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Local democracy in Indian and South African cities: A comparative literature review

Claire Bénit-Gbaffou and Stéphanie Tawa Lama Rewal

The local level has become since the 1990s an important arena of development of democracy in most countries of the world – in a move sometimes described as part of "the third wave of democratization" (Huntington 1992), encouraged both by progressive movements seeking a form of grassroots democracy, and by the World Bank as a new form of governance. India and South Africa are no exception, and both countries have implemented reforms of local government in the mid 1990s, with the objective of broadening and deepening democracy.

This chapter aims at comparing the political and academic debates that took place in South Africa and India concerning decentralization, and more broadly local democracy, in an urban context[1]. We believe, with Hantrais, that "the definition and understanding of concepts and the relationship between concepts and contexts are of critical concern in comparative research that crosses national, societal, cultural and linguistic boundaries" (Hantrais 2009: 72). Through a literature review and a contextualization of local democracy's history, institutions, and practices, this joint chapter aims at identifying the commonalities and differences in the political and social stakes contained in the debates on "local democracy".

We define local democracy here as a set of democratic institutions and practices that are focused on the local level (from the metropolitan level downwards, to the ward and neighbourhood level for instance), and that can take two broad directions: decentralisation (local government authorities allow local votes to matter more than at a State/Provincial or National level, possibly leading to more accountability and a better adaptation to local needs by local politicians and officials); and participation (i.e. mechanisms for citizens to address the state between electoral times). These two dimensions do not necessarily co-exist, even though, according the World Bank, "Participation and decentralization have a symbiotic relationship… participation [can be] a means to successful decentralization [or] … a goal of decentralization"[2]. Our assumption is not that local governments and participation are inherently more "democratic" (as justly pointed out by Purcell 2006); but that they offer a potential for increased accountability and responsiveness by local politicians and officials to local citizens.

Our methodology is based on the review of the literature that we had used in our previous research connected with the subject[3], but also, in order to avoid the bias inherent in the collection of references thus accumulated over the past years, on a systematic search in new bodies of literature. In India, Tawa Lama-Rewal explored the archives of two Indian journals which reflect ongoing political and academic debates: *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW)[4] and *Seminar* magazine[5]. In South Africa, where there is

[1] This work is part of a larger collective project comparing the forms and impact of political participation in the governance of South African and Indian cities (cf. www.cisa-wits.org.za).

[2] http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/EXTDSRE/0,,contentMDK:20246049~menuPK:390249~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:390243,00.html

[3] Tawa Lama-Rewal has previously researched reservations for women in Municipal Corporations; urban governance and the political mobilization of neighborhood associations in Indian megacities. Bénit-Gbaffou has researched local government, redistribution, and local participation in South African cities.

[4] EPW is a generalist weekly journal, including all kinds of articles, from short commentaries on news items to long scholarly essays in social sciences ("special articles"). The authors who publish in EPW are journalists or scholars,

no real equivalent of *EPW* or *Seminar*, Bénit-Gbaffou reviewed a number of collective books published on local democracy in the recent years: a series on "Local government" (Parnell et al 2002, van Donk et al 2008); a series of *State of the Nation* (published yearly); and a collective book on democracy and delivery (Pillay et al 2008).

I. The politics of decentralization

In both countries, a brief genealogy of local democracy highlights how decentralization has been favored and resisted in turn, how it has served contrasting political agendas, and how, ultimately, electoral considerations of parties in power have determined its present form.

One must note that in both national literatures, a large number of authors are at the same time observers *and* actors of decentralisation. For instance many Indian publications originate from the Institute of Social Sciences, an NGO close to the Congress party which works as an observatory of decentralisation, and continuously produces reports about various aspects of this policy[6]. In South Africa, academics were approached by political parties during the transitional period to contribute to social change – academics with a practical experience in local or national government[7].

I.1. Decentralization in India: A Gandhian dream, implemented by communist parties

In the Indian context, the idea of local democracy belongs to the Gandhian political discourse (Mukherji 2008). Gandhi, who took the lead of the Freedom movement in the 1920s, was convinced that new, independent India had to be built, politically but also economically, on the hundreds of thousands of Indian villages. He subscribed to the Orientalist myth of village republics as part of the Golden Age of India, and conceived the new political system as based on a pyramid of rural communities economically self-sufficient, and regulating themselves through discussions aiming at producing a consensus.

Even though Gandhi occupied a dominant position and was a moral reference for a large part of the nationalist movement, his views on local democracy were strongly opposed by Ambedkar (the leader of the Untouchables, and the architect of the Constitution), who viewed Indian villages as a site of backwardness. The Constitution finally reflected Ambedkar's position, as the subject of "local government" is only mentioned in Directive principles, which means that the ultimate decision on this matter remains with the states. Yet even though the Congress party engaged, from the 1950s onwards,

students or well known intellectuals. The index of EPW issues since 1999 is available online; our search was restricted to the "special articles" published between 1999 and 2008.

[5] *Seminar* was founded in 1959, and publishes monthly thematic issues inviting comments by a variety of specialists (actors or observers) from all political opinions. The articles in *Seminar* are never longer than 5 pages, but each issue is built so as to reflect the current state of the political and academic debates on various subjects. We found 7 issues, in *Seminar*'s archives, that deal with local democracy and/or urban governance: "Panchayati Raj" (n°49, 1963), "Decentralization" (n°156, 1972), "Grassroots democracy" (n°234, 1979), "The Panchayati Revival" (n°360, 1989), "Our urban future" (n°372, 1990), "City nostalgia" (n°379, 1991) and "Grassroots governance" (n° 438, 1996).

