DELHI LECTURE

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A summary of Partha Chatterjee´s book
***The Politics of the Governed*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.**

1

My subject is popular politics. When I say "popular", I do not necessarily presume any particular institutional form or process of politics. I do, however, suggest that much of the politics I describe is conditioned by the functions and activities of modern governmental systems that have now become part of the expected functions of governments everywhere. These expectations and activities have produced, I will argue, certain relations between governments and populations. The popular politics I will describe grows upon and is shaped by those relations.

The familiar concepts of social theory that I will need to revisit in this lecture are civil society and state, citizenship and rights, universal affiliations and particular identities. Since I will look at popular politics, I must also consider the question of democracy. Many of these concepts will not look familiar any more after I position my lenses and persuade you to look through them. Civil society, for instance, will appear as the closed association of modern elite groups, sequestered from the wider popular life of the communities, walled up within enclaves of civic freedom and rational law. Citizenship will take on two different shapes – the formal and the real. And unlike the old way, known to us from the Greeks to Machiavelli to Marx, of talking about the rulers and the ruled, I will invite you to think of those who govern and those who are governed. Governance, that new buzzword in policy studies, is, I will suggest, the body of knowledge and set of techniques used by, or on behalf of, those who govern. Democracy today, I will insist, is not government of, by and for the people. Rather, it should be seen as the politics of the governed.

I will clarify and elaborate on my conceptual arguments later in this lecture. To introduce my discussion of popular politics, let me begin by posing for you a conflict that lies at the heart of modern politics in most of the world. It is the opposition between the universal ideal of civic nationalism, based on individual freedoms and equal rights irrespective of distinctions of religion, race, language or culture, and the particular demands of cultural identity that call for the differential treatment of particular groups on grounds of vulnerability or backwardness or historical injustice, or indeed for numerous other reasons. The opposition, I will argue, is symptomatic of the transition that occurred in modern politics in the course of the twentieth century from a conception of democratic politics grounded in the idea of popular sovereignty to one in which democratic politics is shaped by governmentality.

The universal ideal of civic nationalism was well captured by Benedict Anderson when he argued, in his now classic *Imagined Communities*, that the nation lives in homogeneous empty time.[1] In this, he was, in fact, following a dominant strand in modern historical thinking that imagines the social space of modernity as distributed in homogeneous empty time. A Marxist could call this the time of capital. Anderson explicitly adopts the formulation from Walter Benjamin and uses it to brilliant effect to show the material possibilities of large anonymous socialities being formed by the simultaneous experience of reading the daily newspaper or following the private lives of popular fictional characters or, he might have added, supporting the national football or cricket team. It is the same simultaneity experienced in homogeneous empty time that allows us to speak of the reality of such categories of political economy as prices, wages, markets, and so on. Empty homogeneous time is the time of capital. Within its domain, capital allows for no resistance to its free movement. When it encounters an impediment, it thinks it has encountered another time – something out of pre-capital, something that belongs to the pre-modern. Such resistances to capital (or to modernity) are therefore understood as coming out of humanity's past, something people should have left behind but somehow haven't. But by imagining capital (or modernity) as an attribute of time itself, this view succeeds not only in branding the resistances to it as archaic and backward, but also in securing for capital and modernity their ultimate triumph,

regardless of what some people may believe or hope, because after all, as everyone knows, time does not stand still.

In his recent book *The Spectre of Comparisons*, Anderson has followed up his analysis in *Imagined Communities* by distinguishing between nationalism and the politics of ethnicity. He does this by identifying two kinds of seriality that are produced by the modern imaginings of community. One is the unbound seriality of the everyday universals of modern social thought: nations, citizens, revolutionaries, bureaucrats, workers, intellectuals, and so on. The other is the bound seriality of governmentality: the finite totals of enumerable classes of population produced by the modern census and the modern electoral systems. Unbound serialities are typically imagined and narrated by means of the classic instruments of print-capitalism, namely, the newspaper and the novel. They afford the opportunity for individuals to imagine themselves as members of larger than face-to-face solidarities, of choosing to act on behalf of those solidarities, of transcending by an act of political imagination the limits imposed by traditional practices. Unbound serialities are potentially liberating. Bound serialities, by contrast, can operate only with integers. This implies that for each category of classification, any individual can count only as one or zero, never as a fraction, which in turn means that all partial or mixed affiliations to a category are ruled out. One can only be black or not black, Muslim or not Muslim, tribal or not tribal, never only partially or contextually so. Bound serialities, Anderson suggests, are constricting and perhaps inherently conflictual. They produce the tools of ethnic politics.

Anderson uses this distinction between bound and unbound serialities to make his argument about the residual goodness of nationalism and the unrelieved nastiness of ethnic politics. Clearly, he is keen to preserve what is genuinely ethical and noble in the universalist critical thought characteristic of the Enlightenment. Anderson, in the tradition of much progressive historicist thinking in the twentieth century, sees the politics of universalism as something that belongs to the very character of modernity.

