
Legitimacy in Conviviality— Learning from Legitimacy: Ethnographic and Theoretical Insights

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The present era has been characterized as an age in which people are connecting with each other in a dimension different from the spaces in which they live, as typified by such developments as information technology (IT), the Internet of Things (IOT), and ‘blockchain’. However, another characteristic of the current age, the concentration of populations in cities as vast spaces of livelihood and conviviality, has become a prominent phenomenon worldwide. According to UN statistics on the global urbanization rate in 2018, 55% of the world’s population now live in urban areas. The proportion of the world’s population that lives in cities, which was only 30% in 1950, is projected to increase to 68% by 2050. Looking at sub-Saharan Africa, where I conducted my fieldwork, the annual growth rate for urban populations is 3.4%, nearly 2.5 times the world average. In other words, our contemporary world remains an age of cities, one in which the role of urban anthropology — to elucidate human life and urbanism in spaces where heterogeneous populations are concentrated — has become highly important.

When heterogeneous populations come together, the naturally resulting coexistence of different languages, cultures, values and preferences will inevitably result in the constant emergence of tension and conflict, or domination and anomie. In such contexts, there is a strong need for morality and social norms that can ease tensions arising from mutual differences, mediate conflict and resist domination. In urban society, these are ensured by the notions of *legitimacy* and *justification*. The collection edited by Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato on *Legitimacy* (2019) is the outcome of a drive to elucidate these notions and delve deeply into them in the lived context of urban societies around the world.

Modern political science has operated on the premise that justification and legitimacy are both fundamentally assured by the notions of justice and the rule of law presided over by the nation-state. Moreover, in the context of a contemporary world of increasing globalization, forms of universal legal justice have also been envisioned that transcend the legal systems of nation-states, as in the case of universal human rights. In the context of society as it actually exists, however, it is not at all uncommon for the course of events to diverge from such understandings and assumptions. Situations occur daily in which neither the so-called justice embodied in nation-states’ laws nor the justice supposedly enshrined in universal laws can be said to have legitimacy. Urban anthropologists and other researchers are engaged in urban fieldwork themselves in these lived contexts. The questions that such practitioners must tease apart, as summarized with lucid precision by Pardo and Prato (2019) in Chapter 1 of the aforementioned volume, are as follows. How is legitimacy separated out and given a moral foundation in conflict situations that involve multiple forms of legitimacy? If this legitimacy is engendered by specific cultural practices irrespective of the laws of the state, then by what

mechanism? How are the legitimacy and justification conferred, which modern laws derive from the state, articulated, appropriated and domesticated within the grassroots cultural practices of ordinary people? In order to conceptualize the fiercely conflicting desires for fluidity and stability on the part of people living in the contemporary urban world, this collection also serves as a record of an intellectual conflict in having attempted to use legitimacy as a key word for sharing these questions in a joint attempt to address this difficult problem.

Since the 1980s, I have been continuously engaged in urban anthropological research in Kenya, where my field sites have included informal urban settlements in and around Nairobi and the home villages of migrants who arrive in these settlements from Western Kenya. Since 2011, I have been coordinating a ten-year project on ‘African Potentials’, promoting collaboration between Japanese researchers and African scholars in the humanities and social sciences. For the first five years of the project, we were primarily engaged with conducting fieldwork at sites of conflict across Africa, working to learn the local wisdom employed to resolve conflict and tension arising from situations characterized by heterogeneous coexistence.

In domains such as ethnic conflict, religious conflict, and land issues, the differing ideas of ‘correctness’ (that is, justice, morality, values) respectively relied upon by opposing camps will often clash in an irreconcilable fashion. Within these lived contexts, we have studied the ways in which a legitimacy that can be accepted and shared by both parties can be created and then used as a basis for an attempt at problem-solving in such situations, based on specific cases in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa (including Nairobi, Harare, Juba, Yaounde, Addis Ababa, Kampala, Grahamstown and Accra). Many of our own attempts resonate and overlap with the results of the papers in this collection, and we gained considerable insight from the legitimacy-centred conflicts and practices that have occurred in cities elsewhere around the world.

I would like to mention a few of these learning moments, while citing several of the chapters. What these fourteen papers strove to verify in the context of lived practice around the world was the complicated process by which legitimacy is created by urban residents. Herein, we can confirm several levels. The first, overarching urban society, consists of the legitimate order and institutions of the modern nation-state. However, in the lives of many people, the legitimacy of the state and its institutions and laws do not enjoy universal acceptance (Atalay, Turkey). In order to overwrite this situation, legitimacy is generated in the everyday social and cultural practices carried out by ordinary people. Here, this kind of legitimacy is created in a dimension that is distinct from the legality institutionalized by the nation-state and the enforced legitimacy based therein (Pardo, Italy; Abraham, India). The situation is more complex, however, for the norms of their unique legitimacy autonomously engendered in the life worlds of urban citizens do not exist in a state of pure duality in which they simply conflict with the legitimacy of the state. This is because once people accept the institutions and legitimacy brought about by the state, they then reinterpret, recreate and re-appropriate these in ways they find to be expedient in their own lives (Prato, Italy and Albania, Krase and Krase, USA). Complicating this situation even further is the fact that the legitimacy thus engendered is not established as a fixed morality or set of norms; rather than something that functions in

perpetuity, it is constantly changing in accordance with circumstances and the times (Uherek, Czech Republic). While legitimacy in a certain lived context does take shape at the intersection of these three levels, such legitimacy will naturally not be uniform. It is precisely within the dynamic process by which these multiple forms of legitimacy coexist — complementing, competing with, and even rejecting one another (Mollica, Lebanon) — that we can recognize a new kind of agency on the part of urban citizens (Koechlin, Kenya).

I might add that this collection also represents a methodological challenge to fieldworkers approaching the question of legitimacy in urban settings. Krase and Krase, for example, suggest that when confronting intricate situations that pertain to legitimacy in urban settings, urban anthropologists must do more than simply resort to objectification. Instead, they persuasively demonstrate the possibility of researchers committing themselves to such situations and collaborating with community activities from an embedded subjectivity. This is certainly only one option, but an attitude of self-embeddedness and projection is a method that promises to be an important asset for the future advancement of research in the field of urban anthropology.

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