The situation is all the more remarkable since at the scale of Andhra Pradesh and that of India, even today there are more ration cards than there are households, which leads one to imagine the number of false papers.[4]

- *Obtaining the right colour ration card*

Having obtained a ration card from the Rationing Office in Mumbai, or from the Assistant Supply Office in Hyderabad, does not mean that one enjoys all the rights that one may claim. Out of the sample in the Hyderabad slum, only 18% of the ration cards were for the "Below Poverty Line" (BPL). It is true that all Indian slums are far from harbouring only destitute uprooted people— the problem is often more of a shortage of housing than that of extreme poverty. Nonetheless, such a percentage is absurd. Moreover, conditions in Mumbai were worse—not a single BPL ration card in Gilbert Hill (same situation in 2013), and 1% in Antop Hill. That is partially due to the fact that the poverty threshold has been set extremely low: at an annual family income of Rupees 11,000 in Hyderabad and Rs. 15,000 in Mumbai (22 € per month), whereas the daily wage for one day's unskilled manual work was Rs. 100-150 at the time (about Rs. 250 in 2013). The official poverty line is therefore more a destitution line, established at a derisory level, so as

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[4] In Andhra Pradesh 23.5 million ration cards were in existence in 2009 for 19 million households (Central Vigilance Committee, 2009).

to reduce the financial burden of the food subsidy. In 2013, the poverty line had not been re-assessed despite inflation: just 1% of the ration cards in the whole of Mumbai were for the "poor".[5]

But that is not the only reason. A number of households that are officially below the poverty line do not have a BPL card. This can prove tragic for many families.

- *Obtaining the right quantities and at the legal prices*

That is the last (but double) obstacle. In India, the large majority of ration shops are managed by private keepers. Supplied by the State, they are paid a fixed margin on each kilo sold and are supposed to abide by the quotas and prices in force for each different kind of card. In Hyderabad, the stealing from the consumers surveyed was not done through the prices, but through the quantities sold. In Mumbai, the thieving is done in both. Not only the shopkeepers may add sand to food grains or plaster to sugar, or fill kerosene jerry cans with a dented measuring cup, but they also make consumers pay more than the official prices, or they write down higher quantities than those they actually sell in the card. Their aim is to sell these subsidised products at market prices. The case of kerosene is even more spectacular, since at the time of our survey, more PDS kerosene was sold on the free market (which everyone calls the "black market") than in the official shops.

The shopkeepers may have some good arguments in their defence. How could they sell kerosene at the official price of Rs.9.05, when there were no 5 *paisa* coins? They were obliged to round-off the sum... Above all, the official profit margin had been set too low, given the cost of commercial lease in these major cities. Moreover, the shopkeepers were themselves victims of fraud—2-4% of the food grains billed to them went missing on delivery, due to under-filled bags or bags that disappeared during their transportation from the central warehouse.

One of the Gilbert Hill inhabitants declared: "OK, but even if 25% of it goes missing, the *rationwalla* still gets 75% of the food grains! And they currently don't even sell a single kilo to the public!" When asked, the shopkeeper asserted that he did distribute a total of 8,430kg of rice and wheat in the month of January 2013. We calculated that if he had, indeed, sold them on the "free" market, that meant that he had fraudulently earned more than Rs.180,000—140 times more than the official margin of around 2%... The ration shop keeper also complained that deliveries from the State were not regular or complete, especially for rice. He was actually sometimes mistakenly accused. The truth is that three types of malfunction are combined in this obstacle course for citizens: on the one hand, misappropriation by *rationwallas;* on the other, delayed deliveries by the State, which do not make it possible to keep up with demands; and finally, right upstream, the piling up of federal stocks (often over 60 million tonnes), whose maintenance is very costly, but which cannot be distributed due to management problems or the preference for exports.

Further, the officials who had granted the shopkeeper the shop—during a rigged invitation to tender—also had to be "thanked". (For despite all the constraints, people fight to get a ration shop in India!). All these are reasons enough for which shopkeepers are "constrained" to cheat their clients if they want to make a profit (often substantial). They are only the last link in a "chain of corruption" (Landy, 2009): senior officials have to get a reimbursement for their discrete but heavy payment for the post they obtained from the Food Ministry. They therefore pressurise the lower bureaucrats, who collect their tithe from the warehouse shopkeepers or

[5] Calculation according to official figures from mahafood.gov.in. To this problem of definition of the poverty line must be added the problem of the use of such a benchmark.For attributing a ration card to a household, often (but without it being a rule) the PDS officials take into account "exterior signs of wealth": owning a scooter, even a bicycle or a fan can exclude the household from the BPL selection. Such methods are one more element for arbitrariness – and bribery.

truck owners, who in turn collect their reimbursement from the ration shopkeepers, who then make up for it from consumers, who are unfortunately at the end of the chain.

This chain of corruption is an important factor—but not the only one—that creates the verticality in urban governance on a daily basis.