I disagree. I believe this view of modernity, or indeed of capital, is mistaken because it is one-sided. It looks at only one dimension of the time-space of modern life. People can only imagine themselves in empty homogeneous time; they do not live in it. Empty homogeneous time is the utopian time of capital. It linearly connects past, present

and future, creating the possibility for all of those historicist imaginings of identity, nationhood, progress, and so on that Anderson, along with many others, have made familiar to us. But empty homogeneous time is not located anywhere in real space – it is utopian. The real time-space of modern life is heterogeneous, unevenly dense. Here, even industrial workers do not all internalize the work-discipline of capitalism, and more curiously, even when they do, they do not do so in the same way. Politics here does not mean the same thing to all people. To ignore this is, I believe, to discard the real for the utopian.

It is possible to cite many examples from the post-colonial world that suggest the presence of a dense and heterogeneous time. In those places, one could show industrial capitalists delaying the closing of a business deal because they hadn't yet had word from their respective astrologers, or industrial workers who would not touch a new machine until it had been consecrated with appropriate religious rites, or voters who would set fire to themselves to mourn the defeat of their favourite leader, or ministers who openly boast of having secured more jobs for people from their own clan and having kept the others out. To call this the co-presence of several times – the time of the modern and the times of the pre-modern – is only to endorse the utopianism of Western modernity. Much recent ethnographic work has established that these "other" times are not mere survivals of a pre-modern past: they are new products of the encounter with modernity itself. One must therefore call it the heterogeneous time of modernity.

2

The modern form of the nation is both universal and particular. The universal dimension is represented, first, by the idea of the people as the original locus of sovereignty in the modern state, and second, by the idea of all humans as bearers of rights. If this was universally true, how was it to be realized? By enshrining the specific rights of *citizens* in a state constituted by a particular people, namely, a *nation*. Thus, the nation-state became the particular, and normal, form of the modern state. The basic framework of rights in the modern state was defined by the twin ideas of freedom and equality. But freedom and equality frequently pulled in opposite directions. The two, therefore, had to be mediated, as Étienne Balibar has usefully pointed out, by two further concepts: those of property

and community.[2] *Property* sought to resolve the contradictions between freedom and equality at the level of the individual in relation to other individuals. *Community* was where the contradictions were sought to be resolved at the level of the whole fraternity. Along the dimension of property, the particular resolutions might be more or less liberal; along the dimension of community, they might be more or less communitarian. But it was within the specific form of the sovereign and homogeneous nation-state that the universal ideals of modern citizenship were expected to be realized.

Using theoretical shorthand, we could say that property and community defined the conceptual parameters within which the political discourse of capital, proclaiming liberty and equality, could flourish. The ideas of freedom and equality that gave shape to the universal rights of the citizen were crucial not only for the fight against absolutist political regimes but also for undermining pre-capitalist practices that restricted individual mobility and choice to traditional confines defined by birth and status. But they were also crucial, as the young Karl Marx noted, in separating the abstract domain of Right from the actual domain of life in civil society.[3] In legal-political theory, the rights of the citizen were unrestricted by race, religion, ethnicity or class (by the early twentieth century, the same rights would also be made available to women), but this did not mean the abolition of actual distinctions between men (and women) in civil society. Rather, the universalism of the theory of rights both presupposed and enabled a new ordering of power relations in society based precisely on those distinctions of class, race, religion, gender, etc. At the same time, the emancipatory promise held out by the idea of universal equal rights also acted as a constant source of theoretical critique of actual civil society. That promise has, in the last two centuries, propelled numerous struggles all over the world to change unequal and unjust social differences of race, religion, caste, class or gender.

Marxists have, in general, believed that the sway of capital over traditional community was the inevitable sign of historical progress. True, there is a deep sense of ambiguity in this judgment. If community was the social form of the unity of labour with the means of labour, then the destruction of that unity caused by the so-called primitive accumulation of capital produced a new labourer who was free not just to sell his labour as a commodity but free from all encumbrances of property except his labour-power.

Marx wrote with bitter irony about this "double freedom" of the wage-labourer freed from the ties of pre-capitalist community.[4] But in spite of the lingering scepticism and irony, Marxists of the twentieth century generally welcomed the undermining of pre-capitalist property and the creation of large homogeneous political units such as nation-states. Where capital was seen to be performing the historical task of transition to more developed and modern forms of social production, it received the considered, albeit grudging and ambivalent, approval of Marxist historical theory.

When talking of equality, freedom, property and community in relation to the modern state, we are indeed talking of the political history of capital. The debate in Anglo-American political philosophy between liberals and communitarians seems to me to have confirmed the crucial role in this political history of the two mediating concepts of property and community in determining the range of institutional possibilities within the field constituted by freedom and equality. The communitarians could not reject the value of personal freedom, for if they overemphasized the claims of communal identity, they were open to the charge of denying the basic individual right to choose, possess, use and exchange commodities at will. On the other hand, liberals too did not deny that identifying with the community might be an important source of moral meaning for individual lives. Their concern was that by undermining the liberal system of rights and the liberal policy of neutrality on questions of the common good, communitarians were opening the door to majoritarian intolerance, the perpetuation of conservative practices and a potentially tyrannical insistence on conformism. Few denied the empirical fact that most individuals, even in industrially advanced liberal democracies, led their lives within an inherited network of social attachments that could be described as community. But there was a strong feeling that not all communities were worthy of approval in modern political life. In particular, attachments that seemed to emphasize the inherited, the primordial, the parochial or the traditional were regarded by most theorists as smacking of conservative and intolerant practices and hence as inimical to the values of modern citizenship. The political community that seemed to find the largest measure of approval was the modern nation that grants equality and freedom to all citizens irrespective of biological or cultural difference.[5]

