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**Post-democracy and legitimation crisis "squared”: A macro-sociological theorem for the contemporary crisis of democracy**

Specially in the aftermath of the financial crisis there has been a growing strand of scholarship devoted to the “crisis of democracy” in the fields of political science and constitutional theory. These interpretations of the alleged crisis focused almost exclusively either on the “demand-side” or on the “supply-side” of legitimation processes, understanding it respectively as a “crisis of confidence” and a “crisis of representation”. Some apporaches even described the recent rise of populist movements as the very cause of the democratic crisis in Eastern Europe, the UK and the US. And the solutions usually assume the shallow and simplified form of an outcry for “more democracy”, “more participation”, “better representation”, which barely grasps the complexity of the problem. In this piece, I reckon on an informed reconstruction of a social theoretical tradition that draws back to the works of Frankfurt scholars from the 1970s and their debate with systems theory. Initially, I conceive politics as a social structure devoted to providing modern society with the capacity of collectively binding decision-making. Accordingly, political crises can be seen under a different light. Be it as (a) a crisis of consistent self-reference of the political system in its stable reproduction as a condition for its legitimation vis-à-vis its social environment (an input crisis of legitimation). Be it as (b) a hetero-reference crisis, which occurs when decisions being made within the political system are unable to cope with the social complexity in its social environment (an output crisis in political steering). The contemporary crisis of democracy has an interesting feature, as it has assumed a magnitude that could not be imagined by the already classic critical literature of the 1970s Frankfurt scholars. It became a “crisis squared”. On the one hand, processes of social differentiation and fragmentation made more difficult for the political system to keep its capacity of providing collectively decisions on the input side. Here we see a crisis in the capacity of forming governments and a crisis of institutional confidence. On the other hand, on the output side of the equation, the same modern dynamics of differentiation and fragmentation leads to an increase of social complexity that impairs in different ways the capacity of the political system to make collectively binding decisions that can be either complied with, understood by its addressees, or even compatible with the social demands of the public. This trend assumes an even more radical dimension as it becomes transnationalized. Privatization and transnationationalization of power without any kind of constitutional democratic constraint makes the political system even more subject to pressures for legitimization, reinforcing the input crisis. Hence, we may have an input crisis and an output crisis both caused by modern and globalizing differentiation processes. At the same time most part of the political reactions to this “crisis squared” remain conceived in very state-centered constitutional terms. To this extent, a better theoretical paradigm to describe the ongoing crisis of democracy is a central piece in the construction of critical theory of contemporary society.