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Public services as carriers of ideas that (de-) legitimise the state: The illustrative case of free education in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Vital public services have long been considered a source of performance legitimacy for states, based on the material outputs they provide for citizens. However, cumulative evidence shows that the relationship between service delivery and citizens' perceptions of the state's right to rule is not an instrumental equation. This article argues part of the explanation for this lies in the underexplored ideational properties of public services. Theoretically, for public services to become significant for legitimacy, they must register in the repertoire of normative ideas against which the state's moral appropriateness is ultimately judged. This article shows how this happens, empirically, using the illustrative case of free education in Sri Lanka. Based on media, archival and interview data collected across critical junctures from independence through to the contemporary era, the historical analysis shows how free education became entwined with wider ideas about social justice during the formative period of post-colonial state transformation, how elites later capitalised on and narrated these ideas in their legitimation strategies, and how this ideational heritage has been revived to challenge the states moral authority when it is perceived to deviate from it. This case reveals the explanatory potential in tracing the *entwinement* of public services and normative ideas to critical junctures of state (de-)legitimation, observing how elites discursively *'perform' performance legitimacy*, and analysing services that carry ideas as ripe *discursive arenas* wherein the legitimacy of the state is claimed and contested. The implication is that the category of performance legitimacy may usefully be extended beyond the instrumental, to incorporate the ideational. 'Performance' legitimacy is not an exclusively instrumental source of legitimacy if, through the political process of legitimation, public services become carriers of ideas that (de-) legitimise the state.

1. Introduction

Many people experience the state on their doorstep through the provision of vital services they value and need - whether clean streets, access to schooling, or safe drinking water. It follows that in the debate about how citizens come to accept the state's authority as rightful, the provision of such services is considered an essential source of 'output' or 'performance' legitimacy – a form of legitimacy arising from the state's tangible influence over people's daily lives and opportunities (Schmelzle & Stollenwerk, 2018). Via the lived experience of those able to access them, services signal the state's responsiveness to societal needs. They are, as such, a vital ingredient in forming the social contract that enables the state to govern via popular consent (Scharpf, 1999).

Intuitive as this instrumental account may seem, research investigating the relationship between the tangible outputs delivered by services and citizens' perceptions of the state's right to rule has arguably done more to qualify, rather than support it. This is unsurprising, however, when viewed through the lens of legitimacy theory, which has always maintained that the so-called '*right* to rule' cannot be conferred through a purely instrumental transaction, but rather, entails a deeper assessment of the justifiability of the state against certain shared ideas (Beetham, 1991). From this perspective, while not denying the material significance of public services to citizens' wellbeing, ring-fencing them as salient for state legitimacy in an exclusively instrumental sense is both empirically reductive and theoretically incomplete.

This article argues that locating public services within legitimation theory requires closer attention to when, how and why they carry the underlying normative ideas against which authority is ultimately evaluated. To this end, it reveals the explanatory potential in: i) historically tracing the entwinement of public services with normative ideas to critical junctures of state (de-)legitimation; ii) observing how elites capitalise on the salience of these ideas in their political legitimation strategies: in effect, how performance legitimacy is discursively 'performed' and; iii) analysing services that carry ideas as ripe discursive

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arenas wherein the legitimacy of the state is contested.

The significance of these novel analytical avenues is illustrated through an in-depth historical analysis of the salience of the idea of free education at critical junctures of state (de-)legitimation in Sri Lanka. In this case, free education became intimately tied to founding ideas about the rights of the people and the paternalistic role of the state during the period of post-colonial state transformation. The ideational entwinement between free education and founding ideas of social justice freighted it with political capital such that it became a strategic commodity in political legitimation. The legacy effect, over time, was that education became a discursive and physical arena wherein the terms upon which state authority is rightfully accepted were contested.

These findings make both a methodological and theoretical contribution to the study of the relationship between public services and state legitimacy. Methodologically, the historical case analysis sheds temporal light on the origins of the ideational properties of public services, and the processes via which these may become politically salient and reified, over time, in legitimation strategies. This offers a counterpoint to a field hitherto dominated by snapshot or cross-sectional studies that tend to focus on the contemporary effects of services on perceptions of legitimacy without significant recourse to the historical antecedents of their meaning and salience.

The theoretical contribution lies in advancing an ideational perspective on the role of public services in the political process of state legitimation. This, in turn, re-locates the legitimising potential of public services within a closer reading of legitimacy theory and, by extension, in an ideational perspective on the state as a 'structure of intelligibility' (Steinberger, 2004). More than a physical apparatus, the state contains a series of propositions and value judgements about how social life should be organised for the betterment of society. The political act of narrating the ideas carried by public services enable elites to shape and reinforce these propositions. Capturing these discursive dynamics implies a need to expand the study of performance legitimacy beyond the material, to incorporate the ideational properties of public services and their political construction through the legitimation process.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it re-appraises recent empirical findings on the link between public services and legitimacy through the lens of legitimacy theory. It argues that both from a theoretical standpoint, and as revealed in practice, this relationship is interrupted by the normative ideas that public services convey about what is right and wrong for society. It makes the case for zooming in on these ideational properties as a window to understanding their salience in the legitimation process. The following section applies this, empirically, to the case of free education in Sri Lanka. It explores the origins of education's accumulated ideational capital, and how this has been discursively deployed and contested in political legitimation. The analysis combines these theoretical and empirical insights to advance the case for viewing services as carriers of ideas that (de)-legitimise the state, before concluding with a call to expand the category of performance legitimacy to this end.

2. Public services and state legitimacy interrupted

Over the last decade, cumulative evidence has challenged the idea of an automatic relationship between the lived experience of public services and subjective judgements of the state's legitimacy. In practice, this relationship is typically investigated as correlations between the accessibility or quality of such services, and various proxies for citizens' beliefs in the state's right to rule. For example, studies have examined the relationship between perceived government effectiveness in delivering services and people's stated willingness to defer to authority (Levi & Sacks, 2009); between outcome favourability and the perception that the government operates in the 'best interests' of its people (Fisk & Cherney, 2016); or between receipt of public goods and intrinsic tax morale (Bodea & LeBas, 2016). The findings from such studies substantially diverge, however. In one cross-sectional survey in Nigeria, individuals with a positive experience of state services were found more likely to believe citizens are *obliged* to pay taxes, even if they do not actually pay more taxes themselves (Bodea & LeBas, 2016). Another, longitudinal, cross-country survey found no correlation between either material or subjective measures of public services (distance to services, who provides it, perceived quality), and people's views about the state (Nixon et al, 2017).