[6] An exemple is K.C.Sivaramakrishnan, one of the few authors writing about the political dimension of urban governance, who is a retired, top level bureaucrat who participated in drafting the decentralization policy in the late 1980s.

[7] For instance A. Mabin, S. Parnell, E. Pieterse, M. Swilling,who have been involved in civil society organizations challenging the apartheid regime, and who have worked directly or indirectly for post-apartheid local government. Some of them are still involved today as government consultants on urban policies.

in policies which were opposed to the Gandhian vision (i.e. a state-driven industrialization instead of developing cottage industries, and a strong political centralization instead of local self-government), this vision resurfaced at regular intervals, first within the Congress, then out of it, when major Gandhian figures left the party. One can identify four major landmarks in the history of local democracy in independent India.

(1) The first one is the report produced in 1957 by the Committee formed under the chairmanship of Balwantrai Mehta – a Gujarati Congress politician, and a staunch Gandhian - which popularized the phrase "*panchayati raj*"[8]. It is important to note that decentralization at that time was not synonymous with local democracy: even though the report recommended the setting up of a pyramidal structure of locally elected councils at two or three levels (village, block, district), its main objective was to make the implementation of local development programmes more effective, and it recommended that political parties do not participate in local elections[9]. As a result, in 1959 all states got a law organizing *panchayats*, but the resistance of bureaucrats and of elected representatives at higher levels to a true devolution of power combined to weaken *panchayati raj* institutions (PRIs) except in Gujarat and Maharashtra (Narain 1965, Kumar 2006).

(2) The second landmark is the political comeback of Jaya Prakash Narayan (called "JP"), a socialist leader soon converted to Gandhian ideas, who left the Congress after Gandhi's death to practice Gandhi's ideals in his ashram. In 1959 JP had written a manifesto for a communitarian democracy, derided by many as completely utopian (Narayan 1959). In the mid 1970s, when Indira Gandhi confronts a severe economic and political crisis, JP accepts the invitation, by a student organization linked to the Hindu Right, to take the lead of the students' agitation in Bihar and to appeal to "total revolution". He denounces the centralization of power by Indira Gandhi, which breeds corruption, and advocates a refoundation of Indian democracy on the basis of villages: in his vision, universal franchise should be practiced only at the village level, and the village council should be responsible in front of the "*gram sabha*", or village assembly (i.e. the sum of all adults in the village). This is the only moment when the idea of direct democracy finds a national echo. In 1975 Indira Gandhi declares Emergency and arrests all her political opponents, including JP. When she lifts the state of Emergency and organizes elections, two years later, the Congress is, for the first time since Independence, defeated at the national level by a broad coalition gathering all her opponents, from the communists to the Hindu Right, around the Janata Party, who considers JP as its guru.

(3) The Janata government announces a new vision of development, based on rural communities, and sets up a new committee to review the functioning of PRIs, under Ashoka Mehta (who was in jail with JP during the Freedom movement). The Ashoka Mehta report, released in 1978, is the third landmark. It recommends, again, a three-tier structure of locally elected councils, but supports the role of political parties in local elections. It also recommends the formation, in each village, of a village assembly, with a consultative role. While the Janata government soon proves unable to overcome its inherent

[8] "*panchayati raj*" means (in hindi) "government of the *panchayats*"; "*panchayats*" being historically councils of elders, who are in charge of arbitrating conflicts in a given community – the caste, or the village. The phrase was invented by Gandhi who advocated, even before Independence, a political system where village councils would play a major role ("*gram swaraj*", i.e. the self government of villages); it has come to be synonymous with local self government.

[9] Here is another feature of the Gandhian view of democracy: Gandhi viewed parties as feeding on people's divisions, and suggested that after Independence was achieved, the Congress party should be disbanded, and its members should engage in social work.

contradictions, a few state governments start implementing the recommendations of the Ashoka Mehta report, and become pioneers of decentralisation, especially West Bengal and Karnataka.

(4) The fourth landmark is the decentralisation policy adopted in 1992 in the form of two constitutional amendments: the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) deals with rural India, the 74th CAA with urban India. This policy, drafted in the late 1980s, pertains to Rajiv Gandhi's endeavor to modernize the Indian state. The policy draft incorporates most of the recommendations of the Ashoka Mehta Committee, and it is often qualified as historic for two reasons: (i) it institutionalizes locally elected councils as the third tier of India's federalism: local elections are now to be held under the supervision of newly formed State Election Commissions, and there cannot elapse more than 6 months between the dissolution of a council and the new election[10]; and (ii) it provides a substantial number of reserved seats for women, the Scheduled Castes (SCs), i.e. the lowest castes (ex-untouchables) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs). This policy draft is much discussed in 1989, but political turbulences (the Congress loses elections again in 1989, Rajiv Gandhi is assassinated in 1991) explain that it starts being implemented only from 1994 onwards.

Finally, which are the Indian parties most interested in local democracy? Much of the parliamentary debates around the decentralization policy, in 1989, expressed suspicions vis-à-vis the Congress party, which had been characterized so far by a tendency to centralize power rather than to delegate it: was decentralization an electoral gimmick, meant to mobilize local "vote banks" in the back of state governments, who increasingly belonged to regional parties? Beyond suspicions, what comes out strongly from a review of regional cases studies is that both ideology and political culture make a difference in the implementation of decentralisation. Many studies of decentralisation focus on one state: among them, Kerala and West Bengal are the most often studied [11]. These two states have been dominated by coalitions of communist parties (which alternate with a Congress-led coalition in Kerala, but have never been defeated in West Bengal since 1977). Indeed communist parties have consistently been ideologically favorable to decentralization, and they have a party structure[12] able to tap the electoral benefit of local mobilization.

