
Legitimacy Crisis: Commonalities and Differences

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Today there is growing world-wide discontent about the way liberal democracy operates. The representation of this discontent varies from support given to authoritarian tendencies to increasing support for far-right parties, from decreasing tolerance of various social groups like refugees or women to discussions on limiting voting rights. When we look closer into this discontent, we might argue that there is a growing crisis of legitimacy. Legitimacy is a crucial concept for us to understand the foundations of modern society. It refers both to acceptance and to sharing of morality and belief. It allows for the possibility of both trust and recognition to inform social relations. Yet, these features may generate ambiguity as well as contradiction. We could identify these ambiguities and growing discontent in each ethnographic study discussed at the workshop on *Erosions of Legitimacy and Urban Futures: Ethnographic Research Matters* that was held in Sicily in 2017 under the auspices of the International Urban Symposium.

In this short contribution, I reflect on this discontent drawing on my Turkish ethnography. I also try to highlight how this links to the common themes that emerged from the discussions and consider some possible future scenarios. My ethnography on financialization in Turkey centres on the changing dynamics of citizenship, the analysis of which brings out complex three-party relationships among citizens, banks and the state. I examine the contradictory relationship between legitimacy and legality in this context focusing on the case study of actors and institutions that operate in the financial field. A key point is that ‘predatory acts’ by the banks are made legal through state regulation but are considered to be illegitimate by ordinary citizens.

In the modern democratic state, legality is supposed to be the main official source of legitimacy. However, the relationship between law and legitimacy appears to be ambiguous for two important reasons.

First, legality may well not be the only source of legitimacy. As discussed by several contributors to the workshop on the basis of their ethnographies, different moralities may inform ideas of what is legitimate and what is not legitimate. Anthropologists have highlighted these different moralities in their field (Pardo 1995, 2000, and contributions in Pardo ed. 2000 and 2004). Formally, when different moralities confront each other, the legal structure is the final decision maker. In practice, things may well be different. In my ethnography, as there was no regulation on credit card membership fees, the courts have decided in favour of citizens and against the banks. Then, the state produced rules on this issue which favour the banks. As a consequence, legal routes were closed for ordinary citizens. In this case, meeting a key argument on the morality of the law (Pardo 2000), the basic question to ask is, Who writes the law and in whose interest? The role of power relations in modern society becomes the key problematic, as the partnership between the state

and capital becomes more visible. This is important, especially considering that in this context citizens' ability to change, manipulate or question the powers-that-be is decreasing gradually. Power differences among the people and groups involved in these processes become observable in relation to the implementation of the law. In the Turkish case, as elsewhere (see contributions in Pardo and Prato 2010), the gap between the powerful and the less powerful has brought about a crisis of legitimacy.

Second, the borders of legality are not confined to the borders of the nation state, as various international and supranational powers have a say on legal issues. In the age of the global economy, international capital has a certain amount of influence on national decision-making processes. Sometimes, this influence can be observed directly as in the Greek case discussed by Spyridakis (2018). To stay on the Turkish case, I note that the share of foreign capital in the banking sector is relatively high. This also influences the way in which ordinary citizens see legitimacy. People are aware that as far as finance capital is concerned the main components of legitimacy, particularly accountability and control mechanisms do not function. They believe that, through voting, they have a certain amount of control over the actions of the government. There are however no control mechanisms over power groups, who, on the other hand, exert a strong influence on the country's affairs, and especially on its legislation.

These two processes can be clearly observed in the process of financialization in Turkey. Firstly, financialization has weakened the borders of nation state, which is significant, considering the Weberian concept (1978) that in democratic societies the idea of legitimacy is linked directly to the nation state and the rule of law. Secondly, the coalition between the state and capital has become more visible; in particular, when considering one fraction of capital, namely finance capital (Streeck 2014). Thirdly, the relationship between legality and legitimacy is seen as particularly questionable in a financial field where the law is interpreted and applied in the interest of finance capital. The visibility of financial capital and its links with the state have brought out a double problem for citizenship, as this has added an important feature to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and of full citizenship for those who have access and those who do not (Leyshon and Thrift 1995, Pardo and Prato 2010, Kear 2012). This has also contributed to a process of financialization that has increased the gap between rulers and the ruled (Pardo and Prato 2010). This combination of adverse processes has brought a crisis of democracy (Walby 2013) and the end of democratic citizenship (Streeck 2014).

A common theme that emerged from the workshop was that urban settings provide an opportunity to observe better the interaction between micro and macro processes, which is crucial for us to understand the empirical negotiations on legitimacy. Legitimacy, we agreed, not only needs to be earned; it must also be sustained through time and various circumstances. Urban settings offer opportunities to ordinary citizens with different moralities to interact and become actively involved in the dynamic process of legitimization. Hurtado-Tarazona (2018) shows that in Colombia this means becoming an integrated dweller in new housing complexes, while Boucher (2018) brings out ordinary people's engaging in discussions and

actions on the meaning of public space in Canada. In Turkey, becoming engaged in the process of legitimation means defending rights collectively through civil society associations.

