
Introduction: Debating Legitimacy

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Ethnographic research on the dynamics of legitimacy and legitimation is clearly both timely and futuristic, the latter adjective being justified by the foreseeable developments — too often, very worrying — of these dynamics across the democratic world. This Special Issue, published as a Supplement to *Urbanities*, springs from this belief. It is intended to enrich the ongoing multidisciplinary discussion. It offers to the readers of *Urbanities* this Introduction to the debate and sixteen essays by anthropologists, sociologists, historians and urbanists who draw on their diverse ethnographic knowledge and wide-ranging perspectives to address the thorny issue of legitimacy in response to the book on *Legitimacy: Ethnographic and Theoretical Insights* (henceforth, *Legitimacy* volume) recently published by Palgrave Macmillan in the Series ‘Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology’.

The book is a direct result of an intensive six-day workshop held in Sicily in September 2017.¹ It brings together the work of a strong field of fourteen social scientists. An introductory essay on the ‘Methodological and Theoretical Issues of Legitimacy’ (Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato) is followed by chapters on ‘The Legitimacy of Political Representation: Institutional Adaptations to Challenges from Urban Europe’ (Giuliana B. Prato); ‘A Conundrum of Democracy: Naples as a Test Case of Governance that Lacks Legitimacy’ (Italo Pardo); ‘Unemployment, Urban Poverty and Political Legitimacy: The Dark Side of Governance’ (Manos Spyridakis); ‘Legal but not Legitimate: Changing Practices of Financial Citizenship in Turkey’ (Z. Nurdan Atalay); ‘Changing Ideas of Legitimacy in Neighbourhoods: Reflections from a Town in Kerala’ (Janaki Abraham); ‘Privatization of Urban Governance and the Disputes for Legitimacy in a Social Housing Megaproject in Soacha, Colombia’ (Adriana Hurtado Tarazona); ‘Undermining Governmental Legitimacy at the Grass Roots: The Role of Failed Promises and Inflated Expectations of Community Accountability’ (Jerome Krase and Kathryn Krase); ‘Detachment and Commitment in the Competing Legitimacies Surrounding the Ephemeral Opposition to the Redesign of Viger Square, Montreal–Quebec’ (Nathalie Boucher); ‘In or Out? Claims and Practices of Legitimacy in Urban East Africa’ (Lucy Koechlin); ‘Citizenship and Legitimacy in India: Kolkata’s Anglo-Indian Experiences’ (Robyn Andrews); ‘Conflicting Loyalties and Legitimate Illegality in Urban South Lebanon’ (Marcello Mollica); ‘Mourning Through Protest in Seoul: Debates over Governance, Morality and Legitimacy after the Sewöl Ferry Disaster’ (Liora Sarfati); and ‘Morality, Ethics and Legitimacy: The Roma and their Legitimization of Power Relations in Everyday Life’ (Zdenek Uherek).

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Urbanities has long been committed to promoting the study of the empirical complexity and ramifications of legitimacy and foster debate on its theoretical significance. Several articles published in past issues and a *Supplement* to this journal (Pardo and Prato eds 2018) testify to the commitment of *Urbanities* to addressing this topic in the awareness of its growing importance in the social, economic, juridical and political sciences and of the magnitude of its significance in today's world. The aforementioned works expand on the sophisticated intellectual effort that originated in social anthropology in the mid-1990s (Pardo 1995, 1996), stimulating a small group of high-calibre scholars to engage in dedicated seminars and publications (Pardo ed. 2000a and 2000b; Pardo 2000, 2004), and has since involved a growing number of studies (see, for instance, Pardo and Prato eds 2011). This ongoing effort has helped to develop a theoretical framework that contributes to clarify the empirical significance of the complex ramifications of legitimacy and the processes of legitimation in the political, economic and moral life of today's urban world.

The complex, highly problematic and often rocky dynamics that mark these processes and their ramifications are absolutely central to democratic society, electing, we have argued, legitimacy to the status of a 'keystone' of democratic society 'that makes structurally sound, and fair, the complex interaction among morality, values, interests and responsibilities that determine our associated life . . . In the absence of this keystone, the spectre of authoritarianism arises' (Pardo and Prato 2019: 19). It ought to go without saying that, as associated life in democratic society changes, so does legitimacy: the keystone that prevents society from falling apart.

