
Williams, Glyn

Postprint / Postprint
Rezension / review

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
www.peerproject.eu

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Nutzungsbedingungen:
Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use:
This document is made available under the "PEER Licence Agreement ". For more Information regarding the PEER-project see: http://www.peerproject.eu This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.
By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

Diese Version ist zitierbar unter / This version is citable under:
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-231898
Book reviews


The Politics of the Governed is a rich collection of essays drawn from lectures in the USA and India in which Partha Chatterjee addresses subjects that include nationalism, the transformation of contemporary Kolkata and America’s hegemonic role before and after 9/11. The essays are as theoretically engaging as they are varied, providing intelligent and accessible commentaries on the work of Anderson (1998) and Negri and Hardt (2000), as well as a broader engagement with concepts of governmentality as these play out in the contemporary global South.

The theme around which many of these different strands coalesce is the relationship between political participation and forms of governance, in particular, the role the post-colonial state plays in shaping its subjects. Here, Chatterjee draws a distinction between two ways in which the modern state views people: as citizens, or rights-bearing members of a national political fraternity and as populations, or subjects who are constantly divided and re-arranged by government as targets of policy. He argues that the post-colonial state deals with its people primarily as governed populations, and that this mode of operation has been reinforced in part through its expanded interventions conducted in the name of ‘development’.

Lacking full citizenship, the vast majority of India’s population – and by extension their counterparts across the global South – are left to make claims on the state from the murky field of political brokerage that Chatterjee calls political society. It is here that the needs of this excluded populace are voiced and are sometimes met, but always as conditional claims rather than formal rights. Political society emerges as both an important moment in state–society relationships, and as a space of possibility where new forms of democratic representation can be created by working through the contradictions of post-colonial governance.

Throughout the book, these central arguments are fleshed out through a diverse collection of illustrations that includes Ambedkar's drafting of the Indian Constitution, the death of a leader of a Hindu sect, and contemporary attempts to regulate madrasah schooling. Again and again, seemingly esoteric or mundane events are cleverly used to open up debates of global significance. There may be questions as to whether these primarily Indian (and particularly Bengali) examples can ever speak for ‘popular politics in most of the world’, but this is one of India’s foremost public intellectuals writing at the top of his form. As such, Politics of the Governed deserves a wide audience in geography.

Glyn Williams

Department of Town and Regional Planning
University of Sheffield

© 2008 SAGE Publications 10.1177/1474474007085786