Struggles, territories and spatial justice

Judicaëlle Dietrich | Elise Roche | Thomas Zanetti

Traduction | Translation **John Crisp**

Judicaëlle Dietrich : senior lecturer, université Lyon 3, UMR 5600 Environnement Ville Société

Email address: judicaelle.dietrich@univ-lyon3.fr

Elise Roche : professor, université Lumière Lyon II, Laboratoire Triangle, UMR 5206

Email address: elise.roche@univ-lyon2.fr

Thomas Zanetti : senior lecturer, université Lyon 3, UMR 5600 Environnement Ville Société

Email address: thomas.zanetti@univ-lyon3.fr

This issue on "Struggles, territories and spatial justice" is part of the recent surge in work on mobilisations and the geography of collective action, and seeks to build on analyses in these fields (Auyero, 2005; Ripoll, 2008; Mahoudeau, 2016). For more than a decade, there has been an increase in the number of books and journal issues focusing on these "particular forms of collective action" (Rui, 2010) from the perspective of their spatial dimension (Melé and Neveu, 2019; Pailloux and Ripoll, 2019). This field first emerged in English language geography (Miller, 2000; Miller and Martin, 2000) and in the sociology of social movements, where attention is given to the spaces in which mobilisations arise (Mathieu, 2012; Pailloux and Ripoll, 2019). "Mobilisation" is understood here as a moment when power relations arise between groups or collectives that are making demands that involve the government in one way or another (as mediator, object or target of the demands) (Mc Adam et al., 2001).

Within this established field of research, we aim to make new contributions to the literature by establishing the relationship between struggle and justice, by examining their territorial dimension, and by exploring them through the prism of

informality. How do struggles relate to spatial justice? Can the notion of territory be seen as a conceptual tool for thinking about struggles against spatial injustice? How do these struggles establish connections between power relations, positions and modes of action that form part of a continuum between informal practices and the dynamics of institutionalisation?

This issue looks at struggles that are driven by a desire for justice and by challenges to various forms of inequality (social, racial, economic, environmental, etc.). But what kind of justice do these mobilisations serve? To speak of "struggle" implies a dimension of protest, swimming against the tide, whereas the sociology of social movements more often refers to "collective action". While these two formulations can refer to comparable social movements, this choice of terminology encourages a focus on periods when these struggles coalesce or accelerate, contributing to the active transformation of "territory". Do the struggles that we consider to be territorial define their goals in terms of justice? We analyse struggles through the prism of territory and follow a dialectical line of reasoning: firstly, we consider how struggles are territorialised, by connecting material (or spatial), cultural (or symbolic) and political (or social) dimensions; and secondly, how a territory is produced by forms of collective action, whether informal or in the process of institutionalisation, whether those forms are autonomous or hybridised by interactions with public authorities.

Collective action is understood here in the broad sense of "protest politics" as defined by Doug McAdam and his co-authors (2001), and understood in terms of its capacity to transform territory(ies) and their government(s). This is because–and this is our third point of entry–these mobilisations in support of justice may be part of organised collective action, but the term "struggle" also evokes more spontaneous modes of action, which are partly covered by the concept of informality. In this sense, the struggles we are considering would be forms of territorialised collective action in which dialogue or collective protest take place outside social-democratic frameworks that involve identified protest actors and are encountered within set negotiating frameworks. Here we recognise what Asef Bayat (2013) and Ananya Roy (2009) describe as "insurgent" in reference to bottom-up forms of territorial transformation. This issue of the journal therefore looks at what mobilisations reveal about both the tension and the hybridisations between an informal construction of territory (bottom-up, spontaneous, emerging from civil society) and more institutionalised forms of planning (top-down, initiated and supervised by the authorities). In this context, informality and institutionalisation are understood as non-exclusive concepts that are highly porous and often hybrid (McFarlane, 2012).

