" The Unique Identity project and the New 'Bureaucratic Moment' in India "

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At various points in its career through the 20th Century, the Indian state has deployed technologies to govern the country. In its latest move, this has extended to a number of large scale projects to install digital technology, the most controversial being the Unique Identity Project, an ongoing project which is registering biometric data, along with demographic information of residents. This essay attempts to understand what is at stake in technology-mediated governance. Do these interventions signal a shift in the thinking around institutional systems while negotiating the political in a particular way? Do they reconcile the participatory and procedural impulses of Indian democracy? How do they negotiate particular claims? Is this a change in the state-citizen relationship itself? The essay will propose that these interventions cannot be understood as an orthodox neoliberal policy initiative. Rather, they articulate a new desire to segregate and yet preserve the state, even as they free the executive from the encumbrance of populist democracy.

THE NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PLAN AND REGISTERING THE POPULATION

The Unique Identity Project has its origins in the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) adopted by the Government of India in May 2006. Under NeGP, 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) are in the process of being rolling out. These MMPs are 'high priority citizen services' offered by various government departments (like

income-tax, company affairs, pension, passport, etc.), whose mode of delivery would change from manual to e-delivery (i.e. electronic delivery). The NeGP is purported to offer 'a seamless view of Government' and bring service delivery to the doorstep of the citizens. An official document on NeGP highlights two aspects of its approach: a centralised initiative and a decentralised implementation model, as it explains,

> E-Governance would be promoted through a Centralised initiative to the extent necessary to ensure citizen service orientation, to realise the objective of interoperability of various e-Governance applications and to ensure optimal utili(s)ation of ICT infrastructure/ resources while allowing for and adopting, as a policy, a Decentralised Implementation Model[1]

The new governance infrastructure would be deployed using a public-private partnership (PPP) model, which would 'enlarge the resource pool without compromising on the security aspects (of the IT infrastructure and data)'.[2] While most MMPs aim to offer an easy access to the chosen services and their speedy delivery, two of these, the National Resident/Citizen Database and the UID projects stand out, as they aim to create a database on the country's (entire) population and provide the state (and other nonstate actors/ agencies) with an extremely powerful tool. Prior to the conceptualisation of these two MMPs, the Parliament of India had amended the Citizens' Act 1955 in 2003 and introduced a new clause—14A, which stipulates that '[t]he Central Government *may compulsorily* register every citizen of India and issue [a] national identity card to him [*sic*]' [emphasis added] and that '[t]he Central Government may maintain a National Register of Indian Citizens and for that purpose establish a National Registration Authority.' This offered a new means for conceptualising an MMP that would register citizens 'under the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) and provide them National Identity Cards by the Registrar General, India (RGI), Ministry of Home Affairs, who has been designated as [the] Registrar General Citizen Registration (RGCR) by the statue'.[3]

NATIONAL RESIDENT/CITIZEN DATABASE AND UID MMPS

The idea of a National Security System arose out of an obvious concern for national security and 'illegal' immigration. It was proposed that all citizens should be provided with a Multi-purpose National Identity Card (MNIC), and that 'this should be introduced initially in the border districts or may be in a 20 [Km] border belt and extended to the hinterland progressively' (ibid p.70 and passim). A pilot project was launched on April 2003 in 20 districts of 12 States. The project helped to gather information on designing a system for population registration: 'processes for collection and verification of individual data as well s the technology for production, personali(s)ation of identity cards using an inter-operable operating system'.[4]

After the completion of this pilot project on 31 March 2009, an MNIC Mission Mode Project was conceptualised to register citizens under the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) for the purpose of issuing them with National Identity Cards.' However, the experience gathered from the MNIC pilot project made it clear that the '*determination of Citizenship was a complicated and involved issue*'.[5] Hence, it was decided that 'all the usual residents in the country' would be registered, rather than all citizens—and thereby create a National Population Register (NPR). The NPR would collect 'information on specific characteristics of each individual along with their photographs, finger biometrics and Iris. The NPR shall thus result in creation of a biometrics based identity database in the country'. This database would 'become a robust source of authentic real time data which would help in better targeting of the benefits and services under various Government schemes/ programmes, improve infrastructure planning, would provide a fillip to strengthen security of the country and prevent identity fraud'. On the other hand, 'the Unique Identification Number (UID) project was conceptualised to create a verifiable and credible database of individuals'. This database was supposed to be based on 'the voter list of the Election Commission of India (ECI), which is the most credible and validated data on residents [*sic,* citizens] available in the country and thereafter linkages were to be established with

major database holders such as MoRD [Ministry of Rural Development], PDS [Public Distribution System], ECI and RGI [Registrar General, India]'. But later it was decided to move away from the ECI database [i.e. electoral roll] and to opt for fresh registration of residents.