II. Corruption and vertical governance

A. Fixing or filtering intermediaries?

While in Mumbai more than half of the households surveyed had obtained their card directly at the Rationing Office, they had got it made over fifteen years ago—for more recent cards, they had to go through an intermediary or *agent* (the English word is used in local languages). In Hyderabad, where our sample was divided into six quantiles depending on household income, only the richest group had obtained its card directly from the Rationing Office. All the card-less families belonged to the poorest half of the sample, and all those in this half who eventually received a card had had to go through an *agent* or wait for officials to survey their neighbourhoods. In the end, the best-off families had direct access to the administration while the others were either in a relationship of expectancy or dependency with it.

These private intermediaries are actors whose presence best attests to the corruption in the food distribution system. "Corruption" here means the use of a position in public services for one's own personal ends (Kumar, Landy, 2009).[6] These brokers, like the ration shopkeepers, are people on the edges of the administration who enable officials not to receive any underhand funds directly and therefore protect them from checks. If you enter the premises of a Rationing Office, at opening time and sometimes even after, you would see several men and women in the yard, standing or sitting around a tea shop set up in a corner, others queuing up before the main door. Some of them are not merely users—with a pen tucked into their shirt pocket like office clerks or dressed like people from the neighbourhood, or bristling with muscles and a gold chain, they may look like *goondas* (gangsters) or junior officials, like housewives or even prostitutes. They are, in fact, *agents.*

There are often over thirty of them per Rationing Office—though not all are present all the time. They often introduce themselves as "social workers": they are there to provide help to the public, able to read and explain the various forms to illiterate users or those unfamiliar with the local script[7]*.* However, *agents* are not just facilitators. They are also filters and (often physically) deny access to inhabitants wishing to contact the administration directly, thereby imposing a sort of "toll tax" (Olivier de Sardan, 2001). In the forecourt of the Matunga Ration Office we met an *agent* who had been working there for 38 years. That in itself may prove that the job was not very lucrative; but it was definitely proof of implied trust: the officials have to be sure that the concerned agents would not betray them, or would not retain more than their due share. This broker was undoubtedly one of the Rationing Office's oldest workers—almost fading into the brickwork. Just as corruption implies some privatisation of the public sector, with some officials

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[6] See Heidenheimer, Johnston, 2002, for a synthesis on political corruption and the various definitions of corruption. Note that there is surprisingly little academic literature on everyday corruption in developing countries, perhaps because it is considered to be a topic too difficult to be investigated given the illegality of practices, probably also because it is not considered politically correct (some Western academics contend that there is not less corruption in their countries than in the global South, which is very questionable if we consider the everyday "little corruption"). There are even less studies trying to understand *why* the little corruption occurs more in some countries and societies than elsewhere (Olivier de Sardan, 1999).

[7] Our slums are inhabited for the most part by Muslims, whose mother tongue is often Urdu, and sometimes immigrants who are not very familiar with the official languages of Maharashtra (Marathi) and Andhra Pradesh (Telugu).

embezzling State funds, the *agent*, on the other hand, testified to a "publicisation" of the private sector, with the teashop which made up for the absence of a government canteen providing further proof. For the research scholar, identities were blurred, definitions chaotic. Indeed, what was public, what was private? Many inhabitants meet *agents* in the belief that they are officials.

B. *The State, "civil society" and politics—many types of porosity*

There are two vertical structures in which the *agents* can be found (they undoubtedly overlap extensively, but the survey was unable to show that). The first corresponds to the payment of a bribe by users to *agents*, money that then "goes up" to the different administrative levels. While such *baksheesh* (bribe) was rare and limited in Hyderabad, the case was considerably different in Mumbai: in 2006, it took Rs.2,000-3,000 to get a card when papers were in order, but up to Rs.15,000 if a certificate was missing—quite a common case with slum dwellers since a proof of residence must be shown, which is a difficult challenge considering their informal housing. Why spend so much money for a card that gives so little access to subsidized food? We shall see that the PDS is crucial for providing other rights and forms of state recognition that have nothing to do with nutrition.

The second vertical structure is political. Almost all the *agents* are, in fact, protected by a political party. But the *agents* did not often "stick" to the political or rather ethnic sensibility of potential clients (although a Muslim household would probably be more attracted by a Congress Party broker rather than one from the BJP, the rules seem all the less strict since the identity of the *agents* is not displayed straightaway). Rather, each party wants to be present in the Rationing Office forecourt, given that the PDS is one of those sectors that fills the coffers of political organisations in India the most[8]—parties generally have their say in the nomination of Rationing Office officials, and even more so in the selection of ration shopkeepers.

Political parties are also present indirectly through the role played by local associations in the functioning of the PDS. A number of *agents* are members of neighbourhood associations (many of the women belong to *Mahila Mandals*—women's clubs) or of so-called "community-based" organisations (CBO), often in the Indian meaning of the term—in India, "community" is a euphemism for "caste" or "religion". All these CBOs have essentially local roots, unlike NGOs, which, according to Indian terminology, are exogenous associations, whose activities may be spread over a vast area[9]. The two forms of organisation very often enjoy political protection. In Sultan Shahi for example, there are two Hindu CBOs: one, based on the fishermen's caste, is related to the Hindu nationalist movement called the RSS; and the other, based on the ex-untouchable Valmiki caste, is affiliated with the Congress Party.