Today, as the long-festering acute crisis of rulers' responsibility and accountability that mars many democracies has become evident, the legitimacy of the traditional democratic set up has become increasingly questioned. Citizens' grounded distrust in rulers who, often blatantly distrust and dismiss them, is visibly growing, raising fundamental questions that point directly to the dynamics of morality, action, law, politics and governance in the articulation of what is legitimate and what is not in our society. Significant examples, unfortunately, abound. One is given by the Italian rough treatment of the fundamental division of power that, since the early 1990s, has polluted the political system. Notably, until recently, powerful groups' legal but widely questioned manipulation of political competition and the democratic process has allowed, among other things, a succession of unelected governments to rule the country. Another example lies in the grassroots motivations of the American voter that marked the last US Presidential election. Other examples are offered by the strong ways in which similar motivations are reflected among most of the Britons who voted to leave the European Union and of the French, Austrian, German, Dutch, Hungarian, Czech, Polish and Italian electors who amply support 'anti-establishment' parties that just cannot be (conveniently) dismissed as 'populist'. Of course, while acrimony and its many expressions may satisfy some, it solves nothing and may even end up working as appeasement in disguise.

Dissatisfaction with the élite in power is igniting grassroots protests of assorted types. Every day there are reports from across the world of objectively justified grievances that expose

power that lacks legitimacy, in many cases so much and blatantly so that rule is received and seen to be authoritarian, as opposed to authoritative (Pardo 2000, Pardo and Prato 2019). Unmistakably, such grievances bring to light the obnoxious ways — obnoxious, that is, to reason and citizenship rights — in which dominant élite exercise power. As discontent generates grassroots opposition to rulers' rhetoric and behaviours, citizenship is confronted with the appalling spectacle of 'the powerful' panicking into combating unlikely strawmen, inventing inexistent threats, implementing authoritarian actions and hollow accusations of populism, and worse, that demonstrate a dearth of credible, sustainable arguments and implementable actions that meet the fair demands of a justly exasperated citizenship.

It is almost a moot point that now, more than ever in the recent history of democratic society, discontent and its roots have acquired urgent and critical importance. But, moot or not, this is a point that must be raised. This is indeed a point that we must argue robustly, if we accept that one of the duties of the engaged intellectual is to study mankind in order to improve mankind. 'What will happen to us?' is a question being asked around the world, and it is the responsibility of the ethnographically-informed scholar to help answer the question with particular attention to the morality of what is broadly deemed as legitimate. Discussions of morality are notoriously sensitive, if not controversial. For many years a select number of scholars have engaged in this overall debate consistently addressing this question with strong scholarship and logical presentations. They animated the cited publications with warnings on worrying developments that are now for all to see. Drawing on ethnographic evidence, the cited publications have unequivocally pointed to the nature and complications of the growing gap between the rulers and the ruled and have warned against the consequent dangers. Now, such long-ignored worries and warnings have evidently come to bear as this gap has often grown into an unbridgeable chasm. Perhaps naturally, this problematic is especially evident in the urban field.

It is of such urgent and critical importance that the contributors to this Supplement are cogently aware. And it is in such awareness that they have endeavoured to offer their reflections to this ongoing debate. Like the publications that have preceded it, this new collection aims to offer a disenchanting view that firmly eschews conforming to fashionable trends, however convenient such conforming may be. This collection acknowledges that the empirical reality of today's crisis of legitimacy must be addressed, seriously and in depth. The essays that follow have been written specifically for this Supplement by scholars from various disciplines who engage in the analysis of the realities, ramifications and complexity of the dynamics of legitimacy, legitimation and, indeed, de-legitimation.

