
A Modest Rejoinder from a Historian

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It is a pleasure to participate in this debate on *legitimacy*. I cannot match the range of learning and scholarship that has gone into the fascinating work edited by Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato (2019); and, therefore, I have concentrated on Giuliana Prato's illuminating chapter 'On the Legitimacy of Democratic Representation: Two case studies from Europe' (2019), which takes a 'turning point' in European history: the post-1989 collapse of the Soviet Union and its client state empire in Eastern Europe. The collapse 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 and, especially, in Italy. We are probably familiar with Francis Fukuyama's, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) which suggested that the fall of the Berlin Wall marked a final stage in the evolution of liberal democracy and the 'end point of mankind's [sic] ideological evolution' (see also Fukuyama (1989)). Such optimism now seems hollow as even Western European states struggle to eliminate corruption and electorates have in some states turned to populist-nationalist political programmes. In this sense, however, Giuliana Prato's fieldwork illustrates that the processes of change are more complex and drawn-out than the political headlines of the journalist and even sometimes of historians and political scientists. The conclusions that she draws are rooted in the cultural anthropologist's fieldwork notebooks, which can reveal what people, citizens really think, feel and believe. I am sure that the methodology of fieldwork has been subject to much debate and disagreement within the cultural anthropology academic community and is more complex than I suggest. For historians, however, the challenge of empathising with the thoughts, beliefs and feelings of people in the past is probably one of the greatest challenges as the work of R.G. Collingwood suggests.¹ What determines the beliefs and actions of human beings has generated a huge literature and has been inspired by a cultural anthropological perspective such as that revealed by Keith Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971); and Robert Darnton, *The Great European Cat Massacre* (1984). Thus, I would imagine that the fieldwork notes of the cultural anthropologist can provide a unique window through which historians should gaze. Eventually, such field notes will be raided by historians as new primary sources akin to diaries and the transcripts of oral history (Thompson 1978).

However, Giuliana Prato's case studies reveal some of the problems when writing history, especially when it comes to 'turning points', 'watersheds' and 'moments'. I am reminded of A.J.P. Taylor's pithy comment concerning the 1848 Revolutions in the German States when the declarations of the Frankfurt National Assembly suggested that the German states would unite to form a national liberal state when it offered the crown of a united Germany to Frederick

¹ See Collingwood (1946) and Laslett (1972).

William IV of Prussia only to be spurned by the erratic and unpredictable monarch. For Taylor ‘the course of German history reached its turning point and failed to turn’ (Taylor 1945: 68). The liberal nationalists who had assembled in Frankfurt sought *legitimacy* for their aspiration by appealing to a *legitimate* ruler, the King of Prussia, who had espoused numerous romantic notions of a united Germany. I encountered the issue of legitimacy again when trying to understand the establishment of the French III Republic after 1871. Following the French defeat at the Battle of Sedan in September 1871 the new German Empire was proclaimed, *ein reich, ein volk, ein gott*. Bismarck, the Prussian Chancellor, had apparently established a new state that possessed *legitimacy*. The Second Empire of Louis Napoleon collapsed, as Empires that were defeated in war could hardly claim *legitimacy*; and France descended into revolution although the Commune in Paris was brutally suppressed and a National Assembly was elected to decide upon a new constitution for France. What form would it take? Bonapartisme was discredited, Republicanism could not command a majority in the new Assembly but there were a number of deputies who called themselves legitimists. Who were these legitimists? Essentially, they were supporters of traditional monarchy as represented by the House of Bourbon. But surely their claim to be legitimate rulers given French history — the Revolution of 1789 and the execution of Louis XVI in 1792 — and the long-protracted struggle to determine the nature of the power of the head of state all point to the negation of the veracity of turning points. So, in 1871-75 the French National Assembly debated the constitution — should it be monarchist and therefore *legitimate* or should it be republican and therefore representative guaranteeing democratic rights? Eventually a compromise was reached when an amendment proposed by Henri Wallon to secure arrangements for the election of a Head of State to succeed Patrice de MacMahon was passed by one vote 353 to 352. Thus, the amendment Wallon enabled the turning point to be turned as Wallon in his speech had enabled the deputies to take a pragmatic approach and usher in the Third Republic and leave the ‘state of the provisional’ as he so adroitly put it (Cobban 1965). So, *legitimacy* was achieved by monarchist pragmatism and the acceptance of the Republic. Nevertheless, there were competing truths and it would take some forty years to turn peasants into Frenchmen (Weber 1976). Ironically, the French Third Republic never adopted a formal republican representative constitution — with a declaration of rights — unlike its two predecessors. It was an improvised regime that endured until its collapse in 1940.