I.2. Decentralization in South Africa: implemented by the apartheid, resisted by the ANC?

In South Africa, the central debates that one can relate to "local democracy" have focused on the reform of local government: the vast number of successive reforms, from the 1980s onward, shows the importance of the matter, both in the late apartheid era and in the early post-apartheid period. One can broadly distinguish between the following periods[13]:

(1) In the early 1980s, the apartheid state started a policy of decentralisation – the design of a racially segregated society, reflecting the principles of apartheid, had so far required an important level of centralized control as well as public funding that could only be raised by a powerful state. However, in

[10] This is a major break from the past: before 1992, local councils could be superseded by the state administration, and local elections could be, and were, postponed for years.

[11] Decentralization is also considered successful in Karnataka, where the local branch of the Janata Dal inherited from the Janata Party a strong commitment to "grass roots democracy".

[12] They are mass based parties, with strongly committed cadres and a strong presence at the local level.

[13] We'll only focus here on metropolitan areas (the biggest cities) – as it is the focus of our research programme and issues are slightly different for smaller municipalities.

the aftermath of the townships[14] unrest spearheaded by the internationally famous 1976 Soweto uprising, Black Local Authorities were created next to White Local Governments. The idea was to divide and rule, give black notables a stake in social stability and in the continuation of the apartheid regime, enhance the rise of a Black middle class able to resist and sedate the wave of youth resistance in black townships. However, the notion of "democracy" could obviously not be discussed in this context – Black Local Authorities were largely discredited and often the target of political violence from township residents. Many civic movements developed in the 1980s, calling for a boycott of elections and all services and taxes raised by apartheid local authorities: their aim was to render the townships "ungovernable". Some of them joined the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO), a federation of civics; the power and dynamism of this "grassroots democracy" and popular resistance to apartheid (in a context where liberation parties like the ANC and the Communist Party were banned) was epitomized in the development of the United Democratic Front (UDF). One of the famous slogans of the campaign was "one city, one tax base", calling for a political and fiscal integration of municipal government.

(2) From 1994 onwards, the priority of the new democratic regime was to democratize local government, in particular in the sense of "integrating" and de-racialising municipal structures (Parnell et al. 2002). Till 2000 there was a period of "transition" during which several local government reforms were enacted, reflecting hesitations between the objectives of redistribution and integration (requiring a certain level of centralization, at least at metropolitan level), and the needs to reflect a vibrant civil society (calling for a more decentralized type of local government structure). Interestingly both civics and opposition parties (associated with white residents) called for decentralisation, while the ANC insisted on creating strong metropolitan governments (Cameron 1999). The 1995 interim local government structure allowed for a two-tier structure (with one metropolitan government and several sub-structures); but the 2000 reform scrapped the substructures (which had proved dominated by opposition parties) and created what was called "unicities" (one tier, metropolitan councils).

The legacy of civics forms of direct democracy was side-lined, due partly to the needs for reconciliation and redistribution and to the fear of recreating racially segregated local governments (reflecting the spatial structure of segregation in South African cities); partly maybe to the perception that civics' legitimacy was now superseded by democratically elected local governments.

(3) From 2000 and the adoption of the "final" structure of local government, debates shifted to the notion of "developmental local government". This notion is in fact quite ambiguous, but is supposedly emphasizing the broad role of local government, not only in terms of service delivery, but also on fostering the creation of sustainable settlements and communities: an effort to coordinate various categories of infrastructure and service provision; an attention to local economic development (van Donk et al., 2008); and maybe lastly an attention to community participation[15].

This debate rises as mass urban protests erupt around the country (Atkinson 2007) and there is a rising perception of corruption and inefficiency in local government's ability to "deliver" urban services (wrongly or rightfully, as impressive numbers of houses or figures on access to urban services are

[14] Townships refer to residential areas that used to be reserved for non-White residents.

[15] The Department of Provincial and Local Government lists 4 broad objectives of local government: (i) build sustainable human settlements to address spatial and economic distortions; (ii) support viable and robust local economies; (iii) provide access to a package of free basic services to grant every household a minimum of services; (iv) create meaningful opportunities for participation in municipal affairs (quoted in Van Donk et al., 2008).

published yearly by the South African government – but evidence also show that some of these public goods are not adapted to local needs (Charlton and Kihato 2008, McDonald and Pape 2002). This pressure on local government takes two contradictory directions: on the one hand, legislative texts increasingly emphasize the "developmental" role of local government, the need to build "sustainable" communities and encourage their participation in urban governance (Deacon and Piper 2008): the ward level is consolidated around the ward councilor, and through the election of a ward committee considered the main platform for participatory democracy. On the other hand, a rather hard line on local government "efficiency" and "ability to deliver" is adopted (Hemson and O'Donnovan 2007; van Donk et al 2008), through "performance targets" against which municipal officials and politicians are judged, following the lines of the neoliberal and technocratic principles of the New Public Management (how many houses, water and electricity reticulation, roads, etc. have been delivered; to what extent have costs been recovered; etc.).

I.3. Contrasting roles of cities in constructing local democracy

One striking difference emerges from this parallel genealogy, concerning the place of cities in the conceptualization of local democracy. Cities are almost invisible in the Indian literature, whereas there is a South African emphasis on metropolitan areas (at the expense of weaker, smaller municipalities).

The idea that the natural location of local democracy is in *rural* India has been extremely widespread, among politicians and scholars, at least until the 2000s. Thus the decentralization policy drafted in the late 1980s concerned only villages at first; the 74th CAA was drafted on the model of the 73rd CAA, almost as an afterthought. Very few texts address precisely the urban dimension of local politics[16], or the local dimension of urban politics, and many of them were written by American scholars in the 1970s (Oldenburg 1976, Rosenthal 1976, Weiner 1976). A prominent exception here is the literature on the Shiv Sena, a regional party built on the promotion of the "son of the soils" in Bombay. The party has a dense network of local branches in the capital city of Maharashtra, on which it has been able to rely and which allows him to be a major player in both municipal and state elections (Kaviraj & Katzenstein 1981, Gupta 1982, Hansen 2001).

This rural bias does not exist in South Africa, a predominantly urban country with a strong sense that political avant-gardes develop in cities (and in particular in a few townships that have become symbols of resistance and mobilization, nationally and internationally). The legacy of civic organizations has also grounded an ideal, if not of "local democracy", at least of "power to the people", in the major urban centers. Several authors argue that local government restructuring and decentralisation that occurred post 1994 work quite well for large, economically powerful cities, and much less for smaller urban municipalities, not to say rural districts – that have huge needs, little wealth creation and a chronic shortage of skills, and rely much more on centralized types of interventions (Magketla 2007).

II. The transformative agenda of local democracy

[16] In the two issues of *Seminar* devoted to urban issues ("Our urban futures", in 1990, and "City Nostalgia", in 1991, there is no mention at all of local democracy or politics or participation. On the other hand, all five issues devoted to decentralization ("*Panchayati Raj*" in 1963, "Decentralization" in 1972, "Grassroots Democracy" in 1979, "The *Panchayati* Revival" in 1989 and "Grassroots Governance" in 1996) deal exclusively with rural areas. As far as the treatment of decentralization by EPW is concerned, we identified 34 articles dealing with rural India, and 14 dealing with urban India.

In both countries debates on local democracy raise the question of the role of the state in the transformation of society (in post-independence / post-apartheid contexts). While the importance of the central state in promoting a progressive society is consistently stressed, the role of local government in this regard is more contested. On one hand there is an apprehension that the local level of democracy might lead to forms of conservatism: "backwardness" of villages; reactionary local or minority politics. On the other hand local government is expected to provide an important arena of social transformation. Thus in both countries local government reform is seen as an opportunity, or even a key instrument, for building a more integrated society and address some of its inequalities, understood mainly as inequalities inherited from the past and from institutional structures, rather than other types of inequalities, e.g. current socio-economic inequalities. The meaning of "transformation" / "integration" obviously varies.

II.1. In South Africa: reconstruction, integration, transformation

In post-apartheid South Africa, local government was a crucial arena of "reconstruction", "integration" and "transformation". Each of these terms has its own nuance, but has been used in relation to South African cities, urban policies and local government restructuring.

"Reconstruction" refers both to the institutional dimension ("reconstructing local government") and to the spatial dimension ("restructuring" of segregated cities, in particular through an ambitious and modernist housing policy) of the post-apartheid project. "Integration" asserts the necessity of getting away from apartheid ("separate development"), and in particular racially segregated municipalities. The interim local government structure, as well as the final unicity structure, both made sure that former black and white areas were included in a shared administrative and political entity, for electoral and fiscal purposes, but also as a political statement putting an end to decades of separate development. "Transformation" (a term that emerged later) euphemizes the notion of de-racialisation through affirmative action – a progressive shift in leadership structure (political and economic) so that it becomes more representative of the country's (racial) demographics.

The centrality of the urban question in some of the civic movements developed in the 1980s (around the motto "one city one tax base"), the fact that cities were perceived as epitomizing the contradiction of the apartheid system (racial segregation but massive use of Black workforce by white owned businesses and industries), made them a central object of attention in post-apartheid South Africa. The transitional period saw the blooming of ambitious plans of desegregation and integrated urban development (that never really took off, due to their cost and the amount of local resistance to social and racial desegregation), and local government restructuring (that was achieved in several steps as mentioned earlier). For the latter, the choice was clearly made by the ANC of a centralized form of local government, with strong metropolitan councils, no second tier of local government, but a number of electoral wards. There were obviously political considerations in this choice – the majority rule and the fact that elections work almost as "racial censuses" guaranteeing the transformation of the face of local government.

II.2. In India – quotas as a social experiment / democratization by inclusion

The 1989 issue of *Seminar* devoted to the decentralization policy[17] (which was then being debated in Parliament) displays the ability, by concerned actors and academics, to foresee the major hurdles that

[17] "The Panchayati Revival", *Seminar* 360, August 1989.

were to materialize after the policy started being implemented: the lack of resources of local authorities, the need to train newly elected representatives, and more generally an institutional context unfavorable to a true devolution of power. But this issue also reveals the great expectations attached to decentralization, which in several articles appears as a way to reform Indian democracy at large: "A true vision of a decentralized polity and society involves transformation in the nature of the state both with regard to its institutional structures and its operating culture, as well as in respect of its relationship with civil society and the sources of its legitimacy and authority", writes, for instance, the seasoned political scientist Rajni Kothari (Kothari 1989: 16).

In Parliament, the Indian central government justified decentralization with two main arguments: (i) the traditional argument that village councils, as nodal points of rural development, must be strengthened institutionally; and (ii) a new argument, emphasizing democratization as inclusion. Decentralization was supposed to "enlarge the funnel of representation"[18] by creating a large number of new, local, elected positions; and by reserving a substantial number of seats for women, SCs and STs.

