The 'political society' of the governed? Marginalia beyond 'marginalisation'

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Between the sphere of civil society associated with the idea of active, democratic citizenship, and the governance of precariously living populations 'in most of the world' (i.e. not simply 'in the margins'), lies the domain, famously outlined by Partha Chatterjee, of 'the political society of the governed'. This article investigates the concept of 'the political society of the governed', starting with its current definition, social and political contexts and a conceptual history. The article then proceeds to problematise the corollary of a bio-political 'governmentality from below', theoretically questioning the extent of its capacity to inform political agency, and practically examining the forms of such political agency, with special reference to studies on insurgent citizenship in South Africa.

Politics of the governed and governance of populations

Immersed in, and emerging from, studies on the conditions of poverty, are new attempts at conceptualising world-making politics on the part of groups whose conditions of life render them subjects rather than citizens – attempts that eschew the traditional moulds of 'marginalisation', 'civil society', and 'social movement' activism. Rather than finding a unitary denominator, these attempts acknowledge the split between a narrowly defined civil society still related to the state through rights-based citizenship, and the governance of precariously living populations inhabiting spaces and creating places no longer confined to margins or peripheries.

Located within this split is what Partha Chatterjee (2004) terms 'the political society of the governed'. This term has since become programmatic in movements emerging from the global shadows. While acknowledging the wide socially articulatory role of the concept of 'political society', I would like to critically examine its provenance and potential pitfalls. In particular, I will question the way it grafts itself onto bio-political governmentality.

In Partha Chatterjee's (2004) influential study of subaltern politics in India at particular sites,[1] the modern figure of the governed arises at the intersection between sovereignty and government; between the state with the promise of universal liberty and equality, and bio-political governmentality. These poles function both in opposition to, and close relationship with, each other. Chatterjee (2004) describes this antinomy in the following terms:

> [*T*]he classical idea of popular sovereignty, expressed in the legal-political facts of equal citizenship, produced the homogeneous construct of the nation, whereas the activities of governmentality required multiple, cross-cutting and shifting classifications of the population as the targets of multiple policies, producing a necessary 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. (p. 35)

Far apart as these poles are in the terms in which they are described here, they are closely related; yet their respective attributes and subject positions are not symmetrically distributed across the antinomy here posited. The subjects of governmentality are not citizens under the legitimation of civic nationalism, but integers plotted between the national census and the municipal grid (see Veriava 2013:283); their governance is 'less a matter of politics and more of administrative policy' (Chatterjee 2004:35), less a matter of political representation than the business of experts of municipal planning.

The 'part' that does not find a part in democratic citizenship, does not, for that matter, find its role in civil society either. Civil society is characterised as formally emanating from ideas of freedom and equality (see Chatterjee 2004:46), but substantially limited to 'a 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' (Chatterjee 2004:4).

1.Chatterjee's (2004) conceptualisation of 'political society' turns on his observations of the Santan Dal sect's practices in Calcutta, of the Gobindapur Rail Colony Fate Number 1 in Calcutta, the coal mine town of Raniganj near the Western border of Bengal with Bihar, the resettlement of Haldia, a port and new industrial town to the south of Calcutta, and the resettlement of Rajarhat to the northeast of Calcutta.

Much more widespread, to the point of having become conventionalised, are the techniques given effect in the management of populations. These techniques and technologies formed the bedrock of colonial rule; they involved classifying, enumerating and governing population groups, long before multi-national states were established on the Indian sub-continent (see Chatterjee 2004:37). Post-colonially, these technologies were integrated into developmental policies aimed at specific population groups. 'Poverty' now features as a demographic category in the developmental programmes of public policy (see Appadurai 2013:117). Once more, the gap between 'development' – often used synonymously with 'indigence management', 'urban renewal' and 'clean-up operations' – and rights-based democratic institutions is gaping (see Appadurai 2013:120).

Governmentally registered 'populations' have responded in forging their own distinct, systematic, and to some extent conventionalised 'political relationship with the state', that is, their own domain of politics, which Chatterjee (2004:38) calls 'political society', in contradistinction to 'civil society'. Being deprived of full citizenship rights, with the bare fact of their individual and collective life teetering on the brink of unlawfulness, associations of refugees, landless people, day labourers, workers with a tenuous hold on subsistence, and other people living below the poverty line yet solicit recognition from state agencies:

> These groups … 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 (Chatterjee 2004:40) –

even if such right cannot be translated into justiciable claims. These contingent openings between unlawfulness and civic recognition are negotiated on a political terrain where governmental agencies reluctantly recognise these populations on account of their role in an urban economy, sociality, and within a cultural patchwork, and on account of their own calculations of political expediency (see Chatterjee 2004:40; also Chatterjee 2011:14).