The significance of an ethnographic understanding of the changing nature of the legitimacy across time runs through most of the reflections brought together in this Supplement. Niccolò Caldararo addresses this issue with reference to a number of cases from ethnohistorical sources and cross-culturally. His anthropological analysis of recent American housing conflicts illustrates how ideas of legitimacy have been challenged by tenants and property owners, when threatened by eviction or development. Caldararo investigates the relation of law and power to

legitimacy in the context of changing community interests and their political recognition. He looks at the use of the media and developer's ideology of hierarchies of use in the context of delegitimizing community resistance to change and at the nature of delegitimation and its construction to confuse communities and defuse public support for local issues. The changing nature of legitimacy and the problematic relationship between governance and the governed are brought out by the historian Peter Jones, who recognizes the key point that legitimacy entails a capacity of a state to sustain political order. He notes, for example, how the collapse of Communist ideology in the late 20th century and the associated policies and governance represented a crisis of *legitimacy* not only of the Soviet Empire as a political entity but also a crisis for the revolutionary ideology of Marxism and the various Communist Parties of Western Europe. He develops an important methodological argument drawing primarily on his historical research and on Prato's essay in the *Legitimacy* book. Jones offers a comparative historical analysis of legitimacy and its complications, revealing in the process stimulating common ground between socio-cultural anthropology and history and especially, he argues, the benefit of socio-cultural anthropology to history. The anthropologist's fieldwork method, Jones points out, could provide a template for the historian conducting archival research of primary sources. He notes that historians have long been wedded to the narrative form and that their interest in momentous events has led to a search for turning points or great moments which became their stock-in-trade. Stimulated by the *Legitimacy* volume, he argues that the insights of anthropologists can lend weight to new histories outside the narrative of events and their alleged consequences.

The importance of gaining an ethnographic understanding of the culture conundrum brought out world-wide by the dynamics of legitimation and de-legitimation resonates strongly in the contribution of the qualitative sociologist Bella Dicks, who draws on her specialism in the field of cultural heritage and experience as Head of Research at the National Museum of Wales to discuss the currently-dominant instrumental approach to culture in relation to UK museum funding. She takes inspiration from the *Legitimacy* volume to examine the social processes through which competing sources of legitimacy are constructed for cultural institutions. Dicks addresses the key question why people do and do not choose to participate in, and thereby legitimise, the formal spaces of engagement offered by museums and galleries, whether through outreach work or inside visitor sites themselves. Noting that a full picture of how citizens themselves construct the legitimacy of museums using their own criteria and practices is missing, she argues the unique value of ethnographic knowledge on the striated dimensions of public participation in the formal cultural sphere of museums, galleries and other cultural institutions. Dicks makes a compelling case for future research into the ground-level legitimacy of cultural institutions, especially where governments are now seeking to instrumentalise culture for economic, policy and ideological ends.

The problems raised by ideological or ill-thought-out top-down policies resonate strongly in James Rosbrook-Thompson's essay. He draws on the intellectual challenges raised by debate on legitimacy to address the UK government's adoption of a public health approach to urban

violence. Based on the findings of three years' ethnographic fieldwork carried out among front line professionals such as police officers, youth workers and youth offending teams, Rosbrook-Thompson frames a set of questions relating to the public health approach and how it is perceived by those tasked with its implementation. He argues that consent for the approach is both partial and conditional, with many respondents being cynical about the reasons for its endorsement by politicians. This stems from the approach's compatibility with ongoing austerity measures and a failure to address the role of structural inequality in urban violence, which links to Daina Cheyenne Harvey's analysis of the fragility of legitimacy. Harvey examines categorical shifts in legitimacy, and the relationship between capitalism, class and legitimacy. He looks at legitimacy in times of social disorder to highlight some central issues of the text, with specific reference to his work on the long-term aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana and the crisis of legitimacy that ensued the widespread abandonment of the Lower Ninth Ward by local, state and federal government. Ultimately, he poses several questions for legitimacy scholars to consider moving forward, pointing especially to distortions of citizenship, such as those exemplified in many societies by the unconscionable fabrication of 'liminal' citizens or what Pardo (2019) calls 'second-class' citizens.