One of the most striking, and most studied, aspects of the decentralization policy, is indeed the mandatory provision of reserved seats for social categories hitherto politically marginalized: women (33% of seats)[19]; the Scheduled Castes; and the Scheduled Tribes (these two categories benefit from quotas in proportion to their local demographic weight). Even though the sociological characteristics and the bases for the exclusion suffered by these categories are quite distinct, all electoral reservations clearly pertain to the same policy: they stem from a common principle – reparation - they aim at a common goal – including the excluded – and they work along a largely common institutional design – reserving constituencies. Yet a specific problematic is associated to each beneficiary category, that is the impact of electoral reservations on the stigmatization suffered by SCs; on the isolation characterizing tribal societies; and on the "glass-ceiling" that limits women's political representation (Tawa Lama-Rewal 2005).

Women's quotas stir the greatest interest (there are much less studies on quotas for other categories – an exception being Kumar & Raj 2006) because they are the most substantial, and because they do not exist at other political levels (unlike quotas for SCs and STs which have existed in the national Parliament and in state Assemblies since 1952). In a society that remains strongly patriarchal, the prospect of about one million women suddenly being elected to local councils looked revolutionary. After the adoption of the decentralization policy, the study of the implementation of women's quotas has become a subfield of studies on "women and politics" – but (in keeping with the rural bias) very few studies have been devoted to women in city councils[20].

A major difference between the two countries is that in South Africa, social transformation is not about protecting and promoting minorities; it is about making / helping the demographic majority accessing positions of power. Yet one can also observe an important similarity in the two cases: the transformative agenda of local democracy is strongly linked to representative democracy. Indeed in South Africa the democratization of local government was first understood in the sense of including Black (majority) voters and destroying "white only" administrative, political and fiscal entities (Cameron, 1999), at all

[18] Rajiv Gandhi, quoted in Sivaramakrishnan (2000: 17).
[19] The 73rd and 74th CAAs prescribe that at least one third of seats be reserved for women, but recently states such as Bihar or Chattisgarh have increased this proportion to 50% of seats.
[20] An exception is Ghosh & Tawa Lama-Rewal 2005.

scales of government; while in India the political representation of hitherto marginalized social categories is the focus of attention.

III. The conservative framework of local democracy

In both countries, local governments face several challenges in their endeavor to implement a transformative agenda. Indeed the democratization of local government gives rise to a double issue: the relationship between local bureaucrats and elected representatives (the latter often criticized for their lack of expertise, experience or skill, whereas bureaucrats are often suspected of following a conservative agenda); and more generally the question of the place of politics in local democracy.

III.1. Bureaucratic inertia in Indian cities

The Indian decentralization policy combines political and administrative dimensions. Urban local bodies are divided between an executive (i.e. administrative) and a deliberative (i.e. political) wing, and the dominant municipal regime empowers the Commissionner, a top level bureaucrat nominated by the regional state, rather than elected councilors. In this context, one of the running themes of the Indian literature is the difficult relationship between officials and elected representatives. The idea that bureaucrats reproduce the attitude of colonizers vis-à-vis the population they are in charge of has almost become commonplace in India. The difficult relationship between officials in the local administration and locally elected representatives is not new - Oldenburg describes it very vividly in 1976. However it is probably exacerbated today by the fact that due to quotas, a large number of local representatives are also newcomers in politics, which puts them in a dependent position vis-à-vis bureaucrats who know the rules, but are often not willing to part with their knowledge.

Another strong limit to the transformative capacity of local government is the dual structure of Indian urban governance, which is shared between urban local bodies and the regional state (through the utility agencies that are dependent on the latter, dealing with planning, water, transports etc.). Local government being a State subject in the Indian federal polity, all states had to adopt conformity legislations before they could implement the 73rd and 74th CAAs. Wherever there was some scope for adaptation, states have interpreted the 74th CAA in a restrictive way and have attributed only limited functions to urban local bodies.

Moreover, as far as the implementation of the decentralization policy is concerned, there appears to be an important discrepancy between the responsibilities delegated to local authorities and the human and financial means actually transferred to them. The financial crunch of (urban) local bodies is thus a central theme of the literature on urban governance (see for instance Mathur 2006). The State Finance Commissions put up in the framework of the decentralization policy have issued a number of recommendations, which are often ignored. Many studies discuss the tensions between the cities' financial resources and their assigned role in the delivery of basic goods and services such as water, electricity, or housing (Sekhar & Bidarkar 1999, Pethe & Ghodke 2002). They scrutinize the extent and modalities of financial transfers to local bodies, and all of them agree that the gross inadequacy of such transfers, with reference to the tasks assigned to local bodies (at least on paper) is a major reason for the limitations of decentralization.

III.2. Fragmented power in South African cities

The relationship between politicians and bureaucrats is also a very important question in post-apartheid South Africa, as the "sunset clause" (agreement between the apartheid regime and the rising ANC in the early 1990s) has agreed on not firing former (apartheid) state employees and officials so as to create a smooth transition. At local government level however, the imperatives of transformation implied that (i) politicians be given authority over officials; (ii) an affirmative action plan be adopted to appoint new officials; (iii) council policies and priorities to be reconciled with new (ANC) policies (Van Donk et al 2008). The successive local government reforms partly allowed for such a renewal in municipal staff – but sometimes leading to a certain loss of expertise that has led to inefficiencies; or to its privatization through the increasing use of consultants and independent agencies to draft urban policies or even by-laws. In some cases the politicization of officials hiring led to a high level of instability[21]; these crucial dynamics however seem so far to be under-researched.

