Space, politics and (in)justice

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I.

In the last decade or so, there has been a marked attempt in geography and urban studies, in the Anglophone academia at least, to think space politically and politics spatially. Notions and concepts that hardly escaped the confines of the fields of political science and theory have now entered, and started to orient to a certain extent, the research agendas of many scholars working in these fields. This, I believe, is good news for it renders the city and urban space as potentially political sites for the articulation and claiming of rights, and for fighting against various forms of injustice spatially produced or manifested.

A quick list, obviously not an exhaustive one, may be sketched with some of the issues that have recently been re-considered with a decidedly spatial focus. A first issue involves a growing concern with justice and the various forms of injustice inherent in the workings of the capitalist city (Harvey, 1996; Merrifield and Swyngedouw, 1997; Soja, 2000; for a much earlier example, see Harvey, 1973). Such a concern is closely related to a second issue; that is, considering emancipatory projects informed by a politics of space and the (re)construction of the city as a terrain of spatially informed politics (Cresswell, 1996; Keith, 1997; Massey, 2005). Formation of political identities and deliberations on democracy accompany such projects (Keith and Pile, 1993; Tajbakhsh, 2001; Featherstone, 2008). A third issue that is easily discerned is the attempt to reconsider citizenship with a shift in focus from the state to the city, considering the city as a privileged site for the formation and practice of rights and political claims, and re-conceptualizing citizenship with an emphasis on its urban and spatial dimension (Brodie, 2000; Holston and Appadurai, 1996; Isin, 2002; Staeheli, 1999).

Besides more specific arguments, there is a strong argument that is being made, if not always explicitly, in these works as to the nature of the relation between space and politics: that space is not merely a 'container' of politics, an immutable surface on which political processes unfold. Space, in other words, is more than a given and static container of politics; it is causal, transformative, and is itself always in the making. If this is so, however, space could be both a 'good thing' for politics or a 'bad thing'; that is, it could as much hinder political possibilities as it could engender them.

My conceptualization of the relationship between space and injustice follows from these strands of literature that, on the one hand, make space central to theoretical and empirical inquiry, and, on the other, refuse to assign space an a priori emancipatory quality, but rather recognize that most often than not, space seems to be a source of injustice or a means of control, mastery and domination (which, not despite but because of this very reason, can also become a significant tool of resistance). *Spatiality of injustice* is based on the premise that justice has a spatial dimension to it, and that one can observe and analyze various forms of injustice manifest *in space*. *Injustice of spatiality* shifts focus from spatial manifestations of injustice to structural dynamics that produce and reproduce injustice *through space*. The attempt, therefore, is not merely on the spatial manifestations of injustice, but equally importantly, on the processes that produce spatial injustices (for more on this formulation, see Dikeç, 2001). In what follows, I will try to exemplify the interplay between the two – spatiality of injustice and injustice of spatiality – through a notion of 'remainders', using the case of problematization of French *banlieues* as an example.

II.

An instance to explain the notion of remainders may be provided by a brief recourse to arithmetic. When, for example, the number 100 is divided by 11, the remainder is 1. The notion of remainders implies a problematization of the status of the remainder: is 1 *the* remainder or the remaind*ered*?

My definition of remainders is derived from Honig (1993). The implication is that the remainder 1 does not exist prior to *and* apart from the division process; it is remaindered by the very division operation. The notion, therefore, serves as an important reminder of remaindering processes, processes that produce the remainders themselves. Honig employs the notion to expose the remainders of political theory through its processes of closure. Any closure almost necessarily produces remainders. Therefore, it is possible, for example, to discern the remainders of a discourse, a theory, or a hegemonic project. The important point is to focus attention on process, rather than merely on form, and to see whether the discourse, theory, or hegemonic project in question relies on the remainders it produces as a source of legitimacy.

I use the notion of *remainders* both literally and figuratively to refer at once to the *remaining* and the *remaindered*. The former meaning may be exemplified by an OECD report on 'integrating distressed urban areas'. The housing market, the report states, through its dynamics of distribution and redistribution, is a major determinant of concentration. Since the post-war boom in social housing, conceived as an immediate response to housing shortage spawned by increasing population and/or immigration, private sector housing has developed to meet the demands of middle to low income families, many of whom left their initial public housing. 'Those *remaining* in social housing are in many cases, those who are also least able to compete in the modern labour market and, hence, the most likely to be unemployed' (OECD, 1998: 49; emphasis added). This translates into decreased tax returns and investment, and a process of deprivation – first in the physical environment – takes place:

When local actors – notably home-owners, businessmen, potential entrepreneurs, insurers, bankers, and local civil servants – perceive that such a process is taking place, they react to protect investments and minimize risk, and many choose to relocate [OECD, 1998: 51].