As the NPR and UID would both create biometric database, so to avoid duplication of effort and database, an Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) was formed 'to collate the two schemes. . . [It] recommended that the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) be notified as an executive authority and anchored in the Planning Commission to own, manage and operate the UID database'.[6] Arguably, the reason for anchoring the UIDAI in the Planning Commission was that this database would become an important tool for planners as 'the count of people residing in an area would be known at any point of time'.[7] On the other hand, the Knowledge Commission of India felt that various modes of identification by the state, [i.e. the various cards issued by the state] need to be consolidated into one, which reinforced the idea of UID. The UIDAI was formally constituted and notified on 28 January, 2009.[8]

The NeGP document provides an outline of the current strategy to build and maintain the database: the data collected in the NPR will be subjected to de-duplication by the UIDAI. After de-duplication, the UIDAI will issue a Unique Identification Number (UID). This UID Number will be part of the NPR and the NPR Cards will bear this UID Number. The maintenance of the NPR database and updating subsequently will be done by the Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. The UID of each individual in the database will become the *link number* between sectoral databases, thus bringing about a host of conceivable benefits. The NPR database would be updated and maintained on a continuous basis by setting up of NPR centres at each of the Tehsils/Taluks/wards [units of administration].[9]

As it stands now, *Aadhaar* does not either substitute or replace existing cards or numbers, contrary to the proposal of the Knowledge Commission. *Aadhaar* is issued on the basis of extensive biometric information (facial photograph, two iris scans, and ten fingerprints) and a thin set of demographic information: the resident's name, address, gender, age, name

of parent/guardian if the resident is below 5 years of age. The UIDAI claims that *Aadhaar* would offer the following benefits:

1. 'help in better targeting of beneficiary[-]oriented schemes. . . by uniquely identifying the residents/beneficiaries,

2. significantly reduce identity frauds and thereby help in efficient utilisation of funds allocated to these schemes

3. Over a period of time, this may help in reducing the total outlay under these schemes by preventing duplicates both under the same scheme and across various schemes' (DoIT 2011, p. 78).

The benefit of *Aadhaar* for residents would be that they can furnish a single source for all identity verifications (proof of both identity and address) required for obtaining various services, without producing any additional document (an ideal situation, which may not be the actual case). The official documents claim that *Aadhaar* will 'also facilitate entry for poor and underprivileged residents into the formal banking system, and the opportunity to avail services provided by the government and the private sector. The UID will also give [Indian] migrants *mobility of identity*'.[10]

THE WAY *AADHAAR* WORKS

The Aadhaar project has three parts: enrollment, de-duplication, and verification. In various parts of the country the UIDAI has run enrollment, camps often by private agencies to capture biometric and demographic information. After enrollment, encrypted data is sent to the UIDAI headquarters in New Delhi in a secure manner, where the quality of the data is checked and a particular individual's identity verified following a 1:n matching, i.e. one individual is checked against the available database of the (entire) population called the Central ID Data Repository (CIDR). This is the de-duplication process. If the information provided by/captured from the person does not match existing data, then the person is considered to be

unique and an Aadhaar number is issued. The Aadhaar number is sent by post to the person.

If an institution/agency requires the identity of a person to be established and authenticated and accepts *Aadhaar*, then the person in question can furnish his/her *Aadhaar* number. The institution can ask the person to furnish the demographic information as well and to take biometric tests—the information and the level of security required for *verification* will be solely determined by the institution's policy, not UIDAI (and so, for a small transaction, a bank can just ask for thumb imprint verification, whereas for a very high transaction, it can verify the full set of biometric information). The captured information, along with the *Aadhaar* number, is sent to UIDAI. UIDAI will do a 1:1 check of the given information with the CIDR (which can be accessed through electronic networks) to authenticate the information in *realtime*.

Analogically, it is like opening a drawer marked with a particular *Aadhaar* number to check the content: UIDAI would answer the query in the form of a 'Yes', or a 'No', i.e. yes, the UIDAI database matches with the information given by the institute and it is authenticated, or no, it does not match. UIDAI will not provide any other information to the institution seeking verification of an identity. The UIDAI will separate biometric information from demographic ones, encrypt both sets and distribute and store these on various servers so that even if one server is hacked, it cannot provide access to the entire information on a particular person. The sole owner of the database would be UIDAI and no other government department will have access to the data sets.

UID/*AADHAAR* AND THE GOVERNMENTAL RATIONALITY

How do we critically engage with this new governance structure with its overt intention to register the residents? The critique and criticisms of the UID

have so far been either on the ground of civil liberties, claiming that the biometric database could create a super-powerful surveillance state (Ramanathan 2010), or on technical grounds (Ramkumar 2009), asserting that the scale is too large and the failure will be correspondingly spectacular and significant in its consequences; that it is an experimental infrastructure which has no predecessor anywhere, and that the accuracy of biometric authentication of an individual within a massive pool of a billion plus people cannot be assured; that the technology is not adequate to match such a huge number of unique patterns instantly or in real-time (this is a wrong understanding of the way UID works). That the likelihood of error is high and that such errors will cause misery to, and harassment of, ordinary people. A third position sees the UID as an uninvited entity and an intruder in the day-today functioning of social welfare programmes like the Public Distribution System and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which will complicate the existing system, instead of improving it (Khera, Dreze 2010).