Across the wider landscape of literature, the answer to the question of whether public services improve legitimacy appears to be a resounding 'it depends'. It depends, for example, on whether the police discharge their duties by following proper procedures (Tyler, 2006; Jackson et al, 2012). Whether people live in neighbourhoods with high levels of economic inequality (Córdova & Layton, 2015). Whether they experience frontline workers as corrupt, or discriminatory (Bratton et al, 2019; Dreier & Lake, 2019). Whether there is a grievance mechanism available in the event of dissatisfaction (Nixon et al, 2017). Whether people believe the state or via non-state actors should be providing the service (Kushner, 2018). Or whether their expectations of their own welfare, and the state's responsibility to safeguard it, are relatively high or low (Ratigan, 2022). In sum, performance legitimacy is not a straightforward case of add material rewards, and stir.

There are two ways of reading this veritable melange of findings. One is that they helpfully contextualise 'performance' legitimacy by offering a useful range of empirical factors that may influence its power in situ. Another is that they more profoundly signal a missing link in theorisation: Specifically, the core proposition of legitimacy theory, that the right to rule is ultimately conferred or withdrawn based on whether the state is 'appropriate, proper, and just' (Tyler, 2006, p. 375). Legitimacy, after all, follows the logic of appropriateness, rather than the logic of consequences (March & Olsen, 1996). As Migdal (2001, p. 126) expresses it, this entails 'the acceptance of the symbolic order associated with the idea of the state as people's own system of meaning'. By this logic, for public services to be significant in the evaluation of legitimacy, citizens must make connections between the tangible 'output' – their experience of accessing, using, or participating in public services – and what they perceive as right and appropriate.

While material and instrumental rewards may satisfy (or not) vital needs, they alone cannot perform the entirety of this evaluative process. This is not to deny that citizens may greatly value the benefits from services, or form more or less favourable views of their confidence or trust in state institutions based on them (Bakke, O'Loughlin, Toal, & Ward, 2014). But these effects are not equivalent to believing the state has a rightful basis to exercise power in the first instance. Indeed , the diversity of findings across the empirical landscape appears to confirm the theoretical proposition that the (de-)legitimising potential of public services is not reducible merely to interests or preferences (Kelman, 2001), but rather, is filtered through what people consider to be morally right for society (Tyler, 2010). What matters for legitimacy appears to be less the mechanics of public services, but the normative criteria against which citizens judge them (Mcloughlin, 2015).

This raises the question, what links public services with the moral evaluation of state rightfulness? What is the connection between them? From a theoretical standpoint, leading scholars have coalesced around the importance of ideas about the 'common good' (Scharpf, 1999), 'common interest' (Beetham, 1991), or 'shared social goals' (Schmelzle & Stollenwerk, 2018) as the key criteria against which authority is ultimately judged to be more or less appropriate. All social groups have repertoires of such ideas, whether about the rights and entitlements of the people, the fair distribution of resources, or the proper processes via which power and authority can be justifiably conferred. Irrespective of the substantive content of these ideas in any given setting, public services must in theory register within this repertoire in order to become salient for evaluations of the rightfulness of authority. In other words, they must carry and transport such ideas between citizens and the state.

2.1. Public services as ideas

We can analyse the potential for public services to carry ideas as both intrinsic and politically constructed. In the intrinsic sense, all public services embody what Schmidt (2008, p. 306) terms 'normative ideas', in the sense that they contain judgments about 'what is good or bad about what is'. Normative ideas speak to the deeper ideals of a society and attach values to actions through reference to them. In the same vein, public services contain normative ideas and judgments about the value of certain individual or collectively consumed goods. Though such meanings are socially constructed and specific to context, there are also patterns: deservingness or self-reliance is a salient framing of social protection (Pruce, 2022); dignity, respect, freedoms and entitlements in relation to health systems; inclusion and identity in relation to education; sufficient, safe and affordable in relation to water.

In turn, the political process of designing, funding, targeting, providing or regulating public services offers myriad opportunities to broadcast these intrinsic, normative ideas. What may appear on the surface to be 'technical' questions - whether about quality, accessibility or affordability - are deliberated and contested precisely because they must ascribe a normative value to these things, which are not universally understood in the same way (Baquero et al, 2017). The values attached to public services have been shown to influence the policy agenda: Elites, for example, may choose to invest in certain reforms because they align with the ideology of the ruling coalition, thereby offering a means to articulate and re-enforce its fundamental claim to power (Chemouni, 2018). Particularly when legitimacy is contested, there are incentives for elites to politicise performance by cloaking it in the dominant ideologies that justify their rule (Mandefro, 2016). To the beneficiary, in mirror effect, public services may likewise signal the wider justifiability (or lack thereof) of the systems of power they represent. Garbage on the street conveys much more than incapacity; people encounter and interpret it as a literal symbol of political rot (Kraidy, 2016).

Taken together, these insights suggest it is difficult to disentangle the materiality of public services from their underlying normative justification for being, represented in the ideas they convey to citizens about the values attached to 'who gets what, when and how' (Laswell, 1936). They make the case for zooming in on these ideational properties as a window to understanding their legitimacy salience. But this raises the question, *how* do public services accrue legitimising or indeed de-legitimising ideas? To address this question, one logical locus of analysis is the *process* of legitimation; that is, the back and forth, moral interaction between the legitimacy claims and strategies of elites, and public evaluation of them (Kelman, 2001). If this is the process via which citizens come to accept or reject authority as rightful, then we can usefully explore how the ideational meaning of services is constructed, articulated, and deployed within it.