> [*G*]overnmetnal agencies must descend from [*the*] 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 (Chatterjee 2004: 41),

often in the wake of party-political campaigns to garner votes ahead of elections, yet independently of considerations of active citizenship within the state (see Chatterjee 2004:47; see also Appadurai 2013:119). Their response to demands for housing, access to piped water and electricity and other municipal services tends to be framed not by the recognition of constitutional rights, but on the basis of cost-benefit calculations.

'Popular politics in most of the world'

Chatterjee's 'Reflections on popular politics in most of the world' were first presented as lectures at Columbia University in November 2001,[2] and then published under the title *Politics of the Governed* in 2004. They have since become a 'bible' of new social movements contesting neo-liberal governmental policies to 'manage' the poor by regulating access to, use of, and cost recovery for social and municipal services. This is only partly a matter of the conjunctural co-incidence of the publication of these lectures on the politics of the governed in Calcutta with the emergence in South Africa of social movements contesting indigence management posing as 'welfare'.

Much more important in accounting for the enthusiastic reception of Chatterjee's lectures across the Indian (and/or Atlantic) Ocean, is the conceptual formation that theoretically charts a possibility for politically envisioning 'the good life in the bad', or a way of thinking contestations over bio-political governmentality as political contestations at the moment when in South Africa, their antagonism seems to be mired in the de-politicisation entailed in 'the mundane administrative reality of governmentality' (Chatterjee 2004:35). This is how a critical scholar-activist welcomes Chatterjee's path-breaking analysis:

> The immeasurable virtue of Chatterjee's study is to throw light on the forms of politics taking shape on the horizon of modern governmentality, and which exceed the narrow associational grid of civil society. What Chatterjee throws light on is the politics of the governed, that is, the wide set of practices, often skating the boundary of legality, that anticipate and respond to governmental categories for administering to the life of populations – practices that are often structured in order to draw a particular subject into governmental lines of visibility in order to become [*a*] target of government intervention, or, alternatively, to avoid capture by its disciplinary technologies. Rather than the utopian space of civil society, for Chatterjee these practices, which are deeply entangled with modern governmentality, are the real centre of politics in 'most of the world', the place of politics where the promise of citizenship is only the elusive dream of nationalists. (Veriava 2013:283)

This immense hope and promise converges on one concept – namely, that of 'political society'. It gives contours to what otherwise would appear, even in Chatterjee's (2004:35) description of it, 'the heterogeneous social'. It would be left inchoate if it were not for its active role in challenging 'the mundane administrative reality of governmentality' (Chatterjee 2004:35). Under renewed authorship, it emerges on the other side of the nation state and/or civil society axis. '[*T*]he line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare', Chatterjee (2004:37) believes, is a newly emergent domain of politics which he calls 'political society' in contradistinction to 'the classical associational forms of civil society'.

Conceptual Lineage I: Gramsci on 'political society'

The new coinage of the concept of 'political society' stands on a disproportionately thin conceptual base, though. Only

2. They were presented under the auspices of the annual series of University Seminars at Columbia University, with the support of the Leonard Hastings Schoff and Suzanne Levick-Schoff Memorial Fund.

in one instance is it referenced to one of its progenitors – and extremely vaguely at that:

> When I use [*the term 'political society'*], [*Chatterjee explains*] I am always reminded that in the *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci begins by equating political society with the state, but soon slides into a whole range of social and cultural interventions that must take place well beyond the domain of the state. (Chatterjee 2004:50–51)

Gramsci's employment of the concepts of 'civil society' and 'political society' cannot be adduced as warrant for Chatterjee's application. 'Political society' for Gramsci is closely related to the role of the state, in fact often used synonymously with 'the State' (Gramsci [1929] 1986:12, [1934–1935] 1986:52),[3] and in other instances referred to as one element which, along with civil society, makes up the State (Gramsci [1932] 1986:263), whereas the disparate 'subaltern classes' are, for Gramsci, 'intertwined with [*the history*] of civil society' (Gramsci [1934–1935] 1986:52). The possibility of influencing the programmes of the dominant political formations in order to 'press claims of their own, and the consequences of these attempts in determining processes of decomposition, renovation, or neo-formation … , in order to press claims of a limited and partial character', and 'assert ... integral autonomy ...' (Gramsci [1934–1935] 1986:52) – thus, the kinds of claims on livelihood and habitation addressed to municipal-administrative functionaries described by Chatterjee – fall fairly and squarely within the definition of civil society.