And this process eventually leads to a 'vicious cycle':

First [...] once problems start to accumulate the better off residents begin to leave. The poorest, who have no choice, *remain* [...] Second, the worsening situation in the area, particularly as regards security, discourages business even more than before [...] Thirdly, resignation and underachievement tend to take root in the schools. Low educational performance tends to become normal and without the presence of an escape route through education, the spatial 'poverty trap' then passes from one generation to the next (OECD, 1998: 58; emphasis added).

What is missing are the remainders themselves, those 'who have no choice' but remaining; they are not even counted as 'local actors'. These quotes are used to clarify the literal use of the notion of remainders: those who remain 'trapped in space' (Harvey, 1989), or 'chained to a place' (Bourdieu, 1999), which can be seen as an instance of spatiality of injustice.

Figuratively, on the other hand, remainders refer to those that are left out whenever an attempt is made to systematically organize the world conceptually, categorically, linguistically, politically, culturally, socially, morally, and spatially.

The French case provides a typical example that brings together these two meanings. On the one hand, one finds certain groups of the population living in dilapidated peripheral areas of

cities. On the other, these areas, under the rubric of 'the *banlieue*', are being used to designate the problems of the society as places of 'lack' (lack of order, lack of respect for the law, lack of urbanity, etc.), or 'surplus' (too many immigrants, too much crime, etc.), reifying its fears. Inhabitants of such places not only *remain* spatially in these highly stigmatized areas, but are also *remaindered* socially and politically, as groups to be governed from above, to be 'integrated', 'included', rejected, or contained. They are too different, too poor, too violent, not integrated enough, not 'French' enough, not urban enough. They are the *remainders of urbanity*.

How, then, is this remaindering done? Journalists, media intellectuals, 'specialists', and policy makers and politicians have all played their part. A media review by Collovald, for example, demonstrates how this discursive construction of banlieues has made it possible to address the 'immigration problem' (and immigrants as problem) in other, 'more abstract and less directly political' terms, which was not the case when debates around immigration had started in the early 1980s. This is not an innocent modification, but one with significant political consequences, for '[i]n modifying the identification of the problem, it changes its meaning and signification' (Collovald, 2000: 39). Since the 1990s in particular, 'the banlieue', owing to such discursive constructions, has served as an appealing spatial and politically less charged metaphor to talk about such politically sensitive issues as immigration, and to frame problems in a way that drove certain issues away from perspective (e.g., structural dynamics, persistent inequalities, racism and discrimination, etc.) while introducing others (e.g., violence, crime, insecurity, etc.).

As I have tried to show elsewhere (Dikeç, 2007), state policies – in particular, urban policy – have been very effective in the constitution of *banlieues* as remainders as they institutionalized many of the journalistic categories used to frame the banlieues. This constitution has not only externalized the remainders from the very remaindering processes, but also produced a hegemonic discourse on the *banlieues*. While the spatial designation of distressed areas is not inherently bad, and does not automatically produce remainders, the spaces designated by state policies have been subject to different discursive articulations over the years. Despite the republican anxiety over division and disunity, French urban policy operated with a divisive spatiality, eventually consolidating a rather rigid geography of 'threat'. The challenge, it seems to me, is to avoid the hegemony of this spatial order, and to conceive this state-led organization of space as part of the production of space rather than a 'naturally given' organization.

III.

My reading of French urban policy and other state policies addressing the banlieues suggests that policy making has had a role to play in this 'naturalization'; first, through its particular spatial conceptualization, and second, through the discursive re-articulations of its spaces of intervention. Spatial delimitation and designation have been integral parts of French policy making. French urban policy is based on a definition of a 'geography of priority neighbourhoods' (Estèbe, 2001: 25), a geography constituted by the designated areas, which then becomes the basis of policy programmes and interventions. Based on how such areas have been constituted, Estèbe identifies two different 'geographies': a 'local' geography of priority neighbourhoods (in the 1980s) and a 'relative' geography of priority neighbourhoods (starting from the 1990s). I follow his analysis, but also argue that it is possible to distinguish a third, 'statist geography', from the mid-1990s onwards. These geographies also correspond to

changing discursive terms associated with the banlieues and different forms of state intervention.[1]

In the first period (roughly 1981-1989), policy makers tried to address perceived problems in certain social housing neighbourhoods located mostly in the banlieues. The situation in such neighbourhoods were seen as negative consequences of the economic crisis settling in, and they were referred to as working-class (or popular) neighbourhoods, which were the ones most hard hit by the loss of industrial and manufacturing jobs. Such was the spatial order that was starting to settle down: these 'points in space' were characterized by a concentration of problems, and policy measures would spatially target such areas. They were not seen as separate from the urban areas that contained them. The borders that separated the banlieue from the city were situated in a particular geography and history; they were seen neither as naturally given nor immutable. The selection process was very much linked to local knowledge and specificities, and the role of inhabitants in the appropriation of their lived spaces was emphasized in the founding documents of urban policy.