3. The illustrative case of free education in Sri Lanka

Free education in Sri Lanka offers an illustrative case to explore how the ideational properties of public services are constructed and deployed in the political process of legitimation because, on the surface at least, it appears to be a particularly striking example. Scholars have long-noted the enduring significance of education to state legitimacy across the country's history. As a key pillar of a post-colonial social democratic welfare state widely acclaimed for 'taking social development seriously' (Jayasuriya, 2010), free education thereafter became an 'insistent belief' on the part of the masses (Pieris, 1964, p. 448), with successive political parties continuing to pledge, rhetorically at least, to protect and defend it (Amarasuriya, 2015). In the contemporary era, it remains revered as 'perhaps, the greatest gift that the state ever gave to Sri Lankans', and one that 'strengthened the backbone, the character and the future course of the generations in the post-independence era'.[1]

At the same time, the politicised expansion and engineering of access to free education has proven divisive when propelled by ethno-nationalism. Perceptions of unfairness in the distribution of free education have fuelled violent dissent from within the state's core legitimacy audience of Sinhalese, and were a significant contributory factor in the de-legitimation of the state among the Tamil minority in the lead up to the country's devastating civil war (1983–2009) (Mcloughlin, 2018). The post-war era has been punctuated by mass protests when the state appears to deviate from its commitment to safeguarding the people's established right to free education (Witharana, 2015). In these ways, free education has been an arena within which the state's legitimacy has been shaped and contested over the long-term.

3.1. Methodology

While there is no consensus around how to measure the notoriously slippery concept of legitimacy, it is typically studied via beliefs or (non)-compliant behaviours (Schoon, 2022). Legitimation, on the other hand, is the political process of deliberation, persuasion, and contestation through which these beliefs and behaviour are shaped (Beetham, 1991). There are two sides to this process; the legitimacy claims that political actors make, or how they seek to discursively narrate and justify their actions, and how these are received and evaluated by citizens (Zaum, 2013). In line with Hurrelmann et al (2009), this study analyses these claims and evaluations in the public sphere. The public sphere includes all the discursive or physical spaces where people gather to express and deliberate views on the needs of society and form public opinion (Habermas, 1964). It is a key arena through which 'representations of the state are constituted, contested, and transformed in public culture' (Gupta, 1995, p. 376). As such, it plays a role in the social construction of reality which, crucial to this study, extends to the normative foundations of legitimacy (Hurrelmann et al., 2009).

In practice, the public sphere analysis collected primary data from political speeches, archival records of key debates in parliament, and more than 250 media articles and opinion columns, in print or online. This was combined with documentary analysis of official government reports, memoirs, and key writings of Sri Lankan historians and policymakers. The analytical aim was to capture the ideas attached to education, how elites discursively framed their policies around them, and how citizens individually or collectively responded to, reproduced, defended or contested them.

The public sphere analysis was triangulated through a series of key informant interviews undertaken during two field visits in 2014 and 2016. Snowball sampling was used to identify 50 key informants from three organisational spheres: education institutions, government ministries, and civil society. The sample included university lecturers, senior university administrators, students, leaders of student groups, retired political advisors, past and present ministry officials, public intellectuals, journalists, researchers at prominent think tanks and leaders and members of the Federation of University Teachers Association (FUTA). The aim of the interviews was to hear first-hand, narrative accounts of the meanings and significance of education for state-society relations and legitimacy.

While the timeframe of the study spans some 60 years, between 1944 and 2012, the analysis zooms in on critical junctures when state legitimacy was being claimed or contested. Critical junctures, derived from historical institutionalism, are formative periods when economic, cultural, ideological, or organisational contingencies change (Capoccia &

[1] 'C. W. W. Kannangara – the father of free education', Daily Mirror, 28 December 2013. (Book review of 'No Pearl of Greater Price' by Dr. Ananda Guruge', reviewed by H.L.D. Mahindapala.

Kelemen, 2007). From a legitimation perspective, they are marked by acute political attention to the question of the state's right to rule, which manifests in heightened justificatory discourses, and/or behaviours that signal the withdrawal of consent. As Beetham (1991) has argued, this is valid because the otherwise latent criteria for legitimacy comes to the fore precisely when it is under threat. The analysis below is sequentially organised around three critical junctures: i) the formative period of post-colonial state reclamation during which free education was adopted ii) the critical juncture of heightened ethno-nationalism after 1956 when these ideas were political mobilised in legitimation strategies; and iii) the end of the civil war in 2009, when the threat to the idea of free education provoked contestation in the form of social mobilisation to defend it.

3.2. The ideational origins of free education

In the period leading up to the end of colonial rule in 1948, Sri Lanka's education system came to symbolise the wider injustices of foreign domination. The colonial system of denominational (religious) schools had segregated the education system along linguistic lines: While the majority was learning in poor quality, already free schools in the swabasha languages (Tamil and Sinhala), a privileged minority was learning in the English medium, in fee paying, elite schools. The more populated areas of Western Province, Colombo and surrounding commuting districts, as well as the Jaffna Peninsula, Galle and Kandy had benefited from a higher concentration of these schools (Roberts, 1979, p. 189), . The effects on literacy disparities were acute: a 1921 census had found 58.1 per cent of Christians were literate, compared to 38.6 per cent of Buddhists, 28.5 per cent of Hindus and 25.5 per cent of Muslims.[2] Those who attended these schools had preferential access to higher education, taught exclusively in the English medium. In an influential and widely-cited paper, the first Vice Chancellor of the University of Ceylon, Sir Ivor Jennings (1944), claimed that compared to the population distribution, Tamils and Burghers were proportionately over-represented, and Sinhalese and Muslims proportionately under-represented, in the university population. These group inequalities, perpetuated by linguistic segregation, were considered an unacceptable legacy of colonialism.

As colonialism was coming to an end, Sri Lanka's political system was reformed in such a way that it became conducive to re-dressing these inequalities. More than a decade prior to Independence, in 1931, a landmark colonial commission - the Donoughmore Commission – extended semi-autonomous government and universal franchise for the first time to a British colony. Under a new constitution, local legislators were elected to the State Council while control over budgets and resources remained firmly in the hands of the non-elected colonial administrators (Jayasuriya, 2010, p. 94). This partial democratisation of the state set the stage for a new era of politics and radical changes in educational policies (Little, 1999). It shifted the basis of power from a system of communal representation to one of democratic election, and simultaneously in favour of the demographically dominant Sinhalese majority, who outnumbered Tamils by six to one. Thereafter, the demographic power of the Sinhalese masses became politically decisive and appealing to this constituency instrumentally vital for election (Pieris, 1964). At the same time, the incentives to court this majority for electoral gain were not restrained by any concern for resources, since that responsibility was retained by colonial administrators. The scheme was made possible by revenues from the buoyant plantation sector (Little, 1999), but the de-jure separation between power and budgetary responsibility enabled elected legislators to pass progressive social welfare reforms 'without any acknowledgement of how this package of social legislation was to be implemented' (Jayasuriya, 2010, p. 94). From that time onwards, 'proposals for social reform poured out of the legislature like lava from an erupting volcano' (Jayasuriya, 1969, p. 630).