'Political society', in contrast, becomes visible for Gramsci in processes of changes that shift the division and distribution of powers and functions within the State-Society relation towards the side of the State (when, for instance, one faction within the Church, in the process of secularisation, aligns itself with civil society, whereas another, under the influence of a privileged interest group, assumes the character of 'political society' in moving the remaining part of the church closer to the State (see Gramsci [1930–1932] 1986:245). The impact of such conjunction is felt by citizens as a combination of rule and governance (see Gramsci [1930] 1986:253). Of such a state, Gramsci says (in attempting to 'translate the notion of "Prince", as used in Machiavelli's work, into modern political language', in 1930):

> It is not possible to create a constitutional law of the traditional type on the basis of this reality, which is in continuous movement; it is only possible to create a system of principles asserting that the State's goal is its own end, its own disappearance, in other words the re-absorption of political society into civil society. (Gramsci [1930] 1986:253)

In this situation, governance becomes 'government by functionaries' (Gramsci [1931–1932] 1986:268). The absorption of political society into civil society does not readily open political society to agonism or antagonism; in fact, and especially in conditions in which a separation of civil society from the State and sovereign statehood *per se* has not been historically possible, 'the government by functionaries' relying on statolatry from their subjects, would

> serve to determine the will to construct within the husk of political society a complex and well-articulated civil society in which the individual can govern himself without his self-government thereby entering into conflict with political society – but rather becoming its normal continuation, its organic complement. (Gramsci [1931–1932] 1986:268)

Only secondarily does this 'government by functionaries', despite itself, give rise to 'new forms of State life, in which the initiative of individuals and groups will have a "State" character, albeit not one owed to the "government of the functionaries"' (Gramsci [1931–1932] 1986:268–269). The emergence of 'new forms of State life' despite and outside of 'government of the functionaries' is possible only through active critique (Gramsci [1931–1932] 1986:268).[4]

It is precisely the requirement of 'active critique' in the transposition from governmentality to political society that is being foreclosed in Chatterjee's account of 'popular politics in most of the world'. This transposition thereby appears as an act of radical nominalism, and all the more so, as it does not put itself through the requisite conceptual labour. It thereby falls short of bringing clarity – a clarification so urgently needed – to the question as to why it is that social movements contesting regimes of bio-political governmentality are faltering not just under welfare-lawfare-warfare, but under the difficulties of grappling with the location and the modalities of the political in the midst of the retrenchment of the state in its governmentalisation.

These difficulties, practical, organisational and theoretical, are echoed in initiatives at other sites in India.

Chatterjee's Calcutta and Appadurai's Mumbai – Some conceptual-political comparisons

Similarly to Chatterjee's lectures on subaltern politics in sites around Calcutta, some of the essays compiled in Appadurai's recently published book deal with sites and forms of precarious collective life in and around Mumbai. Similarly to the forms and activities of self-organisation described by Chatterjee for people living precariously in Calcutta, Appadurai's essays highlight collaborative initiatives at sites in Mumbai, similarly home to large numbers of insecurely or poorly housed residents without food security and largely without, or with severely restricted, access to essential services such as running water, electricity and waste removal (see Appadurai 2013:157).

3.The dates in square brackets refer to the date in which the notes, written in prison, were composed, and are important markers for the development of Gramsci's thought during his imprisonment from 1928 to 1935 (the year of his death). The 1986 date gives the publication date of the 5th edition of the *Selections from Prison Notebooks* from which I am quoting.

4. In Gramsci's formulation: 'However, this kind of "statolatry" must not be abandoned to itself, must not, especially, become theoretical fanaticism or be conceived of as "perpetual". It must be criticised, precisely in order to develop and produce new forms of State life, in which the initiative of individuals and groups will have a "State" character, even if it is not due to the "government of the functionaries" (make State life become "spontaneous")' (Gramsci [1931–1932] 1986:268–269). It is instructive to compare Gramsci's more rigorous demand for critique with the 'default' critical position attributed by Chatterjee to 'political society', which is considerably thinner and weaker: 'It could be said that the activities of political society in postcolonial countries represent a continuing critique of the paradoxical reality in all capitalist democracies of equal citizenship and majority rule, on the one hand, and the dominance of property and privilege, on the other' (Chatterjee 2011:16).

This is how Appadurai (2013) describes the physical-social habitat of Mumbai's precariat:

> Housing is at the heart of the lives of this army of toilers [*that is, the poorest of the poor in the city of Mumbai, working in menial occupations, mostly on a daily or piecework basis*]. Their everyday life is dominated by ever-present forms of risk. Their temporary shacks may be demolished. Their slumlords may push them out through force or extortion. [*The force of the elements or open fires*] may destroy their fragile shelters and their few personal possessions. Their lack of sanitary facilities increases their need for doctors to whom they have limited access. And their inability to document their claims to housing may snowball into a general invisibility in urban life, making it impossible for them to claim any rights to such things as ... municipal health and education facilities [and] police protection … . In a city where … electricity bills, and rent receipts guarantee other rights to the benefits of citizenship, the inability to secure claims to proper housing and other political handicaps reinforce each other. Housing – and its lack – set the stage for the most public drama of disenfranchisement in Mumbai. In fact, housing can be argued to be the single most critical site of this city's politics of citizenship. (p. 158)

Similarly to Chatterjee, Appadurai focuses on the way in which residents begin to actively inhabit, traverse and transgress the striated spaces on the bio-political-developmental grid on which municipal governance has plotted them.

But unlike Chatterjee, who moves those so plotted into the domain of 'political society' on account of such self-activity, Appadurai (2013:158), while similarly talking about 'making interventions' and 'generating new forms of politics', does not spirit away the problematic nature of this 'politics' – which is of the nature of a *Realpolitik* of accommodation, negotiation, and exerting influence and pressure (Appadurai 2013:160). He candidly talks of the 'dilemma' of poor communities impelled to engage in collaborative risk-taking, 'to participate in the experiments to partner in the possible designs of and to share in the risks of specific investments in space, infrastructure, and urban services' (Appadurai 2013:128), 'seizing every opportunity to collaborate, experiment, and aspire in the public domain, not just with their allies but also with their opponents' (Appadurai 2013:129) in a non-partisan, non-party-politically aligned manner (Appadurai 2013:160). Being pragmatically and patiently 'non-political' allows them to enter into discussion with various levels of the state bureaucracy administering urban infrastructure such as housing loans, development planning, real estate regulation, urban transport, municipal power and police services (Appadurai 2013:160). While endorsing collaborative risk-taking, Appadurai and the Alliance with which he works, remain alert to 'the ever present risk … that the needs of funders will gradually obliterate the needs of the poor themselves' (Appadurai 2013:161).

This risk is added to the risk taken collectively and organisationally by the residents. Residents take on this added risk of population-based data gathering, with the idea of creating a governmentality from below to confront and de-fang a governmentality from above, and making themselves count, through a self-conscious strategy of self-enumeration and self-surveying, gathering data about households in their own settlements (Appadurai 2013:166) that would otherwise fall out of a documentation based on residential address, rent receipts and electricity metre readings. Appadurai (2013:167) considers it enabling: the self-monitoring, self-enumeration and self-regulation, he explains, can 'operate at the nexus of family, land, and dwelling that is the central site of material negotiations in slum life', and can therefore provide the social infrastructure for the transfer of rights, entitlements, claims, goods and services that is integral to social citizenship. It actively operates to create a power-knowledge whose discursive and material negotiation it undertakes itself, rather than handing it to the governmentalised state at local, state and federal levels trying to get a grip on uncounted and invisible marginal populations. This set of strategies emerges as a 'counter-governmentality', a 'governmentality from below' (Appadurai 2013:167, 166). It simultaneously provides the testing ground for 'deep democracy' (Appadurai 3013:212) generating identifications, contexts of solidarity, and social legitimacy.

Appadurai is prepared to honour these 'deep democratic' forms of associational life becoming-politics-of-the-governed with the title of being 'revolutionary'. Yet there remains a troubling sense that this form of auto-governmentality, with its self-enumeration, self-monitoring and self-evaluation, serves to insidiously entrench the governance of populations, into the capillary extensions that had so far remained out of the reaches of the state (see Appadurai 2013:167).

Appadurai (2013) wipes this consideration off the slate with a single gesture, countering it with his own view stated in one sentence:

> But my own view is that this sort of governmentality from below, in the world of the urban poor, is a kind of counter-governmentality, animated by the social relations of shared poverty, by the excitement of active participation in the politics of knowledge, and by its openness to correction through other forms of intimate knowledge and spontaneous everyday politics. (p. 167)

The ethnographic authority at work in this statement, by which the observer's own view attains definitional power, is similar in its effect to the nominalism by which Chatterjee creates, by announcing it, 'political society' at precisely those points where its existence is most radically in question – namely, at the conjunction of 'politics' and 'necessity' that would continuously throw the very notion of 'a politics of necessity' into question.[5]

A contradictory economic-social-political terrain of contestation cannot easily be levelled in and through un-problematically understood consensual 'negotiation' of the

5. Shannon Walsh explains and elaborates the methodological and practical cautions to be heeded in forging the conjunction of necessity, poverty and politics: 'The idea that what binds people together is their very poverty itself is something only the most rudimentary understanding of social dynamics and everyday practices of power – and of global capitalism – could support. ... the poor are given only their wretchedness as their common unifier. We become complicit by celebrating the dangerous fiction of the homogeneous 'community' of the shack settlement ... ignoring the ... antagonisms' (Walsh 2013: 250).

terms of necessity with those of politics, irrespective of any declared good or political will evinced in the decision or the process. This is brought home also in the recent history of some of the initiatives of groups affiliated to the Anti-Privatisation Forum, as well as other new social movements in South Africa at the beginning of the 21st century. While commercialisation, privatisation and outsourcing of municipal provisions and services have been heavily contested, forcing changes in policies and their implementation on the ground, such shifts have often been negotiated and 'moulded in relation to the rationalities of governmental frameworks' (Veriava & Naidoo 2013:81) that give with one hand and take away with another (as in the 'Siyazana' campaign, 'bringing together prepaid technology with free basic water delivery, debt write-offs and other "incentives" to "rehabilitate" consumers within an indigent management framework …' [Veriava & Naidoo 2013: 83]). Thus, while making some concessions to decommodified access to water, power and municipal services, governmental campaigns devoted to cost recovery, interpellate 'responsibilised citizens' as managed populations. The shifts in policy responding to resistance are not so much an instantiation of the tired old characterisation of 'struggle between resistance and accommodation'; rather, they pose a challenge to confront a political limit (see Veriava & Naidoo 2013:82).

Conceptual lineage II: Locke on 'political society' and the social contract

To address that limit conceptually, beneath and beyond the nominalistic acts that I had identified in the accounts of Chatterjee and Appadurai, I would propose examining an extended lineage of the concept of 'political society' – one that falls out of Chatterjee's purview. In particular, I would like to trace the way in which it features in the thought on government of one of its earlier progenitors, John Locke. In the concept of 'political society', the contradictory mutual implication of constituent power and social contract stands starkly revealed from the outset.

Fully assuming its avowedly inaugurating power, Chapter 8 of the Second Treatise of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1691) is entitled 'Of the beginning of political societies'. While asserting the principles of equality, liberty and individual autonomy, a number of individuals would agree to 'make one body politic' for their peace, security, and for the protection of their private property (§95), governed by leaders elected, forms of government agreed upon and laws adopted by the majority. Yet this hypothetical construction is plagued by an infinite regress that Locke (1691) formulates in anticipation of the following objection:

> That all men being born under government, some or other, it is impossible any of them should ever be free, and at liberty to unite together, and begin a new one, or ever be able to erect a lawful government. (§113)

And Locke (1691) elaborates this anticipated objection:

> All men, say they, are born under government, and therefore they cannot be at liberty to begin a new one. Everyone is born a subject to his father, or his prince, and is therefore under the perpetual tie of subjection and allegiance. (§114)

Locke restricts the binding force of such 'natural subjection', and highlights 'positive engagement' in 'expressing promise and compact' that constitute membership of a society. At this point, Locke cites Hooker's Eccl. Pol. I.i.sect. 10, to qualify this promise-in-compact by referring to the 'com[ing] unto laws, wherein all men might see their duty beforehand, and know the penalties of transgressing them' (§94 n.).

The few extracts from Locke's idea of 'political societies' rendered here clearly indicate the conjunction of divergent lines of thought of the political: constituent power is captured in the social contract. Locke emphatically asserts the possibility of the emergence of the new through a founding act, but that founding act is immediately cast in the form of the contract, which entails not only simultaneous, but also prospective subjection enforced by anticipated punishment, thus invoking the political antagonisms that remain continuous with it.

In political modernity, the contract with the sovereign is increasingly diffracted to outsourced agencies not beholden to the mutual and reciprocal relationship between autonomy and obligation that defines legitimacy; they come to wield power without authority.

