For historians, just as much as for political scientists, the concept of authoritarianism is deeply bound up with the related ideas of democracy and, in particular, 20th century totalitarianism. In political science this has often evolved into debates over classification, e.g. what regimes were truly “totalitarian” or truly “fascist”. Yet, while issues of taxonomy are important when comparing nations quantitatively and synchronically, they become less salient when considering dynamics of change over time. Thinking historically about the relationship between authoritarianism and globalization, our attention is drawn away from fixed definitions and towards the ways in which regimes secure their authority over time. The way in which they do so develops in response to changing internal and external contexts and challenges, not least that of globalization. The idea of globalization has also been embraced by historians in recent years, but in ways that emphasize the evolving nature of transnational forces, linkages and flows since (at least) the last five centuries when not one, but several “globalizations” and “de-globalizations” are deemed to have taken place.¹

This piece approaches these topics from the perspective of an historian – by focusing on processes of change – and in relation to two important but neglected dimensions: the engagement of authoritarian regimes in international systems, and the interaction between authoritarianism and global population movements.

In meeting the challenges of these transnational processes, the nature of regimes is necessarily transformed. Authoritarian regimes are successful first and foremost because they evolve. To capture these dynamics it is necessary to have more fine-grained tools than the binaries of authoritarian-non-authoritarian allow for, tools capable of taking change into account even as regimes continue to retain their essential authoritarian nature.

Thinking historically about globalization also directs our attention to the shifting position of nations in a global system and the changing nature of the flows and interactions between them, so that we can say that global processes affect states differentially according to their location: migration, for instance, raises distinct challenges for labor-exporting countries and for those which are importers of labor, as discussed below. Equally, challenges facing regimes differ according to their place in broader geo-strategic systems such as the global Cold War—Cuba’s relationship to the USSR was naturally distinct from that of Albania’s. The variability across time and space of the influence of a particular type of globalization on any regime, authoritarian included, means that their responses will be equally diverse.

Highlighting issues of change, variability, and the importance of context are some of the means by which historians can contribute to the way the social sciences engage with the more abstract concepts of authoritarianism and globalization. Yet, the historical perspective’s ambition to map the particular and historians’ aversion to generalization can, if taken to an extreme, result in the kind of project satirized in Umberto Eco’s essay on the difficulties of creating a 1:1 map of the world.

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2 For a lucid statement of the importance of the historical perspective to understand contemporary global processes, including in the ways highlighted here, see Michael Woolcock, Simon Szreter, and Vijayendra Rao. "How and why does history matter for development policy?" The Journal of Development Studies 47.1 (2011): 70-96.
Focusing on what regimes do, rather than what they are is a way out of this problem of perspective, allowing us to relate the ideal types of political science to the critical issue of change dear to historians. Historical sociologists, more than historians *tout-court*, have been particularly attentive to the historicity of regime forms. While Barrington Moore’s foundational work in this area focused more on the origins of authoritarianism than its evolution or nuances, the challenge of accounting for dynamics of change has been taken up in two extensive bodies of work that take a global perspective on such themes, those of Michael Mann and Charles Tilly. The latter’s relational regime model offers a particularly useful framework with which to approach the issue of authoritarian evolution in a global context.³ Tilly’s model sees both authoritarian and democratic regimes as variations on a spectrum combining at least four areas of relationship between states and populations:

- a) the degree of inclusivity of the ‘citizen’ category (*breadth*)
- b) the extent to which citizens are equal/unequal in relation to both each other and treated as such by the state (*equality*)
- c) the degree to which citizens are protected from arbitrary action from the state (*protection*)
- d) the extent to which there are mechanisms of binding consultation (*consultation*)

At any one point in time a given regime can be characterized by how it conducts each of these relationships—how inclusive it is and the terms of that inclusion, comprising both issues of distribution and legal process; and the extent to which it is responsive to interests and demands of its population. The particular arrangements of each regime depend on its historical trajectory, on the balance of forces between social actors within it, and on the capacity of the state to enforce its authority. All of these factors are, naturally, liable to be influenced by external factors that could come under the heading of globalization, from war to trade to environmental change. At some point when a given regime conducts these four types of relationships towards the ‘more’ end (more breadth, more equality, more protection and more consultation) we begin to describe them as democratic. Yet the boundary between authoritarianism

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³ This model is presented in a number of his works, but perhaps most succinctly in Charles Tilly, *Democracy*, Cambridge University Press (2007), pp.11-15.
and democracy conceived in these terms is fluid, and nations can de-democratize as well democratize while remaining in the zone of authoritarianism.

