



Geographies of mediation: Market development and the rural broker in Maharashtra, India

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A B S T R A C T

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This paper explicates the role of community-level intermediaries in post-liberalized economic sectors. Focusing on nascent commercial markets for improved, smokeless cookstoves in southwestern Maharashtra, I describe how development is encountered by three analytic groups – artisans, female stove users and NGO field officers. This study highlights patterns of strategic intermediary action, or forms of brokering, used to negotiate the commercialization process for individuals involved in the fabrication, distribution and use of improved cookstoves. A close analysis of the mediating agent can strengthen theories on how individuals and communities encounter sector privatization and state retrenchment. This study reveals a diverse set of brokering activities and actors, and shows how intermediaries combine tasks associated with traditional conceptions of the political fixer and market broker by working within and between groups of market, village and state operatives to transform market supply chains. Mediating agents coordinate counter regulating activities within civil society in the absence of heavy state intervention and play a crucial role in activating and connecting community interests to latent neoliberal state resources.

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Mr. Bhaskar Datta Kumbhar's artisan workspace sits directly across from his home in a small courtyard where a number of *chulah* (cookstove) molds are stacked over ten feet high. Only a few paces away, a small canal flows in a straight line bisecting the village. Mr. Kumbhar regularly uses water from the canal to mix cement and soften and shape clay during the potting process. Pointing to the large pile of *chulah* molds, Mr. Bhaskar tells me they are part of a large order he arranged in a nearby village. "My family will install these *chulah* in the next few days." He adds that he has been trying to install stoves there for some time, "You see, when I first began my enterprise, I followed the instructions of the market experts. I advertized to the villagers with radio spots, public presentations and showed CDs. But still no one bought *chulah* from me." After pointing out specific characteristics of his stove molds and what makes his variety produce less smoke than traditional *chulah*, Mr. Kumbhar turns and tells me more about marketing to nearby households, "You see my smokeless *chulah* here? Now I sell them more successfully. I marketed to many women in this village and described their benefits, but this was not enough. They were too expensive for some. Then I got wise." Reaching up and retrieving one of his molds, Mr. Kumbhar explains how he recently

gathered a group of women and members of the *panchayat* (village governing body) together to coordinate a bulk purchase order. "I brought them together to explore options and make an agreement. Now these women will receive loans of Rs 150 for each stove from government funds." He continued, "This is how I make deals now, from the middle."

During my fieldwork in southwestern Maharashtra examining the transition from a State subsidized to commercially-oriented improved cookstove delivery program, I was struck by the number of individuals who, like Mr. Kumbhar, described coordinating development activities by positioning themselves between multiple interest groups. This includes groups and individuals brokering financial and merchandise transactions, facilitating village-wide decisions and arranging meetings and information sharing sessions. Mr. Kumbhar, like so many others I interviewed, has seen his personal enterprise and daily routine significantly altered by market reforms. Yet he has also demonstrated an ability to transform supply chain relationships and informal governance structures embedded within the commercial marketplace. This study is motivated by this field observation and argues that further scrutinizing rural brokers can strengthen theories on individual and community responses to rural development programs relying on the advancement of market mechanisms to deliver benefits.

Previous studies attempting to explain discrepancies between rural development project plans and results frequently question

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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*.

coordinating and implementing strategies for accessing latent government resources amidst significant state withdrawal.

In Maharashtra's recently liberalized improved cookstove economy, government intervention is largely supplanted by conditions of market entrenchment and sector privatization. Yet to suppose that the market merely replaces the state is to oversimplify conditions of economic reform (Bakker, 2002). In rural India, liberalization may alter the nature of state control, but it does not eliminate it (Harriss-White, 2003). Peck and Tickell (2002) suggest that market-based development does not necessarily obviate intentional participation by non-market and state actors. The authors describe "roll out" neoliberalism as the "purposeful construction and consideration of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance and regulatory relations" (p. 4). Such variegated governance stands in contrast to conceptions of a "roll back" state where the state is entirely replaced by free-market services.³

Rather than wholesale deregulation, "roll out" neoliberal development involves reworking state intervention on a more limited level as well as giving local non-state entities the option of regulating with a stronger presence (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004). The Shell Foundation's 'scaling up' of governance to international levels has resulted in new opportunities for local governance by various actors within civil society. Smith (2004) refers to this form of variegated protectionism under liberal reforms as "flexible governance" where opportunities for participation, governance and counter protectionism are effectively deployed by village-level groups, local NGO members and other informal organizational bodies (Larner, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2005).