Free education was a key pillar of a new, welfare-oriented social contract enabled by this changing political environment. Colonial 'defects' in education were scrutinised by a Special Committee appointed in 1940, headed by Sri Lanka's first Minister of Education, the Hon. Mr Christopher William Wijekoon Kannangara - affectionately revered as the father of free education. Speaking in the State Council in 1944, Mr Kannangara decried it as conferring the English-educated with a 'badge of superiority' and concomitantly resulted in the 'utter neglect of Sinhalese and Tamil'. This, he concluded, meant 'the system was unfair and unjust to a larger section of the population'.[3] As an antidote, the committee proposed radical reforms. First, to extend free, compulsory education at all levels: no educational institution could any longer levy fees, including universities. Education provided in elite, fee-levying denominational schools, would now also be free. Second, the medium of instruction in secondary schools would be changed from English to the swabasha languages. Importantly, as J. E. Jayasuriya observed in 1976 (p. 537), 'free' education did not actually level the educational playing field – rather, it gave an educational 'bonanza to the well-to-do by giving them without payment the good education that had hitherto been paid for by them'. Meanwhile, the underprivileged majority continued to receive, for free, the poor quality education that 'had all along been free to them' (Jayasuriya, 1976, p. 537).

In spite of its apparent misnomer, the rhetorical power of 'free' education lay in the promise of explicitly extending entitlements to the majority. Through its adoption, free education, which Kannangara famously termed the 'pearl of great price'[4] – a reference to biblical parable – was enshrined as a fundamental right. The Kannangara Report was described by Jayasuriya (2010, p. 112) as 'the single most important social policy document of this period'. During this critical time of national reclamation, it came to represent the victory of the masses over elite privilege, and the displacing of the colonial order in favour of social justice. Rectifying colonial unfairness meant 'every individual must have equal opportunity so that, provided he has the necessary innate ability, he can lift himself from the humblest to the highest position in the social, economic and political life of the nation'.[5] In this way, the right to education was anchored to the idea of social justice. In a frequently-cited statement to the State Council encapsulating this ethos, Kannangara urged the passing of the Bill so that councillors would be able to tell future generations that 'we found education dear and left it cheap, that we found it a sealed book and left it an open letter, that we found it the patrimony of the rich and left it the inheritance of the poor'.[6] This statement, perhaps more than any other, captures the essence of the new ideas underpinning a welfare-based social contract. The normative value in extending the right to free education derived from the moral abhorrence of colonial injustices. In the sphere of higher education, this meant de-legitimising an elite, westernised model of education, and legitimising a new form of mass, popular education for the nation.

Against the legacy of felt injustice, the landmark passing of these reforms was significant for the legitimation of a post-independence social order, and for the advancement of the Sinhala-Buddhist majority constituency in principle, if not in practice. These ideas, strategically articulated by elites in the public sphere, carried across society because rectifying colonial injustices, and extending new rights to the masses, had intrinsic popular appeal. A 'Central Free Education Defence

[2] Hon. C.W.W. Kannangara: Hansard, June 2, 1944 Col. 938.

[3] Hon. C.W.W. Kannangara: Hansard, June 2, 1944 Col. 918.

[4] Hansard, June 2 1944, Col 938. Kannangara stated, in defence of free education at all levels, that: 'I have been condemned for offering this 'false pearl' of the central schools. I say it is a pearl of great price. Sell all that you have and buy it for the benefit of the community. 'Mankind has struck its tends and is on its onward march'. Let us not lag behind.'

[5] Hansard, June 2 1944, Col 938.

[6] Hansard, June 2, 1944. Col 946.

Committee' promoted free education for the masses in an island-wide campaign. This put pressure on state councillors to vote for it, while at the same time building the necessary popular support (De Silva, 1981). As Jayasuriya (1969, p. 25) later recalled, free education 'had such an emotional appeal to the enfranchised masses that it became a slogan with them', such that 'for any political personality to oppose free education was to commit political suicide, and none dared to take the risk' (Jayasuriya, 1969, p. 25). Ideas of social justice were popular because inequality in education was an acutely felt lived reality. As elsewhere across the British colonies, the colonial education system in Sri Lanka was designed first and foremost to produce an English-speaking cadre of local officials with the requisite skills to staff the civil service. Poor English literacy was a formidable obstacle to government employment and entry to the professions (teaching, journalism, engineering) for the swabasha-educated majority (Roberts, 1979). A select committee reported in 1946 that six million Tamils and Sinhalese were governed by twenty thousand English-speaking government officials (Pieris, 1964, p. 447). Contemporaries described the gulf between the English-speaking minority and swabasha speaking majority as amounting to the division of the country into 'two nations': westernised and indigenous (Jayasuriya, 1976, p. 539). In this way, the idea of free education offered a remedy to a visibly divided society.

Because of its material and moral value, the idea of free education enabled the state to reach out to the masses and make a commitment to providing social justice for them. The reforms also marked the ascendance of a new, national elite, pitted against a more established, westernised elite with vested interests in preserving the status quo. Its central champions were a coalition of elites with shared nationalist and socialist ideologies, who galvanised support from a second-tier elite, comprising Buddhist monks, swabasha teachers, and editors of swabasha print media (Jayasuriya, 1976). These groups overcame significant opposition from those who benefited from the system of fee-paying English schools and missionary schools: including state councillors of both Buddhist and Christian religion with ties to these schools, who sought to delay and disrupt its passing. In this way, the eventual passing of these reforms represented a victory for the masses and established the majority rural population as the critical mass of followers and power base of the state (De Silva, 1981). Moreover, it exemplified the new, legitimate role of the state in providing for this legitimacy audience. Along with other social services, it 'established firmly the principle of collective provision for common human and social needs through state intervention' (De Silva, 1981). The new rights and ideas enshrined in free education became inseparable from the development of the identity of the Sinhalese nation. Indeed, in Kannangara's own words, the very fate of the nation hinged on these reforms. In his closing remarks to the State Council, he said: 'Are we going to have a nation in this country or not? Are we going to be slaves forever? Are we not going to have some freedom? If we aim at that, let us start with our schools, let us educate our people'.[7] Just as educational injustice had denied national identity, delivering educational justice to the masses was rhetorically entwined with its restoration.