What has remained of the empty shell of the social contract in late 20th century and beginning of 21st century forms of neo-contractualism, I would submit, are 'covenant-like mechanisms of the contractual displacement and allocation of risk' (Mitropoulos 2012:27) and of the limitation of liability in the context of precarious conditions of economic, social and biological life. The conversion of the contract from moral-philosophical to economic registers has generated an indistinction between economics and politics (see Arendt 1958).

Far from providing an imaginary for constituent power, or even for a relationship between constituent and constituted power, the contract has become 'the hyphen situated between politics and economics, which is to say, the emergence of political economy from moral economy, and the points of articulation between the state and market' (Mitropoulos 2012:32). Closely related to its functioning at the transmission between politics and economics, it has become

> the hinge between socialisation and individuation, which is to say: both the individuation of a social being and the socialisation of the individual; the conjuncture between internalised submission and the social projection of individuation as the very definition of freedom. (Mitropoulos 2012:38)

The infrastructural-infrapolitical

Locating itself at the infrastructural, does the political become infra-political? The answer to this question has

been seen to depend on the capacity to render contradictory and distinct, each within its own forms of engagement and theorising, the risk calculations of futures technologies and the contingencies of world-making under conditions of precariousness. Angela Mitropoulos places the rendering distinct within activism at infrastructural-infrapolitical sites, antagonistically radicalising the negotiations envisioned as 'the politics of the governed' by Chatterjee and Appadurai:

> The infra-political builds toilets in homeless encampments in Sacramento; by-passes pre-paid water meters, trickler systems and privatised water piping in Durban; formulates vocabularies of reconfiguration rather than foreclosure and standardisation; delivers health care to noborder protests and undocumented migrants; creates phone apps for evading kettling by police in London; digs tunnels under national boundaries; and more – the infra-political, in other words, revisions activism not as representation but as the provisioning of infrastructure for movement, generating nomadic inventiveness rather than royal expertise. (Mitropoulos 2012:117)

Yet even these bypass-subversions are not immune to governmental adjustment (see Veriava & Naidoo 2013:85). Inaugurating a series of such 'adjustments' in South Africa was the formalisation of civil society initiatives in the late 1990s, inducing them to claim public resources through official structures. At the same time, municipal services provision was restructured, as state-owned enterprises were privatised or sold off. The loss of formal employment for increasing numbers of citizens was coupled with the commodification of public services. 'Socio-economic rights' that had become the domain of the 'social wage', are relegated out of sight in ever widening social contexts marked by the absence of the wage relation coupled with persistent commodification of social goods. Correspondingly, alliances between labour and community-based organisations largely fell apart. A notable exception was the Anti-Privatisation Forum, formed in July 2000 as a social movement bringing together initiatives – usually divided between workers organised in trade unions and unemployed members of community organisations – contesting neo-liberal governmentality at local level.

At particular sites of local mobilisation of citizens around their conditions of life in South Africa, the question of the relation between the infrastructural and the infra-political is far from being decided; or rather, it has been decided partly on negative grounds: while the infrastructural has become infra-political, the infra-political is not defined by the infrastructural. It is widely recognised that the term 'service delivery protests' designating social mobilisation and insurgency escalating in the second decade of democracy (see Alexander 2012; cited in Von Holdt 2013:590), is a misnomer. The high incidence and intensity of protest is avowedly not simply a response to failed service delivery (see South Africa 2009:ii), but understood to be related to systemic and structural weaknesses in the interface between governance and citizenry (South Africa 2010:5).

The 'political society' emerging in and from these cracks, while tactically manoeuvring between power complexes, itself bears the imprint of its dual insertion: it features in the course of the expression of protest, gesturing towards constituent power on the one hand, and towards a reconfiguring of local power relations, laying claim to inclusion in local elite coalitions, on the other (Von Holdt 2013:598–599). At times, the resultant political contestation involves conflict between state institutions, the dominant political party and local groups of residents; and at times, alliances are being forged between aggrieved elites and marginalised citizens (Von Holdt 2013:591). These two moves are not mutually exclusive or contradictory – they appear as different tactics employed by some of the same groupings at specific occasions with specific aims.

In this outline of struggles for expanded civic scope, 'political society' does not arise on independent or autonomous ground. In Gramsci's terms, it combines 'rule' and 'governance'. 'New forms of State life in which the initiative of individuals and groups will have a "State" character, albeit not one owed to the government of the functionaries' (Gramsci [1931–1932] 1986:268–269), remain the critical vision for a society to come.

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