The interaction between state and non-state actors situated within a broader constellation of market transactions is of critical issue. The form, extent and distribution of state intervention is not predetermined upon state "roll out" and does not automatically result in meaningful outcomes for members of civil society. Unlike the NPIC where state resources were specifically earmarked for cookstove distribution assistance, government funds under conditions of state disinvestment do not necessarily avail themselves in clear and accessible ways. In fact, the CBFC program mandates that state action be reoriented away from direct financial intervention and toward a more regulatory role "that works with, not against, the market" (World Bank, 2002b: 5). Community members must therefore actively seek out state assistance in most cases. One of the most notable characteristics of the low-level intermediary is their ability to serve as an important link between community members and decentralized state resources (Kaushik, 2005). Thus, as Corbridge et al. rightfully note, "where poorer people do require help from government agencies, their contacts with the state are for the most part routed through low-level intermediaries" (2005: 107). Paying close attention to 'geographies of mediation' reveals how local brokers are important catalysts that activate decentralized neoliberal state provisions for use by village residents and market operatives such as buyers, merchants and manufacturers.

The rural broker: agents of benevolence or corruption?

Rural modernization through the introduction of markets and new technologies can be "controlled" by local agents, to "increase

indigenous people's abilities to negotiate market relationships, administer rural enterprises and agro-industry, and compete in a hostile market" (Bebbington, 1996: 104). When reworking market mechanisms and accessing state resources however, some political fixers and market brokers have been depicted as empowering and benevolent social workers while others are cast as predatory and corrupt. Scrutinizing complex community scale activities frequently reveals community dynamics fraught with gender inequities, political fissures and unequal access to local and exogenous economic and political resources (Brosius, Tsing, & Zerner, 2005; Castree, 2004; Mohan & Stokke, 2000). The introduction of rural development projects into heterogeneous and politically fractious communities is therefore predictably, marked by acts of corruption, bribery, favoritism and opportunism (Corbridge & Kumar, 2002). Brokers in rural Indian villages are often complicit in such behavior (See Harriss-White, 1999, 2004; Jeffrey, 2002; Jeffrey & Lerche, 2000). The geographies of mediation examined in this study reveal similar complexities, power dynamics and expressions of opportunism. Predatory agents tend to deliver benefits to a very narrow population or look to secure personal gains. Harriss-White (1999) describes how village-level power relations – along gender, political, caste and class lines – shape the possibilities for, and political and financial outcomes of, intermediary activities. Mediating agents may re-inscribe historical continuities and block level social structures of accumulation thereby contributing to class reproduction in civil society (Jeffrey, 2002; Jeffrey & Lerche, 2000). Because brokers strategically position themselves between civil and political societies in order to negotiate 'votes for benefits' agreements, there is also a tendency for development finance networks to run closely parallel to relationships of tribute and political patronage (Harriss-White, 2004). Meanwhile, many brokers are fueled by their own self-interest and seek handsome monetary paybacks for their efforts. Some middlemen regularly take bribes for linking members of the public with politicians and state agencies holding access to coveted resources such as employment opportunities and police protection (Jeffrey & Lerche, 2000).

Corbridge et al. (2005) on the other hand, while sympathetic to critical representations, describe many low-level intermediaries and money-lenders as effective village patrons bringing development benefits to poorer households. Village members in search of development assistance will therefore frequently route their requests through the financial and social networks of rural brokers. Brokering activities are also described as a crucial mechanism for empowering small-time entrepreneurs by reorienting control over market activities away from collusive oligopolies and toward petty traders. Anirudh Krishna (2003) also illustrates the empowering role of brokers who activate latent stocks of social capital in order to advance village-wide development. According to Krishna, mediating agents survey politicians and government departments in order to locate and secure development benefits for poor villagers. They also meet with traders, suppliers and other market actors to boost profit margins across class and caste lines from the sale of agricultural and other village products.

This study describes how state retrenchment and market reforms generate new spaces of mediation where brokers combine activities associated with the political fixer and market broker into a single mediating repertoire. Intermediaries operate within, and indeed help define, a sphere of variegated governance by reworking market mechanisms and accessing neoliberal state resources. Also revealed is the tendency for brokers to act as agents of empowerment and impartiality while also supporting an agenda of corruption and wealth accumulation. They do so in an effort to advance smokeless cookstove distribution to poor households and also financial and political advantages to kin, patrons and professional associates.

³ Non-market regulations occur when the state prevents markets from operating in certain affairs – i.e., market excluding conditions, or when the state is thrust into action by an unwilling market – i.e., market complimentary conditions (Drèze & Sen, 2002). In so far as market mechanisms fail to deliver benefits to poorest households, the state in this case has stepped in to complement the market by providing financial and social capital to villages.

Improved cookstove distribution in India

The rise and fall of the national program on improved chulah

In India, where seventy percent of the population lives in rural areas, cooking is traditionally performed on open stoves producing high levels of smoke. Nearly seventy-five percent of the energy consumed for cooking and heating purposes is in the form of fuel-wood and crop waste. Dried dung cakes contribute twenty percent of the fuel with the remaining five percent split amongst kerosene, liquid petroleum gas and biogas (Chopra, 2004). The incomplete combustion of these carbon-based fuels exposes household members to harmful levels of particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and other pollutants (Bruce, Perez-Padilla, & Albalak, 2000; Ezzatti & Kammen, D., 2001; ICMR, 2001; Smith, 2000; Von Schirnding et al., 2002). A 2002 study by the World Health Organization concluded that exposure to these pollutants contributes to nearly 500,000 deaths among women and children in India each year (Winrock, 2004). Because of the widespread and serious nature of indoor air pollution from traditional *chulah* and the prohibitive cost of switching to cleaner fuels such as liquid petroleum gas, biomass burning 'improved' or 'smokeless' cookstove programs have been prevalent in rural India over the past 25 years.

In 1983, the Government of India introduced its most far-reaching cookstove distribution program. Under the jurisdiction of the Department of Non-Conventional Energy Sources (later assuming a Ministerial designation), the National Program on Improved Chulah (NPIC) aimed to reduce household dependence on fuel-wood and decrease indoor air pollution. From 1984 to 2002, as a result of the NPIC program, cookstoves were modified in over 32-million rural households. In the State of Maharashtra alone, approximately two-million improved stoves were distributed (NCAER, 2002; World Bank, 2002a).⁴ While a variety of improved *chulah* were distributed, the most common models fabricated in the State of Maharashtra contained modified cement or mud fire-boxes and chimneys designed to remove harmful smoke from the cooking environment (Hanbar & Karve, 2002).⁵

After nearly 18 years without any bilateral or multilateral aid, the central government phased out the NPIC program in mid-2002 (Kishore & Ramana, 2002; Rehman & Malhotra, 2004). The abrupt closure of the NPIC occurred in the wake of a liberalizing Indian economy marked by increased foreign direct investment, sector privatization, and measures to curtail government subsidies (Kale, 2002). Beginning in the mid 1990s, the World Bank and its Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP) began advising a number of household energy related development programs throughout India. A few months after the NPIC closed, the World Bank and ESMAP released an "Agenda for Action" suggesting, "programs that disseminate improved stoves on a commercial basis enjoy greater financial sustainability and respond better to user demand, including the production of more durable stoves" (World Bank, 2002b: 5).

In 2002, following a series of structural adjustment directives from ESMAP, the rural household energy sector (which includes *chulah* producers and distributors) experienced sharp state

disinvestment. Only one year after the NPIC was dismantled, the Shell Foundation began investing seed money into a project that would distribute improved cookstoves in Maharashtra without state assistance by taking advantage of preexisting *chulah* production and distribution capital. Established in 2000 as an endowed corporate foundation of the Royal Dutch Shell Group of Companies, the Shell Foundation operates in India and other developing nations by funding scalable, enterprise-based programs aimed at solving energy related environment and poverty issues. In 2003, the Foundation initiated its 'Commercialization of Biomass Fuel and Cooking Devices' (CBFCD) program. Over the period 2003–2007 foreign direct investments by the Shell Foundation into Maharashtra have been used to develop markets and disseminate scalable business practices for the purpose of increasing the regional distribution of improved cookstoves (Shell Foundation, 2005).⁶

Market integration under the Shell Foundation program

In Maharashtra, improved cookstove dissemination was given new life under the Shell Foundation. Yet the initiation of the CBFCD Program brought with it a radically different allocation structure that significantly altered the role and behavior of individuals participating directly in the cookstove distribution process. Under the NPIC, cookstove distribution in the State of Maharashtra was determined by regional targets and allocated by Block and Child Development Project Officers to individual villages. The distribution framework under the Shell Foundation's CBFCD program relies on free-market mechanisms rather than government decision making to distribute cookstoves around the region. This study closely examines the perspectives and embedded perceptions of sample populations from three key analytic groups—local NGO employees, artisans and female stove users as they encounter *chulah* distribution post sector liberalization.

In a reformed improved cookstove industry, households experience higher stove prices and must actively search for cost assistance opportunities. Prior to the NPIC's closing, the Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources issued subsidies to state nodal agencies for stove material, building, administrative and publicity costs. The cost savings were then passed on to households through significantly reduced stove prices. Because subsidies made improved stoves more affordable for poorer village households, many Block Development Officers targeted scheduled caste and tribe members (National Council of Applied Economic Research, 2002). Commercial distribution, on the other hand, relies on robust marketing campaigns (newspaper, radio, public demonstrations) to attract customers rather than cost subsidies. As a result, households are faced with recouping all artisan production costs. Still, despite asking full price, market proponents argue that households will demand improved *chulah* after learning about their benefits as part of the intensive advertising blitz (Shell Foundation, 2005). Fig. 1 describes the cost structure for improved *chulah* in the State of Maharashtra under the NPIC and Shell Foundation programs. In response to higher stove prices and because households must now seek out stove vendors, a number of female villagers have come together to broker agreements between state, market and

⁴ The 2-million stove estimation for the State of Maharashtra was calculated using a 1.1-million stove distribution estimate during the period 1983–1993 (NCAER, 2002) and a 790,000 stove distribution calculation from 1995 to 2000 (World Bank, 2002a). The years 1994 and 2001 are omitted from this total due to lack of reliable data.

⁵ In my study area the dominant stove types are the Laxmi, Ghriyalaxmi and Bhagylaxmi models which all contain modified geometries to minimize smoke production. The Laxmi stove also contains a chimney.

⁶ The Shell Foundation participates in the Partnership for Clean Indoor Air, a consortium of organizations including the US Environmental Protection Agency, World Health Organization and the US Agency for International Development that builds global consciousness around the issue of indoor air pollution from wood burning stoves. The Partnership was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. The Shell Foundation's specific role is to provide technical assessment, advice and funding for projects around the globe.

NPIC (2001)			
Type of Stove	Unit Stove Cost	Central Subsidy	Beneficiary Contribution (%) ¹
2 pot mud precast	180	70	110 (61)
1 pot cement	220	100	120 (55)
2 pot cement	220	110	110 (50)
Shell Foundation (2005)			
Type of Stove	Unit Stove Cost	Central Subsidy	Beneficiary Contribution (%) ²
1 pot cement	300	0	300 (100)
2 pot cement	300	0	300 (100)

¹ Members of Scheduled Caste/Tribe and Other Backward Classes only paid Rs. 10–20 due to additional state-level subsidies.

² Some stove users receive subsidies from village level sources, depending upon affiliation with Self-Help Groups, Village *Panchayat* allocation of state funding for health and education, or the assistance of outside agencies.

Fig. 1. Improved cookstove subsidy structure in Maharashtra.

non-profit groups to implement bottom-up subsidized stove distribution initiatives.

For artisans in Maharashtra, the cessation of the NPIC brought about a considerable transformation in their day to day stove production and delivery regimen.⁷ Under the NPIC program, Self-Employed Workers learned skills for *chulah* construction in ten-day training camps at federally sponsored Technical Back Up Support Units.⁸ Upon completing these courses, 'certified' artisans received bulk orders to deliver mass quantities of ICs in pursuit of block and village-level targets (Rehman & Malhotra, 2004). Artisans were guaranteed payment after filling mandated delivery quotas (Hanbar & Karve, 2002). The most significant transformation for artisans under market reforms involves payment and *chulah* order schedules. Supply chain subsidies are deemed inefficient by the Shell Foundation because artisans wind up lacking basic entrepreneurship skills suitable for sustaining long-term operations. Instead, one time Shell Foundation payments are delivered to trained artisans for start-up marketing and raw material costs. These interest free loans require payment-in-full upon cost recovery. Once repaid, artisans are expected to navigate the open market without any financial assistance, relying instead on an array of newly implemented marketing strategies. In order to maintain a profitable enterprise, many artisans have adopted intensive brokering strategies that involve striking deals between state and non-state actors to secure and deliver financial resources for village cookstove initiatives.

The role of NGOs is also markedly different under the Shell Foundation's commercialization program. NGOs worked closely with local artisans and households to promote cooking technologies, but had very little interaction with program authorities at the state and federal level due to static mandates and infrequent consultation requirements. Now, many small NGOs play a central role in the commercial distribution process and actively manage multiple interest groups, including those of funding agencies. Program managers at Appropriate Rural Technology Institute (ARTI) for example, fill a paradoxical position in the neoliberal development process by, on the one hand, helping establish regional markets for cookstoves that accommodate the Shell Foundation's "scalable and transferable" commercialization template throughout Western Maharashtra (Shell Foundation, 2005). This is achieved by managing and allocating foreign investments, and by training artisans to become productive entrepreneurs. On the other

hand, NGO field officers routinely respond to the needs and concerns of village households and artisans including responding to product malfunctions and artisan business loan requests. In order to make commercialization work for a diverse set of interest groups, partner NGOs have implemented a repertoire of intermediary activities to facilitate purchase orders for culturally and environmentally appropriate stoves at affordable prices.

Fieldwork investigating specific brokering activities within these three analytic groups took place over a 6 month period in late 2005 and early 2006. I conducted open-ended interviews, surveys and participant observation in the Kolhapur, Satara and Sangli districts of Southwestern Maharashtra.⁹ These districts lie within the Pune division of Maharashtra and contain some of the most productive agricultural lands in the region. These districts were selected because they were targets of both NPIC and later Shell Foundation program intervention. This was therefore a useful region to examine how community members and local organizations have experienced the transition from state subsidized to market-driven cookstove distribution.¹⁰ Accounts from NGO employees, female stove users and artisans detail an assemblage of actors, market transactions and brokering strategies – what I label 'geographies of mediation' – that have influenced the distribution of health and indoor environmental benefits from improved cookstoves.

Geographies of mediation and counter protectionism

In Maharashtra, mediating agents combine activities of the market broker and political fixer to influence how health and financial benefits associated with improved cookstoves are delivered within and between villages. This behavior contributes to, and indeed shapes, a variegated sphere of counter protectionist activities amidst state withdrawal (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Peck & Tickell, 2002) where civil society has intervened to regulate market

⁷ Thirteen of fifteen artisans were male and two were female. Ten considered themselves members of the *Kumbhar* or potting caste. Not unlike other tradesmen, village potters are descendants from a long line of *kumbharas*. All artisans fell between the ages of 18 and 60.

⁸ In Maharashtra, The Appropriate Rural Technology Institute served as the main Technical Back up Support Unit facilitating both stove design and SEW training courses during the NPIC.

⁹ I performed participant observation and conducted open-ended interviews with four NGO program managers and seven field officers in my study area. Open-ended interviews and survey questions were also used to examine the experiences of fifteen artisans producing, marketing and installing improved cookstoves in one or more of the four districts. I also conducted open-ended interviews and surveys with 40 females in charge of household cooking in four villages.

¹⁰ In December of 2002, the Shell Foundation selected the Appropriate Rural Technologies Institute (ARTI) to serve as its central domestic social service, monetary outlet and technical expertise hub. During the NPIC, ARTI held similar duties within the region and was therefore an attractive business associate under the NPIC. The commercialization template fashioned by the Shell Foundation requires the involvement of dozens of micro-enterprises, organizations, and community actors, ARTI was therefore asked to manage quality control activities, supply chain networks, promotional activities, educational outreach and product assembly.

supply chains (Tsing, 2007). Although these actions are performed within a recently liberalized sector, they frequently enable community groups to locate and secure financial resources from a still influential neoliberal state (Harriss-White, 2003). Operatives in Southwestern Maharashtra reveal five specific types of brokering activities – financial, employment, merchandise, business loan and individual subsidy – which emerged as central features of the flexible governance process. Though not without their challenges, these intermediary activities significantly influence how development is achieved at the community and household level. The five principal brokering strategies are used by NGO field officers, artisans and female stove users to facilitate interactions between various actors including the Shell Foundation, money-lending banks, and village-level groups such as *gram panchayat* (village-level governing body), *grama sevak* (lowest level development official and village advisor) and Self-Help Group members. Fig. 2 describes each form of brokering in more detail, including how and by whom each strategy is deployed to regulate Maharashtra's rural improved *chulah* market.