The relationship between citizenship and governance is a critical dynamic of democratic society (Pardo and Prato eds 2011) that, more or less explicitly, runs throughout the *Legitimacy* volume and interests the contributors to this Supplement. Recognizably key to this debate, Anna Waldstein discusses legitimacy in relation to three anthropological conceptualizations of citizenship: biological citizenship, cultural citizenship and spiritual citizenship. Referring to various chapters in the *Legitimacy* volume and other related literature on citizenship, she draws on her ethnographic work with Jamaican migrants in the United Kingdom to consider the legitimacy of the different citizenships that migrants enact in a hostile environment created by unlawful government policies. Windrush generation migrants, like others, have forced the Home Office to recognize their legitimacy as British residents and citizens. Thus, Waldstein argues, work in the anthropology of legitimacy gives us hope that citizens of all sorts will ultimately retract the legitimacy of governments that act unlawfully. There is a direct link, here, to Pamela Stern's historical and contemporary research on the Canadian state's understanding of the Inuit. In the Cold War era, her anthropological work shows, the Canadian state understood the concentration of Inuit, an indigenous people, into government administered towns and villages as both a problem to be tackled and an opportunity to assert its sovereignty over northern peoples and their lands. While many Inuit were pleased to have access to government services, including healthcare and housing, residential concentration exposed them to capricious administration and naked racism. In part, to legitimate its control over Inuit lives and lands the Canadian Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources employed young anthropologists and geographers to document what it regarded as Inuit problems of adjustment to living in the new communities. In her essay, Stern reports on the experiences of one young anthropologist sent to the Mackenzie Delta region of the Northwest Territories.

The intersection of urban governance and cultural practices is at the centre of Andrés Salcedo's comparative analysis of legitimacy and placemaking processes in Bogotá. He draws on his anthropological fieldwork to argue that low-income workers understand legitimacy as their right to protect their housing environment in areas where city planning has imposed legal but damaging urbanization. Upper-class groups, he goes on to say, have forged a socially legitimated entitlement to preserve an exclusive, safe and beautiful enclave by creating legal agreements that favour their perceived interests and enforcing practices of social exclusion. On the streets of Bogotá, an intricate proliferation of social norms tied to the naked rule of violence seems to render law and rights useless. For example, linking to a central issue in urban anthropology (Pardo 1996: Ch. 2 and 2017; Seligman 2012; Marovelli 2014) Salcedo tells us how street vendors negotiate their claims over informal work spaces in the face of city programmes aimed at recovering public space, whereas transsexual and heterosexual sex workers face both the surveillance, abuse and exploitation of powerful bosses and health-oriented public programs aimed at controlling them instead of enforcing their rights to dignifying living and working conditions.

The qualitative sociologist, Judy DeSena, engages with the key issue that presently, around the world, there is failed legitimacy through broken democracies that lack effective leadership and governance. Most important, she points to the fact, too often unforgivably underestimated and underreported, that ordinary people have grown frustrated with those in power inciting mass protests and other forms of activism. DeSena highlights the conflict between élites and masses on a local level. In New York City, she suggests, ethnographic research on gentrification and large-scale development indicates that neighbourhoods have been reconfigured and refashioned with new residences, which has led to a crisis of adequate services greatly affecting the quality of life. It is in this regard that DeSena focuses on neighbourhoods in North Brooklyn looking specifically at alternative transportation and sanitation services.

Complementing Stern's analysis of Canadian residential policies, and Salcedo's and DeSena's neighbourhood-based work (see also DeSena 2017), Motoji Matsuda points out that 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 IT (Information Technology) and IOT (Internet of Things). Drawing on his anthropological research and activism in Africa, he argues that among heterogeneous urban populations there is a strong need for morality and social norms that can ease tensions arising from mutual differences, mediate conflict and resist domination (see also Matsuda 2017). These are ensured by the notions of *legitimacy* and *justification*. Modern political science, he notes, has operated on the premise that justification and legitimacy are fundamentally assured by the notions of justice presided over by the nation-state or the notions of universal justice. However, it is not uncommon for the course of events to diverge from such understandings and assumptions. Matsuda's urban ethnography focuses on how legitimacy and justification are conferred,

articulated, appropriated and domesticated within the grass roots cultural practices of ordinary people.