3.3. Politically mobilising the idea of free education

The ideational springboard for the post-colonial state's legitimacy had been the promise of rectifying injustices of the past. These ideas gained increasing political salience after the critical juncture of 1956 when, for the first time since independence, the previously dominant centre-right United National Party (UNP) of the westernised elite was defeated by a centre-left coalition of Sinhalese-nationalist elites, led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Sri Lanka was now a dual party, ethnic majoritarian and ethno-nationalist state. The SLFP championed a populist platform of ethnic chauvinism that appealed strongly to the religious, linguistic and material grievances of the Sinhalese masses (Kearney, 1975). Their victory reflected the successful mobilisation of the peasant vote in Sri Lanka, a breakthrough itself aided by early franchise and welfarism, including free education (Obeyesekere, 1974). Voter turnout increased significantly along with the politicisation of the rural villages, from 56 per cent in 1947 to 70 per cent in 1956 and up to almost 85 per cent in 1970 (Kearney, 1975, p. 457). In turn, this political awakening increased the pressure on the state to deliver on the promise of social justice for the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority.

Since it captured the essence of social justice, free education became salient within the process of political legitimation. The two competing Sinhalese parties sought to correct perceived inequalities and Tamil advantages in what was termed a process of 'ethnic outbidding' (DeVotta, 2004). Between 1956 and 1977, the ruling party, or coalition, changed five times.[8] These pendulum swings amplified popular expectations of social justice and the political legitimacy claims and electoral promises made to this effect. Social expectations had risen because through the 1950s, the intergenerational benefits of free education had come to fruition; as more children were being born to educated parents, popular demand for education grew (Aturupane, 2009). Rapid expansions in secondary enrolment had, for example, swelled the number of candidates taking the advanced level qualifications necessary to enter the University of Ceylon, from 1,612 in 1948 to 14,000 in 1970 (Samaranayake, 1999, p. 101). Political pressure to widen access to university simultaneously mounted, but the university was not equipped to accommodate rising demand. In 1957, the leader of the opposition, Dr Perera, reiterated that 'expanding access, and thereby dismantling the elitist model of education, was nothing less than fulfilling a promise to the people.[9] In reply, the new SLFP government was, according to Mr Bandaranaike, 'fully alive' to the increased need for university education.[10] In this way, free education became salient within ethno-nationalism, while the political and social pressure to realise it had, in practice, come of age.

This impetus found particular expression in the political legitimation practice of democratising access to university education. The political stage was set for the new nationalist government to begin, unabated, to 'open the doors'.[11] For at least a decade after 1956, Sri Lanka pursued what has been termed a 'social demand' model of higher education (Jayaweera, 1969). As the label implies, its driving principle was that all who were qualified should have access. This period subsequently saw astonishing levels of expansion – the student population trebled between 1960 and 1965/6, from 3,181 to 10,723 (Samaranayake, 1999, p. 101). At the same time, expenditure on the universities increased from LKR 7, 325 in 1955/56 to LKR 18,466 in 1965/66 (Kearney, 1975). Such was the scale of this expansion that by 1965 the University of Ceylon had been forced to acquire the adjacent Colombo Racecourse, where horses used to run, to deliver open-air lectures (De Silva, 2013). The politically motivated drive to democratise higher education proceeded without due concern for its practical implications. In the momentum, university faculties lost control over admissions, water supplies were strained, and accommodation became overcrowded. Government demands to switch the language of instruction from English to swabasha faced dissent from

[7] Hansard, June 2, 1944. Col 946.

[8] Election victories were as follows: 1956, Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led by SWRD Bandaranaike; 1960 (March) United National Party (UNP), led by Dudley Senanayake (could not form a government due to insufficient majority); 1960 (July) Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike; 1965 United National Party (UNP), led by Dudley Senanayake as National Front coalition; 1970 Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), led by Sirimavo Banaranaike as United Front coalition; 1977 United National Party (UNP) led by JR Jayewardene.

[9] 'University council hid facts from Vice-Chancellor', Daily News, August 15, 1957; Mr A. Amirthalingam (Vadduloddal).

[10] 'Premier not in favour of a communal university', Daily News, November 11, 1957.

[11] Interview with retired govt. official, Colombo: April 29, 2016.

the University of Ceylon because there were few textbooks available in these languages, and limited academic staff able to teach in them (Malasekera, 1969).

This seemingly uninhibited democratisation was justified, rhetorically, through recourse to the earlier legitimising idea that education should deliver social justice and rectify colonial unfairness. The SLFP was driven by the idea that 'a qualified applicant was deemed to have a right to a university education' (De Silva, 2013, p. 214). Accordingly, Mr Bandaranaike argued 'the common man deserved his place' in higher education.[12] He later reflected on the effects of democratisation in the same vein, finding it 'a matter of great satisfaction and encouragement to find that those of them who were successfully going through a university education were not limited to a particular type of school or college, and a good many of them were rural schools'.[13] Realising free education, at whatever cost, was narrated as a matter of reclaiming self-esteem and realising post-colonial rights and freedoms. A *Universities Commission* (1963, p. 23) stated 'if people are to realise what freedom stands for, and what it means, they must be in a position to know what is taking place in their own country'. A later *Commission on Higher Education in the National Languages* (1956, pp. 82–83), decried the dominance of English as not only excluding the majority but hindering the development of national identity. It described the switchover to swabasha as vital for the 'restoration to the people of their cherished inheritance, their culture and language and way of life' (ibid, p. 82). This reflected wider social concerns to 'bridge the gap existing in society between the English-educated and the swabasha-educated'.[14] In these ways, the expansion of education enabled elites to capitalise on its ideational entwinement with social justice and national reclamation, and deploy it as a legitimacy commodity in the politicised environment of ethno-nationalist competition.