The three elements that together structure any patronage—personalisation, reciprocity and dependence (Briquet, 1998)—are characteristics of the Indian society that have adapted really well to the advent of democracy. This explains the widespread prevalence of patronage and its counterpart—corruption (Kumar and Landy, 2009; see also Véron et al., 2006). This also explains to a large extent the "structural violence" of the Indian state (Gupta, 2012), that paradoxically leaves millions of people in poverty even though these people do vote more often

[8] Admittedly this research could not prove such a claim. To our knowledge no assessment exists about the amount of bribes circulating along the food administration, in the States under study or elsewhere in India. (For a thorough but qualitative study on PDS rent-seeking in Karnataka, see Mooij, 1999). As for leakages in kind, it has been calculated that about half of the PDS grain is diverted at the all-India level (and probably more in the case of sugar) (Khera, 2011b).
[9] That does not mean that CBOs are necessarily endogenously creation—they are often initiated by NGOs, or (as in the case in Hyderabad) by the municipal corporation, especially in order to be involved in development projects. On "examples of identity-based associations stepping in to fill the gap where other, more "modern" organisations have failed to establish a practical link between transparency and accountability", see Jenkins, Goetz, 2003 (p.116).

than the rich and educated citizens. This kind of political mediation takes place in both directions: upwards—what one could call the "springboard party", without whose support any access to public services is difficult; and downward—what could be called the "umbrella party", which protects *agents* and other parasites. It is also the "damping party", which keeps the local organisation's actions in check and often siphons off its funds. Patronage undoubtedly represents the power of the weak (Harriss, 2005), but it is also a major cause of exploitation largely explaining the inefficiency of the anti-poverty policies of the Indian state (Gupta, 2012).

Figure 1: Local PDS governance
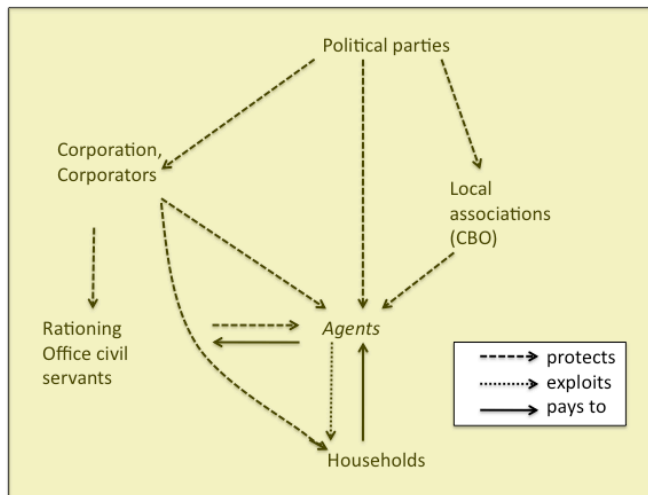
Among other factors, it is patronage that makes governance "vertical". Because for the rest, if citizens appeal to higher levels of power to uphold a cause, what could be more banal than that? All governance is "vertical" in and of itself, foliated by a pile of decision-making levels that are more or less based on a hierarchical system. But patronage engenders structures that are perpendicular to these levels of power—axes that cut across them orthogonally.

It may, of course, seem risky to speak of "vertical governance" solely on the basis of the PDS, and to generalise on the basis of food distribution to describe the way the entire city works. However, apart from the fact that many other public services face a similar situation (Bertrand et al., 2008), the PDS is far from being a negligible social aid mechanism and also structures the daily lives of a lot of poor people. As one of the Gilbert Hill inhabitants put it: "If we spend our days battling to obtain a ration card and then to buy food, how then can we find the time to earn our living?" So you have the queues, particularly for kerosene every week or fortnight, the considerable opportunity costs involved in waiting for households who often live off daily wages, complaints against swindling ration shopkeepers, the pain of households who see the relative share of the food budget grow when income is lost, the ration card that a construction worker carefully guards wrapped in a fold of her sari, even in the construction yards where she works…

Apart from the middle-class Parsi Colony, which has hardly any access problem, political parties are often contacted by residents when a problem with the PDS occurs; they play a key role in enabling inhabitants to assert their rights. Under the "civil society" section, associations carry a lot of weight, along with *agents*, but we have seen to what extent civil society is politicised, confirming the contention by Chatterjee (2003) that what he calls the "political society" is dominant in the poorer sections. There, mobilization and mediation are done by political leaders

and parties—unlike the genuine "civil society" which is based on equality and individual autonomy (see also Harriss, 2007).[10]

The verticality can also be explained by the fact that the PDS falls within the purview of the State, not of the municipal corporation, despite the 1993 federal laws on decentralisation. In urban localities, the PDS remains the preserve of the Food and Civil Supplies Ministry. A legacy of decades of urban centralisation, when Nehru and his successors feared that the corrupt elite would highjack any transfer of power to the local level, the Indian legislators seem to still lack confidence in both the efficiency and transparency of the urban representative democracy.[11] Admittedly, some households, discouraged by the bureaucracy and corruption at the Rationing Office, also try their luck by filing complaints with their elected representatives. The idea behind this is that since the Corporation is an institution that governs the entire city, it should be able to help with regards to a service that is supposed to be accessible to all citizens. However, such households are scarce and their action is generally doomed to failure. The Municipal Corporation does not seem much concerned by this issue, which is a matter for the State—not the city. While Corporators (or even Members of Legislative Assembly) do intervene commonly in food matters, it is not so much because of their institutional status, but rather because of their informal position as intermediaries, protectors—the *big man*: a prominent citizen who may have the means to accelerate or order the issuance of a ration card.