Major institutional restructurings in 1989 and 1990 brought about new measures. With the initiation of the City Contracts program, the local geography turned into a relative (or contractual) geography, defined through negotiations between local and central actors. The institutionalization of urban policy made the question of social housing neighbourhoods and banlieues a national issue of political eminence. It also corresponded with the constitution of its problem, defined in spatial terms as 'exclusion'. But the specific context, both national and international, in which urban policy was institutionalized led to different discursive articulations of its spaces of intervention, diverging from the ways in which social housing neighbourhoods were seen by the earlier generation of policy makers. Marked by the unprecedented scale of riots in Vaulx-en-Velin, one of urban policy's neighbourhoods, the Islamic headscarf and Salman Rushdie affairs, Intifada and the forthcoming Gulf War, this context led to the articulation of the question of banlieues with immigration and Islam. It was in this context that a special section called 'Cities and banlieues' was created at the French Intelligence Service.

In the contractual geography of urban policy, the neighbourhoods were seen as 'neighbourhoods at risk'. However during the 1990s, they have increasingly become associated with insecurity. They were no longer 'at risk'; they were the very risk, the threat, that had to be confronted by the 're-foundation of the republican pact' and more security measures. This shift from risk to threat in the mid-1990s, once again, reflected larger happenings around the world. Following the 1992 Los Angeles riots, 'ghettos' and references to the perils of the so-called 'Anglo-Saxon model' became integral parts of the urban policy discourse. Wacquant (1999a) shows that the dystopian images of the American city have been very influential in shaping the discourse on banlieues in France, and in this sense, it is emblematic that Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* was first translated into French in this period, in 1997 (followed by a reprint in 2000), seven years after its publication in English. These dystopian images of the city were also accompanied by what Wacquant (1999b) called 'the punitive wind' blowing from the other side of the Atlantic, and the increased emphasis on security in this period also reflected 'the intensification of social and spatial control' in the city with a security-obsessed urban discourse (Soja, 2000: 299), instilled with republican references.

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[1] This periodization is not meant to imply that each 'geography' represented a rupture with the preceding period. Although there were noticeable changes in forms of state intervention, spatial conceptualization and discursive articulation of intervention areas in these periods, there were also many continuities among different policy programmes.

Therefore, the third period, especially after the *Pacte de relance* of 1996, was marked by the transformation of the relative/contractual geography of the priority neighbourhoods of urban policy into a *statist (étatique) geography*. Local specificities disappeared, and the neighbourhoods of urban policy became hierarchized neighbourhoods of exclusion, some of which were 'more excluded' than the others. This was also a shift from a relative geography of difficulties (now relativity exists merely among the excluded neighbourhoods themselves) to an absolute geography of threat, determined by centrally decided upon criteria, and rearticulated by a republican nationalist discourse. The neighbourhoods of urban policy were thus closed upon themselves, becoming 'problems' as such. The inhabitants and local specificities, in the process, turned into internally homogeneous spatial categories, and the earlier ideas about appropriation of lived spaces by inhabitants themselves disappeared.

Such was the spatial order consolidated throughout the 1990s, which also informed the 'new generation of city contracts' announced by the Jospin government. The priorities of urban policy, and with them the image of the banlieues and their inhabitants, were constantly being re-defined with more emphasis on the republic, the issue of insecurity and the authority of the state. Despite the criticisms of the Sueur Report (1998) and those of the Cour des Comptes (2002), both of which maintained that 'zoning' brought with it a string territorial stigmatization and that it was very difficult to get these neighbourhoods out of the 'priority geography' of urban policy once they were included, urban policy's spatial focus has not changed. A comparison of the lists of the priority neighbourhoods of urban policy (16 neighbourhoods in 1982, 23 in 1983, 148 in 1984, 400 in 1989, 546 in the early 1990s, and around 1,200 in 751 ZUSs since 1996) shows that despite the increase in the number of neighbourhoods included, the list basically remains 'unchanged'; that is, new neighbourhoods are constantly added to the list while the older ones *remain*. For example, the very 16 neighbourhoods that were selected in 1982 as 'neighbourhoods in difficulty' when urban policy was *experimentally* initiated are still on the list. The same is true for about 500 neighbourhoods included since 1989 – they have practically all remained on the list since then.

Although the same spatial strategy (i.e., spatially targeting intervention areas) was in place since the early 1980s, it was in the third period that the exclusion of the neighbourhoods was absolutized. This points to a major trait of urban policy. The main issues that French urban policy is concerned with have not changed, but the way its intervention areas have been conceptualized and their representations have changed remarkably. Since the early 1980s, the shift of focus from 'social development' to 'security', from 'prevention' to 'repression', from 'right to difference' to 'the republican model of integration', and from '*autogestion*' to 'the republican pact' did not ensue 'naturally' from the changing nature of problems, but followed, to an important extent, from different discursive articulations of the spaces urban policy.