These are important and influential positions, but beyond these, politically, is there anything further at stake here? For that we need to look at the specificity of the UID. First, let us consider the focus on 'population'. A decisive shift comes to be in the function of the state when the concept of population overrules that of sovereignty (Foucault 2007). The state undertakes projects to know, to map and to categorise both population and territory. The technologies for such a task have been mostly cartography (maps of territory and 'resources' like forests, rivers, etc.), ethnography (classifying people into 'tribes', 'castes' based on 'cultural' and social attributes) and demography (census, national sample survey, etc. recording names, physical attributes, territorial coordinates), i.e. an epistemological drive informed by the Cartesian positing/positioning of a subject. Parallel to this, there have been various attempts to record the physical (i.e. visible) characteristics of a person to uniquely identify him/her (like thumb imprint, size of the cranium, etc.)—these were the early practices of biometrics (and anthropometry), many of which were part of eugenics and racial profiling experiments mostly on the 'people without history'.

This history has taken a great leap forward with recent advancement in the computation of algorithms used in biometrics and digital communication systems, used to map, categorise and track people in a relentless search for new ways of knowing and governing the population. 'Sovereignty is exercised within the borders of a territory', writes Foucault, whereas 'discipline is exercised on the bodies of individuals, and security is exercised over a whole population'. The deployment of (electronic) biometrics and digital networks bring about for the first time a convergence in all these three aspects of governance: sovereignty, discipline, and security. It is not a question of whether technological interventions like UID would be successful or would fail; rather we need to understand the political significance and consequences of this convergence, understand the logics and rationality of this new technology-mediated governance structure, and whether we can detect a shift in the organisation of the state and the state-citizen relationship.

As already mentioned, the main (operational) purpose of *Aadhaar* is to verify an identity in real time, i.e. to instantly match a person with the data already available on the CIDR. The digital infrastructure that would allow the UIDAI to verify an identity in real-time operates on a combination of both the Logic of Network and the Logic of Biometrics. We need to see both in a little more detail.

The Logic of the Network: A Network allows the accessing, collation, coordination and comparison of both inter/ and intra-sectoral databases. The possibility of authenticating and weeding out fake and duplicate identities, and the purported claim of identifying 'benefit/identity-frauds' depend crucially on this comparison. States such as Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh have already constructed a Management Information System (MIS) in their PDS which allows monitoring of their stock at various points within the supply chain, the quantities of provisions supplied to the fair-price shops, and the offtake of ration by beneficiaries. Such an MIS is an intra-sectoral database.

Various government departments and institutions in India maintain databases on their population, but due to institutional jurisdiction and policy, or a due to lack of technology, these databases do not 'talk' to each

other. Digital technology allows these databases to interact in various ways depending on the agreed norms and policy decisions. A network offers the *technical possibility* for the creation of a unitary system, which would enable communication between inter-sectoral databases. There is an attempt to create such networks, though it is not clear at this moment whether they will be interlinked to form a network of networks: UIDAI will regulate the Central ID Data Repository (CIDR), the Ministry of Home Affairs [the ministry for internal security] is setting up a National Intelligence Grid or NATGRID.[11] NATGRID will have access to '21 categories of database like railway and air travel, income tax, bank account details, credit card transactions, visa and immigration records in the country' (*The Business Standard*, 30 May 2011) which will purportedly allow it to combat terrorism. If this Network of Networks, along with Central ID database, comes fully into being, it could bring together agencies with three sets of concerns: security and intelligence, social protection (managing PDS and NREGA databases) and financial regulation and verification of customers (including by the private sector).[12]

The Logic of Biometrics: The utility of biometrics lies in the claim of recording and authenticating a unique and permanent (!) identity. This uniqueness is based on identifying certain features of the human body to be a stable parameter, which can be standardised into a metric or a quantity. This metric can be used to generate an access code that stands for who you are; something non-transferable, something singular, i.e. your body (Fuller, 2003). This access code can override or complement photo- or electronic- ID-cards or passwords [in the industry parlance it is: 'who you are (biometric), what you have (ID-card), and what you know (password)'].