Ordinary citizens, I have found, are most critical about the credit card membership fees. Why are they against these fees? Contrary to other cases, the credit card membership fee was introduced lately in Turkey (Aysan 2012). Since its introduction, it became a source of dispute among customers, banks and state. There was no specific regulation and both individual strategies and special deals with banks allow exceptions to take place. Citizens are trying to find a way to deal with this situation. Through NGOs and customer protection associations, they are calling for the state to take action against the ‘illegitimate behaviour’ of banks. In this case, ‘illegitimate behaviour’ refers to extra costs, including annual credit card membership fees and other payments and hidden fees. Individuals usually fight this ‘illegitimacy’ through the judicial system. The aforementioned court decisions in favour of citizens started to create an extra financial burden for the banks, which they try to avoid by appealing to the judicial system. The state did not intervene; it just watched what was going on. This dispute continued until 2014, when new regulation was introduced and the ‘illegitimate behaviour’ of banks was made ‘legal’, closing the way for associations and individuals to take legal action. In spite of these new regulations, people continue to ask for regulatory reform in favour of citizens, not the banks. It is, I note, precisely because in a modern democratic system it is the state that provides legitimacy through the rule of law that, despite all, Turkish citizens are still asking for state intervention into this controversial field.

The globally linked economy also emerged as a common theme among several contributions to the workshop. In particular, I found interesting that the effects of financial flows could be observed in various ethnographies. Although the relationship between the urban construction sector and the financial capital was not explicitly discussed, this relation is one of the forces behind the high rates of urbanization and rapid transformation, as in the case of Kenya (Koechlin 2018), Colombia (Hurtado-Tarazona 2018) and the U.S.A. (Krase and Krase 2018). The effects of the globally linked economy are clearly observable in the financialization in Turkey. There are 21 foreign capital banks in the country, accounting for around half of the total number of 47; they offer the kind of global banking products, like credit cards and all kinds of consumer credit, that are available in every country but they do so in accordance with the conditions in Turkey that I have outlined.

A key issue is, I reiterate, the relationship between citizenship and legitimacy. The widening gap between governors and citizens has been identified as one of the reasons behind the erosion legitimacy in democratic society (Pardo and Prato eds 2010). Citizens are widely resentful of their legally limited ability to control rulers, as discussed in the ethnographies from Italy (Pardo 2018), Albania (Prato 2018), Greece (Spyridakis 2018) and Turkey. They are cognizant of the interaction among local, national and international processes and they also question rulers’ right to make decisions that adversely affect their lives. As I have mentioned, the asymmetric relations between national governments and international powers such as the European Union and the centres of financial capital have increased the discontent among ordinary citizens. This kind of asymmetric relations also mars relations among

unequal citizens, businesses and, notably, also cities within a nation state. As power differences become observable in policy areas and are experienced in daily life, citizens lose trust in the establishment and its legitimacy. The legislation that has been passed in this field has generated a serious crisis, increasing ‘the gap between the ruled and the rulers’ (Pardo and Prato 2010).

As a result of this growing discontent, possible future scenarios are not optimistic. In my empirical experience, many ordinary people hold a pessimistic view of the future and it is from such a viewpoint that they tend to develop alternative frames of reference for what they regard as legitimate, as well as new value systems and practices. So, the relationship between the legality and legitimacy is turned on its head; here, being legally grounded does not grant legitimacy to the new regulation.

What would be the possible outcomes of these developments? Do we expect that legitimacy crisis to deepen? Do we need to talk about different ‘legitimacy’ claims? Do we need to recognize, investigate and understand the different dynamics that inform the processes of legitimation in specific contexts? As discussed in the workshop, people tend to search for possible sources of legitimacy. They turn to neighbourhood (Abraham 2018), or to civic/grassroots organizations (Boucher 2018, Krase and Krase 2018), or refer to different loyalties (Mollica 2018), or form ‘pirate’ alternatives to public services (Hurtado-Tarazona 2018). Overall, people at the grassroots create ‘different repertoires’ (Koechlin 2018), either to modify the dynamics of legitimation (Pardo 2018, Prato 2018, Uherek 2018) or to attempt for the redefinition of the border between legality and legitimacy as in the case of Italy (Pardo 2018) and Turkey. Therefore, the researcher has to consider different sources of legitimacy and different mechanisms of legitimation. Given the crisis of legitimacy generated by the processes that I have briefly discussed, a point of reference is probably needed for people to stay together as citizens of any particular state. Inevitably, in modern democratic capitalist societies, this point of reference is the legitimacy of the state; serious problems arise when this is questioned (Pardo 2010, 2018). I suggest that, in order to understand different ‘claims’ of legitimacy, we need to study in depth these processes and their impact on people’s view of what is legitimate and what is not legitimate. In this endeavour the ethnographic approach has a critical role to play.

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