This zone of legitimate political discourse, defined by the parameters of property and community, is emphasized even further by the new philosophical doctrine that calls itself republicanism and that claims to supersede the liberal-communitarian debate. Following upon the historical researches of John Pocock, this doctrine has been advanced most eloquently by Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit.[6] Instead of the usual liberal understanding of freedom as negative liberty, i.e. the individual's freedom from interference, the aim of republicanism is to invoke the moment of anti-absolutism and claim that freedom is freedom from domination. This goal would urge the lover of freedom to fight, unlike what liberals would advocate, against all forms of domination, even when they are benign and do not normally involve interference. It would also allow the lover of freedom to support forms of interference that do not amount to domination. Thus, the republican would be in favour of governmental measures to ensure greater equality or to pursue the moral values of community as long as they do not imply an arbitrary power of domination. In this way, the theorists of republicanism argue, both the unattractiveness of a narrowly limited regime of liberal non-interference and the dangers of rampant communitarian populism can be avoided. The structures of property would not be threatened, while community in its sanitized and palatable forms could flourish.

I do not here wish to enter into the question of whether the republican claim actually leads to conclusions that are substantively different from those of the liberal theory of government. Instead, I would like to turn our attention to the institutional presuppositions that the doctrine of republicanism shares with that of liberalism. Whether individualist or communitarian or republican, all agree that their desired political institutions cannot be made to work effectively merely by legislating them into existence. They must, as Philip Pettit puts it rather cutely, "win a place in the habits of people's hearts".[7] They must, in other words, be nested in a network of norms in civil society that prevail independently of the state and that are consistent with the laws of the state. Only such a civil society would provide, to use an old phraseology, the social basis for capitalist democracy. This was the grand theme of virtually all sociological theories in Europe in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, when the problem was posed of the possibility of capitalist transition in the non-Western world, the same presupposition provided the foundation for modernization theory, whether in its Marxian

or Weberian version. The argument, to put it simply, was that without a transformation of the institutions and practices of civil society, whether carried out from the top or from below, it was impossible to create or sustain freedom and equality in the political domain. To have modern and free political communities, one must first have people who were citizens, not subjects. For many, this understanding provided the ethical core of a project of modernization of the non-Western world: to transform erstwhile subjects, unfamiliar with the possibilities of equality and freedom, into modern citizens.

3

However, while philosophical discussions on the rights of citizens in the modern state hovered around the concepts of liberty and community, the emergence of mass democracies in the advanced industrial countries of the West in the twentieth century produced an entirely new distinction. This is a distinction between citizens and populations. Citizens inhabit the domain of theory, populations the domain of policy. Unlike the concept of citizen, the concept of population is wholly descriptive and empirical; it does not carry a normative burden. Populations are identifiable, classifiable and describable by empirical or behavioural criteria and are amenable to statistical techniques such as censuses and sample surveys. Unlike the concept of citizen which carries the ethical connotation of participation in the sovereignty of the state, the concept of population makes available to government functionaries a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of their "policies" – economic policy, administrative policy, law and even political mobilization. Indeed, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, a major characteristic of the contemporary regime of power is a certain "governmentalization of the state".[8] This regime secures legitimacy not by the participation of citizens in matters of state but by claiming to provide for the well-being of the population. Its mode of reasoning is not deliberative openness but rather an instrumental notion of costs and benefits. Its apparatus is not the republican assembly but an elaborate network of surveillance through which information is collected on every aspect of the life of the population that is to be looked after. It is not surprising that in the course of the twentieth century, ideas of participatory citizenship that were so much a part of the Enlightenment notion of politics

have fast retreated before the triumphant advance of governmental technologies that have promised to deliver more well-being to more people at less cost. Indeed, one might say that the actual political history of capital has long spilled over the normative confines of liberal political theory to go out and conquer the world through its governmental technologies. Much of the emotional charge of the communitarian or republican critique of contemporary Western political life seems to flow from an awareness that the business of government has been emptied of all serious engagement with politics. This is shown most obviously in the steady fall in electoral participation in all Western democracies and the recent panic in left-liberal circles in Europe at the unexpected success of right-wing populists.

How did the enumeration and classification of population groups for the purposes of welfare administration have this effect on the process of democratic politics in advanced capitalist countries? Many writers working in vastly diverse fields have thrown light on this question in recent years, from the philosopher Ian Hacking to the literary historian Mary Poovey.[9] Most relevant for us is the account given by British sociologists such as Nikolas Rose, Peter Miller or Thomas Osborne of the actual working of governmentality in Britain and the United States.[10] They have surveyed the emergence of what has been called "government from the social point of view", typically in the areas of work, education and health, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There was, for instance, the rise of social insurance systems to minimize the uncertain impact of the economy on various groups and individuals. There was the constitution of the family itself, the subject of numerous pedagogical, medical, economic and ethical discourses, as a site of governmentality. There was a proliferation of censuses and demographic surveys, making the work of governmentality accountable in terms of numbers, and leading in turn to the idea of representation by numerical proportions. The management of migration, crime, war and disease made personal identity itself an issue of security and therefore subject to record and constant verification. (The issue has suddenly loomed large in the United States and Britain in the wake of the recent panic over terrorism, and yet both countries have for decades had a plethora of agencies, both state and non-state, recording, verifying and validating the biological, social and cultural details of personal identity.) All of this made governance less a matter of politics and more of administrative

policy, a business for experts rather than for political representatives. Moreover, while the political fraternity of citizens had to be constantly affirmed as one and indivisible, there was no one entity of the governed. There was always a multiplicity of population groups that were the objects of governmentality – multiple targets with multiple characteristics, requiring multiple techniques of administration.