The temporality inherent in Tilly’s model is particularly useful when considering the responses of authoritarian regimes to the challenges of globalization; in adapting to them regimes may become more inclusive or responsive in one area as a means of securing legitimation (both external or internal), whilst preserving authoritarian power in other areas. The model is also neutral as to causes—being more of a dynamic typology than a theory of regime types and change—which also allows us to use it in an open-ended way to develop and compare multiple causal hypothesis and broader theories.

The paragraphs that follow explore some of the ways in which we can use Tilly’s model to think historically about the effects of globalization on authoritarian regimes. Yet, a word of warning—this cannot be taken as a comprehensive survey of History’s engagement with the questions of authoritarianism and of globalization, both extensive subjects of scholarship. Not even of the field of the history of authoritarianism and globalization which, although much smaller, is still wider than this short essay allows. Instead, as a way of example it explores two topics within globalization—internationalism and global migrations—seldom considered but relevant to contemporary authoritarianisms.

Authoritarian internationalism

Nationalism was a key axis for authoritarian legitimation and political mobilization in the 19th and 20th centuries, as it was for liberal, civic nationalism. It was also a political language that became quickly global, aided by the reach of European empires. But while nationalism is today understood as a transnational phenomenon, we have been perhaps slower at exploring the history of authoritarianism in a similar light. The universalism of democracy and the diffusion of democratic constitutionalism are well-rehearsed topics, but the way in which authoritarian regime forms have crossed national boundaries and been adapted and transformed into local contexts is less well studied—with the possible exception of work on global dimensions of communism.
and international socialism. Examination of the question of what could be called “authoritarian internationalism” has been rare.

Like other states, authoritarian regimes have had to negotiate their position and exchanges in a globalizing world. To do so, internationalism—understood as “an idea, a movement, or an institution that seeks to reformulate the nature of relations among nations through cross-national cooperation and exchange”—is not a strategy available exclusively to liberal regimes. The ‘top-down’ internationalism of the Cold War, where the international order of the two power blocs was of critical importance in creating, supporting and (in some cases) transforming authoritarian regimes in their orbit has been the subject of recent syntheses that also draw attention to the capacity of the periphery of the Cold War to influence developments in the “core”. But of increasing resonance in a multipolar world are cases of “horizontal internationalism” between authoritarian regimes. On one hand, this describes diplomatic and political interactions between regimes on a more even plane than the vertical influence of the global superpowers, as in the cases of the mid-20th century non-aligned movement or pan-Africanism. On the other, it also describes a much broader transnational circulation of ideas, policies, and expertise between authoritarian states.

This second mode of horizontal internationalism is as critical as the first when thinking about authoritarian adaptation and long-term survival. One area provides an apt example encompassing both issues of transnational diffusion and regime transformation—authoritarian social policy. A recent survey shows how, globally and historically, non-democratic regimes have most often been the first to introduce welfare systems in their territories. These include healthcare, pensions and other

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6 Natasa Miskovic, Harald Fischer-Tiné, Nada Boskovska (eds.): The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi - Bandung - Belgrade (Routledge, 2014)
forms of social insurance or protection. The introduction of social policies by authoritarian regimes can expand the category of citizen, by covering new populations (Tilly’s dimension of breadth); it can alter the internal dynamics of relations between citizens (equality). Of course, authoritarian welfare systems can, and often are, used to generate new types of inequality, even as they include a broader proportion of the population and, in some cases, ameliorate the overall impact of social deprivation. For instance, authoritarian welfare systems can help legitimate and sustain authoritarian regimes, establishing clientelistic relations with that Partha Chatterjee has termed ‘political society’ as opposed to the western liberal ideal of a ‘civil society’.8

My own current research explores the transnational circulation of ideas, technologies, expertise and experts between authoritarian regimes in what could be called “Latin Atlantic” between 1930 and 1980—Brazil, Argentina, the Iberian countries and Italy (until the fall of Mussolini).9 Regimes in this transnational political and social space suffered significant transformations in this half century that took them through various forms of state-society relations that would be difficult to pin down to even rather sophisticated models of regime-type—personalism, bureaucratic authoritarianism, military dictatorship, or populist presidentialism. It would be easy to get tied up in categorization and periodization of regime types without acknowledging fundamental continuities and evolutions in these regimes. One of the evolving features of these regimes was their construction of systems of welfare and economic management that, aside from specificities of regime type, evolved to condition state-society relations and social inequalities throughout the middle of the 20th century, shaping legacies that have endured beyond democratization. Elsewhere I have argued that the development of systems of social citizenship combining influences from fascist corporatism and from international organizations partially account for the persistence of the Iberian authoritarianism in the second half of the 20th century.10