THE RATIONALITY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY OF UID

By enquiring about the rationality which governs this digital network, we can also find how and which economic interests are brought into this network's fold. The Aadhaar network borrows the operational rationality of 'Know-Your-Resident' (KYR) and 'Know-Your-Customer' (KYC) from the commercial (public and private)

sector, both of which require (i) a proof of identity (PoI) and (ii) a proof of address (PoA). In the commercial sectors like bank, electricity, telephone, air travel, railways, etc., services are made available after furnishing PoI and PoA. KYR and KYC become important mostly within the service sector where the provider and the subscriber enter into a (long-term) relationship for servicing (e.g. electricity or telephone) and payment. Therefore it is important to have for a company to recover any outstanding amount, to install devices at the customer's premise, or when the identity of a traveller with an electronically-issued ticket needs to be ascertained before boarding a train or an aeroplane. Most often the need for KYR arises because of the information asymmetry between a service provider and a service seeker, where it is assumed that the service provider would not know the customer personally. This calls for a reliable third party/authority who would verify KYR and KYC data. So far, government issued photo-ID cards such as a driving license, a voter ID card, etc. have been considered acceptable. However, the authenticity of these cards, even when they had holograms inscribed, could not always be ascertained. Aadhaar promises to overcome this problem and the UIDAI therefore emerges as that third party, the state agency, which authenticates and identifies a person. In turn, there is also a reverse move: in playing this role, and in receiving wide acceptance as the most authentic authenticator we have, so to say, the UIDAI positions itself as a potential player in a larger role in the commercial sector and even finding its own economic viability in such a role.

The UIDAI sees *Aadhaar* as an 'ecosystem' comprising the government, people, vendors, developers, operators and applications ('apps'). The UIDAI presumes that, in the near future, authentication and identification would become central to the economy, making the UID ecosystem into an attractive proposition for both developers and operators. *Aadhaar* would be the foundation for authentication and identification, and private operators can build applications as layers on it. This ecosystem mimics the mobile telephone platforms like iPhone and Android—the 'app market' model, where there are apps for almost every aspect of life. The entrepreneurial developers will see the opportunity and create innovative 'apps'. In ways similar to how paper money got replaced by plastic money in transactions, the UID will solve the problem of authenticating and identifying a party.

Two questions arise here: just when, and why, did 'transactions' become a problem? If the UID is a commercial infrastructure, then who stands to benefit most from the design of the system?

Any market is about transactions or exchanges. In transactions, even before the legal/contractual obligations set in, there is a question of trust between people. If a transaction takes place face to face, then it may be assumed that there is no serious trust deficit or information asymmetry. But where transactions take place between unknown people or involve many people/multiple agents, then both trust deficit and information asymmetry become significant issues. The process of authentication of one or both parties and the verification of their rights and entitlements, helps in creating trust between two unknown individuals.

In informal economies, transactions are generally of small amounts and usually take place either on a face-to-face basis or follow a social referral system, i.e. information is sought from within the social network in selecting a customer or a business partner. The transactions in the informal economy do not generally follow the principles of an open market; it is generally a closed network. It is clear that the need for a UID-like guarantor of identity is biased in the direction of *large volumes of anonymous transactions*.

The problem presented in this strand of argument may therefore need to be slightly revised from how it is usually presented. The usual assumption is that there are leakages in the social welfare systems and a large number of benefit-frauds in public distribution system (PDS); there are leakages from the supply chain and diversion of ration to the open market, and fake/ghost and duplicates ration cards further amplify the leakages. These malpractices happen because government departments (e.g. Dept. of Civil Supplies) cannot ascertain who 'took up' the quota of supplies: is it the intended beneficiary or someone else? This understanding pivots around the 'calculation of cost' of loss in the system, and how best to manage the state subsidy, particularly when the annual budgetary outlays for social expenditure have been meagre.

In this manner of presenting the problem, it is assumed that the relationship between the state and the citizen gets obfuscated by the

mediation of intermediary institutions: in the case of PDS, the supply chain from the Food Corporation of India's warehouse to the fair-price shop. Since the relationship between the state and the citizen is fundamental, it follows that it has to be made transparent and the intermediaries made modifiable, transformable, or even removable. Such a description of the issue is *not* similar to the 'Last Mile' problem articulated in policy discourse. The Last Mile is a problem of reaching the ultimate beneficiary, whereas here the problem is not about failing to reach or cover the last beneficiary, but—as mentioned above—a problem of ascertaining whether the actual beneficiary has availed the benefit. From the point of institutional design, it is not an issue of reach/coverage, but rather on the loss. It is more like a dark end of a tunnel: the state of affairs at the recipient's end is unknown to the state and hence needs to be illuminated, rendered visible. However, there is a connection with the 'Last Mile' problem. The term 'Last Mile' problem has been borrowed from the telecommunications industry where the companies found it challenging to 'fan out' wires from the main cable to individual premises, particularly in the rural areas. The very fact that the telecommunication revolution in India has largely been able to solve this by adopting a hybrid technological solution means that this network can be harnessed and augmented for bridging the Last Mile problem even in public systems such as the PDS if the design and infrastructure of PDS can be overhauled.[13]

The UIDAI's premise is to bring together the process of identifying the beneficiary with the parallel process of reaching that beneficiary. The former happens through *Aadhaar*, the latter through telecommunications networks (including end-level portable/handheld devices). The delivery system needs to be thought of in a bottom-up way, starting with the beneficiary. The authentication of a beneficiary is to be done at the fair price shop (FPS) when the person comes to draw her/his family's ration. This would screen out the ration taken using fake and duplicate cards. This authenticated offtake by beneficiaries becomes the record on the basis of which the government allocates provisions to that particular fair-price shop. The allocation becomes variable, linked to authentication and the choice of FPS by the beneficiary. This authentication is then followed up through the supply chain and the

allocated grain is tracked from the point of release to its arrival to the FPS over the MIS as the UIDAI document (2010, p. 5) explains:

> An *Aadhaar*-linked MIS would enable the PDS to address broader procurement, storage and monitoring challenges. Registration and procurement orders could be managed online, enabling decentralised, and more local procurement Inventory management could be streamlined and handled online in real-time. This would also enable the PDS to implement state wide information systems that link all ration shops in a state, and give beneficiaries more flexibility in how they collect their entitlements, and from which ration shop.

Beneficiaries on the other hand can receive an SMS intimation of the amount of grain allocated to their FPS and when those should be available to them. Therefore, the system tries to bridge the information asymmetry between the FPS owner and the beneficiaries. The UIDAI (2010, pp. 7-8) claims that since *Aadhaar* verifies the identity of a person by providing the PoI and PoA, so it also becomes easier for that person to apply for a ration card online by simply furnishing her/his *Aadhaar* number:

> [G]overnments can implement a *centralised, Aadhaar-enabled registration* system for the whole state, where a poor person can log a request for a ration card through SMS. The request would be published on the system once the *Aadhaar* is verified. Governments could subsequently process the logged request, verify eligibility of the individual, etc. Governments would also be able to track delays in processing applications and identify bottlenecks in issuing ration cards. In addition, civil society groups could track the progress in processing the applications, and take up these applications on behalf of the individuals.

An *Aadhaar*-based PDS can also allow the governments to supply provisions to 'targeted' individuals (e.g. nutritional supplements for pregnant women), instead the whole household.

This rationalisation and management of social welfare systems by means of technology is located within the re-thinking of the role of a government.

The Blair-Clinton 'Third Way' had advocated welfare benefits like education, health, etc. should not be 'produced' by the government, but should rather be 'procured' from the market. To that we now have a further suggestion, that the government should not be involved in procuring directly; rather it should offer cash or coupons to the beneficiaries, who will go to the supplier of their choice, as a proper consumer does in a competitive market.

The policy initiatives of the Government of India, like 'financial inclusion' and 'cash transfer', would inject financial resources in the (rural) economy. This would all of a sudden bring a large number of people to the financial market, either as recipients of cash from the government or as consumers of newer financial as well as material commodities. In this market, the financial companies and service providers will face a large number of unknown individuals and the conventional model of paper trail would increase the transaction cost.

This is where UID becomes important: it establishes the identity of the person with whom a financial company would deal; a 'business correspondent' of the company who can use a handheld electronic device to complete the transaction and record the necessary information. Second, cash or coupons would be provided by the state to avail services like education and health, which were hitherto 'supplied' by the state, from the market. This market for education and health would require means to connect 'beneficiaries' with 'service providers' or 'government-supported-entrepreneurs', to identify beneficiaries and authenticate their entitlements. Again, the UID becomes crucial in bridging the gap.

THE NEW ONTOLOGY

The networks thus established, together with biometrics, come jointly to define a different social and political ontology: they do away with sub-divisions within the territory-population relationship, i.e. the domicile criterion. Here, 'territory' represents that supra-space which the international boundary of the Indian nation-state curves out, i.e. a space conceived as a container. The 'population' contained within this space does not require further fixation and can be

mobile. The challenge is now to design an institutional structure which would allow the possibility of being mobile, i.e. a structure that can govern both the domiciled and the migrants. It is pertinent to note that the UIDAI document (2010, p. 4) emphasises the concept of 'portability':

> *Aadhaar* is a universal number, and agencies and services can contact the central Unique Identification database from anywhere in the country to confirm a beneficiary's identity. The number thus gives individuals a universal, portable form of identification.

Interview with Sanju Sharma in Mandi, Himachal Pradesh. He is a migrant from Bihar, has been living in Mandi for the past 11 years, but is unable to complete his Aadhaar enrollments since he does not have a 'valid' introduction letter from his village mukhiya in Bihar. He now needs an introduction from the District Collector of Mandi to get enrolled.

Mobility in a mapped out space is not a problem for the administration as long as one can be matched with a profile on the CIDR. As a consequence, for example, the public distribution system should no longer operate on a model of territorial confinement, i.e. one need not be tied to one PDS/fair-price shop. The beneficiaries should be able to take up ration from an FPS of their choice.