Besides, isn't it because they already had significant social clout that they stood for elections and got elected? In Mumbai a social rights' activist, up in arms, had this to say: "The corporators practically own the ration shops! They have all the powers. Even the Rationing Officers are sometimes under their control." We were unable to verify this assertion but it undoubtedly corresponds to the reality in some neighbourhoods. Elected representatives can get their supporters a job in ration shops and even in Rationing Offices, they can protect agents, etc. They are sometimes the first to pay surprise visits to inspect the records or measuring instruments in the ration shops—at least those that are not owned by their protégés. However, their role should not be exaggerated. On the one hand, they are often not well known to the inhabitants: there are only 100 corporators in Hyderabad and 227 in Mumbai. The constituencies are far too large for citizens to contact their representative easily. Moreover, ethnic and religious factors play a significant role: in Sultan Shahi, many Muslim inhabitants ignored their elected representative, who was from the BJP and a Hindu, and preferred to look for support in their community.

C. *Multi-scalar approaches, both for activists and for research*

A crucial methodological question ensues from all this for social science research as well as for the fight against corruption. What scale should be selected to comprehend the verticality of governance? It is quite clear that because of this structuring, neither should be favoured *a priori*. As far as research is concerned, a multi-scalar approach is imperative, even if just to understand how the different links are connected in the chain of corruption. For example, it is not possible to understand the ration shop managers' practices if we do not see that they themselves suffer from corruption and that they too have to pay back a part of their earnings to higher levels. Apart from the difficulty of accessing information that increases at higher levels of power, the problem is that research projects lack sufficient time and money to approach the matter in a truly systemic manner.

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[10] Yet it remains to be proven that the strategies of higher social classes always correspond to the model of the "civil society" See Webb, 2013, for a study of the PDS criticizing the excessive class-based analysis of Chatterjee.

[11] In the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution (1992), the PDS is listed as a matter that can be managed by *rural* bodies. Yet it does not appear in the 74th Amendment on urban localities.

The same methodological question arises for anti-corruption activists and organisations as well. How can one fight an entire *system*? The problem begins with the city-dwellers themselves. They are not necessarily mere victims. They are just as involved as other actors in "practical norms" (Olivier de Sardan, 2001), far removed from the official norms (on the "corrupted nature of civil society itself", see Jenkins, Goetz, 2003). Many conceal the death of a grandfather to hold on to higher family quotas, or do not declare the installation of gas to hold on to their right to subsidized kerosene. In fact, this is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to reform the PDS. People feel that they are being deceived or robbed, but, since they themselves do not always play by the rules, they don't protest - not so much because they do not have a clear conscience but because they know that they run the risk of losing without being sure of what they may gain. This may partly explain the defeatist attitude that exudes from interviews: "Oh, what can we do, nothing can change… "; "Even journalists ask us for money if we want to complain to them"; "The MLA doesn't even bother to get the streets cleaned, how can he get us ration cards?"; "NGOs are like the government. They organise demonstrations, meetings; you waste a lot of time, you wait under the hot sun the whole day and then the police *lathi* (truncheon) charges you. And then you come home."

Activists should be able to "trace" the chains of corruption and patronage relations, and therefore "go up the ladder". That is what the Ration Kruti Samiti federation (RKS, Ration Action Committee), which brought together 192 NGOs[12] in 2006, has been attempting to do in Mumbai. The RKS' multi-scalar action is possible because of its status as a federation, which groups together essentially local NGOs within an institution that acts at the regional, national and even global level (Table 2). Its action is adapted to the vertical governance that has been described by us, as well as to the official PDS administration structure, from local ration shops to State level, and to New Delhi. Quite different types of activities correspond to this multi-pronged approach—demonstrations, documentation centre, activism, awareness campaigns or petitions to the authorities in the name of the Right to Information Act. Its two main lines of action are the definition of food policies and the local implementation of measures. In the area of policies, the RKS is an active member of the Right to Food Campaign (www.righttofoocampaign.in), a national group of NGOs and activists that have been fighting for the vote in New Delhi of a Food Security Act (2013).

Table2. Multi-scalar interventions by RKS

LEVEL OF ACTION	ACTORS AND TOOLS	SCALE
WTO arena, GMO issue, etc.	In network with Indian and foreign organisations	Global
Government of India, Supreme Court	Right to Food Campaign	Federal
Minister / Secretary, Department of Food, Civil Supplies ; Consumer Protection Department	RKS ; Anna Adhikar Abhiyan (a Maharashtrian network for the Right to Food)	State
Controller of Rationing in Mumbai	RKS	
5 Deputy Regional Controllers	Citizen audits	Urban (Mumbai)
	5 RKS zonal convenors	
42 Rationing Office(r)s. Rationing Inspectors	NGOs and CBOs	Ward
Ration shops	NGOs and CBOs, women's clubs	Neighbourhood

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[12] Yet in no surveyed colony we found any NGO working actively in the field of the PDS.