3.4. Contesting the idea of free education

The ideational heritage of free education, cast in the formative period of post-colonial transformation and consolidated through the politics of nationalism, left an enduring legacy: any state action perceived to deviate from these founding ideas and responsibilities prompts vocal opposition from those with vested interests in defending it.[15] Dissent is triggered by 'the adoption of any course that steers too far from its colonial and post-independence inheritance' (Wickramasinghe-Samarasinghe, 2006, p. 333). There is, as one informant put it, 'no going back, because people would be on the streets'.[16]

This dynamic of contestation was exemplified in the Federation of University Teachers Association (FUTA)'s high profile campaign to 'Save State education', in 2012, which took place at a time when the founding idea of free education appeared under threat. During the final stages of the war, state capacity was increasingly diverted into the government's final military campaign against the LTTE in the north. As defence expenditure increased, educational expenditure declined. Some 3 per cent of GDP, and 20 per cent of public expenditure, was absorbed by the state military apparatus (Bastian, 2013, p. 1). By 2009, Sri Lanka was spending a substantially smaller portion of its national wealth on education than comparable South Asian economies (World Bank, 2009).[17] At the official cessation of military conflict, government funds were diverted to massive infrastructure investments (ports, highways, airports, railroads, power),[18] framed in a populist promise of economic progress (Walton, 2015). In this way, war undercut and diverted the fiscal capacity of the state fulfil its legitimising, paternalistic welfare role. At the same time, the prevailing political climate did not appear conducive to reclaiming it. The state's apparent annihilation of the LTTE during the violent final phase of the war had ushered a period of post-war triumphalism (Keerawella, 2013). The regime tapped into fear and paranoia around a return to violence to justify a centralisation of power, signified in the passing of the 18th Amendment, which removed constitutional constraints on presidential powers and brought the public service, police and judiciary directly under the control of the executive. The post-war SLFP regime, led by Mahinda Rajapahkse, openly supported the marketization of education. In reference to higher education, the interpretation of the 'right' to education had shifted - from the foundational idea of it being a state responsibility, to the question of realising better 'choice' through the market (GoSL, 2012).

In the context of this apparent threat to the founding ideas attached to free education, FUTA mobilised to defend them. On the surface, their demands were typically trade unionist: calling for an increase in educational expenditure up to 6% of GDP, an end to politicised control over universities, and enhancements in academic pay and conditions. Yet through an island-wide campaign of mass rallies, conventions, print and social media and a 'million signature' petition, it was able to galvanise a cross-section of public and civil society support for this cause. This popular mobilisation culminated in the so-called 'long march' – a 130-kilometre, 5-day, symbolic procession from the south of the country to the capital, Colombo. What began as narrow trade union action developed into a social movement; remarkable in a context where political dissent carried risk of imprisonment or personal harm. FUTA nevertheless won significant concessions on academic salaries – a victory that surprised even some of its own members.[19] By galvanising cross-sections of society around the idea of saving free education, FUTA established itself as an emblem of anti-state protest and in the process, fortified other pockets of resistance.[20] In this way, challenging the state's deviation from the foundational idea of the right to education became significant within a process of contesting its wider legitimacy.

Crucially, FUTA strategically leveraged the power of the same normative ideas originally associated with free education to mobilise and narrate this contestation. The need to safeguard social justice was the rhetorical heart of its campaign materials and narratives.[21] Through its popular slogans and campaign material, it elevated the crisis in education to an abrogation of state responsibility to fulfil its legitimate role as patron of the poor.[22] It cast free education as a pillar of national identity, reminding people that Sri Lanka's welfare state was 'of great

[12] 'Common man must be given his due place, says PM', Daily News, November 11th, 1957.

[13] 'Premier not in favour of a communal university', Daily News, November 11, 1957.

[14] 'Education minister deplores craze for govt. jobs, MPs on plight of swabasha teachers', Daily News, August 27, 1953: Mr M Banda (Minister of Education).

[15] Interview with researcher at think tank, Colombo, October 6, 2014.

[16] Interview with retired academic, Colombo, October 16, 2014.

[17] In 2009, Sri Lanka was spending less than 10 per cent of its budget on education – the lowest in the South Asian region and below India and Pakistan, whereas some government budgets allocated up to 30 per cent (Thailand and Malaysia) (World Bank, 2009, p. 21).

[18] Interview with Senior staff, University of Sri Jayawardenepura: April 19, 2016; Interview with former Minister of Higher Education: Colombo, April 20, 2016.

[19] Interview with former FUTA VP, University of Sri Jayawardenepura, 25th April, 2016; Interview with former FUTA secretary, Open University, 28th April, 2016.

[20] Interview with Lecturer and FUTA activist, University of Sri Jayawardenepura, April 19, 2016; Interview with Lecturer and FUTA activist, Open University, April 21, 2016.

[21] 'Education Under Attack!' FUTA campaign pamphlet, April 2012.

[22] 'Federation of University Teachers' Associations' Continuous Strike Action of 2012 July – Demands', FUTA, 14th June, 2012.

distinction and therefore needs to be protected at all costs'.[23] Moreover, it argued that if the ideals of the post-colonial period were left by the wayside, the injustices of the past would resurface. In an particularly illustrative pamphlet entitled 'Education Under Attack!', the question was posed directly: 'do we want to go back to the time of colonialism, when only a few were educated?'.[24] In it, Kannangara's legacy was revived to defend education against undue political interference: 'Kannangara would surely administer a stern rebuke to those who destroy teachers' freedom'.[25] Through these discursive strategies, FUTA revived the original ideas behind the adoption of free education, but re-deployed their legitimising power for the purpose of mobilising popular dissent.

This discursive strategy was successful, in part, because the idea of social justice continued to have intrinsic popular appeal. In public discourse, the justifiability of the state's actions in the education sphere were evaluated against this ideational heritage. The apparent marketization of education evoked concern that it would no longer be, in Kannangara's words, 'the inheritance of the poor'.[26] To many, the regime's pledge to make Sri Lanka's education system the 'Wonder of Asia' by increasing educational choice could not be tolerated at the expense of protecting this inheritance. As one commentator wrote, 'this could be a noble dream of visionary thinking, but if it is to be realised while the social identity that Sri Lanka inherited from free education of welfare state is left for destruction, the future that this regime is making will not belong to the ordinary citizen of Sri Lanka'.[27] As another wrote: 'in a militarized society where war heroes have been celebrated, the contribution of the working people towards this country's progress had not been duly recognized or remembered by the state'.[28]

The mobilisation to save state education was primarily led and orchestrated by the generation that had benefited from it: The majority of FUTA members were Sinhalese, of middle-class background, educated through the free education system (Witharana, 2015).[29] In turn, FUTA was also able to boost its island-wide campaign partly by drawing on a network of alumni from state universities – again, the children of free education – who were strategically positioned across the island in business and government. The campaign also accumulated cross-party backing from the mid-level elite of religious leaders, trade unionists and artists. This was not least because, as one academic put it, 'in the end, we are all children of free education'.[30] In this way, the defence of state education was boosted by the structural effects of decades of it.[31]