While it might be possible to address mobility within the governance structure, new technology-mediated governance structures struggle to reconstitute the basis of state recognition. The new structure claims to want to circumvent the normative and legal contentions that a politicised

category like 'citizenship' entails, and it has therefore adopted 'resident' as a category to register people in both the NPR and UID. Specifically, it wants to accept the empirical body of a resident as a category. This move has an important political implication: it can potentially also shed away the necessary condition of being propertied to be recognised by the state (and market) that the concept of citizenship demands. This potential is an articulation of a different form of freedom. The workers only have their bodily capacity (both physical and intellectual/mental) to labour which they can sell as commodity in the market. Thus, the bodily capacity to labour is the only attribute of human beings that is recognised by capitalism.[14] In that sense, this turn away from citizenship indicates a convergence of the attributes/ categories which are recognised by capitalism and the new bureaucratic rationality: *the unencumbered body becomes the sole property* (as a legal category and as an attribute) that is recognised within the formal set up of the state and market.

Mekala Kundalala, a labourer Allur village, Koilakuntla mandal, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh, elaborates a labour market in which he borrows money in advance from a landlord in exchange for his labour for a certain period of time. These borrowings are linked mostly to consumption needs. His annual salary is ₹ 34,000, which he has taken in advance, and some sustenance supoprt. If he needs more money, he borrows it from the person for whom he is working. This is often referred to as bonded labour in the region, though it differs from the traditional concept of bonded labour.

Yet, this desire to recognise the bare body of the resident/labourer remains unfulfilled as the requirement for furnishing demographic information, proof of address, etc. while dealing with the government and private agencies

remains in place. In other words, the bare body soon gets reterritorialised. This can be seen as the tension (and a contradiction) between recognising a person as a seller of labour-power and the buyer of certain commodities and services and a debtor.

Biometrics and political logics

The logic of biometrics cannot be solely seen through the lens of technology, I propose. I would further claim that the deployment of/dependence on biometrics is linked to the desire for a pure bureaucratic rationality, which informs the new institutional design.

Biometrics has been for some time now a key part of security discourse, and has its origin in eugenic practices (Maguire 2009). It was developed to identify, record and control the non-Europeans in colonised countries, specifically the dangerous margins [e.g. criminals] and delinquents (see Sengupta 2003 and Caplan 2001 for further discussion on this topic). It is governed by a principle of suspicion and combines the technologies of discipline (setting up norms of formal relationships) and the technologies of regulation and control (of flow and access). This biometric technology has moved out of this particular sector to become universal, covering all residents of a country and being deployed in managing welfare programmes among other fields. We need to unravel the logics of biometrics to understand the changes that it desires to bring.

If conventional politics emerged in the backdrop of cartographic, ethnographic and demographic surveys of the state, and the identities created in such practices were later politicised (the premise of Partha Chatterjee's political society),[15] then the logic of biometrics stands apart from that populist political logic. This conventional politics is about reconfiguring the ethics of recognition and redistribution. The representational order depends on contesting and negotiating an identity, which develops a (relativist) play of difference and requires the construction of (meta)-narrative(s).

The logic of biometrics signals a shift/rupture in that logic. Here, the difference is absolute and the entire exercise is geared towards overcoming contingency, contestation, and negotiation—an attempt to go beyond, and shield the institutions from, the messy body politics of democracy.

The epistemic objective of the biometric *dispositif* is to know and count the population over a territory (along with resources) to make the application of power effective and the apparatus scalable and interoperable. Biometrics establishes a difference, i.e. uniqueness, by using algorithmic techniques of pattern matching. It attempts to completely map out the population of a given territory (hence, mapping residents, not citizens) and render it as a rational (no fakes and duplicates) and transparent space. It can further accommodate various axes/vectors—cartographic, ethnographic, demographic, etc.—each of which can cross through the unique body, and can thereby together locate a particular body in a given space. It becomes like a crosshair:[16] you become a *target*. Thereafter, whether you become a target of a bullet,[17] or of PDS rice, or some cash, does not matter for the biometric system.

The ethical foundation of recognition is reduced to moral certainty, and gives away to a *static rule governed system*: a regime of standards and protocols. The syntax and objective of identification depends on the intention of the programmer (e.g. the state agencies) and how it is triangulated with other categories.[18] The imperative is to *verify* the bearer of entitlement/right and deny access to those who do not match. It requires no participation from subjects—either you are entitled or you are not, i.e. you are disciplined by the rule. Therefore, on the face of it, a biometric system appears to be ideology-neutral (i.e. a rule governed system, which simply authenticates a person), yet it is very much ideology-driven (i.e. it is part of making a selected population discernible and targets for policy objectives—what Samuel Weber (2005) calls 'the Militarisation of Thinking'). This 'will to power' articulates a desire for an absolute bureaucratic, procedural system and establish a new 'normal' relationship between 'citizens' and the state.

I have mentioned earlier that the objective/desire of this absolute bureaucratic, procedural system is to shield and free public institutions from the messy body-politics of democracy (at least the messiness of Indian populist politics). But what kind of relationship does it form with a messy populism, with various new demands for 'rights' and 'inclusion'?