Engaging and taking up positions in territorial struggles

The texts in this collection reflect the debates about the engagement and positionality of researchers, and raise questions about the possible specificity of work on struggle in this respect. The relative scientific literature invites researchers to reflect on where they "stand". These territorial struggles are often studied by researchers who identify with critical currents and who are committed to a high degree of reflexivity, particularly in the analysis of research biases. Indeed, over and above the mere condition of access to the field, the public nature of their position and participation in these struggles is inherent to their scientific approach. For ethical reasons, they reject any idea of neutrality, particularly when research is carried out in (conflicting) spheres of power. While the dual positioning–as academic and activist–that arises from this is often stated openly in English-language scientific literature (see, for example, Ferreri et al., 2024, p. 470; Tubridy, 2024), it may be viewed with suspicion and perceived as less legitimate by French political and academic institutions. The authors of the article proposals submitted for this issue also display a certain discretion as to their position during these struggles. More broadly, these questions of engagement are linked to the timeframes of research: while researchers are present at the start of struggles, in moments of turmoil and maximum visibility, there are fewer long-term investigations into the aftermath, the failures and momentum losses of these mobilisations (on this topic, see Lion [2024]). Moreover, producing research on these territorial struggles and exploring the emotions that emerge in them are also part of a process whereby the researchers involved seek to legitimise these aspects, which have long been denied or neglected in urban research.

The impact of spatial justice on struggles

How do territorial struggles define justice, and how do they advocate spatial justice? There has been a tendency for these struggles to be reduced to their local or neighbourhood character, and to NIMBYism. This caricature of an opponent fixated on their own interest to the detriment of the wider community (Sintomer, 2007) masks an analytical issue: what criteria of justice do participants in such struggles adopt, bearing in mind that shared frames of reference regarding justice also helps to set groups in motion and therefore to encourage the territorialisation of struggle?

The articles in this issue address the complexity of these territorial struggles and the issues of justice they raise. They point to injustices produced by structural systems of domination and "spatial violence" in which space is a means of perpetuating a "violent social order" (Allaverdian et al., 2023). These injustices are part and parcel of

spatial systems that support capitalist production of space (social inequalities produced by unlimited concentration of capital) and a variety of predatory or oppressive systems (such as apartheid, colonisation, over-exploitation of natural resources, etc.), and which are targets of protest. However, the readiness to fight does not necessarily imply a commitment to greater social justice. The defence of closed borders or territorial (e.g. national) preference exists, and its supporters mobilise in large numbers, particularly at the ballot box.

This issue of *JSSJ* brings together articles that attempt to analyse struggles that we consider to be territorial, and question injustices and state the criteria of justice at work (Rawls, 1971; Young, 1990; Bret, 2015). These texts also highlight how competing representations of justice can coexist at the heart of territorial struggles.

Understanding struggle through territory

This issue draws on a number of studies that have demonstrated the importance of the spatial dimension in the analysis of social movements. These contributions focused in particular on how space conditions the forms of collective action. For William Sewell, social movements are thus "shaped and constrained by the spatial environment in which they take place, but also participate in the production of new spatial structures and relations" (2001, p. 5). In order to look at the geography of mobilisation differently, we employ the notion of territory. Although it is much less widely used than the concept of space as a means to understand social mobilisation, it is not absent from French, English and Latin American literature.

Since the 1980s, French geography has been riven by debates about the use of "space" vs that of "territory" (Ripoll and Veschambre, 2004). These two notions, which are closely linked in French geography, are quite distinct and not interchangeable. For us, the term "territory" reflects a form of spatial appropriation (Le Berre, 1995) that arises from human action. As this appropriation can be contested, we envision territory as a battleground. The actions of a wide range of actors, pursuing either divergent or common objectives, possessing heterogeneous resources and employing evolving strategies, form the basis of a territory. Conceiving struggles in terms of territory directs attention to the people taking part in them, and raises the question of "the spatial dimension of power" (Klein, 1996, p. 36). Finally, the definitions of "territory" include an ideal or immaterial dimension, highlighted by cultural geography (Soja, 1971; Bonnemaison, 1981; Chivallon, 1999), in which territory relates to a system of representations and values that help to crystallise an identity.

Debates about these notions are also present in Anglophone literature, where the concept of space largely prevails, as Fabio Duarte showed in a 2017 book on space, place and territory. Our argument is in line with that of authors who see territory as a "tool of political *praxis* that is produced and contested" (Ince, 2012, p. 1646), recognising the agency of a diverse spectrum of social groups rather than confining it to the exercise of power over space by the state. In particular, this approach opens the way to analysing the production of territories by and through collective actions, some of which take place in a situation of conflict and can therefore be seen as territorial struggles.