We could then say, in short, that whereas the classical idea of popular sovereignty, expressed in the legal-political facts of equal citizenship, produced the homogeneous construct of the nation, the activities of governmentality required multiple, cross-cutting and shifting classifications of the population as the targets of multiple policies, producing a necessarily heterogeneous construct of the social. Here, then, we have the antinomy between the lofty political imaginary of popular sovereignty and the mundane administrative reality of governmentality: it is the antinomy between the homogeneous national and the heterogeneous social. I might note in passing that when T. H. Marshall made his classic summation in 1949 of the story of the expansion of citizenship from civic to political to social rights, he was guilty of what we can now see was a category confusion. Applauding the progress of the welfare state in Britain, Marshall thought he was seeing the onward march of popular sovereignty and equal citizenship. In fact, it was an unprecedented proliferation of governmentality leading to the emergence of an intricately heterogeneous social.[11]

But in the chronological plotting of his story, Marshall was not wrong. The story of citizenship in the modern West moves from the institution of civic rights in civil society to political rights in the fully developed nation-state. Only then does one enter the relatively recent phase where "government from the social point of view" seems to take over. In countries of Asia and Africa, however, the chronological sequence is quite different. There the career of the modern state has been foreshortened. Technologies of governmentality often predate the nation-state, especially where there has been a relatively long experience of European colonial rule. In South Asia, for instance, the classification, description and enumeration of population groups as the objects of policy relating to land settlement, revenue, recruitment to the army, crime prevention, public health, management of famines and droughts, regulation of religious places, public morality, education, and a host of other governmental functions has a history of at least a

century and a half before the independent nation-states of India, Pakistan and Ceylon were born. The colonial state was what Nicholas Dirks has called an "ethnographic state".[12] Populations there had the status of subjects, not citizens. Obviously, colonial rule did not recognize popular sovereignty.

That was a concept that fired the imaginations of nationalist revolutionaries. Ideas of republican citizenship often accompanied the politics of national liberation. But without exception – and this is crucial for our story about politics in most of the world - they were overtaken by the developmental state which promised to end poverty and backwardness by adopting appropriate policies of economic growth and social reform. With varying degrees of success, and in some cases with disastrous failure, the post-colonial states deployed the latest governmental technologies to promote the well-being of their populations, often prompted and aided by international and non-governmental organizations. In adopting these technical strategies of modernization and development, older ethnographic concepts often entered the field of knowledge about populations – as convenient descriptive categories for classifying groups of people into suitable targets for administrative, legal, economic or electoral policy. In many cases, classificatory criteria used by colonial governmental regimes continued into the post-colonial era, shaping the forms of both political demands and developmental policy. Thus, caste and religion in India, ethnic groups in Southeast Asia and tribes in Africa remained the dominant criteria for identifying communities among the populations as objects of policy.

There are then two sets of conceptual connections I have described. One is the line connecting civil society to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty and granting equal rights to citizens. The other is the line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare. The first line points to a domain of politics described in great detail in democratic political theory in the last two centuries. Does the second line point to a different domain of politics? I believe it does. To distinguish it from the classic associational forms of civil society, I am calling it *political society*.

In a series of recent papers, I have attempted to sketch out this conceptual field in the context of democratic politics in India.[13] I have favoured retaining the old idea of civil society as bourgeois society, in the sense used by Hegel and Marx, and of using it in the

Indian context as an actually existing arena of institutions and practices inhabited by a relatively small section of the people whose social locations can be identified with a fair degree of clarity. In terms of the *formal* structure of the state as given by the constitution and the laws, all of society is civil society; everyone is a citizen with equal rights and therefore to be regarded as a member of civil society. The political process is one where the organs of the state interact with members of civil society in their individual capacities or as members of associations. In actual fact, this is not how things work. Most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of the state. But it is not as though they are outside the reach of the state or even excluded from the domain of politics. As populations within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, they have to be both looked after and controlled by various governmental agencies. These activities bring these populations into a certain *political* relationship with the state. But this relationship does not always conform to what is envisaged in the constitutional depiction of the relation between the state and members of civil society. Yet these are without doubt political relations that may have acquired, in specific historically defined contexts, a widely recognized systematic character, and perhaps even certain conventionally recognized ethical norms, even if subject to varying degrees of contestation. How are we to begin to understand these processes?

Faced with similar problems, some analysts have favoured expanding the idea of civil society to include virtually all existing social institutions that lie outside the strict domain of the state.[14] This practice has become rampant in the recent rhetoric of international financial institutions, aid agencies and non-governmental organizations among whom the spread of a neo-liberal ideology has authorized the consecration of every non-state organization as the precious flower of the associative endeavours of free members of civil society. I have preferred to resist these unscrupulously charitable theoretical gestures, principally because I feel it important not to lose sight of the vital and continually active project that still informs many of the state institutions in countries like India to transform traditional social authorities and practices into the modular forms of bourgeois civil society. Civil society as an *ideal* continues to energize an

interventionist political project. But as an *actually existing form* it is demographically limited. Both of these facts must be borne in mind when considering the relation between modernity and democracy in countries such as India.

Some of you may recall a framework used in the early phase of the Subaltern Studies project in which we talked about a split in the domain of politics between an organized elite domain and an unorganized subaltern domain.[15] The idea of the split, of course, was intended to mark a fault line in the arena of nationalist politics in the three decades before independence during which the Indian masses, especially the peasantry, were drawn into organized political movements and yet remained distanced from the evolving forms of the post-colonial state. To say that there was a split in the domain of politics was to reject the notion, common to both liberal and Marxist historiographies, that the peasantry lived in some "pre-political" stage of collective action. It was to say that peasants in their collective actions were also being political, except that they were political in a way different from that of the elite. Since those early experiences of the imbrication of elite and subaltern politics in the context of the anti-colonial movements, the democratic process in India has come a long way in bringing under its influence the lives of the subaltern classes. It is to understand these relatively recent forms of the entanglement of elite and subaltern politics that I am proposing the notion of a *political society*.

4

In illustrating what I mean by political society and how it works, I will now briefly describe the results of a few field studies from West Bengal with which I have been directly or indirectly involved that show a politics emerging out of the developmental policies of government aimed at specific population groups. Many of these groups, organized into associations, transgress the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work. They may live in illegal squatter settlements, make illegal use of water or electricity facilities, travel without tickets in public transport. In dealing with them, the authorities cannot treat them on the same footing as other civic associations following more legitimate social pursuits. Yet state agencies and non-governmental organizations cannot ignore them either, since they are among thousands of similar associations

representing groups of population whose very livelihood or habitation involve violation of the law. These agencies therefore deal with these associations not as bodies of citizens but as convenient instruments for the administration of welfare to marginal and underprivileged population groups.

These groups on their part accept that their activities are often illegal and contrary to good civic behaviour, but they make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right. They profess a readiness to move out if they are given suitable alternative sites for resettlement, for instance. The state agencies recognize that these population groups do have some claim on the welfare programmes of the government, but those claims could not be regarded as justiciable rights since the state did not have the means to deliver those benefits to the entire population of the country. To treat those claims as rights would only invite further violation of public property and civic laws.

What happens then is a negotiation of these claims on a political terrain where, on the one hand, governmental agencies have a public obligation to look after the poor and the underprivileged and, on the other, particular population groups receive attention from those agencies according to calculations of political expediency. Groups in political society have to pick their way through this uncertain terrain by making a large array of connections outside the group – with other groups in similar situations, with more privileged and influential groups, with government functionaries, perhaps with political parties and leaders. They often make instrumental use of the fact that they can vote in elections, so that it is true to say that the field of citizenship, at certain points, overlaps with that of governmentality. But the instrumental use of the vote is possible only within a field of strategic politics. This is the stuff of democratic politics as it takes place on the ground in India. It involves what appears to be a constantly shifting compromise between the normative values of modernity and the moral assertion of popular demands.

Civil society then, restricted to a small section of culturally equipped citizens, represents in countries like India the high ground of modernity. So does the constitutional model of the state. But in actual practice, governmental agencies must descend from that high ground to the terrain of political society in order to renew their legitimacy as providers of well-being and there to confront whatever is the current configuration of politically mobilized demands. In the process, one is liable to hear complaints from the

protagonists of civil society and the constitutional state that modernity is facing an unexpected rival in the form of democracy.

Let me illustrate. My first case is a group of squatters along a suburban railway line in southern Calcutta studied in 1991-92 by Asok Sen. The settlement here has grown since the 1940s and consists of migrants from southern Bengal and East Pakistan. There are no pre-existing ties of kinship, caste or locality that have brought them together. The first settlers built the shacks and rented them out, even though they were on illegally occupied railway land. Until the 1960s, the settlers were led by a man who owned more than two hundred shacks – he was known as the zamindar of the rail colony. He and a few other local leaders developed connections with the Communist Party which was then organizing the struggle of East Pakistan refugees to be allowed to permanently settle in the refugee colonies dotting the suburbs of Calcutta. In the 1960s, and especially during the Emergency in 1975-76, there were attempts by the railway authorities to evict the settlers. The attempts were foiled by a combination of physical resistance and intervention by prominent communist leaders.

From the early 1980s, however, a new organization developed in the rail colony in the form of a Welfare Association. It started a medical centre and a library. The local municipal officials, political party leaders, officers of the local police station and prominent middle-class residents of the neighbouring apartment blocks were regularly approached to raise funds for the association or to be involved in its activities. The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) opened a child-care unit in the offices of the association. From the late 1980s, the colony obtained a legal electricity connection through six community meters organized by the association. Since 1996, the residents actually have individual electricity connections. The municipal authority also supplies them with water and public toilet facilities. All of this, of course, on illegally occupied public land barely three or four feet away from the railway lines.

When the leading members of the association talk about the colony and its struggles, they do not, however, talk of the shared interests of members of an association. Rather, they describe the community in the more compelling terms of a shared kinship. “We are all a single family,” one leader said. “We don’t distinguish between refugees from east Bengal and those from villages in West Bengal. We have no other place to

build our homes. We have collectively occupied this land for so many years. This is the basis for our claim to our own homes." It is not any prior biological or even cultural affinity that defines this family. Rather, it is a collective occupation of a piece of land – a territory clearly defined in time and space and one that is under threat. It is remarkable how clearly the residents define the limits of their so-called family: they are defined by the territorial limits of the "colony". One leader explained: "The other side of the bridge is another neighbourhood. That area should be left to the men of that neighbourhood. We don't cross the limits." Those limits are often crucial in determining claims: who can become members of the association, who must contribute to collective festivities, or who can demand jobs as domestic help or security guards in the middle-class apartment blocks in the neighbourhood.

This Welfare Association is not an association of civil society. It springs from a collective violation of property laws and civic regulations. The state cannot recognize it as having the same legitimacy as other civic associations pursuing more legitimate objectives. The squatters, on their part, admit that their occupation of public land is both illegal and contrary to good civic life. But they make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right and use their association as the principal collective instrument to pursue that claim. In one of its petitions to the railway authorities, the association wrote: "Among us are refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan and landless people from South Bengal. Having lost everything – means of livelihood, land and even homestead, we had to come to Calcutta to eke out a living and in search of shelter…. We are mostly day labourers and household help, living below the poverty line." Refugees, landless people, day labourers, homesteads, below the poverty line – are all demographic categories of governmentality. This is the ground on which they define both their identity and their claims.

These claims are irreducibly political. They can only be made on a political terrain, where rules may be bent or stretched, and not on the terrain of established law or administrative procedure. The success of these claims depends entirely on the ability of particular population groups to mobilize support to influence the implementation of governmental policy in their favour. But this success is necessarily temporary and contextual. The strategic balance of political forces could change and rules may no longer

be bent as before. As I have said before, governmentality always operates on a heterogeneous field, on multiple population groups and with multiple strategies. Here there is no equal and uniform exercise of the rights of citizenship. Thus, it is quite possible for the equilibrium of strategic politics to shift enough for these squatters to be evicted tomorrow. In fact, in the last few months, a citizens' group successfully moved a public interest litigation in the Calcutta High Court demanding the eviction of the rail colony because it was polluting the waters of the Rabindra Sarobar lake in south Calcutta. A substantial section of the squatters had, in the meantime, shifted their allegiance from the Left Front to the Trinamul Congress. In early March, they managed to physically beat back a police force sent in by the government to implement the court order. They are now hoping against hope that their party leader would soon be reinstated as Railway Minister in Delhi; they might then get rehabilitation before they are forcibly evicted. Such is the tenuous logic of strategic politics in political society.

Not every population group is able to operate successfully in political society. An example of this comes from a study of the bookbinding industry in the College Street area of Calcutta carried out by Asok Sen in 1990. There are many different kinds of bookbinding units and workers, coexisting for the most part on the bare margins of viability and frequently in competition with one another. The vast majority of units are of medium or small size, where the owners are also workers and there are often no more than two or three employees. The average earning of skilled male workers in 1990 was around Rs.500 a month and that of the relatively unskilled women workers around Rs.400. There are children too, employed as "boys" (regardless of gender, they are all "boys" here) – helping hands who could be engaged in all sorts of jobs from fetching tea to loading and unloading piles of books. They could earn about Rs.150 a month if they are paid in cash at all, because frequently all they get is food, clothes and a place to sleep. These earnings are extremely low by the standards of industrial employment in India, but this is an unorganized industry lodged deep inside what is called the informal sector.

There were concerted attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to unionize the bookbinding workers and bargain with the owners for better pay. Activists of the Communist Party took a lead in this, especially after their party formed the state government in 1977. In 1990, there was a three-day strike in the binderies of Daftaripara.

The form of the strike and its results are instructive. The workers demanded a wage increase of Rs.100 a month. But 90 per cent of binderies were units whose owners were themselves workers. Everyone knew that most owners would never be able to pay the increased wage. The strike then became one in which the entire industry at Daftaripara – owners and workers together – tried to put pressure on publishers to pay more for binding jobs. The bigger publishers threatened to get their jobs done from other units in the city or even from outside the state. In the end, when the handful of large binderies in Daftaripara agreed to increase wages by Rs.75 a month, the strikers declared a great victory and called off the agitation. Following the strike, union activities in Daftaripara were once more at a low ebb.

Unlike what we saw in the rail colony, there is very little sense in Daftaripara of a collective identity of bookbinders. Here are 4,000 people in the same trade, in a small urban neighbourhood. Most of the men sleep in their workshops at night and go home to their villages on weekends and holidays. The workers in Daftaripara generally vote for the Left parties, but they know about politics from their rural connections, not because their lives as workers lead them to politics. Instead, they speak of ties of loyalty between owner and worker, of mutual acts of kindness, of paternal care. There is no engagement here with the apparatus of governmentality. The bookbinders of Daftaripara have not made their way into political society. Their example shows once more the difficulties of class organization in the so-called informal sector of labour, where the capitalist and the petty mode of production are intertwined in a mutually reinforcing tangle. Despite the sincere efforts of many activists, Leninist strategies of working-class organization have foundered here. The political leaders of the Left have instead turned their attention elsewhere and found much greater success – in political society of rural Bengal.