The UIDAI document on PDS agrees that 'implementing the "Right to Food" is a priority for the Indian government'.[19] It does not dispute this late 'rights-based approach to development'; rather it concurs with it and argues that *Aadhaar* is well suited—in fact foundational—in realising the objectives of the 'Right to Food':

> The functioning of the PDS—the mainstay of India's food programme(s)—is critical to the implementation of Right to Food in India. . . *Aadhaar* is best translated to mean a 'foundation', and the number would play precisely this role in the PDS. The number would be a foundation, over which the government can build more *effective* PDS processes, and ensure that the program helps [fulfil] the broad and admirable vision of India's proposed national food security act. [emphasis added]

In the above quoted text, *Aadhaar* envisages its role in helping to build an 'effective PDS'. Following a critique of ideology approach, one can obviously argue that this is an attempt by the UIDAI to insert itself into the PDS and thereby become relevant and ubiquitous, and expand its 'usefulness'.[20] The point which needs to be foregrounded is that UIDAI (often seen as a neoliberal institution) sees no conflict with the objectives of the 'Right to Food' (a progressive social democratic/left-liberal demand for economic and social—the so-called 3rd generation rights). This is not merely a compromised position of UIDAI: in fact, a rights-based approach coming together with a norm of entitlement presents a formalised subject of entitlement, and in turn generates protocols of presenting and verifying the subject on behalf of whom the state has assumed certain responsibilities. Thus, bureaucratic rationality encroaches upon political reason by creating a demand for a singular, closed (no play of difference) and final subject from political mediation.

Bureaucratic rationality also converges with rights-based approaches to development on the issue of realisation of rights and delivery of benefit-goods, which both parties see as a problem of institutional design. The very emphasis on the performance of institutions and the creation of effective delivery system has already drawn political attention to organisational structures and power-relationships, i.e. to institutions encroached upon by vested interests.

The rights-based approach itself signals a shift in the political imagination and struggle—one that moves away from the struggle around production-relations and into issues of social reproduction which the state now has to guarantee, thereby making the state a powerful (central) entity in the process. I argue that the politics of rights in this instance is a reduction of politics into 'politics of supplementation'—supplementation of the reproductive needs of the people. Therefore, 'politics' has to be primarily around managing and supervising the operation of a supply chain.

We can see that bureaucratic rationality in this move does not see itself in opposition to either the state or to politics; rather, it preserves a very definite role for the state and politics, understood as the process of mediating contentions, building consensus, defining and guaranteeing rights, generating norms for entitlements and presenting a subject before the executive. This is *not* neoliberalism that wants 'the retreat-of-the-state',[21] but one that wants to segregate the legislation from the executive, and make the executive free from the everyday wrangling of the conventional state.

On the other hand, it does *not* challenge the sovereignty of the state, but leaves certain issues as the state's absolute privy, and once the norms are agreed upon, it opens up the actual operation of a public system to a hybrid institutional order. To explore this, we need to look at the recommendations for redesigning the state apparatus in the recent documents produced by expert groups set up by various government departments.

Bureaucratic rationality beyond the state: It is important to note that the literature on Networks pits the Network against sovereignty, and thereby sees an emancipator possibility in the Network. IT-enabled network structures have contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, because of the ease of centralisation and monitoring, they can perfectly superimpose themselves upon existing structures of authority. On the other hand, this system now raises the possibility of a serious decentralisation, and is as a result often considered (by Centralists of all hues) as vulnerable to anarchic 'attacks' and disruptions. Here we have a strange contradiction: a situation where the state (the sovereign power) itself constructs and controls the network, but at the

same time opens up the infrastructure to private, often very local, commercial interests. One can detect that a convergence, or at least, a certain degree of overlap, between the state and the commercial sector is taking place, one that needs in the coming years to be observed in terms of how the state opens up to private corporate interests, how the state and private sector not just share the logics and rationality, but the actual infrastructure.

The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) articulates a rethinking on the organisational design of the government (i.e. 'Mission Mode'). It emphasises 'political ownership at the highest level'—which perhaps is an alternative term for 'political will' and 'command chain' such that a plan gets executed once it has been planned and agreed upon. It also advocates adopting public-private partnership models in implementing e-governance projects, though it acknowledges that the authority should remain with the government and the concerns of security and privacy needs to be addressed adequately. It borrows concepts like 'business process re-engineering' and 'management of change' from management discourse.