Since this "return of territory" (Painter, 2010) in Anglo literature, which has also incorporated a feminist perspective (Jackman et al., 2020), a number of books and articles (Escobar, 2008; Agnew and Oslender, 2013; Routledge, 2015) have focused on how social movements are territorialised and how "territory" can add to the study of collective protest action, echoing an approach that has been fruitful in Latin American literature (Sandoval *et al.*, 2017; Halvorsen, 2018), and in particular in the work of Brazilian geographer Bernardo Mançano Fernandes. Drawing on his close links with the landless rural worker movement in Brazil, he developed the concept of socio-territorial movements (Fernandes, 2005), in conjunction with the work of Jean-Yves Martin (2001).

In this issue, we seek to understand struggles as territorialised collective actions that develop over time and in confrontation with other organisations (including institutions) through the implementation of political objectives that require both spatial and ideological appropriation. Territorial struggles are therefore defined by the combination of spatial configuration and appropriation, an intangible cultural substratum, political action and evolving embeddedness over time.

Struggles are territorialised first and foremost through the implementation of political projects, in the context of a confrontation with the projects of the state and of capital, reminding us that territory is always the product of a balance of power (Raffestin, 1980). According to Sam Halvorsen, Mançano Fernandes Bernardo and Valeria Torres Fernanda, "the relationship between a socio-territorial movement and the state (at different scales of government) is central because of the mutual dependence or antagonism that can arise once a movement reaches sufficient size to claim significant political and economic resources" (2019, p. 1466). Territorial struggles therefore arise from the interactions between actors, and from the spatialised confrontation between social mobilisations and an authority, often public authorities.

The territorial struggles studied in this issue stand out for the importance they assign to challenging market mechanisms, which also play a part in the transformation of territories outside institutional frameworks: the making of the city is thus seen as

the product of a neoliberal conception of society (Hackworth and Moriah, 2006; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Jessop, 2002). The state plays a major role in increasing the market powers (e.g. the housing market). The blurring of responsibilities inherent in neoliberal urban policies (Swyngedouw, 2011) can be seen in these struggles to remedy injustices. Moments of conflict help to reveal the norms and constraints of public action, as well as the ideologies that underpin them, and to deconstruct the mechanisms of legitimisation associated with them (Roy, 2011).

The territorialisation of struggle also produces political socialisation, for example through the circulation of individual experiences and the interplay of trajectories of political action, which encourage the development of activism. It thus reflects the politicisation of movements which, for the most part, do not originate in political engagement, but which progressively link social values to their spatial dimensions, where–in particular–issues of reproduction (working the land or procreation) and care for the private and domestic spheres (the home, whether temporary or permanent) may intersect. Far from being confined to the everyday, territorial struggles have larger political implications that are closely linked to demands for justice: the right to housing, maintaining a working-class presence in the city centre, interconnection, land grabbing and eviction, apartheid, etc. The shift from appropriating an area, often a familiar one, to creating a territory, reflects the growing generality of these demands.

The material dimension of territorial struggles is founded in variable spatial configurations whose boundaries are not fixed. Indeed, they are territorialised on scales of varying size, through a combination of long-term and temporary occupancies, and are distinguished by spatial dynamics of concentration or dispersal, and by movements that run from a periphery to a centre or from a centre to areas of withdrawal. Struggles thus evolve out of the defence of threatened places as specific and circumscribed spatial units (Piveteau, 2010), to the appropriation of a wider space, thus contributing to their territorialisation. This spatial diffusion goes hand-in-hand with a circulation of practices and strategies of protest, particularly when the struggles analysed join with others in pursuit of more general demands. The material dimension of territorial struggles can then be seen in a tangible, recurring and visible practice of occupation (Ripoll and Veschambre, 2005), which turns appropriated space into a strategic resource to have demands for justice heard.

Nevertheless, this material appropriation of space is not enough for struggles to be described as "territorial". The territorialisation of struggle also lies in symbolic appropriation and in the construction of a collective identity that links a mobilisation to a territory (see Keith and Pile, 1993; Featherstone, 2008, Halvorsen et al., 2019).

Numerous studies have highlighted the role of affects and emotions in individual and collective engagement (Goodwin et al., 2001; Juris, 2008; Traïni, 2015; Dechézelles and Olive, 2016; Melé and Neveu, 2019) and attested to the factors associated with attachment to place in the construction of many social movements (Altman and Low, 1992; Stedman, 2003; Devine-Wright, 2009). The attachment process, which may be constructed over time, appears to be a source of emotions (anger, fear, sadness, etc.), which in turn trigger mobilisation (Guinard and Tratnjek, 2016). The territory is thus a medium (and a tool) for expressing collective emotions of opposition as well as being the object of expressions of attachment, which also fuel political projects.

