In 2014, the French government changed the geographical targeting of poverty and urban policy. Billed as simplification, the changes symbolize an economic approach to poverty as discrete, static and contained rather than fluid and relational. The highly technical changes couched in the language of simplicity in fact represent an intense political debate about the recipients of state subsidies and the criteria for urban renewal. As a result of the reform, new technocratic practices, city contracts and territorial maneuverings emerged with disparate impacts on cities across France. I analyze how the poverty mapping process in France is framed as a technocratic intervention and used as a political instrument. Using a case study of Roubaix, considered the poorest city in France, I explore the spatial implications of the new mapping, the scaled politics of negotiation and the impact on communities that reside in so-called priority neighborhoods.

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