In South Africa, local governments are responsible for many basic services (water, waste management, electricity reticulation, sanitation, roads, land and planning, transport planning). For these responsibilities, and unlike their Indian counterparts maybe, the bigger municipalities are somehow well resourced (their income relying mainly on property tax; rates on water and electricity; till recently, tax on businesses; and national grants). Equally important is the responsibilities municipalities share with Provincial governments: housing, health and education (and in fact, land management as well) – this shared responsibility often creating problems of coordination[22]. This often raises coordination issues (Bénit-Gbaffou 2008), as reflected in the debate on terminology. Legislative texts and academic literature sometimes define local government as "tier" (the lowest tier, under the supervision of higher tiers such as Provincial and National governments); sometimes as "sphere" (i.e. democratic platforms in their own right, with interaction but not submission to other spheres) of government. This hesitation is also captured in the debate around "developmental local government" – where development can be understood in a narrow sense (as captured in the sentence "local government is the hands and feet of the Reconciliation and Development Programme": not "the head or brain": its function is to "deliver" along a policy that has been decided elsewhere) or in the broader sense (encouraging residents to participate in the definition of their own needs and allocation of public resources). While legislative texts (and the hopes they have given rise to: Parnell et al. 2002, Van Donk et al. 2008) explicitly adopt the broader understanding, practices of local government rather seem to lean towards the narrower, including participation more as a matter of exception and response to emergency crisis, than in their daily and normal working (Bénit-Gbaffou 2008).

Politics is largely discredited in local government workings. In Southern African cities, ward committees, supposedly "neutral" and non-partisan, are criticized as both inefficient and heavily politicized (Piper and Deacon 2008). Politics is equated with either corruption or political violence, although the lack of political competition in a context of dominant party is still being analyzed as detrimental to local government accountability and leading to state and party's rising arrogance, corruption, and inefficiency.

[21] It is the case in Cape Town where political leadership is highly volatile and contested between the ANC and a coalition of opposition parties; or in Durban where factionalism is rife, and is expressed in particular in conflicts between the Provincial government and the metropolitan council.

[22] Institutional fragmentation is aggravated by the adoption of the principles of New Public Management that creates parastatal but autonomous departments, agencies and corporations to run different municipal functions on a cost-recovery basis.

On the whole, in South African as in Indian cities the transformative potential of local democracy is severely constrained, for reasons linked to the national and local political contexts. India's federalism allows some slackness in the interpretation of decentralisation principles; but the great competitiveness of its electoral scene ensures political interest for local democracy. In South Africa on the contrary, the dominant party system is not conducive to a genuine adoption of local democracy principles; where electoral competition exists locally, like in Durban or in Cape Town, it is not yet robust enough to seem to have led to meaningful democratic debates.

IV. Urban democracy: missing links between local government and social movements studies

The literature on participation (both institutionalized and extra-institutional) in both countries is characterized by strong judgment values and wide gaps.

IV.1. Representative vs (institutionalized) participatory democracy

In India local democracy is hardly participatory, especially in cities, despite the provision, in the 74th CAA, for ward committees, meant to be a space where elected representatives, municipal bureaucrats and civil society could meet and discuss local problems. This provision has been interpreted in a restrictive sense by most states, and Mumbai is today the only city where ward committees actually include civil society – in the form of three NGOs selected by the local councilors.

More generally in India, participation is usually discussed only as *electoral* participation[23] – Jayal has convincingly summed up this phenomenon as the "fetichisation of representation" (Jayal 2006: 7). Thus observers of (local) democracy have been discussing the turnout of various social categories in local elections, and they have also, more broadly, paid attention to the participation of various categories of people as candidates and as candidates' supporters. The notion of participation as a direct form of democracy has been so far discussed mostly in the context of studies on Kerala, related to the recent experiment with participatory planning.

One can however expect more studies focusing on participation in urban governance in the near future, since there seems to be an expansion of "invited" spaces of participation (Cornwall, quoted in Miraftab 2006) focusing on local affairs. Participation is the key word of new schemes, launched by state or municipal governments in the 2000s, aiming at involving the middle class in the management of urban affairs, and more precisely in the improvement of service delivery (Tawa Lama-Rewal 2007, Zérah 2007, Baud and Nainan 2008, Paul 2006). Also, the recently launched Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), a Central government scheme launched in 2005 "to encourage reforms and fast track planned development of identified cities [with a focus on] efficiency in urban infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms, community participation, and accountability of ULBs/ parastatal agencies towards citizens"[24], may evoke more interest in participation in the sense of "consultation". Indeed the JNNURM includes a Community Participation Law whose content has been much discussed by neighborhood activists in the big cities. Thus current studies focusing on *ad hoc* consultation procedures (Mitra 2002, Ramanathan 2007, Thakkar 2004) might soon give way to a focus on the institutionalization of such procedures, and on their engagement with local structures of political

[23] As a key word, "participation" leads either to electoral studies, or to studies of development programmes, especially with a focus on community management of natural resources (water, forest) – see Manor 2004, Puri 2004.

[24] Mission statement, http://jnnurm.nic.in/nurmudweb/toolkit/Overview.pdf

representation. However, participation here seems restricted either to middle-class groups (giving rise to the powerful critique of the notion of "civil society": Chatterjee 2006), or used as a World Bank-inspired tool of management or urban poverty.

By contrast, South African local democracy has made ample institutional provision for participation at the local level, mainly through ward committees that are elected by local voters, whose members are given specific portfolios and are supposed to help liaising between the ward councilor and civil society. However, numerous studies have shown the inefficiency and superficiality of such structures as platforms for residents' participation in urban governance (see special issue of the South African journal *Transformation*, 66-67, 2008). Therefore, even though institutions of local participation are much more developed than in Indian cities, the reality of residents' participation might not be that different.