Finally, in the articles collected in this issue we find a dynamic of long-term struggle and activist engagement which we consider characteristic of territorial struggles that are more broadly part of processes of territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation (Fernandes, 2005). The territorialisation of movements is inextricably linked to the temporal and spatial embeddedness of collective action. This action is thus rooted both in a history, through the protection of an individual or community legacy, or both, and in a projection of time. The struggles studied in these texts are a reaction to a situation that is visible at a given moment. However, they are also part of a longer timeframe, in which the object of struggle gives rise to the construction of a territorially-linked memory. In this way, each movement seeks to become part of a local or supralocal history that is partly chosen and mobilised for the purposes of the cause. This dimension of memory and this political history of the territory–sometimes at odds with official history–are a resource for the struggle. The timeframe of struggles is therefore central to the analysis of their process, whether the reference is to a history of struggle, or to a long-term link to, or embeddedness in, a territory. We can also see that the struggles analysed relate to long-term issues, so that time becomes a determining factor in their territorialisation.

Articulation of powers in territorial struggles, between ordinary making and informality

A product of the confrontation between protest movements and authorities, particularly public authorities, territorial struggles are part of the ordinary making of cities as defined by Jennifer Robinson (2006). So while they may sometimes coalesce in moments of particular visibility (demonstrations, one-off occupations), some of the mobilisations studied are part of a long-term, day-to-day process. Far from being organised mobilisations, the struggles analysed in this issue are also more often the work of "subalterns" or "dispossessed city dwellers" (Bayat, 2007, p. 581). They are

described here in their own right, as the studies proposed do not focus much on the institutional responses, though these can be glimpsed in the background.

To study territorial struggles is thus a way to analyse the "grey areas" (Yiftachel, 2009), the "arrangements" (Bayat, 2013; collectif Inverses et al., 2016) at the heart of the making of territory, where territory is discussed and disputed. Through the study of these mobilisations, characterised by a connection between informal and institutional dimensions, we are able to look at the plural, ordinary and negotiated nature of the production of territories (Bayat, 2013). This issue thus illuminates more specifically how struggles–localised disputes, defined over time and outside the arenas of public debate–contribute not only to producing territory, but also to blurring the processes–part institutional and part informal–by which it is produced.

The territorial struggles analysed by the authors in this issue take place at a distance from institutionalised repertoires of action (Tilly, 1984). They frequently combine practices that have taken full account of legal constraints with other, more forceful practices that may be illegal or, more often, in a "grey area". They use modes of action that are generally informal and not much institutionalised, hybridised with more formal and regular forms of opposition.

This issue therefore shows how territorial struggles contribute to challenging forms of government while remaining outside institutionalised frameworks, in other words by means of informal practices. The articles also highlight the extent to which public action is itself steeped in informality. This fact, already well established in the literature, is central to the triggering of certain struggles. In several texts, the role of the state is characterised by the use of arbitrary or bureaucratic practices that may benefit private actors. It can also be reflected in authoritarian practices, both in urban projects and in processes of everyday legal violence and in police action. In struggles for greater justice, informality thus appears to be the way activists actively create room for manoeuvre (collectif Inverses *et al.*, 2016) in order to make tactical (de Certeau, 1990) use of territorialised loopholes and potentialities.

Articles that link struggles and l territories

The struggles studied by the authors in this issue are particularly diverse, not confined to the neighbourhood arena, to the scale of development projects or to dense urban areas. Here, the analysis encompasses struggles taking place at the scale of public spaces, rural areas and unplanned, ordinary urban processes. The articles in this issue all look at the intersecting relations between struggle and territory, highlighting

the diversity of the issues of justice that underpin mobilisations and their dynamic hybridisation between the informal and the institutional.

Margaux de Barros's article looks at how racial discrimination and the socio-spatial segregation inherited from apartheid in Cape Town are driving mobilisation against gentrification and tenant evictions. On the basis of the demand for greater justice in housing matters, one-off or longer-term occupations have helped to broaden the struggle and have reflected the territorial dimension of the repertoire of action employed by the Reclaim the City movement. Indeed, beyond the simple physical appropriation of space through informal actions, the struggle has been territorialised by the staging of working-class identity in the Woodstock district, through the symbolic dimension of the occupation of a public hospital in the city centre, the territorial marking of protest slogans or the practice of "escrache" (localised shaming).

