Research Report for India China Institute

The Bihar Movement and the First 'Crisis' of India's People

By Udeepta Chakravarty, PhD, Sociology, The New School for Social Research

The Project

My dissertation project title is "Contesting the People" — and one of the chapters focuses on an important episode from postcolonial India's history: the Bihar Movement. The context is 1974-1975 in India.

The Indian National Congress under the leadership of Indira Gandhi is politically dominant.[1] The party had become increasingly centralized — Gandhi's 1971 election campaign was explicitly populist — in that she claimed to be the sole legitimate voice of the people and made promises of welfare and removal of poverty. His campaign slogan was "Garibi Hatao" or remove poverty.

The economic situation, however, is dire because of inflation caused by the Oil crisis of 1974 coupled with high levels of unemployment. The Economic Survey for 1974-1975 (an annual survey report put out by the Ministry of Finance) begins with the following declaration: "By all accounts, 1974-75 was a year of unprecedented economic strains in the history of Independent India."[2] These economic strains generated counter-government mobilizations but one that principally viewed the problems as a result of governmental corruption.

There is a student-led movement in Gujarat that was able to dissolve the State assembly in 1974. Students in the Bihar state are inspired by the Gujarat movement and initiate a similar campaign

[1] Kaviraj, Sudipta. "Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics." Economic and Political Weekly (1986): 1697-1708.
Hart, Henry C., ed. Indira Gandhi's India. Routledge, 2019.
[2] "Economic survey of India", Ministry of Finance, Government of India. New Delhi: 1974-95

in their state.[3] The movement's initial aim is to dissolve the state government that the students claim does not represent the needs and voices of the people of Bihar. A seasoned Gandhian socialist and independence struggle political activist, Jayaprakash Narayan, is asked to lead the movement by the student organizers. He escalated the mobilization and initiated "Sampoorna Kranti" (total revolution) — the call, at mere face value, signaled an extra-legal and extra-institutional revolutionary politics–it antagonized the Bihar Government, and eventually the Indian government and the whole apparatus of the Indian state.[4] The Bihar movement included a whole range of actors—some sections of communists, Hindu nationalists, and socialists—they adopted a range of creative practices — processions, assemblies, and even the establishment of parallel "people's governments" (Janata sarkars). From dissolving the Bihar Assembly, the movement's scale and scope shifted upward to toppling Indira Gandhi's government.

In response, not just to the movement but a conjuncture overdetermined by many crisis factors, the Indira Gandhi government declared an emergency in effect creating the first nationwide constitutional dictatorship in India. More importantly, the Bihar movement led to the formation of a coalition of opposition parties — the Janata Party—that, once the Emergency was lifted in 1977, came to power.[5] The coalition government did not survive, and Congress certainly returned to power in successive years, but this tussle between the Bihar movement and Indira Gandhi's populist government ended the hegemonic single-party system that had defined Indian electoral democracy.

Many capable and critical historical accounts have been produced about this period. The difficulty with such accounts and other interpretive analyses of the movement and the Emergency has

[3]Chandra, Bipan. *In the name of democracy: JP movement and the emergency*. Penguin UK, 2017.
[4] Prasad, Bimal, and Sujata Prasad. The Dream Of A Revolution: A Biography of Jayaprakash Narayan. Penguin Random House India Private Limited, 2021.
[5] Jaffrelot, Christophe, and Pratinav Anil. India's first dictatorship: the emergency, 1975-1977. Oxford University Press, 2021.

been their obsession with personalities.[6] The organization and practices of the Bihar Movement have largely been treated as insignificant in the literature which has simply evaluated them from the perspective of success or failure. By and large, the two events, the Bihar movement and the Emergency, are framed as a clash of two ambitious political personages – Jayaprakash Narayan or JP (the Bihar movement is eponymously named the JP movement) and Indira Gandhi. Both engaged in political tussles as defenders of democracy and represented the true interest of the people.

My ambition in dealing with the Bihar movement is to move away from a focus on persons. Whether or not the practices of the Bihar movement brought about or could have brought about the "total revolution" JP wanted or was successful is not anymore an interesting question — the obvious answer is no. Nor is it interesting to determine whether JP and Indira were truly fighting for democracy and representing the interests of the "people".

What is interesting to examine is precisely how the movement and Indira Gandhi's populist government wrestled over the concept of 'people,' how disputed each other's claims to representation, and generated alternative figurations of "people". This is what is significant about this moment in Indian history because it represents the "first crisis" of the "people" in India. To understand this requires one to realize that the "people" have no real existence —it is always constructed and subject

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[6] Perhaps the most comprehensive account is Bipan Chandra's In the Name of Democracy (2001), which was the first attempt to historically analyze the relation between the two. See: Chandra, Bipan. In the name of democracy: JP movement and the emergency. Penguin, 2003
More recently Pratinav and Jaffrelot's India's First Dictatorship (2020), and Gyan Prakash' Emergency Chronicles (2018) are mostly analyses of the cause and nature of the Emergency, and the Bihar movement has a presence in these texts as a cause. See: Prakash, Gyan. Emergency chronicles: Indira Gandhi and democracy's turning point. Princeton University Press, 2019.
There is another genre of texts on the Emergency and Bihar movement. These are from participants who experience both events from the front seat. For example, P.N. Dhar's (head of Indira Gandhi's secretariat) Indira which is both biographical and historical, and MG Devashayams book on the JP movement.
Devashayam was one of the rare bureaucrats who refused to budge to political pressure –and ultimately, he was the one to oversee JP Narayan's treatment under arrest.
See: Dhar, Prithvi Nath. "Indira Gandhi the 'Emergency' and Indian Democracy." Oxford, 2018.; Devasahayam, M. G. JP movement, emergency, and India's second freedom. Vitasta Pub., 2012.

to contestation. Thus, the questions I wish to pose in studying the movement are - how was the concept of ‘people’ deployed, by whom, and to what effect?

Most crucially, the tussle with populism in power and a Popular democratic or assemblyist movement from below suggest that there are different modalities of constructing the ‘people’. Confrontations between these two extreme modalities—populist and assemblyist—reveal the intensely contested battles over ‘people’ because of their dynamically opposed representational logics: the centrality of the leader and vertical representation, on the one hand, vs self-organized horizontal representation, on the other.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The inspiration for the project comes from Edmund Morgan’s seminal *Inventing the People* (1988).[7] His work is mostly an institutional tale of the concept of the sovereignty of the ‘people’ that was invented and negotiated over in the English Parliament, representative institutions, and sometimes of the military or charismatic leaders in colonial America. The sovereignty of the people, for Morgan, is a structuring fiction of modern representative politics. The political negotiations and maneuvering in Morgan’s story occurred because of the insurmountable gap in the “fiction” of the sovereignty of the People—the idea that a ‘people’ rules—and the “fact” of it — the extent to which governing institutions were representative of the ‘people’; as he puts it, “a fiction must bear some resemblance to fact. If it strays too far from fact, the willing suspension of disbelief collapses.”[8]

The magical moment in the text, however, comes in the seventh chapter where Morgan produces a social history from below of elections, which in some ways provides an opening to move beyond both the “fact”-“fiction” dichotomy and the institutions of representative politics. This chapter

[7] Morgan, Edmund S. *Inventing the people: The rise of popular sovereignty in England and America*. WW Norton & Company, 1989.
[8] Ibid. p. 7

mostly focuses on the activity of the political elite after the American Revolution, who in trying to represent the "people" had to get votes through bribery and intimidation during elections. But, this is also where the represented — the embodiments of the 'people'—make their first appearance. Though they are pliable in offering votes, when they come face to face with their representatives they force the latter to engage in carnivalesque rituals and ribaldry. The representatives are forced to descend from their high stations to ingratiate parts of the "people" they encounter.

From this social history, one gets an insight into the notion's variegated topology. 'People' operates across multiple levels and has plural rhetorical valances. Its deployment and mobilization in institutional politics, official corridors of power, and disseminated through media is in disjunction with the actual lifeworld, politics, and practices of subjectivation of the many parts of that very 'people.' To observe this disjunction is not to assert Morgan's distinction between the fiction and fact of the 'people', but to point out that the 'people' is a discourse that is both wholly fictional and real—it is a mythic discourse that has effects and structures reality — it enables practices just as it represses them.

To modify an Adornian formulation, the 'people' is a mythic emphatic concept.[9] It is mythic in that it has no true substance. It's a signifier that fails the signified. But it is also a notion that is emphatically conceived—a notion that is never exhausted by its particular instantiation or deployment. The 'people' do things— create new orders, make war, undertake reforms, challenge power—yet, in doing so, it does not culminate its possibilities or foreclose its future appearances. It is always simultaneously precarious and obstinate.

[9] See: Adorno, 2007. pp. 149. Adorno writes, "The nonidentical element in an identifying judgment is clearly intelligible insofar as every single object subsumed under a class has definitions not contained in the definition of the class. But to a more emphatic concept, to one that is not simply the characteristic unit of the individual objects from which it was abstracted, the opposite applies as well. *Emphatically conceived, the judgment that a man is free refers to the concept of freedom; but this concept in turn is more than is predicated of the man*, and by other definitions the man is more than the concept of his freedom."
My reading of this crucial passage is that emphatic concepts have definitions that have something that is "more" than the object. I.e. they have a normative excess. A concept's exemplification bears the significance of that meaning that cannot be inferred from mere conceptual definition or description. Every concrete application is partially constitutive of the meaning of the concept; there is no universal beyond the particular application. But the empirical concrete application of the concept does not wholly capture the meaning of the concept either.

Here I wish to offer three important clarifications. “We the People” was a major invention of modern liberal constitutional democratic republics—an invention that papers over internal divisions of political society.[10] Jacques Ranciere has compellingly argued that ambiguity and internal divisions of ‘people’ are precisely what makes it politically effective and actually creates space for political innovation.[11] Ernesto Laclau has further drawn the normative insight that all politics is the construction of a ‘people.’[12] I am thus not asking the question: why is the notion of ‘people’ so obstinate? Instead, I wish to examine how the notion works—how does a ‘people’ get constructed, how does it come undone? What are the different modalities of subjectivation? Do different modalities alter the substance of the ‘people’? What utterances and practices bring it into being, and what practices undermine and put it in crisis? How is the notion deployed, and to what effect?

Second, although I am interested in “the modes of appearances” of ‘people,’ to use Ranciere’s phrasing, my crucial interest is to examine how, precisely in the moments where constructs of 'people' fail (in the sense that its very parts contest the notion itself) and are rendered precarious, the notion displays its obstinacy. What mechanisms, practices, and procedures of deployment make the simultaneous failure and persistence—the paradoxical duality— of 'people' possible? For this, it is useful to isolate moments of conflict—what I will call “cross-sections” of contestation. Specifically, I

[10] Shklar, Judith N. *Redeeming American political thought*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.
[11] Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and philosophy*. U of Minnesota Press, 1999. pp. 87-88
[12] Laclau, Ernesto. On populist reason. Verso, 2005. P. 153

wish to look at populism in power[13] confronted by extra-institutional practices of assemblyism.[14] I choose such confrontations between these two extreme modalities—populist and assemblyist—because the most intensely contested battles over 'people' occur in these moments owing to their dynamically opposed logics of representation and subjectivation: leader contra mass, vertical contra horizontal, etc. I do not wish to suggest that the battle of 'people' is what is centrally at stake in these struggles, but it is always in the background and is explicitly and implicitly involved in the struggles.

Finally, in thinking of 'people' as a mythic discourse, I wish to not tell the history of India's 'people' as much as what history the concept of 'people' has produced in India. So the question is not just who or what have been the 'people' in India—who has been included and who has been excluded? The question instead is how has the discourse of 'people,' and the oppositional modalities and practices of constructing and challenging it, structured inclusions and exclusions. This is especially crucial in understanding how the topography of 'people has operated in postcolonial India, and how its reconfigurations have been triggered by oppositional conflicts between populist and assemblyist practices. For this reason, I have seen it fit to isolate moments from India's history where such confrontations have occurred.

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[13] My understanding of this fraught concept largely follows Laclau's theorization in *On Populist Reason* — that is, as a political logic of subject construction. However, I supplement it with Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen's synthetic theory of Populism, which understands that a constructed 'people' is deployed in mobilizations that seek governmental authority, and goes through stages of development, often acquiring governmental power.
See: Arato, Andrew, and Jean L. Cohen. Populism and civil society: The challenge to constitutional democracy. Oxford University Press, 2021.

[14] I use "assemblyist" to refer to the political practices of a collective acting in concert in the commons, and that may have a degree of formalization, but are outside the framework of institutionalized politics of the state. This can include a range of activities like occupations of public spaces to loosely formalized bodies of collective decision making. Theoretically, I want to use "Assembly" as a broader nodal signifier of a conceptual field that refers to practices from below. My specific interest is how these practices are distinctive modalities of political subjectivation. In this sense, I view, to Modify Hardt and Negri's formulation, assembly as "a lens through which to recognize new democratic" possibilities of subject formation.
See Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. Assembly. Oxford University Press, 2017.
For another related conception of assembly, also see: Butler, Judith. *Notes toward a performative theory of assembly*. Harvard University Press, 2015

Method

This dissertation will employ a qualitative historical case study approach to study the four cases. My qualitative approach is not a retrospective ethnography of the Charles Tilly type. Most scholars in social movement studies typically employ an ethnographic approach where they try "to describe, qualitatively, the complexity and texture of all the contextual factors that presuppose and entail human activity, meaning-making, and imagination." This approach is useful in understanding why actors participate in and make sense of movements.

On the other hand, my interest is to produce a genealogy of the politically contested conception of the 'people' in India, by extracting some of the critical moments where one can find sedimented "cross-sections of contestations"—with various competing discursive articulations of the 'people,' subversions of dominant conceptions of 'people' and the conflictual deployment of the notion through utterances and practices of the state and assembled bodies in public spaces. Any contemporary study of this kind owes its debts to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's contribution to a discursive approach to politics. The "Essex school" brand of discourse analysis has been very significant. While the Essex school acknowledges that all reality is discursively constituted, and as such always contingent and subject to contestation, in their study of the political, the Essex school thinkers emphasize and focus on the formation of new identities — which, especially after their "populist" turn, has been focused on articulations of 'people.' This is, in part, understandable because of their normative commitment to the populist mode of politics.

But to insist on the contestability of discursive reality by focusing only on moments of constitution and construction is to tell only half the story. I want to shed light, instead, on moments and processes of the deformation of 'people' as well as its re-formations. Therefore, I will employ a discourse analysis approach to study utterances and practices of political actors, the state, and

collective assembled bodies reading these for implicit and explicit presence for the ‘people’ and its effects. How do the assembly and practices of multiple beings speak? What mediums of representations does it create, and how do they destabilize constructs of ‘people’? In response to this, how does the state, especially when ruled by a populist formation, maintain the integrity of the notion, and delegitimize subversions? What tactics and strategies are used to diffuse the contestations?

There are two levels to the analysis. First, is the level of text—where text can include speeches, utterances, and even visual representations, rhetorical and aesthetic expressions. Typically this includes the study of “politically speaking” actors who adopt specific genres of speech, strategies of framing, and techniques of rhetoric. Such utterances occur at specific sites and are subject to conventions and rules — public address, parliamentary speech, campaign speech, etc. It also includes the examination of iconography, images, visual communication, and styles of representation. The latter have specific relevance in populism study which engages with hyper-mediatized performances.

The second level, however, is of practices that do not exist textually but their appearance and visibility have performative effects. Here I draw on Butlerian and Arendtian perspectives on public action. Judith Butler's Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly offers a unique perspective on the role of assemblies as sites of political action. Butler's work on performativity emphasizes that assemblies are not merely spaces for discourse but arenas where political gestures and identities are performed. The act of assembling itself becomes a political gesture, signifying dissent and asserting the right to public visibility. Butler's exploration of the precariousness of assemblies highlights their democratic significance, as their vulnerability exposes the ongoing struggle for democratic rights and necessitates continuous collective action. Hannah Arendt's notion of the public — which is produced by the assembly of plural beings— emphasizes the significance of political discourse and activity that discloses human distinctiveness, builds power, and generates a new shared world.

The embodied performative practices of collectives invariably project or destabilize political subjectivities without making explicit utterances. The Butlerian and Arendtian perspectives help make sense of political activity that goes under the radar of cognized speech.

I wish to examine the case from both these levels. With the help of the India-China Institute, I was able to conduct archival research. For the Bihar movement, most of the material is textual and archival. I have already conducted archival research for the JP movement. I have compiled Home ministry documents and parliamentary debates from the National Archives in Delhi. From the Bihar State Archives in Patna, I have collected material from an eight-volume collection on the Bihar movement. Finally, from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, I was able to collect material pertaining to the movement organizations and their activities—calls for rallies, protests, reports of the movement organizations, and organizational details of Janata Sarkars. These documents of the movement have virtually been ignored. I want to discern the architectonics of the "people" created by the Bihar Movement through its practices and utterances as visualized by these archival texts.

Contributions

With this project, I wish to contribute to gaps in populism studies, social movement theory, and post-colonial democratic theory.

The theoretical questions I have posed in the previous section, as should be clear, are *not* a nod to Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism.[15] While retaining the use of the category of populism for analytical purposes, my interest in the notion of 'people' differs in two significant ways from Laclauean populism. I contend that 'peoples' appear in plural and conflictual ways, and don't only undergo the standard populist mode of construction through articulating chains of equivalence. That is,

[15] Laclau, Ernesto. On populist reason. Verso, 2005;
Laclau, E., and C. Mouffe. "Post-Marxism without apologies." New left review 166 (11) (1987), 79-106;
Mouffe, C. For a Left Populism (London: Verso, 2018);

there are non-populist logics of constructing 'people.' Second, *I want to examine what happens when the equivalential chains of a constructed "people" get delinked and fragmented*. The conflict between populism in state power and assemblies is the most intense and revelatory moment of such fragmentations. Even when there is no populist formation, or precisely when a populist formation comes undone, the notion of the 'People' retains an intractable presence that structures political practices of various parts of the polity. Such is the cunning of 'people'!

Populism, in the Laclauean sense, is the construction of 'people' as a political subject — a construction that incorporates specific social groups and excludes others. Laclau and Mouffe are mostly interested in the process of this construction. However, a discursive construction has effects and involves assertions by specific actors about how the real or authentic "people" of typically a national political society have been excluded from power.[16] Populist mobilizations and parties, under the leadership of charismatic leaders, who claim to be the *vox populi*, make a bid to power and often succeed in coming to power and establishing governments and regimes.[17] The literature on this pervasive political phenomenon, through various schools of thought and approaches,[18] mostly tries to understand why populist mobilizations occur, how they are structured, and how they go through different stages of development—typically from movement to party to government. Additionally, the literature evaluates whether the phenomenon delivers on its promise to bring power to "the people," or contains immanent tendencies towards authoritarianism.[19]

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[16] Müller, J.-W. What Is Populism? (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Urbinati, N. Me the People: How Populism Transforms Democracy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019); Mudde, C. and C. Rovira Kaltwasser. Populism: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

[17] Arato, A, and J. L. Cohen. Populism and Civil Society: The Challenge to Constitutional Democracy. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[18] Gidron, N. and B. Bonikowski."Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda." Working Paper Series, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, No.13-0004; De la Torre, C. "Global Populism: histories, trajectories, problems, and challenges" In Routledge Handbook of Global Populism, ed. C. de la Torre (New York: Routledge, 2018)

[19] Finchelstein, F., and N. Urbinati. "On populism and democracy." Populism 1 (1) (2018), 15-37

A serious lacuna plagues contemporary scholarship on populism. It pays little attention to how populisms in power are challenged by mobilizations from below, that is by the parts of the very 'people' who are allegedly represented by populist governments, and what happens to the notion of the 'people' in such challenges. Although there are significant normative interventions made that argue for alternatives to populist mobilizations,[20] actual contestations from below are subsumed under the category of populism as "populisms from below" or "grassroots populism."[21] This is especially true of the Laclauean post-Marxist school which tends to view everything as populism, even if the practices of construction of 'people' are diametrically opposed and rely on incompatible logics. Critical approaches to populism, while pointing out its dangers and theoretically arguing for alternatives—popular mobilizations, deliberative or procedural democracy[22] — seldom look at actual oppositions, specifically assemblyist, to populisms in power.

Within the sociology of social movements, on the other hand, which does look at the particularities of actual movements against governments, there is a lack of engagement with the notion of 'people.' The field of social movement theory itself was constructed as a response to elite theory and crowd psychology. First abused and disregarded as anomalies and disruptions—phenomena infected with deranged crowd psychology[23]—that threatened political institutions and regimes rendering them ungovernable,[24] 'movements' were gradually rehabilitated as both legitimate forms of political expression (Dahl, Offe 1985), and as vital mechanisms of social change.[25] The mission of social movement theory beginning in the 60s and 70s, in the epoch of "new social

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[20] Arato and Cohen's argument for "popular" mobilizations from civil society is an example. See: Arato and Cohen, 2021.
[21] Grattan, L. Populism's power: Radical grassroots democracy in America. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
[22] Urbinati, 2019
[23] LeBon, Gustave. The crowd. Routledge, 2017 [1895]; Turner, Ralph H., and Lewis M. Killian. Collective behavior. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1957;Blumer, Herbert. Selected works of Herbert Blumer: A public philosophy for mass society. University of Illinois Press, 2000.
[24] Crozier, Michel, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki. The crisis of democracy. Vol. 70. New York: New York University Press, 1975.
[25] Offe, Claus. "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics." Social Research, vol. 52, no. 4, 1985, pp. 817–68.

movements"—anti-institutional mobilizations of "self-limited radicalism" (Offe 1985)—was to make 'movements' within and of civil society[26] the redemptive protagonist of politics in the face of the abuse it had suffered.

If the first theoretical assault on 'movements' was to accuse them of irrationality, the first line of defense was asserting the rationality of movements and the individuals who took part in them. Movement elements and organization were endowed with rationality. The resource mobilization school and the political process school conceptualized the language of protest, riot, civil disobedience, and popular collective behavior, in terms of interests and claim-making. The field focused on the 'hows' of the movement: how movements were structured by the state and other institutions.[27]

Interventions from the continental sphere were instructive but still limited. Allain Touraine and Alberto Melucci, living through the "new social movements" of the post-industrial age, were struck by their post-materialist and anti-institutional nature.[28] With a wild simplification, we can refer to Touraine, Castells, and Melucci as three representatives of a position that shed light on the centrality of collective identity formation and meaning-based (value-rational) action. The opening provided by the continental intervention facilitated the cultural, and later, affective turn in social movement theory. Participation in movements, these later works argued, was not guided purely by cognized "interests" of actors but also driven by complex narratives that infused and generated webs of meaning drawing in and transforming the participants of the movement.[29] Furthermore, meaning and cultural frames of 'movements' did not operate only at the level of value-rationality but involved necessarily the

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[26] Cohen, Jean L., Andrew Arato, and Jean L. Cohen. Civil society and political theory. Vol. 185. Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1992.

[27] McCarthy, John D., and Mayer N. Zald. "Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory." American journal of sociology 82.6 (1977): 1212-1241; Jenkins, J. Craig. "Resource mobilization theory and the study of social movements." Annual review of sociology 9.1 (1983): 527-553; McAdam, Doug. *Political process and the development of black insurgency, 1930-1970.* University of Chicago Press, 1999.

[28] Touraine, Alain. "An introduction to the study of social movements." Social research (1985): 749-787.; Melucci, Alberto. "The process of collective identity." Social movements and culture 4 (1995): 41-63; Melucci, Alberto. "The symbolic challenge of contemporary movements." Social research (1985): 789-816.

[29] Polletta, Francesca. It was like a fever: Storytelling in protest and politics. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

emotional register.[30] With the dialectical return of social movement theory to the bane of its existence, the affective and emotional dimension of collective behavior was sublimated to a non-prejudicial foundation.

However, even when the centrality of identity and modes of representations were foregrounded, these were viewed as supplementary to claim-making and were of interest only insofar as they explained why actors participated in these movements. What social movement literature sidelined was how the notion of the 'people' or collective identity more generally itself became the arena of dispute, and involved conflictual processes and practices of subject-making and unmaking. This is true, as I will demonstrate below, for the literature on the very cases I have selected as well.

Finally, postcolonial democratic theory has also avoided theoretical engagement with the concept of the 'people.' Subaltern studies in India have been one of the theoretically most provocative and illuminating attempts to give voice to the disjunction I mentioned in discussing Edmund Morgan's work. Subaltern studies have highlighted the separation of different social spheres for the elite populations and the subaltern populations in India. However, it has furnished accounts that render both worlds mutually unintelligible,[31] and overstressed its separation—one can think of Partha Chatterjee's distinction between 'political' and 'civil society.'[32] Furthermore, typically it historically produced an account of the separation through an analysis of nationalism,[33] not the category of 'people.'

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[30] Goodwin J., J. M. Jasper and F. Polletta (eds). Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2001

[31] Guha, 1997. Amim, Shahid. "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2." *Selected Subaltern Studies* Oxford University Press, 1988; Pandian, M. S. S. "Culture and subaltern consciousness: An aspect of MGR phenomenon." Economic and political weekly 1989

[32] Chatterjee, Partha. The politics of the governed: Reflections on popular politics in most of the world. Columbia University Press, 2004*;* Chatterjee, Partha*. Lineages of political society: Studies in postcolonial democracy.* Columbia University Press, *2011.*

[33] Chatterjee, Partha. The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories. Vol. 4. Princeton University Press, 1993.; Kaviraj, Sudipta. The imaginary institution of India: politics and ideas. Columbia University Press, 2010.

Although analytically useful, the separation between civil and political society is hard to maintain in practice and empirical observation.[34] The "politics of the governed," self-organized around the community and seeking exceptions for governmental benefits often boils over into the terrain of civil society or is captured by civil society discourses and practices. Statist articulations of and negotiations over 'people'—through populist and other modes of representation—have to constantly butt heads with collective political practices that fragment and subvert these constructions. Partha Chatterjee has himself recognized the centrality of this notion in his latest work on populism, significantly titled *I am the People*, where he acknowledges that populist practices bridge civil and political society. He is right to view populism as a unidirectional bridge that straddles both institutionalized civil society and the political society that remains outside of formal capitalist relations and governmental practices of the state.[35] But his account ignores how parts of both civil and political society interpenetrate each other's lifeworlds in a multiplicity of ways to confront and refute the populist constructions.

The theoretical literature on populism remains silent on contestations from below; social movement theory wholly ignores how the notion of the 'people' is a terrain of dispute; and postcolonial democratic theory ignores how divided social spheres of elites and subaltern groups do intermix to disidentify with constructions of 'people.' These fields are poised for an encounter. My dissertation seeks to facilitate this meeting.

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[34] Michael Levien's study of dispossessions shows how the politics of those who inhabit spheres outside the formal circulation of capital, nonetheless mobilize and engage politically through channels and resources of civil society. See: Levien, Michael. Dispossession without development: Land grabs in neoliberal India. Oxford University Press, 2018.

[35] Chatterjee, Partha. *I am the people: Reflections on popular sovereignty today.* Columbia University Press, 2019.