



## Call for papers:

### **Authoritarian spaces as unjust spaces?**

Issue coordinated by Sabine Planel, IRD

This call for proposals aims at answering a double question: that of the specificity of authoritarian spaces and that of their relations to justice beyond the mere and somewhat self-evident accusation of injustice that authoritarian spaces usually provoke. The aim of the call is thus to examine the relations between space and power relations in authoritarian (or semi-authoritarian) contexts, where the monopoly of power held by the governing body forbids or limits contestation; where authoritarianism manifests itself sometimes through subtle means of domination ranging from armed violence to 'insidious sweetness' (Foucault, 1990, Hibou, 2011); and where the expression of justice is usually twisted into propaganda. Social sciences dealing with politics (and in particular Political Sciences with their emphasis on the understanding of the mechanics of authoritarianism) have traditionally led the way in the analysis of local authoritarian contexts, situations or regimes. These strands of research have emphasized the hybridization of authoritarian regimes in general, and of semi-authoritarian regimes in particular; they have revealed the collusion between democracy and authoritarianism (Camau et Massardier (dir.), 2009), but also these regimes' capacity to transform (see in particular Bayart's analysis of the "thermidorian moment" unpacking the recent influence of neoliberalism on revolutionary regimes, Bayart, 2008). Authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes are in the process of repositioning themselves, between a reaffirmation of the role of the State, the emergence of new actors and the capture of new opportunities arising from their participation to global Trade (Hilgers, 2010). In particular, they use the principles of "good governance" to legitimate their powers, reassure their economic partners and control and develop their populations. Thus, they create, they reactivate -or on the contrary they quench- new expectations and new demands for justice.

The dynamics of authoritarianism, in its material manifestations, with all its inner tensions and complexity, can usefully be understood via close attention to space -although it is not the sole perspective that can be mobilized, see for instance Bayart's "from the bottom up" perspective-. The embedding of politics into space leads to a certain "resilience of authoritarianisms" (Otayek, 2009), but it can also help us read more clearly the contradictions of this contemporary "new authoritarianism" (Brooker, 2000). The tensions at play there can then be read through the prism of justice (Planel, 2012).

Authoritarian space can appear in various contexts, including democratic ones, within which it thus becomes a form of derogatory space. Enclosed detention centers, *ad hoc* perimeters and other forms of enclave within democratic, rule-of-law-abiding States can be viewed as authoritarian spaces operating at various scales. Yet, more frequently, authoritarian space is shaped by authoritarian political regimes, and it also tends to reinforce them due in particular to its resilience. Quoting from Foucault (1997 [1976]: 25, our translation), the goal is to analyze spaces where "this power overcoming the rule of the law that organizes and limits it, extends consequently beyond these rules, materializes itself within institutions, takes shape within techniques, and forges its own material tools for intervention, including violent tools."

This call aims to give an occasion to apprehend these different forms: how can space (in the social-political sense) work as an 'instrument of control'? What are the vectors involved in the

diffusion of coercion? How do they combine and what spatial forms do they produce? How can we read today, in the new landscape of authoritarianism, the old forms of previous ways of ruling over space and populations (i.e. cells, committees, and other socio-spatial units more or less institutionalized yet highly ideological)? Finally, how does one experience authoritarian space? Can dominated populations be considered a form of civil society? Can we talk about territories, public space or even communities in such contexts? Caught between armed surveillance, bureaucratic routine and partisanship, how do these populations adapt? Are resistance, avoidance or circumvention strategies possible and in what way do they mobilize spatial forms or scales? Following Swyngedouw (2000), can we identify the scalar identity of authoritarian governance and in particular scalar shortcuts ('*jumping scales*')?

Weakly democratic by nature, (semi) authoritarian regimes can guarantee their legitimacy by using strong references, either revolutionary or religious -and sometimes both simultaneously- that call for scrutiny regarding justice but forbid a reading from outside of the official ideological constraints. We wish with this call to address this gap in the literature. One can often find at the ideological heart of such regimes an ideal of equality, and even egalitarian ideals in the case of soviet-inspired regimes, as well as communist, leninist or Maoist-inspired ones... Justice in these cases means equality, yet justice can also be envisioned totally differently. The State has often orchestrated, sometimes with the utmost violence, the reorganization of space and the forced displacement of the population in order to reach a better redistributive justice, yet the spatial impacts of such reorganizations have been limited, led only at a specific scale (national, but in particular not local; at a specific time and in a specific historical context, but not anymore).

Until recently, people's participation and decentralization were unheard of. Today, both movements infuse authoritarian spaces in a very depoliticized way, and they do not 'mechanically' facilitate popular expression nor do they facilitate the emergence of collective forms of empowerment. Would they be instrumental, against all odds, in the modification of local power games and thus trigger the emergence of a more participative justice as well as the construction of a more just space?

How do political systems founded on domination envision space: as a blank page on which the revolutionary project will be written? As a resource that must be controlled or valorized? As a reality that must be corrected or on the contrary taken into consideration? The answers to these questions clearly determine the conditions of existence of a just or unjust space in any given authoritarian regime.

We are expecting potential contributors to this issue of *JSSJ* to propose texts (either theoretical or empirical) that will question the convergence/divergence between justice and authoritarianism on the material plane of the analysis of the spatial forms these combinations create. This call is thus fairly open and the following suggestions are not restrictive. Contributions could focus on:

- the conditions for the emergence (and in particular spatial, territorial or scalar conditions) of a local power game: mobilization/participation and resistance can be envisioned as a way out of authoritarianism but can sometimes be subverted by authoritarian regimes.
- the references used to separate the just from the unjust and their mobilization in authoritarian regimes (in particular through the use of propaganda), their spatial configurations (national/local anchoring, focal *loci* of power...), their evolution, in particular under globalization processes, the impact of good governance



- principles on the practices and routines of authoritarianism (the bureaucracy in particular)
- the spatial dimension of the "instruments of control": i.e. the numerous uses of control in its social, partisan and spatial forms; the means of domination over space and populations; the spatial tools used for the confiscation of power (in particular facade-style decentralization)
  - derogation and its spatial translations, such as *ad hoc* perimeters, the way they operate and how they are inscribed in a broader space. One could thus question the issue of the justice of derogation and more broadly of the constant double standards oscillating between the official and the non-official within which 'special regimes' operate.
  - the scalar constructions and the circulation of power; the scalar hierarchies of domination, the various scales at which power is captured, and the mechanisms of authoritarian governance in this regard.

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**Submissions should be sent no later than June 15th, 2014**

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