In terms of the local management of PDS, the RKS conducts inspections of ration shops—always in a group since an activist who had gone alone had to spend five days in prison after the manager wrongly accused him of aggression. The RKS tries to form women's associations at the level of each shop, despite the difficulties it faces in mobilising them. It only manages to do so when the prices are high on the open market and in those rare neighbourhoods where there are many BPL ration cards. The RKS also visits the Rationing Offices in order to accelerate the issuance of ration cards—and when it is unsuccessful, it gets in touch with higher authorities in the Department. Another technique that has been developed—and not just by the RKS—is public hearings (*jansunvai*) (Pande, 2014). The first such audits were held in Mumbai at the end of 2005 in each rationing region of the city. Between 500 and 1500 people took part in these meetings (which managed to get one Rationing Officer transferred, in particular). This figure is at the same time a lot and very little, if you compare it with the 2 or 3 million inhabitants in each zone. It must be noted that while members of the Food Administration sometimes attend these meetings, the Municipal Corporation or the local elected members do not—yet another testimony to the limited impact of municipal decentralisation on the PDS administration.

Finally, the management by the RKS of these audits is a good example of what Goetz and Jenkins (2005) call "vertical accountability", based on "processes through which citizens organize themselves into associations capable of lobbying governments, demanding explanations and threatening less formal sanctions like negative publicity. Vertical accountability is the state being held to account by non-state agents" (p.11). Along with this, we see the addition of "horizontal accountability" by the institutions, such as the anti-corruption commissions, the Comptroller and Auditor General, etc., which the RKS also calls upon. Hence, Goetz and Jenkins describe the RKS' action as a hybrid form of "diagonal accountability". The adjective may admittedly seem geometrically questionable given the fact that what is vertical and what is horizontal do not necessarily combine into a diagonal... But it is justified by the fact that the verticality we have described in this article is anything but perfect: no precise interlocking of scales, no Russian dolls, but rather a series of porosities, leakages, fusions and confusion, legal and illegal connections that often call for various twists and turns to ensure the respect of rights.

Yet a challenge remains: how can an institution such as the RKS mobilize people by overstepping the lines of vertical governance? Concretely, if an activist has successfully engaged with and stimulated a local community-based organisation, how can s/he hope that the neighbouring community shall mobilize itself as well? How to spread awareness and mobilization in spite of the vertical rigidities of patronage that partition the urban society? This is a hard work for NGOs such as the RKS, all the more so since they may fall into two traps: being themselves "captured" by corruption or intimidation (Jenkins, Goetz, 2003), or creating new relationships of brokerage between the activists and the assisted people (Webb, 2012).

III. Horizontal segmentation—from the issue of food to that of identity

To continue with the geometrical perspective, the verticality mentioned in terms of governance is a source of horizontal segmentation, when projected to the territory. Different clientelist and political factions, different systems of connection—all tend to carve up space into fractions, which cannot but have certain consequences on the territory. In turn, this segmentation is itself a source of verticalisation and patron-client structures.

Such a horizontal segmentation—whose negative impact can be perceived in the hindrances to the rallying together of citizens as far as the PDS is concerned—is visible at several levels.

a. At the national level first. Because this question has been dealt with elsewhere (Landy, 2009), let us limit ourselves to two aspects: regional disparities and international migration. As for regional disparities, normally, poverty lines are defined for the entire country without taking differences in living standards into account. In addition, the ration card registration system is by

no means adapted to urban growth with high mobility: migrants remain attached to their original ration shop and the cost of applying for the transfer of the registration is high, both in terms of time as well as money. The case of young brides who move to their husbands' home is far from anecdotal. The situation is particularly sensitive when an immigrant comes from a different state—there is a lack of communication between the two administrations and sometimes the migrant can hardly read or understand the local language.

The situation is even worse in case of international migration. The PDS is reserved for Indian citizens. Now, there are many clandestine immigrants, notably from Bangladesh and particularly in Mumbai. Since 2005, attacks by Muslim terrorists—for the most part, of foreign origin—in Mumbai and Hyderabad, regularly place Indians of the same religion under suspicion, which can lead to serious consequences, going as far as a pogrom. Any Muslim citizen (of the same religion as the Bangladeshis) is liable to suspicion of being a foreigner—whence the advantage of having a PDS card to show. The objective of getting a card is obviously food, but at least sometimes, it is as much a citizenship issue. Until 2012, there were practically no identity cards in India. To open an account in a bank, to get a driver's licence, to get a passport (concerns of well-to-do persons for the most part, not really interested in food subsidies), you had to and still have to produce a ration card.

That is why even rich households are determined to get the ration card, even if they do not buy anything under the PDS, and are ready to queue up for hours at the Rationing Office for a card. That is why poor Muslim families are ready to shell out thousands of rupees in Mumbai to get a ration card. A young Muslim in Sultan Shahi was insistent that his ration card had two purposes: to supply him with kerosene, and to also prove his identity ("Kerosen ke lie, aur nationality ke lie"). Ration cards must be issued to "bonafide Indian citizens including the homeless"—the Government of Maharashtra circular of 23 March 2004 announcing this is truly telling. Socially progressive, it is much less so politically: foreigners are excluded from the PDS and this restriction leads to the establishment of controls that are as complicated as they are doubtful, and from which poor (Indian) households are the ones that suffer. Indeed, the PDS is a victim of its multiple functions. Useful for much more than subsidized food, the ration card is all the more coveted, which opens the window to substantial bribes. As such, it can only be hoped that the implementation of the biometric ID card (Aadhar programme)—which is in fact very problematic for many other reasons—will gradually put an end to the system's misuse.