FUTA's stand against perceived unfairness in the education system became emblematic of wider contestation around the state's legitimacy. State retreat from free education resonated with broader concern over social injustice and the arbitrary abuse of increasingly authoritarian state power. As one commentator wrote, 'the FUTA strike is no longer about FUTA, it's about you and I and what we do to bring a halt to the caravan of state as it rumbles on to total control of public life'.[32] An academic member of FUTA described how 'the orange and black t-shirts with 'Save Education' and '6%' printed on its back in black or orange became a sign of pride in Sri Lanka in the year 2012' (Witharana, 2015, p. 3). As one former FUTA leader put it, 'the government was seen as invincible. No one disagreed with anything they did. No one critiqued anything. This kind of opened up the space to say there is space for dissent, and you can'.[33] Though education was the main concern and mobilising force, FUTA also embodied a call to re–establish democracy, rule of law and good governance to address social justice.[34] In the same way that the original ideas associated with free education were intimately tied to the underlying normative justification for the state, they had, in turn, been revived to contest it.

4. Public services as carriers of (de-) legitimising ideas

What makes education in Sri Lanka such a striking and illustrative case – that is, its formative association with anti-elite struggle and rectifying injustice – are also reasons why its experience may not generalise across context, or even to other types of public service within the same context. It could be argued that the characteristics of education, both in general and in Sri Lanka, afford it greater capacity to carry normative ideas that generate the kind of affective response entailed in evaluating legitimacy. Education is often analysed as the service most deployed for the political purpose of cultivating national identity, particularly by nationalist, post-colonial leaders (Bereketeab, 2020). It has also been considered pivotal to the restoration of national languages and, as such, a key pillar in the nationalist drive to create 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983).

In Sri Lanka, social demand for education rests on its promise of social mobility; specifically, breaking through social hierarchies and accessing (government) employment opportunities (Dunham & Jayasuriya, 2000). The stakes from educational attainment are heightened in a patronage-based, hierarchical society such as Sri Lanka, where life prospects are often defined by who you know and what position of power they hold (Roberts, 1979). Obtaining a degree-level education carries significant social value. As one informant described it, 'when students come from an outstation into universities, it's a big event. The whole family will come. It's very prestigious. Somehow the whole village gets to know. Everyone knows, somehow, this person has made it to university'.[35] It is telling that educational provision reportedly survived through the war even in the most conflict-affected areas.[36] Indeed, whether or not the children go to school is considered a baseline standard for the basic functioning of village life.[37] In this way, access to education at all levels is a symbol of social prestige and therefore primed to be ideationally significant. It has been subject to direct state intervention and delivered via centralised provision over the long term for these reasons.

While there are specificities in this case, the proposition that certain

[23] 'Federation of University Teachers' Associations' Continuous Strike Action of 2012 July – Demands', FUTA, 14th June, 2012.

[24] 'Education Under Attack!' FUTA campaign pamphlet, April 2012.

[25] 'Education Under Attack!' FUTA campaign pamphlet, April 2012.

[26] 'The State of the free education system in Sri Lanka: Confessions of a disgruntled student', Groundviews, March 26, 2013.

[27] 'FUTA and free education in Sri Lanka: Question of social justice and democracy in an oligarchy', Groundviews, October 3, 2012: Athulasiri Kumara Samarakoon.

[28] 'Some reflections on the trade union action by the FUTA', May 20, 2011: Thiruvarangan, Mahendran.

[29] It is worth noting that not all academics supported the FUTA action: some were opposed on grounds that students were already suffering too much disruption of interrupted classes. Others felt pay hikes were unjustifiable in the context of Sri Lanka's post-war economy, and the 6 per cent expenditure request was unreasonable (Witharana, 2015).

[30] Interview with Lecturer an FUTA activist: Open University, April 21, 2016.

[31] 'Why some university teachers are not participating in the FUTA strike action', August 25, 2012, Dbsjeyaraj.com: Mahendra Gunawardane, Kelaniya University.

[32] 'FUTA and the survival of democratic dissent', Sunday Island, September 29, 2012: Kumar David.

[33] Interview with lecturer and FUTA activist, University of Sri Jayawardenepura: April 19, 2016.

[34] 'Let us act decisively in the name of generations to come: Declaration by dons on 2015 Presidential Election', Colombo Telegraph, December 14, 2014.

[35] Interview with journalist, Colombo, April 26, 2016.

[36] 'Education survives amid war in Sri Lanka', Asia Sentinel, May 16, 2007.

[37] In the words of one key informant: 'You know, as a researcher, if I'm going to a village, even a war-torn village, we'll arrive and it will appear there are no resources, nothing. I'll go with donor agencies, and the first question I'll ask is: 'do the children go to school'. Now usually they will say yes, and take me to a place, in a small shack or something, where the children are getting taught. Now, if the children are not learning in a village, that's when you know that everything's broken down in that place'. Interview with independent consultant, Colombo, April 29, 2016.

public services accumulate ideational salience is also not unique to Sri Lanka, or to education. Aneurin Bevan's great dream of the UK National Health Service, forged at a period of post-war recovery (Webster, 2002), lives on in social imagination, captured in the colourful rainbow emblems of the NHS people posted in their windows, or the 'protect the NHS' framing of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Alex de Waal (1996) argued that because the post-colonial Indian nationalist movement used famine to discredit the colonial government, famine prevention thereafter became a key pillar of the legitimacy of the new nation-state.

The logic of illustrative case studies is to explore the empirical relevance of a theoretical proposition (Levy, 2008). The Sri Lankan case supports the theory that the 'right' to rule is ultimately conferred or withdrawn based on ideas about what is right and wrong for society. It reveals the explanatory potential in analysing why public services carry such ideas: In effect, how the services on people's metaphorical doorsteps come to reinforce or challenge the wider repertoire of ideas against which the rightfulness of the state is assessed. It also proposes specific mechanisms via which this may occur, which are discussed below.

4.1. Formative junctures of entwinement

The first is that the ideational properties of public services may be traced to their entwinement with wider, legitimising ideas at critical junctures of state transformation. Historical institutionalists argue ideas become powerful at the point of their adoption (Sikkink, 1991), often precipitated by critical junctures of crisis of threat (Blyth, 1997). In Sri Lanka, the idea of free education was embedded during a formative period of anti-colonial struggle, when the normative justification for state power was being re-negotiated under a new social contract. It was entrenched as the conceptual sibling of the identity of the post-colonial nation, symbolising its ideological orientation towards welfarism and social justice, and the paternalistic responsibility of the state to deliver for its primary legitimacy audience - the rural masses. In this process of entwinement, the idea of free education became inseparable from the idea of the state.