The practices of the Réquisitions Collective, analysed by Annaelle Piva and Oriane Sebillotte, also oppose social and economic injustices in the housing sphere in Paris, giving rise to a "territory of struggle for the right to a home [which] arises from the seizure of space, however ephemerally". The latter is seen as a means of territorialising the struggle, raising its profile and attracting media attention, and creating a balance of power with the local authorities. So, occupations of public buildings are not just a way to respond to the needs of homeless people. They contain a broader political dimension that challenges the prevalence of vacant properties and the primacy of exchange value over use value, and which makes it possible to "[make] territory through struggle". Finally, the authors show that interactions with public authorities and the progressive institutionalisation of collective action resulted in the protesters losing their capacity for self-organisation–a capacity developed through informal initiatives–and becoming demobilised.

Lucile Garnier's paper illustrates the role in the territorialisation of a struggle played by the politicisation of a movement that began with the occupation of a circumscribed area and subsequently grew in scale. It shows how the defence of the Bas-Chantenay gardens and their everyday uses against a development project became part of an arena of opposition to the metropolisation of Nantes. It also describes how a struggle produces territory by making the most of proximity and ordinary practices such as gardening by (re)activating "attachments [...] projected onto the qualities of a protection area tended by a neighbourhood community"; and how, by embedding the demands of the present in the long history of a familiar territory, the support of "a collective identification that gives meaning to the co-presence of local residents and politicises their day-to-day experience". Bonds of proximity and

pre-existing communities play an essential role in triggering social movements (McAdam, 1982; Lichterman, 1996).

The territorialisation of struggle is thus partly a matter of mechanisms of collective identification, which connect with affective links to the territory and its symbolic power (Piveteau, 1995). In his article, Alexis Gumy notes how the confrontation between demands for mobility justice, on the one hand, and environmental protection, on the other, is based on diverging understandings of identity and competing representations of the territory and its development. In the Chablais region, a pro-mobility organisation–mainly made up of local entrepreneurs–supports a road link, whereas an association of residents from a variety of backgrounds (hunters, walkers) favours the "enclavement" of the Chablais as a resource. These two groups build their mobilisations from informal resources, different forms of practical expertise and their members' "autochtony capital" (see Retière, 2003; Berthomière and Imbert, 2020), with the aim of persuading the public authorities to legitimise "a territorial vision that is consonant with their lifestyles".

Philippe Lavigne Delville and Momar Diongue use the case of real estate projects in rural areas on the outskirts of Dakar, Senegal, to demonstrate the legal opacity that underlies the practices of land predation by public institutions. The struggles studied here concern the appropriation of land long-occupied for farming and sacred practices (cemeteries). The article explores a territorial struggle in which different types of law (legal, customary, etc.) come into competition, the outcome of the misuse of the legal framework by public institutions. It also looks at the need for collectives to employ unofficial networks in order to access information and documents. The publicising of the conflict by village collectives thus becomes a means of opposing land grabs. The authors' work highlights the distributive and procedural issues at stake in struggles against land dispossession, the use of the law as a means of dealing with injustice, and the continuum of informality in the practices involved in identifying injustice and contributing to struggle.

Finally, Céline Allaverdian's interview with Tania Li, which appears in the Public Space section, airs a rich discussion of situations of injustice that are not opposed and that link local conditions with global issues. The lack of action and of recourse to law in the Indonesian case in question are presented as an ordinary situation in a context of injustice and land grabbing (or even predation) in rural areas which, because of the spatial and political conditions, cannot be constructed as territories. Tania Li highlights the importance of local conditions (complex and rare) in making it possible (or impossible) for a territory to mobilise and emerge. The absence of mobilisation does not, however, prevent a feeling of injustice. It also shows how informal practices are

equally a form of recourse, a way of maintaining the use of certain places or practices under conditions of survival.

The contributions gathered in this issue shed light on the territorial issues at stake in the struggle for greater justice. The articles describe and analyse mobilisations that encompass spatial, political, temporal, cultural, sensory and symbolic characteristics, constructing the territory both as a frame and as a stake. These proposals thus express the heuristic potential of the notion of territory as a way to capture collective action at the intersection of informal and institutional dynamics.

To quote this article

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