The PDS card is not merely a *national* ID card, but also a *local* proof of residence. It indicates the family's address and has therefore proved to be crucial for all those living in illegal accommodations, especially slum-dwellers. The ration card is an indirect but official recognition of their place of residence. When a slum is razed to the ground, its original inhabitants may be granted land or a flat in compensation—and the ration card provides proof of "eligibility" with its date of issue, which attests to the time the family first arrived in the concerned slum. In fact, recurrent tragedies occur when a household has had to renew its card as per the directives of the Food Ministry, thereby getting a new one, and later faces difficulties to prove when it first settled in the slum, risking being excluded from relocation benefits. The household may well see its temporary shelter razed to the ground without receiving any compensation (Dupont, 2013). The PDS therefore ensures much more than a right to food—it ensures a right to shelter and a right to the city, not to speak of the right to Indian citizenship (on the equivocal content of the right to the city and its application to India, see Zérah et al., 2011).

b. Another potential segmentation: the disparities between the two cities studied. The inhabitants of the slums surveyed are above all Muslims, but for different reasons. In Hyderabad, it is a reflection of the glorious history of the former capital of the Muslim *Nawabs*, whose rule had led to the adoption of Islam by a significant segment of the old city's population. In Mumbai, it is more the effect of migrations dating back to the mid-20th century or later, by Muslim population groups that in India are poorer than the national average. This led to the

establishment of slums that are located now in the middle of the agglomeration as a result of the urban sprawl[13]. Mumbai has witnessed acute inter-religious tensions since the 1992-93 riots. Hyderabad was relatively harmonious at the time of our survey (but since 2007, attacks have worsened relations between communities); national and international immigration here is a little less than elsewhere. That is why *agents* are quite rare in Hyderabad and bribes less frequent, and are rather considered to be "speed money" to speed up the process (often paid by the better-off). In Mumbai, the rise in the number of *agents* and bribe amounts have gone hand in hand with the rise in tensions between people of different nationalities (Bangladeshis/Indians), religions (Muslims/Hindus), and even castes or regions. The Shiv Sena, a BJP ally, which has been in municipal power since 1996 and governed the state between 1995 and 1999, and now its dissident faction, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, have been criticising the presence of Muslims in the city, along with that of migrants, "outsiders" and "infiltrators" from North India (who at times may be the same). As a result, the importance of the PDS card as an ID card has far from lessened.
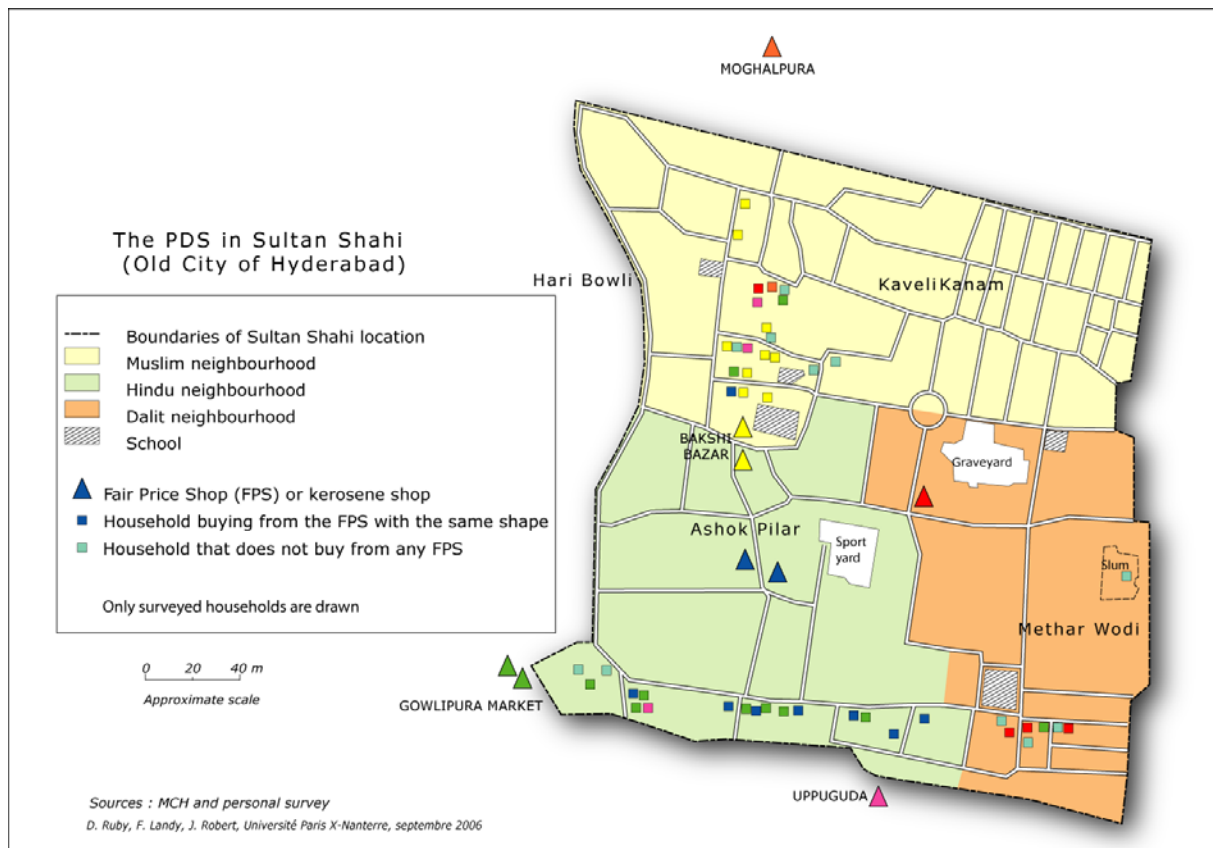
c. Segmentation trends are also internal to the city. Indeed, socio-economic disparities are high: the well-to-do in Parsi Colony have neither the same interests nor the same food practices as their neighbours in Antop Hill. The administration plays with all these disparities to forestall demands. The fact that the ration cards for the "non-poor" often no longer grant rights to anything apart from bad quality items has made their holders lose interest in the PDS. They therefore refuse to get down into the streets along with the BPL "poor" to demand improvements in the system. As for the ID issue, the well-to-do are both less suspect in terms of their identity and less keen on the card, given that they often have other documents available to prove their identity (passport, driving licence, bank account number, etc.).