There are many examples I could give you of strategic negotiations in rural political society in West Bengal. Let me focus on three cases of resettlement that I studied two years ago.[16]

The first case is from the coal mine town of Raniganj. The air hangs heavy here with smoke and at night you can see the fires burning in the distant fields. Large settled areas, including densely populated urban areas, are prone to subsidence and underground and surface fires because of decades of indiscriminate mining. Following several minor

and not so minor disasters, efforts have been under way to stabilize the surface and prevent the fires. However, the methods are technically difficult, slow and extremely expensive. The alternative is to resettle the population at safer locations. After prolonged discussion and some local agitation, the government of India decided in 1996 that more than 34,000 houses in 151 locations were in critically unstable areas. The cost of resettlement for about 300,000 people would be Rs.2000 crores. The decision was to begin resettlement immediately without waiting for the institutional machinery to be put in place.

Apparently, the resettlement work is still in progress, but no one in the area could show me any visible signs and most didn't even seem to know. There is a vague sense of the possibility of large-scale disaster, but the people here have lived with this danger for decades and don't seem to be greatly concerned. Resettlement is not tied here with a new developmental project or with new economic opportunities. If there is a sense in the government and public sector agencies that resettlement needs to be carried out as a means of preventing a sudden and massive disaster, there is little urgency in this regard within the population. There does not seem to be any evidence of a "voluntary" move for resettlement. Political society has not been mobilized here to benefit the people.

My second case is from the port and new industrial town of Haldia, across the river from Calcutta. The Haldia resettlement took place in two phases for two very different projects. The contrast between the two experiences is instructive.

First, land was acquired for the construction of Haldia port from 1963 to 1984. The process of acquisition and resettlement was long, slow and marked by numerous difficulties including many disputes that ended up in court. In the early 1990s, with the rapid rise in land prices following the urbanization of the Haldia area, there was a rush of applications for the resettlement plots, some from people (or their sons and daughters) who had been dislocated twenty-five years ago. As of two years ago, more than 1,400 of the original 2,600 families who qualified still remained to be resettled, more than twenty years after their lands were taken.

The next phase of land acquisition came with the new industrialization of Haldia in 1988-91, leading to considerable organized agitation demanding resettlement. In 1995, it was decided that rehabilitation cases would be dealt with on the recommendations of a

Rehabilitation Advisory Committee. The Committee would consist of two administrators, two land acquisition officers and four political persons representing the main government and opposition parties. All processing of applications for resettlement, hearing of cases, allotments, dealing with grievances, were to be done by this committee.

The general impression among administrators, political leaders and affected persons seems to be that this has been a successful procedure. The idea is that the task of formulating the specific norms, under prevailing local circumstances, of qualifying for rehabilitation plots and of identifying genuine cases deserving rehabilitation should be done on the basis of a ground-level agreement between political representatives. Since the agreement would involve both the government party and the party of opposition, it could be assumed that this would represent an effective local consensus. Once an agreement was reached at this level, the task of the administration was simply to carry out the decisions.

The important assumption here is, of course, that the political parties effectively cover the entire range of interests and opinions. Given the highly politicized, organized and polarized nature of rural society in most of West Bengal today, this may not be an unwarranted assumption. If there was a third organized political force in the area which also represented a distinct set of voices, it would also have had to be accommodated within such a committee if it was to be effective.

The Committee decided, for instance, that families with a larger number of dependents would get larger plots, that no one could get cash instead of rehabilitation plots, that those who owned houses elsewhere would not qualify, that those who had built structures on their homesteads in anticipation of the land being acquired would not qualify, etc. All of these matters were decided on the basis of local investigations and the feeling was that if both political parties were represented, there was no way that the qualification criteria could be misapplied. Looking through the decisions made by the committee, I even found cases where it reversed its earlier decisions in the light of new information brought to its notice by the political representatives and one case where a woman was given a rehabilitation plot on humanitarian grounds even though she did not meet the stipulated norms.

My third resettlement case is from Rajarhat, to the north-east of Calcutta, where a new town is coming up. In the course of only a few years, it is being transformed from a rural agricultural area to a virtual extension of the Calcutta metropolis. As a result, land prices in the area have skyrocketed. As soon as news spread of the New Town project, property developers and land speculators swooped on the small landowners and tried to buy them out before the land acquisition process began. Apart from the rapidly soaring land prices, another problem was that all values of land sales in urban and semi-urban areas are routinely under-recorded for registration purposes in order to avoid taxes. The official decision was to encourage voluntary resettlement by offering market prices. But if market prices were determined by the legal records of land sales in the area, no one would be induced to part with their lands voluntarily.

The decision was then made to acquire land at "negotiated" prices. A Land Procurement Committee was set up to negotiate an acceptable price with the affected persons. Not surprisingly, the Committee included local representatives of the government as well as the opposition political parties. The result, it is claimed, is a virtually trouble-free acquisition with almost no court cases. Owners were paid the compensation within three months (since there was no official procedure of price fixation) – this was a record by any standards. The cost of acquisition was certainly higher than would have been the case if the normal legal procedure was followed. But then the project would have been delayed. And since the object of the project was to develop new urban land for sale, the increased cost could be absorbed in the prices to be charged from those who would be given the developed lands.