This brief account shows the naturalization of a certain spatial order (i.e. the geography of priority neighbourhoods of urban policy) and its different discursive articulations through state policies. The remaindering of the *banlieues* as a form of exteriority menacing the 'values and principles of the republic' is not merely the product of the state's discursive practices, but also about the becoming hegemonic of a certain spatial order, a form of injustice of spatiality as the hegemonic spatial order has become a source of stigma. Such a spatial order and its discursive register, to be sure, has been used by successive governments to legitimize increasingly repressive measures directed towards the *banlieues*. It has been, in other words, an integral part of the so-called 'securitarian ideology', said to be characteristic of the last four governments. Or better yet, it has been the *product* of this ideology, which contributed to the remaindering of the *banlieues* in the established 'police order'.

IV.

What is ultimately important for me is to dismiss the facile opposition between a plane of appearances and a plane of reality and to show […] how it is that the 'social' – a category supposedly intended to explain away and thereby refute the 'ideological' – is in fact constituted by a series of discursive acts and reconfigurations of a perceptive field.

[Rancière, 2000a: 117]

What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?… [W]hat we call ideology only achieves consistency by intervening in social space and in its production, and by thus taking on body therein. Ideology *per se* might well be said to consist primarily in a discourse upon social space.

[Lefebvre, 2000 [1974]. 55]

'The police', in its non-pejorative sense, is the name Rancière gives to orders of governance. It is based on a particular regime of representation, to which he refers to as 'the partition of the sensible', defined as 'that system of sensible evidences that discloses at once the existence of a common [i.e., the whole to be governed] and the partitions that define the respective places and parts in it' (2000b: 12). The partition of the sensible, as a system of sensible evidences, arranges the perceptive givens of a situation – what is in or out, central or peripheral, audible or inaudible, visible or invisible. The police, then, is not self-evident or naturally given, but rather a product of a particular regime of representation, or what Rancière calls sensible evidences. It is exemplary in this sense that one of the first measures the then French Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy had proposed, when he first took office in 2002 with a stated aim to 'restore the Republican order', was to modify the periodicity of the publication of figures of delinquency, and to make them publicly available more frequently (*Le Monde*, 31 May 2002).

Rancière's conceptualization of the police as consolidated through the putting in place of sensible evidences suggests a way of looking at state policies. State policies put in place certain sensible evidences (policy documents, spatial designations, mappings, categorisations, namings and statistics) that help to consolidate a particular spatial order and encourage a particular way to think about it. In the French case, the spatial order that state policies helped to consolidate with its designations of intervention areas (the *banlieues*) became officially so accepted that when the French Intelligence Service decided to engage with the question of *banlieues*, it was the list of urban policy neighbourhoods that they took as a starting point. When the Ministry of Justice engaged with the issue with a stated aim to restore the law, its measures aimed at the same neighbourhoods. Similarly, other repressive measures (like security contracts, Sarkozy's flash-ball guns, etc.) and growing anxieties about the 'values of the republic' were all guided by the same spatial imaginary, which became the basis for the consolidation of what I call the 'republican penal state' from the 1990s onwards (Dikeç, 2007).

Arguably, the most perverse consequence of the consolidation of this spatial order – the police – has been the constitution of *banlieues* as spaces that somehow do not fit, excluded, dangerous, deviant – as, in other words, a form of exteriority that menaces the integrity of 'the Republic'. By confining the 'other' into a geographical elsewhere, by closing the *banlieue* in itself, this constitution not only removed from perspective the structural dynamics of persistent inequalities – that is, shifted focus away from the remaindered to the remainder itself – but also reconfigured the 'givens' of the situation by representing the *banlieue in itself* as a problem. This has, furthermore, made it possible to debilitate potential movements of justice rising from

the *banlieues*; first, by legitimizing repressive measures and surveillance techniques, and second, by turning political claims into disturbances. Since the mid-1990s, no government has seen the recurrent *banlieue* revolts as anything more than pointless looting and burning, which was not the case in the 1980s and early 1990s.

To follow the remarks of Lefebvre that open this section, ideology may be seen as a discursive reconfiguration of social space, which establishes the terms of a discourse with which problems are identified, solutions shaped, measures legitimized, and claims articulated. This social space, however, is not naturally given, although it may seem to be naturalized. The sheer contingency of the established order may be questioned by opening up new discursive spaces organized around different discursive terms, which could form the basis of new political formations that act on the police. It is in this sense that a notion of 'spatial justice' can be mobilized as a critique of systematic exclusion, domination and oppression, which are reproduced, among other things, by the police order that has been consolidated.

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