The Report of the Technology Advisory Group for Unique Projects[22] recommends that the government should move away from in-house management of smaller projects and outsourcing to Managed Service Providers (MSP) or vendors for larger projects to a National Information Utility (NIU) framework. The government would formulate the policy and enforce it, while the NIU would implement the IT systems. It recommends that every Mission Team should be able to hire people from outside the government on contractual basis. The relationship between the government and NIU would be contractual and that of a partnership. The NIU would be autonomous, profit *making* institutions, but *not* necessarily profit *maximising*.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this paper that the Aadhaar project signals a new turn in the thinking on the institutional design, by importing ideas of networked governance and biometric mapping of the population. It does not articulate an orthodox neoliberal position. It segregates the state's legislative power and the executive wing, and thereby tries to make the executive free, and shield it, from the compulsions and negotiations of populist democracy. Without challenging the sovereignty of the state, it opens up the executive to the non-state actors. It posits a different ontology wherein the individual's bodily presence becomes the attribute for recognition by the state and market, and thereby enunciates a different form of freedom. But, at the same time, it re-territorialises the body and demands demographic information and a proof of residence. Through these moves, governmentality has for the first time in India started to move beyond the institutional domain of the state. I suggest that this can be seen as the coming of a new 'bureaucratic moment.'

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NOTES

1   Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 11.

2   Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 12.

3   Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 70.

4   Wikipedia defines interoperability as, 'the ability of diverse systems and organi(s)ations to work together (inter-operate).'

5   Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 71 and *passim*, emphasis added; note: the MMP is entitled as 'resident/citizen'.

6   Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 72.

7   Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 73.

8   Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 78.

9   Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 72, emphasis added.

10 Department of Information Technology 2011, p. 79, emphasis added.

11 We are not interested to understand the politics within the institution, in this case the inter-ministerial tension over NATGRID and the debate over the budgetary allocation for the UID project. It has been widely reported that the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Finance 'apparently think that if the [NATGRID] project comes into operation, the MHA [Ministry of Home Affairs] would have uninterrupted access to all information under their jurisdiction' (*The Business Standard,* 30 May 2011) and thereby become more powerful than the other ministries.

12 This convergence of various concerns needs to be examined to understand the development and sharing of common logics, which could possibly extend governmentality beyond the state.

13 This point was put forward by Ashish Rajadhakshya. Nandan Nilekani, the chairperson of UIDAI, emphasised the role of telecommunications and 'UID data will be accessible to authenticating applications through telecom networks.' He told the delegates of a conference, 'We are going to create apps which will need connectivity: Our whole assumption is that these are online systems, mobile based—it assumes ubiquitous connectivity throughout the country. We are banking on the Telecom Industry to deliver on the promise of connectivity' (Medianama, 2009).

14 The free workers are therefore free from, *unencumbered* by, any means of production of their own. [Marx, Capital Vol. 1, p 874, emphasis added]. One can see that the institutional requirement of politics of supplementation also creates the conditions for the development or thriving of a cadre-based political party or community-based organisations (CBOs), which can 'supervise' the implementation of the programmes. The reproduction of grassroots level political institutions depends on being part of the developmental *dispositif*.

15 See Chatterjee 2004.

16 Gillian Fuller provides an interesting insight, 'In a world of multidimensional movement, biometrics is becoming the means by which the singularity of our bodies connect[s] quite literally into the networks where our multiple selves reside. The individual bodily connects to her divided self through regulated networks of power rather than as an individual 'seeing herself' through representational metanarratives. What is important for identity now is how the points come together in a scan. For instance, do ten points correctly correlate in an iris scan? The individual in a biometric world is not 'seen' as a whole body. The individual has no discernible outline, it is seen in fragments—a pattern match of the eye. Thus the algorithmic logic of the database replaces the linear logic of narrative and character development in the structural formation of the individual. In this sense then the *individual is a networked becoming* rather than a Cartesian positioning.' (Fuller 2003, n.p, emphasis added).

17 Hence, the reference to IBM's involved with the Nazis in the Holocaust is made in connection with this calculative logic (refer to Black, 2002).

18 But at the same, the very fact that a particular category can be triangulated with spatial and temporal coordinates, means that a population can be identified for displacement or, deportation and help in the reorganisation of a given territory.

19 UIDAI 2010, p. 1 and *passim.*

20 Khera 2010, Dreze 2010.

21 In fact the contemporary Indian discussion papers (e.g. Ahluwalia 2011) and policy documents make a departure from orthodox neoliberalism. These are marked by the tension between 'economic growth' (without which capitalism is meaningless) and 'inclusiveness', the latter stands for the problem of addressing the growing inequality in the society. Indian 'neoliberalism' is increasingly open to negotiate and accommodate the pressures of the political processes, and accepts that 'particular groups' 'have not gained the benefits' of the economic growth (which is a tacit way of acknowledging that 'particular groups' like Dalits, Muslims, have been affected by the process of economic growth) and that certain 'rights' of the people need to be formalised. Therefore, while ways of achieving a desirable (high) growth need to be found and ascertained, it is also imperative to restructure the social protection programmes, i.e. subsidises need to be rationed and managed. Parallel, to this one can observe a renewed attempt to redesign the institutional structure, particularly in deploying various technological tools to solve both the 'business process' and tackle the 'Last Mile'/coverage problem wherever it exists.

22 Ministry of Finance, 2011.