So, now to the ‘turning point’ of 1989 and its consequences for Albania and for Italy: it used to be said that ‘when France sneezed the rest of Europe caught cold’. Such a homespun view apparently explained the chain-reaction revolutions in 1830 and again in 1848 (Jones 1991). So, if the Russian Bear had a sore head and was stuck in his lair was it that the smaller animals of Eastern Europe shed their fear — no Budapest as in 1956 and no Prague as in 1968. The Wall came down in Berlin; the Trabant drivers went on tour given their new found freedom; Albania came out of its self-imposed isolation; and communist parties in Western Europe, especially in Italy, lost their legitimacy. For Italians the *partitocrazia* could be overthrown and

Albania could take a liberal democratic path free from tyranny. Surely Francis Fukuyama was right to be so buoyant and optimistic?

In Italy, however, the regime's *sottogoverno* proved remarkably resilient and I would set that against Max Weber's classic model: legitimacy is the basis of power and authority; and a system of government as well as the conduct of politics. If a regime loses *legitimacy* in the eyes of its citizens or subjects then it dissolves. Legitimacy can be sustained by tradition; by charismatic leadership; by rational legal means where citizens believe or accept the enacted rules that are formed. Legitimacy entails a capacity of a state to sustain political order. The sustenance of such political order can be challenged by disaffected minorities within a state—Quebeois in Canada, Catholics in Northern Ireland, Basques and Catalans in Spain and *Lega Nord* in Italy. But nationalist aspirations of minority groups within a larger state are not the only sources that can erode the legitimacy of the state. Indeed, in Italy the rejection of the *partitocrazia* appeared to have been triggered by the events of 1989 and its aftermath. It was essentially corrupt which in turn produced a classical democratic deficit as citizens rejected those parties that had dominated Italian politics since 1948. The case of Brindisi and the coal fired electric power plant demonstrated, clearly, the inability of the state to intervene successfully for the sake of the citizenry's wellbeing. The power plant case revealed starkly the self-serving nature of the *partitocrazia*. This was not the only factor that made for a turning point as disillusion with the existing parties had already developed prior to the tangentopoli case in Milan the enormity of which became apparent in 1992. The combination of the events of 1989 together with long repressed disillusion with corrupt politics, politicians and other public office holders engendered new political language — *integro* (having integrity), *onesto* (honest), *fiducia* (trust) — and a radical transformation or ribaltone of the party system with new parties established: Forza Italia, Partito Democratico, Liberi e Uguali as well as a host of local and regional parties — the Lega d'Azione Meridionale, for example. There was a realignment of the parties and an energised civil society (Ginsborg 2005).

For Albania, a closed totalitarian state, aspirations for democracy and a sustainable economic life were increasingly apparent before the 1990s. Indeed, in 1985, Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia sought to establish trade relations with a number of Western European states, principally the Federal Republic of Germany which prompted the establishment of a number of new diplomatic missions in Tirana (Glenny 1990). Nevertheless, 1989 was a turning point for Albanians who now could look outwards beyond the mountain ranges and to Italy which provided a mirror, via television satire, which inspired the exposure of corruption within Albania itself. Readers may think that I have defaulted to conventional historical narrative but this is not the case. Rather the meeting of the anthropologist with the historian influenced by the 'cultural-turn' should enable a new debate whereby conceptual exchanges will establish new structured environments for arriving at new understandings (De Bolla 2007).

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