Such ideational entwinement is made possible because the state is itself a set of ideas – existing not only in physical form, but in social imagination (Holsti, 1996; Hay, 2014). As per all institutions, it contains 'judgments and discriminations, beliefs and discoveries, conceptions and theories that compose, collectively, a particular way of life' (Steinberger, 2004). Ideational entwinement can occur when services represent these same normative judgments about how social life should be organised. Ideas are 'web of related elements of meaning' that provide cognitive shortcuts and interpretive filters to enable people to make sense of the world around them (Carstensen, 2011, p. 600). When there is overlap between the ideas associated with a service and the idea of the state, that service may become part of the state's 'structure of intelligibility' (Steinberger, 2004) that helps render the state legible to the people.

4.2. 'Performing' performance legitimacy

The second proposition is that when public services carry (de-)legitimising ideas, they are primed to become salient commodities in the political process of justifying power. Public services do not become associated with ideas by osmosis – rather, these attachments are actively embedded and reproduced by elites capitalising on their justificatory potential through this process. At critical junctures when free education has been salient to legitimation claims, practices, and contestations in Sri Lanka, its material benefits came wrapped in justificatory discourse that harnessed this ideational salience. When politicians were whipping up social demand for education during the 1950s, their given political justifications were not only about social mobility or jobs but centred on the deeper social meaning of educational access for realising nationalist ideals. When FUTA was defending the social contract, they were not making overt appeals to self-interest, but reminding people of their rights, the state's obligations to them, and the historical significance of education for Sri Lanka's national identity.

In this way performance legitimacy is, quite literally, a performance. It entails the discursive act of framing and articulating the ideas and values associated with services in such a way as to make wider, normative claims to moral authority. Ideas provide interpretive 'frames' – a set of symbols and concepts that actors can use to justify action (Campbell, 1998). When services carry ideas, they may become vehicles for reinforcing the 'specific discourses of moral value' that ultimately cultivate legitimacy beliefs (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 97). Elites may strategically abstract from the material benefits services bring and moralize them, by articulating their intrinsic contribution to realising what is ultimately right and wrong for society. Through this process, the ideational entwinement between services and legitimising ideas can become further entrenched.

4.3. Discursive arenas of contestation

Finally, when public services carry ideas that (de-)legitimise the state, they may become ripe arenas wherein the legitimacy of the state is discursively or physically contested. In Sri Lanka, this occurred after the civil war when the capacity of the state declined, and its ideological orientation shifted, such that it appeared to deviate from the original ideas attached to free education and, in so doing, dislocate the state from its ideational heritage. Over time, the ideas that free education carried were not singular, but polysemic. 'Free' education was never truly free, it had removed fees for those studying in elite schools; social 'justice' was re-interpreted through a nationalist lens as justice for Sinhalese-Buddhists. FUTA's mobilisation to challenge the state was able to gain cross-class, popular support because its meanings could be applied to interpret the new political environment.

Because of the ideational entwinement between free education and the idea of the state, contesting the state's apparent retreat from it became an effective arena for contesting the legitimacy of the state itself. In the context of creeping authoritarianism, the original ideas that free education encapsulated, about the fundamental role of the state and the rights of the people, applied not only to the education sphere, but were deployed as a reference point for the wider abuse of state power. In boomerang fashion, the earlier ideals of free education rebounded on the state's legitimacy. In this way, we can view public services that carry wider criteria around which authority should be rightfully accepted as spaces where the thresholds - lines in the sand - for state legitimacy are revealed and contested.

5. Conclusion

Cumulative evidence suggests that performance legitimacy is not a given: delivering the goods does not have a direct line of sight to moral approval. This is not surprising when viewed in theoretical perspective; the anchor source of state legitimacy is a normative belief in the moral appropriateness of the state. By this logic, for public services to be significant for state legitimacy, they must register in the repertoire of ideas against which this moral appropriateness is judged. This study helps to reveal how these connections are made; specifically, how the deeper normative ideas and meanings associated with certain services are reproduced and contested through the legitimation process.

In the case of Sri Lanka, free education became entwined with normative ideas about social justice, national reclamation, and the rights of the majority during the formative juncture of post-colonial state transformation. Thereafter, political elites vying to consolidate and extend their power base re-interpreted these ideas through a nationalist lens and capitalised on their legitimising potential among the Sinhalese majority. The legacy of the ideational entwinement between free education and the founding character and purpose of the post-colonial state has been to make free education a discursive arena wherein the

legitimacy of the state is itself contested. The essence of these founding ideas were revived to challenge the states moral authority when it is perceived to deviate from them. In this way, education became intimately entwined with the idea of the state.

The case of free education in Sri Lanka is distinguished by the specific nature of the post-colonial, socio-political environment, and the characteristics of education as a highly coveted social good. At the same time, this illustrative case raises propositions about *how* public services become carriers of normative ideas that could be tested in other cases. The legitimacy salience of public services may be traced to the ideas they come to embody at formative junctures of state transformation, and to how elites capitalise on and narrate these ideas in their legitimation strategies: in effect, how performance legitimacy is discursively 'performed'. Through these mechanisms, services may become ripe discursive arenas wherein the ideas that legitimise the state are articulated and contested. Analysing these ideational dynamics implies reading the state, beyond its institutional form, as a structure of intelligibility.

This is not an argument against the material significance of public services for state legitimacy. It is not a claim that people react to, or indeed make, legitimacy claims independent of their material interests. Legitimising ideas must be credible to their intended audience, which requires tangible confirmation through lived experience (Beetham, 1991). The narrative rationality of performance-based legitimation strategies can erode if they lose grip on reality (Vasu & Cheong, 2014). In these ways interests and ideas are, of course, co-constituted. But this fundamental point is underappreciated in the study of the link between public services and state legitimacy. In international debates, sources of state legitimacy tend to be siloed into discreet categories, wherein outputs are often ringfenced as separate from the more subjective categories of ideas and shared beliefs (Dagher, 2018). But 'performance' legitimacy is not an exclusively instrumental source of legitimacy if, through the political process of legitimation, public services become carriers of ideas that (de-) legitimise the state.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Claire Mcloughlin: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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