Top-down ungrounded constructions of legitimacy — superimposed through ever-powerful traditional and new media — may not be a novelty but they do need empirical attention as they clearly have growing strategic influence in today's world. Ebru Thwaites Diken addresses the contentious matter of how borders of legality and legitimacy are defined through an analysis of cinematic narratives on the foundational issues of law. She addresses the paradox of the legitimacy of law in the context of the tension between politics and religion in contemporary Turkish films that polarize formalized religion and socialist interpretations of Islam, acknowledging the legality of the former while according legitimacy to the latter. Thwaites Diken first discusses this polarization in terms of the distinction between morality and universalistic ethics, then looks at legitimacy in relation to the hegemonic status of non-formalized religion, questioning the assumption of actors' free will in the production of consent and legitimacy. These questions reverberate in the industrial relations studied by Corine Vedrine, who engages with the complex links between legitimacy, recognition and identity. Inspired, she says, by her reading of the *Legitimacy* volume, Vedrine offers a re-interpretation of her French ethnography, pointing out how in Clermont-Ferrand the Michelin Company built a mythical justification of its system of labour exploitation. This myth was meant to legitimate the norms and values of the spirit of capitalism according to Michelin. The impact at the local level of the world-wide transformations of capitalism raised strong feelings of injustice among the workforce. Without social protection, what seemed legitimate became illegitimate, unbearable, immoral and intolerable. Workers have publicly denounced injustice, reclaimed dignity and demanded public recognition. Bringing out the complex links between moral and justice, these feelings have concretised in a demand for moral reparation *via* successful mobilisation of the justice system.

The link between justice and citizens' rights is addressed with reference to the urban environment in Karolina Moretti's and Julian Brash's essays. From an urbanist viewpoint, Moretti notes that a comparative view of the complexity of legitimacy in today's urban settings — in their set up and in their development — evidences the fundamental importance of the formal and the informal in the social, political and economic dynamics of everyday life. Moretti emphasizes the significance of legitimacy as a reciprocal process in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Aware of the impact of processes of globalization on the local level and the significance of local dynamics in the global context, she castigates the uncritical implementation of urban policies on specific urban environments, arguing that it could easily damage the very essence of democracy and deprive ordinary people from their fundamental right to citizenship. In tune with a widely recognized topic in current anthropology (Pardo and Prato 2017: 17, Shortell 2017, Markowitz 2017, Spyridakis 2017, Matsuda 2017, Lindsay 2017, Vedrine 2017, Gonzalez 2017), Julian Brash's essay highlights the importance of a legitimate use of urban space. He connects his anthropological research on the High Line in New York City to the explorations of legitimacy in contemporary urban public space put forward in the

Legitimacy volume, and particularly to the Canadian case studied by Nathalie Boucher. Meeting a point long argued in the literature on legitimacy (Pardo 2000a, Pardo and Prato 2011) and developed throughout the *Legitimacy* volume, Brash suggests that it is the closure of debates over what is legitimate that poses the true threat to democracy.

As repeatedly argued in the cited literature on legitimacy, trust is an essential element in a democratic process based on power that enjoys authority. Laszlo Kürti's essay focuses on legitimacy and trust in the political arena. Kürti meets the critical point (Pardo 2000 and 2019; Pardo and Prato 2019: 6-8) that democratic states need authority and in turn must rely on citizens' trust in order to rule. For anthropologists, he suggests, the real challenge is to identify how and in what ways citizens rely on state institutions at the local level, and how state policies influence citizens' loyalty. He discusses how, under Socialist rule, institutionalized Committee of Grievances may have aimed to promote trust in the population by allowing discontent to be voiced but failed to gain citizens' confidence. Kürti also points to the fact that popular support and trust of regimes are fundamentally intertwined issues of state legitimacy that concern not only European post-socialist states. The Supplement concludes with Michalis Christodoulou's argument that ethnographers should not restrict themselves to description (notwithstanding its merits), that ethnography is a valuable tool for pursuing theoretical explanations and that the logic of 'causal process' could play that role. On this basis, he outlines how a critical dialogue between an existential ethnography and a critical-realist-inspired social anthropology could provide ethnographers with the tools for constructing empirically grounded theoretical propositions regarding the morals of legitimacy (see Pardo 2000). Drawing on the comparative insights offered by the urban ethnographies collated in the *Legitimacy* volume, he discusses how the form that 'fragmented legitimacy' takes in non-western countries could be explained by the process of 'urban transformation'.

It is the hope of the Editors of this Supplement and the Board of *Urbanities* that a collective reading of the essays offered here, alongside the cited body of literature, the *Legitimacy* book and the work previously published in the journal may encourage others to join this debate in the future.

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