At the intermediary level, the five "rationing regions" in the city of Mumbai and the nine rationing circles in Hyderabad are undoubtedly locations where action takes place (RKS' citizens' audits). However they represent too large a mesh and are too far from day-to-day life and from ration shops to be effective areas for rallying together ordinary citizens. Likewise, at the micro-level, the rationing office jurisdictions do not correspond either to the administrative wards of the Municipal Corporation nor to electoral constituencies. Corporators therefore fail to defend their voters well though they may at times cover population groups beyond their constituency (a Muslim representative surveyed said that he helped his co-religionists from neighbouring constituencies quite a bit). This does not make it easy to mobilise users—nor to collect data either for academic research or for activists. In Mumbai more than in Hyderabad, there is admittedly quite a high degree of sociability in the rationing offices visited (tea shop, bangle or cloth merchants, etc.), but this does not seem to suffice for founding an identity that is favourable to mobilise people.

This is especially valid since—as is clear from Map 1—users are spread across several ration shops, to which they are attached more or less arbitrarily. True, these shops are close to homes, within about 10 minutes walking distance, and that is a major advantage of urban India where, thanks to the population density, there is a dense network of PDS shops. Neighbours, however, are not at all inclined to make common cause with others, as they are often attached to different shops. What is worse, this may even enhance communal tensions. In Sultan Shahi, PDS users in the Muslim Moghalpura area were suddenly transferred to a ration shop in the Hindu neighbourhood of Gowlipura. The physical distance from their residence to the shop increased a bit but the cultural and, especially, political distance increased substantially, as the families now had to cross an area that—rightly or wrongly—was considered to be unsafe. Far from "de-ghettoing" these areas, the fact that people have to cross them, bear the look and the contact of the Other sometimes even strengthen ethnic identities and create conflicts. In fact, it may even drive people to give up the use of the PDS out of fear.

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[13] For the political situation of Muslims in Mumbai and Hyderabad, see Gayet and Jaffrelot ed. (2012).

Map 1.Ethnic segmentation and fragmentation of the PDS in Sultan Shahi

The PDS in Sultan Shahi
(Old City of Hyderabad)

---- Boundaries of Sultan Shahi location
Muslim neighbourhood
Hindu neighbourhood
Dalit neighbourhood
School

▲ Fair Price Shop (FPS) or kerosene shop
■ Household buying from the FPS with the same shape
■ Household that does not buy from any FPS

Only surveyed households are drawn

0   20   40 m
Approximate scale

Sources : MCH and personal survey
D. Ruby, F. Landy, J. Robert, Université Paris X-Nanterre, septembre 2006

Our examples of community-based organisations—all of which are connected to a political party and based on a given caste—have shown that spatial identity counts for much less, so to speak, than the "community" or ethnic identity. There is a sense of proximity at the neighbourhood or at least the street level, since the blocks of houses are often inhabited by people belonging to a single religion. However, this spatial identity does not easily go beyond the neighbourhood scale itself, given that "citizens" find it hard to strip themselves of their caste or religious identities : this limits the possibility of mobilising people (by NGOs such as the RKS) or of having people spontaneously mobilizing themselves (since they may have little support from other residents). Admittedly, it remains true that in general "city provides a territorial identity to mobilizations that reflect very little or no territorialized senses of belonging" (Dorier-Apprill, Gervais-Lambony, 2007, p.57). In particular, the inhabitants often try to meet the representatives of the party in office irrespective of their community. But voters are divided according to religious or caste divisions and get organised into associations that are means to move closer to power by supporting a candidate who may—once he or she is elected—pass on favours. Indeed, this is far from the ideal of the "civil society" as it is often understood in the West. In Sultan Shahi, we questioned an inhabitant at his doorstep: "Is there a local association in the area?" The response was, "No, there isn't one. Why should there be one? Hindus and Muslims live in harmony here…". Too many people are incapable of thinking in terms of territoriality based on proximity. Beyond the immediate neighbourhood, spatial identity soon gives way to ethnic identity.