In both countries, and probably even more so in South Africa, no political party is really supporting residents' participation (in contrast with experiment of local democracy in Brazil for instance) – because they have little political interest in doing so, or limited capacity to implement it at the grassroots level. The ANC is a dominant party in South Africa, like the Congress was before the 1980s in India – and, unlike the Workers Party in Brazil, they do not need to advocate for another form of democracy to gain support from the masses. Decentralisation could only provide a platform for opposition parties[25]; while participation is only conceived as a "nuisance", wasting time and resources by debating (and contesting) ANC policies. Opposition parties, and in particular the DA (Democratic Alliance), have opposed the unicity reform and argued in favor of decentralisation (Cameron 1999); they have also repeatedly criticized ANC-led metropolitan councils for not being participatory enough: but they are far from developing a programme on participatory democracy, not being a radical party, and lacking the mobilization resources at the local level to promote such a programme. Other opposition parties, more radical in their ideology and more likely to be sympathetic to the legacy of the civics and direct democracy, (like the Pan African Congress or the Communist Party) simply lack the financial and human resources – they are not mass movements like the ANC.

This political context is very significant to explain the lack of progress of participatory democracy in South African local governance. Indian examples mentioned above (West Bengal and Kerala, where decentralization and participation have been implemented by leftist coalitions in power) confirm the importance of political party strategies in explaining the implementation (or lack thereof) of participatory institutions– in most cases promoting participatory democracy is not seen as an effective electoral strategy by political parties.

IV.2. Invited and invented spaces of participation: contrasted legitimacies

In South Africa, there is a gap between literature focusing on local government and local democracy (although as mentioned earlier the term is seldom used) and literature on social movements and civics – which rarely addresses directly the issue of urban governance and of democracy (unlike issues of social justice, revolutionary potential, political resources and organization). The link with local government and democratic institutions is underdeveloped – as social movements appear overall more confrontational than cooperative (Ballard et al 2006), even though the reality might be more nuanced (Oldfield in Van Donk et al 2008). Some address the issue of the alliance between civics and local politicians or officials – but often to deplore the decline of civics as a force of confrontation (Heller 2003, Zuern in Ballard et al.

[25] It was the case under the transitional local government system, with two-tier municipalities where sub-metropolitan structures were sometimes captured by the political opposition.

2006); other start to look at deeper linkages of clientelism at the local level (Staniland 2008, Bénit-Gbaffou forthcoming).

Indian literature seems even less focused on developing the link between social movements and civil society on the one hand, and local democracy on the other. A large majority of papers focusing on the notion of civil society are theoretical, and often normative in their approach. A few papers are more empirical, but they usually discuss the role of civil society organizations at the national level. Rob Jenkins (forthcoming) clearly shows how the Indian discourse on civil society distinguishes social movements, supposed to be massive, altruistic and progressive, from NGOs, suspected of being too small to matter, opportunistic and reformist at best[26]. But the relationship of social movements with democracy, local or otherwise, is far from clear.

As far as cities are concerned, only a small part of the literature on social movements focuses on urban movements (Shah 2002). Within this limited literature, the issue of class is prominent. Concerning the urban working poor, labour movements have traditionally been closely associated with trade unions, which are themselves "sister-organisations" of political parties. But in today's India, "informality [which concerns more than 90% of the workforce] poses serious challenges both to the theorists and practitioners of class politics"(Roychowdhury 2008: 604). Collective action by workers in the informal sector is being documented (Sheth 2004, Dasgupta 2009), but there is usually no discussion of the links between these mobilizations and local democracy. An exception is Omvedt's account of the Dalit movement, describing how the short-lived Dalit Panthers' movement, "born in the slums of Bombay" in 1972, engaged with electoral politics as it opposed both the Congress and the Shiv Sena (Omvedt 2002). This is not so surprising since, contrary to the South African case (where activists, trained with a Castellsian vision of "the urban question", have taken the right to the city as an object of struggle), the city in India is more a site than an object of struggles. It is the place where protests are being staged, but protests are usually not *about* the city[27].

On the whole, urban activism in India today appears to be increasingly dominated by the middle classes, and one can distinguish two broad types, whose relationships with institutionalized structures of interest representation are quite different. One, there is activism by the middle classes but on behalf of the poor: typically, NGOs whose main mode of action is lobbying authorities at various levels (Harriss 2007, Roychowdhury 2008). Two, one observes an increasingly assertive activism by the middle classes and for the middle classes (Fernandes 2007, Ghertner 2008): typically, neighborhood associations who frequently resort to press campaigns and judicial action (Dembovski 1999, Mawdsley 2004, Véron 2006). In both cases, there appears to be hardly any connection between these activisms and local authorities; indeed several studies show that the major constituency of local representatives is not the middle classes but the poor (Baud & Nainan 2008, Ruet & Tawa Lama-Rewal 2009).

Finally, in both contexts the marginal place of social movements in the academic field of local democracy reflects a set of different theoretical literature (political studies rather than literature on local government); but it might also echo a binary vision of urban governance, opposing the state (and

[26] This distinction does not seem to be that operational in South Africa (maybe a less globalised society in this regard), where emphasis is rather put on the difference between social movements (supposed to be massive, altruistic and progressive as well; but also having a radical political agenda) and civics (more local in their constituency as well as in their objectives, restricted to pragmatic, "bread and butter" issues).

[27] A recent exception is the series of protests evoked by the implementation of the new Master Plan in Delhi in 2006.

its institutions) and civil society (in all its forms, including social movements); or at least the workings of institutions (including participatory institutions) and more informal (and often more oppositional) lobbies and movements. This theoretical opposition is also a political one – one that allows local authorities to discard mass urban movements (in particular when they become oppositional and violent) as part and parcel of local democracy. Here, similarities between the Indian and South African contexts tend to grow, as in both cases the most radical social movements and spaces of "invented" participation (that is, falling outside participatory structures and institutions) are increasingly criminalized by the state and the media.