This is political society in an active relationship with the procedures of governmentality. Political society has here found a place in the general political culture. Here, people are not unaware of their possible entitlements or ignorant of the means of making themselves heard. Rather, they have formally recognized political representatives who they can use to mediate on their behalf. However, the form will work only if all have a stake in the success of the particular project, or else some mediators will wreck the consensus. Further, the form is likely to work only if the governmental authority follows the recommendations of the political representatives but is itself outside the ambit of electoral politics. That is to say, the governmental body and the political body must be

kept separate but put in a relationship in which the latter can influence the former. But the distinction between the governmental and the political must be clearly maintained.

The decisions recorded by the governmental authorities clearly hide the actual negotiations that must have taken place in political society. We are not told on what specific criteria the political representatives finally agreed on the list of beneficiaries. It is entirely possible that the negotiations on the ground did not respect the principles of bureaucratic rationality or even the provisions of the law. In Rajarhat, we know from other sources that the local consensus includes an understanding that a part of the compensation to be paid to the owners of land would be distributed to tenants and labourers who have lost their livelihoods. This is entirely beyond the purview of what the governmental authority needs to recognize, or even know, but it presupposes it by accepting the recommendations of the political representatives.

We must also remember that a local consensus among rival political representatives is likely to reflect the locally dominant interests and values. It would be effective in securing the demands of those who are able to find organized political support, but could ignore and even suppress demands of locally marginalized interests. Besides, let us not forget that a local political consensus is also likely to be socially conservative and could be particularly insensitive, for instance, to gender or minority issues. As I have mentioned a few times before, political society will bring into the hallways and corridors of power some of the squalor, ugliness and violence of popular life. But if one truly values the freedom and equality that democracy promises, then one cannot imprison it within the sanitized fortress of civil society.

In these lectures, I have not told you very much at all about the dark side of political society, not because I am unaware of its existence but because I cannot claim to fully understand how criminality or violence are tied to the ways in which various deprived population groups must struggle to make their claims to governmental care. I believe I have said enough about political society to suggest that in the field of popular democratic practice, crime and violence are not fixed black-and-white legal categories; they could be open to a great deal of political negotiation. It is a fact, for instance, that in the last two and a half decades, there has been a distinct rise in the public, and political, outbreak of caste violence in India, in a period which has also seen the most rapid

expansion of democratic assertion by the hitherto oppressed castes. We also have numerous examples when violent movements by deprived regional, tribal or other minority groups have been followed by a quick and often generous inclusion into the ambit of governmentality. Is there then a strategic use of illegality and violence here? A particularly insightful recent study of this question is by Thomas Blom Hansen on the Shiv Sena in Mumbai: for the moment, I can only refer you to this work.

I must now conclude. Let me do this by reminding ourselves of the founding moment of the political theory of democracy in ancient Greece. Centuries before either civil society or liberalism was invented, Aristotle had concluded that not all persons were fit to become part of the governing class because not everyone had the necessary practical wisdom or ethical virtue. But his shrewd empirical mind did not rule out the possibility that in some societies, for some kinds of people, under some conditions, democracy might be a good form of government. Our political theory today does not accept Aristotle's criteria of the ideal constitution. But our actual governmental practices are still based on the premise that not everyone can govern. What I have tried to show is that alongside the abstract promise of popular sovereignty, people in most of the world are devising new ways in which they can choose how they should be governed. Many of the forms of political society I have described would not, I suspect, meet with Aristotle's approval, because they would appear to him to allow popular leaders to take precedence over the law. But we might, I think, be able to persuade him that in this way the people are learning, and forcing their governors to learn, how they would prefer to be governed. That, the wise Greek might agree, is a good ethical justification for democracy.

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[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
[2] Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, tr. By … (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp….
[3] Especially in Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" (1843) in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), pp. 146-174.
[4] Chapters on "The So-called Primitive Accumulation" in Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, tr. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954), pp. 667-724.

[5] Two convenient collections that give a fair sampling of these arguments are Michael Sandel, ed., *Liberalism and Its Critics* (New York: New York University Press, 1984) and Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit, eds., *Communitarianism and Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[6] See especially Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[7] Pettit, *Republicanism*, p. 241.
[8] See, in particular, Michel Foucault, "Governmentality" in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 87-104.
[9] Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and *A History of the Social Fact* (…, …).
[10] See in particular Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, "Production, Identity and Democracy," *Theory and Society*, 24 (1995), pp. 427-67; Thomas Osborne, *Aspects of Enlightenment: Social Theory and the Ethics of Truth* (London: UCL Press, 1998).
[11] T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, ed. by T. Bottomore (1949; London: Pluto Press, 1992), pp. 3-51.
[12] Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

13. Partha Chatterjee, "Two Poets and Death: On Civil and Political Society in the Non-Christian World", in Tim Mitchell and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., Questions of Modernity, Minneapolis, forthcoming; "Beyond the Nation? Or Within?" Social Text, Autumn 1998; "Community in the East", Economic and Political Weekly, January 1998; "The Wages of Freedom" in Partha Chatterjee, ed., The Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-state, Delhi, 1998.

14. For arguments of this kind, see Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory, Cambridge, Mass., 1992.

[15] See in particular Ranajit Guha, "…", *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. …
[16] Partha Chatterjee, "Recent Strategies of Resettlement and Rehabilitation in West Bengal", paper presented at the workshop on Social Development in West Bengal, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, June 2000.