At the end of 2012, the federal government announced its intention to replace subsidized food (as well as other social programmes) by the transfer of cash and subsidies directly into the households' bank accounts. But many poor families do not have a bank account. Many banks do not have a branch in poor areas. Never mind, since the project provides for "banking correspondents". But these individuals who will be in charge of distributing money to

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neighbouring residents will be prominent people or shopkeepers, who will undoubtedly be able to get their cut, say opponents of this reform. And here too, the risk is that it may further segment the possibility of making claims or demands. As Leena Joshi, a researcher and social worker who is a member of RKS, already laments, "the people for whom we are fighting are not the same people *with whom* we are fighting"[14]. Generally speaking, mobilising people to defend their rights in India is often done through external agents such as NGOs (Bautès, 2013), because the local middle classes, who are not interested in the PDS, do not support the cloutless poor (Zérah, 2007). The transformation of the PDS into millions of bank transfers would further fragment any spirit of protest, with the minimum collective unit for a revolt—the group of customers in a ration shop—disappearing and being replaced by a single level—that of a household or even an individual.

Conclusion:

The PDS situation is, to say the least, delicate in Hyderabad and even more so in Mumbai:
- the very poor do not have ration cards;
- poor households often have one, but they have had to pay a lot for it;
- while the poor may have a ration card, it is meant for the "non-poor";
- Well-to-do households have a free ration card but they do not use it for food.

Given the almost *de facto* exclusion of "non-poor" households and the bad quality of products offered, only the very poor still have a strong interest in the system. However, they have neither the time nor the means, nor even the social clout to voice their grievances. The less poor could do it, but if they already have a gas connection or an ID card, the motivation would be lacking. Just as the existence of private alternatives to public schools and hospitals prevent the well-to-do from being the driving force behind social claims (Ruet, Tawa Lama ed., 2009), the "proletarianisation" of the PDS has reduced its coverage and the possibility of a widespread mobilisation of citizens for improving it. Should "spatial targeting" by the PDS then be advocated, with ration shops established only in poorer zones, the rest benefitting from cash transfers or no aid at all? That would offer the advantages of what Jaglin (2006) calls "territorialisation": a priori more trust and sense of responsibility, more focus on the most needing areas and people. However, India is well aware of the damages that any sort of "targeting" can cause: regarding the PDS, the social targeting, implemented at the federal level since 1997, erroneously excluded many of the poorest of the poor from the system while defining who was poor and who was "non poor". The fear is that the relatively low level of socio-spatial segregation that still exists in India (a slum may well adjoin an extremely bourgeois residence) makes spatial targeting extremely difficult to carry out without injustice. Furthermore, one of the outcomes would assuredly be the undoing of an already low level of solidarity through a depoliticising process of fragmentation (Jaglin, 2006). All in all, what Jaglin calls "territorialized public action" or what Benit-Gnaffou (2013) calls "flexible governance" may bring more challenges than solutions. Whereas it could deliver more procedural spatial justice, providing adaptability to local needs and some empowerment to residents, "it has a strong potential to divide urban policies spatially", and "it allows for a blurring of political responsibility and democratic accountability" due to the fragmentation of stakeholders (Benit-Gnaffou, 2013, pp.196-7 about Johannesburg). It can increase patronage by more role given to unelected local civics (in South Africa), CBOs, notables and even civil society activists (in India) (Webb, 2012). If we agree with Benit-Gnaffou that "clientelist practices are probably consubstantial to local democracy, even if not named so" (p.199), then the case study of the PDS in urban India may appear as a (biased, unjust) form of democratic governance, contributing to explain the paradox of the vibrancy of democracy in a country so socially unequal as India.

Finally, the issue of urban splintering that was raised in the introduction has only found a mixed response. At a meso scale, major Indian cities still present quite a low level of socio-economic or

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[14] Interview, 25.2.2013.

ethnic segmentation (there are many poor areas in the rather well-off western part of Mumbai), although it is emerging quite significantly at a more micro scale. On the other hand, the issue of fragmentation has to do not only with public services and goods but with day-to-day living, the family rationale and strategies, from electoral choices to matrimonial alliances (Harris-White, 2003). If the PDS increases spatial differentiation instead of reducing it, it is because by not providing enough subsidised products in poor areas and by promoting corruption, it triggers factors of segmentation like the "community" or even political parties. However, segmentation does not solely concern the contrast between rich and poor areas, between luxury residences and slums. It also has to do with the location of people according to their caste, their region of origin, their language and their patronage relationships. The scale of segmentation is not the city ward or district, not even the neighbourhood; it is the alley, the street corner or even the building. The fact that poor households are protected by a "patron" who does not live in the same area in no way thwarts this trend. The differentiation therefore appears to be more social than spatial, since the same neighbourhood can be divided into several ethnic or patronage groups.
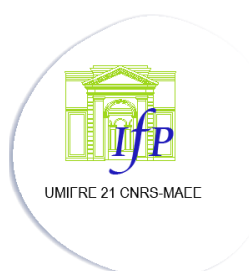
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