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9 The international dimensions of fascism have been the subject of a few studies, the most recent being Federico Finchelstein, Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945, Duke University Press (2010) and David Aliano, Mussolini’s National Project in Argentina, Farleigh Dickinson University Press (2012)
The key question my works follow is how the production of a form of authoritarian internationalism in this period shaped the evolution of the political regimes that connected to these global processes. The welfare regimes of countries in the “Latin Atlantic” have often been noted for their structural similarities. But the origins of these similarities lies not in a primordial shared culture, but in the way in which the countries in question were embedded in multiple global networks, not all of which were ‘authoritarian’. Besides the authoritarian internationalism mentioned above, they were also shaped in interaction with North America and Europe powers, or with international organizations, from the United Nations to the World Health Organization. Critically, however, these regimes engaged with them as authoritarian regimes albeit at a time (perhaps like now) when international organizations placed a low premium on democracy as a condition for membership or as a necessary part of development.

Authoritarianism and global migration

Another topic linking the evolution of authoritarian regimes to transnational processes is global migration. In my own area of expertise, three features appear relevant. There is no doubt that Southern European dictatorships of the twentieth century relied on emigration as an escape valve for social tensions in their countries. Officially illegal, migration was nevertheless tolerated as way of relieving unemployment and rural poverty and a welcome source of foreign currency in the form of remittances. Migrant communities (Portuguese in Brazil, Italians in Brazil and Argentina) were also important in supporting the kinds of transnational authoritarianism discussed above by creating local “chapters” devoted to the dissemination of authoritarian ideology. Yet, at the same time emigration was not without its risks: it was in some ways an exercise in ‘exit’, in Albert Hirschman’s sense of the term, that also revealed the failure of the regimes to address the problems that provoked. Migration is also rarely a one-way ticket, and returning migrants bring with them ideas, information, and expectations that can also be a challenge to authoritarian regimes.

Migration within and into nations controlled by authoritarian regimes is another important area to consider, namely bringing large populations under the jurisdiction of states that deny them the status (and rights) of citizenship. We can observe this in the contemporary Gulf States, but also in the Chinese hukou system of registration. Created in 1958 as a tool of development planning, hukou was a system that established categories of citizens with differentiated entitlements, in this case between rural and urban populations, and tied them to local systems of state provision (Benefits were more generous in the urban areas so as to reward managerial and skilled working-class workers). In the last twenty or so years, the explosion of rural to urban migration, tolerated and necessary, but not officially sanctioned, has left millions in the grey area of not being officially local citizens of the areas they moved to, and therefore unable to access welfare, housing, the legal system, and at the mercy of the authorities who often deport large groups back to the provinces when they become troublesome. In this case, Tilly’s dimensions of breadth and equality of citizenship came into play. Inequality, initially designed by the Communist Chinese state to incorporate and gain the loyalty of professional and managerial groups, was overtime transformed into a system with different functions. After a rapprochement with the West in the 1970s, when China entered the global economy and re-directed its efforts towards export-led growth, the hukou was used to ensure that a growing industrial labor force would place only limited demands on the state by excluding them from more generous ‘urban’ rights. At the same time hukou was a means to control the industrial labor force, since troublemakers could always be removed from cities on account of not possessing the required residence permit, even as millions around them were tolerated for the sake of staffing China’s booming economy.\textsuperscript{13} China has also recently announced sweeping reforms to the hukou system, which will make it easier for many to access urban citizenship, especially in smaller, mid-sized cities.\textsuperscript{14} These measures were to a large extent driven by the fear that growing


inequality would undermine the regime’s legitimacy, but even as China expands the breadth of its most inclusive mode of citizenship and seeks to generate a degree of equality, party rule remains untouchable feature of the regime, at least for the time being.

Closing remarks

Looking at past instances of authoritarian internationalism or how longer histories of migration have affected authoritarian regimes are not a way to diminish the novelty of the challenges posed by contemporary processes of globalization. Yet neither does looking to the past interaction between local powers and global processes offer ready-made models for their future development. But this exercise does help us understand the genealogies of present-day authoritarianism and how their nature has been influenced by past forms of engagement with global processes. And, this may offer clues as to the ways they do so in the present. Perhaps most importantly, it directs our attention to the evolution of regimes in response to challenges — both internal and external — and towards analytical tools sensitive to such processes of change.

About the author: