

the compatibility of top down, modernist development policies and the sincerity of alleged locally 'sensitive' participatory development models (e.g., Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Gupta, 1998; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Mitchell, 2002; O'Reilly, 2007; Scott, 1998). These and other similar studies frequently perform grounded assessments of development in order to expose the variegated relationships and community mechanisms responsible for reworking intervention at the grassroots level (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Power, 2003). For example, Crewe and Harrison (1999) refer to the 'misbehavior' of project participants who simply do not do what program managers expect of them while others cite networks of cooperation to explicate modes and outcomes of local participation (e.g., Chambers, 1983; Mutersbaugh, 2002). Tanya Li suggests development is accomplished "at the interface between development projects and those they target" (Li, 1999: 298) through a series of everyday 'compromises' that "fill the gap between project plans and on-the-ground realities" (Li, 2005: 391). Others, countering outmoded stories of passive acceptance, refer to resistance struggles, and oppositional movements to developmentalism (E.g., Escobar, 1995; Neumann, 2002; Routledge, 1993, 2003). Such studies highlight how development projects routed through some combination of decentralized planning, participatory governance and state withdrawal are achieved on the ground in ways that at least partially reflect the needs and interests of local groups. This paper offers the lens 'geographies of mediation' as another, complimentary approach to studying everyday development. Geographies of mediation underscore the crucial role of brokering agent activities in influencing market relationships, levels of state withdrawal and the eventual distribution of development benefits.

This essay proffers three principle assertions; First, conditions of economic liberalization have created new market actors, business transactions and political alignments at the village and regional level. As a result, mediating development increasingly involves operating within and between groups of community, market and state actors to rework market supply chains. This requires taking on and combining roles historically assigned in rural India to either the political fixer (Manor, 2000; Reddy & Haragopal, 1985) or market broker (Bailey, 1957; Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava, & Veron, 2005; Dubash, 2002). Second, this study finds that mediating agents transform strict market distribution mechanisms by engaging neoliberal state resources. Roll out neoliberalism does not necessarily make state resources readily available to community groups. Brokers shape conditions of decentralized, heterogeneous and variegated governance (Peck & Tickell, 2002) and help to connect various parties to latent state resources. Third, distinct expressions of both empowerment and corruption arise within this flexible brokerage community. When operating within these intermediary spaces, brokers frequently act as agents of benevolence, goodwill and increased equity as Corbridge et al. (2005) and Krishna (2003) have suggested, and as agents of improbity, avariciousness and wealth accumulation as Jeffrey and Lerche (2000) and Harriss-White (2004) assert. In this case, intermediaries rework market mechanisms and access neoliberal state resources in order to bring health benefits from smokeless cookstoves to poor households while also consolidating development benefits for personal, familial and political gain. In many cases, these strategies of benevolence and corruption occur in concert with one another, simultaneously overturning and reinforcing structures of social organization.

Political fixers, market brokers and post-liberalized economies

Essays examining rural development in India have primarily characterized intermediaries as either political fixers or market

brokers. Political fixers work between villages and political offices securing development provisions for local areas in exchange for political patronage. James Manor identifies the crucial function of small-time, freelance political fixers as "political intermediaries between the localities and powerful figures (bureaucrats and, especially, politicians) at high levels" (Manor, 2000: 817). For members of civil society, development is facilitated by a series of 'local uppers' or intermediaries with ready access to political resources who help to "bridge the gulf that exists between government and 'the public'" (Véron, Corbridge, Williams, & Srivastava, 2003). Contemporary descriptions of the political fixer have been heavily influenced by Reddy and Haragopal (1985) who describe the *pyraveekar* as influential middlemen who broker or 'fix' deals between government bureaucracies and members of civil society. The political fixer provides a link between rural villagers and urban-based state administrators (Neale, 1983) as well as between various governmental agencies in the implementation of development programs. On the surface, the main strength of political fixers appears to be their ability to understand and convey the cultural idiom of distant communities in order to establish development programs that benefit rural localities.¹ However fixers also channel benefits upwards and help politicians maintain power. Just as the political fixer can serve as a conduit for rural communities seeking development benefits from a centralized or incapacitated ruling party, so too can (s)he deliver benefits to the politician by contributing to the politics of representation and coalition building.

Others have stressed the important role local operatives play in facilitating the advancement of rural markets by mediating financial, service and commodity transactions. During the middle 20th century, villages transitioning from agriculture-based economies to modes of production premised on mercantilism and ties to the broader Indian economy generated various contingent intermediary labor opportunities connecting local and regional sellers and buyers (Bailey, 1957). Similarly, contemporary commercial markets infuse rural economies with assistance from pure market brokers or *adati*² who provide crucial links between socially diverse village producers and geographically distant markets (EDA Rural Systems, 2001), including wholesalers, local distributors, and village-level consumers (Corbridge et al., 2005; Dubash, 2002). Commissioned agents are operatives in every sense of the word and oftentimes travel great distances to markets and wholesale outlets on behalf of growers and manufacturers. They also serve as money-lenders providing financial resources essential to commercial transactions (Debroy & Khan, 2004).

Variegated governance and strategies for accessing neoliberal state resources

State retrenchment and increased privatization have generated new spaces of mediation where brokers combine activities associated with the political fixer and market broker into a single mediating repertoire. In southwest Maharashtra, the rural broker coordinates activities between state, market and civil society actors and actively shapes community governance over nascent commercial markets. Within this variegated assemblage of villagers, bureaucratic operatives and market traders, intermediaries are particularly effective at

¹ Such behavior has been necessary in light of the urban bias embedded within the political economy of development in India that has historically funneled economic resources toward more consumptive and politically powerful urban areas and away from production oriented and comparatively less developed rural sectors (Lipton, 1977, 1993; Varshney, 1993, 1995).

² Also referred to as *dalaries* in informal and unregulated markets. See G. Ram Reddy and G. Haragopal Asian Survey, Vol. 25, No. 11, pp. 1148–1162. Corbridge et al. (2005) refer to political workers acceptable to the Forward and Scheduled Castes as *dalaals*.

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