In South Africa, it takes the form of movement leaders being put in jail and sued in Court; through a general discourse on a "third force" trying to compromise the democratically elected South African government and its efforts to build the nation; etc. (Miraftab 2006, Ballard et al. 2006).

In India, the unequal legitimacy of various categories of urban mobilizations is revealed by the implicit, but very strong, connotations of the various terms used to qualify urban dwellers. Indeed all possible terms seem overloaded with meaning. To call them "voters" (as much of the literature on local democracy does) suggests that urban democracy can be reduced to the local electoral process. "Residents", in the Indian contemporary context, implies legality, and thus excludes squatters – who form anywhere between one fourth and one third of the population of megacities. Moreover "residents" are now associated to "resident welfare associations", which conjure an image of middle class colonies, as opposed to "slum dwellers". The term "citizens", too, postulates a series of rights of which a large number of city dwellers in India are deprived. It is much favoured in the framework of participatory programmes for the middle classes (Nair 2006, Tawa Lama-Rewal 2007, Zérah 2007); it has been appropriated by neighbourhood activists (as clearly shown by their numerous press statements), and has come, as a result, to evoke a combination of legality (of residence in the city) and of legitimacy (of participation in urban governance). Indeed Ghertner, through an analysis of court cases related to slum evictions in Delhi, highlights the potency of "discursive devices" in constructing a "property-based citizenship" (Ghertner 2008: 66). Unlike in SA, "community" cannot provide a solution to this lack of a neutral term, because in India it is a code word for "caste" or "religious group". Two recent papers dealing with neighbourhood activism use the term "bourgeois", which evokes more explicitly the combination of economic and political clout enjoyed by this social group (Chatterjee 2006 and Baviskar 2007).

By contrast, "resident" has become a neutral term in South African urban society – although when referring to civil society a more commonly used term is the one of "community" (for both low and higher income local groups of residents – otherwise differentiated into "civics", for the former, and "ratepayers / homeowners associations" for the latter). It has not always been the case, however, as the right of residence in South African cities (considered ultimately "white spaces" where Black people had only a temporary right to stay under apartheid) was restricted to Whites and Blacks having a permit. In post-apartheid South Africa, it is not politically possible to deny anyone the title of local "resident" (even if living in an informal settlement, and even if undocumented migrant). This also explains why residents of informal settlements do have rights in South African cities (notification of eviction, relocation, etc.) – even though most of them are not aware of them nor able to access them if not having political and social resources- which contrasts to the situation of informal dwellers in Indian cities.

Conclusion

Our comparison shows that some important concepts have different meanings in the two contexts. One of the most significant differences is the meaning of the term "residents", which excludes the poor in Indian cities, which is telling on the social and rights status of a majority of the urban population. A second notion whose meaning is significantly different is the one of "communities", which evokes caste in Indian cities, whereas it is commonly used in South Africa to describe local groups of residents engaging in participation (although it often implicitly designates racially homogeneous groups). More broadly, some notions have different echoes in the two contexts. Decentralization is linked to the Gandhian utopia in India, and more ambiguously, both to the apartheid infamy in SA, and to post-apartheid global governance rhetoric. Local democracy is implicitly urban in SA, rural in India; thus cities figure prominently in the heroic narrative of the conquest of democracy in SA, not so in India.

But there are also important similarities. To start with, in both cases local democracy has been considered mostly as a matter of "more representative local government" (in the sense of a local government mirroring the society's demographics). For different reasons: in South Africa the non-white majority has been deprived for decades of representation (in state institutions as in private organisations leadership) – a fair representation is about promoting non-white at leadership positions. In India, attention is paid more to marginalised groups. Thus in both cases local government is seen as a tool for social engineering – setting up a path towards more equality and more inclusion in the broader society. In other words, decentralization is linked to a socio-political experimentation. Lastly, the reinvention/deepening of democracy through decentralization is limited by resistance to making local government more participatory, thus the question of the relationship with democracy remains open. Indeed participation is the weak dimension of local democracy in both countries – although it is at least institutionally and rhetorically encouraged in South African cities; whereas it is largely absent from the legislative texts governing urban local bodies in India. If some forms of invited participation are encouraged through different mechanisms (broader and more generalized in South Africa), "invented" participation (generally more oppositional) is often demonized and seldom used by opposition parties.

This literature review points to the need for a more integrated view of urban democracy, which would link up studies of (urban) social movements, civil society and urban politics, to analyze democracy in the city. Such an endeavor would necessarily lead to discussing the nature and specificity of urban citizenship – insofar as it is constructed by the relationship between the political participation of city-dwellers and structures of urban governance. This seems to be all the more urgent that today another convergence appears which is born from the global dominance of a neo-liberal agenda: poorer populations are being pushed out of the city centers and new movements claim a right to the city, defined in different ways by different social groups. In this regard, the conceptual distinction invented by Chatterjee between "civil society" ("proper" urban citizens who have rights and are recognized as such) and "political society" (the mass of the urban poor who, living in informality in a way or another, have only access to the state by stealth, through local arrangements and favours, while simultaneousy being at the core of political parties' attention) can usefully be used in a South African context, even if, as we have stressed, the deprivation of rights of the poor seems less acute than in India. An understanding of the politics of local democracy, in its noble sense of citizenship and participation but also in its not less meaningful sense of clientelism and everyday political strategies to access urban resources, seems crucial.

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