NGO employees use *business loan brokering* techniques to garner financial resources from banks to assist local artisan enterprises. This form of brokering is an influential strategy for regulating markets in the absence of heavy state intervention by injecting alternative sources of financial capital into the development process (Swyngedouw, 2005). Business loan brokering is performed by NGO employees to help stimulate the *chulah* marketplace and help entrepreneurs locate financial assistance. Many artisans find that market reforms have increased business uncertainties and altered cash flows, profit margins and longstanding relationships with buyers and raw material vendors. Business loan brokering can help offset these trends. First, NGO program managers increase the loan eligibility of artisans by helping them settle outstanding loans and enrolling entrepreneurs in accreditation courses. Second, they introduce them to new loan opportunities through personal contact or written correspondence. "After the business training," Mr. Vyas of the Sahyadri Cooperative described, "if the entrepreneur needs help ARTI will put together a proposal for the lending agency. We go with them to the bank and show the benefits of the entrepreneur's technologies, good character and also their financial capabilities." These are acts largely of goodwill aimed at developing the *chulah* marketplace and the individual enterprises of ARTI-trained artisans. On more than one occasion however, the loan-receiving entrepreneur happened to be a relative of the NGO employee. These businesses were oftentimes arranged with special low rate loans to promote growth and increased profit margins, thereby organizing structures of development around relations of nepotism.

Used primarily by ARTI and its partner NGOs, *employment brokering* activities shape patterns of flexible governance over rural markets and increase rates of commercial improved *chulah* distribution.¹¹ As employment brokers, NGO employees restructure supply chains and develop business networks for entrepreneurs by arranging meetings with potential clients. Field officers also introduce local artisans and vouch for the quality of their craftsmanship and the value of their training to *gram panchayat* members looking to fund cookstove installation projects. When the financial coffers of

village *panchayat* are activated by NGO employees, decentralized state resources become a crucial form of protectionism amidst heavy state retrenchment (Bakker, 2002). Mr Mhagen, a field officer at ARTI, describes this process, "You must sit together at one platform anywhere in a central place with *village panchayat* who may be looking to fund cookstove installation projects, and also with our trained entrepreneurs and women who may want to purchase *chulah*." In order to solicit cooperation from *panchayat* members, field officers advise them to use money from the State of Maharashtra earmarked for health and education programs to subsidize village-wide cookstove distribution. In return, entrepreneurs actively campaign on their behalf and assemble political support for other village projects. By soliciting votes for funding agreements between entrepreneurs and *panchayat* members, NGO employees help to establish and reinforce patterns of development that, as Harriss-White (2004) notes, run closely parallel to relationships of tribute and political patronage. Mr Mhagen, summarizing this process, notes that "putting together meetings with all of these people, and advising entrepreneurs to support the *panchayat* in future projects, all of this is how the artisans get maximum support and cookstoves schemes are funded."

The integration of foreign investments and commercial development frameworks into rural *chulah* markets marks a scaling up of governance to the international scale (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004). NGO employees at ARTI are uniquely positioned to broker these investment expenditure decisions by answering the requests of the Shell Foundation while also responding to concerns voiced by community groups. As the State is no longer the central arbiter of financial decisions and industry behavior, NGO employees have become a central player in reregulating financial channels of the post-liberalized *chulah* industry. Acting as *financial brokers* for the Shell Foundation, field officers and program managers use Foundation money to fund various content-appropriate marketing strategies, including the publication of brochures, public awareness camps and radio spots. Funding is typically given to trained artisans in the form of zero-interest "revolving funds" for raw materials and demand generation. NGO program managers and field officers broker the *chulah* delivery process by making loan allocation and timing decisions consistent with the demands of the Shell Foundation, while simultaneously performing grounded market tests and locating potential trainees so as to meet the specific needs of community groups and individuals throughout the project area. As Mr. Deshmukh, a program manager at ARTI, remarked "There is a whole business model we have to meet for the Shell Foundation. But you see, we know these villages best. We are the social-minded people. We develop our professionalism with an ear to the ground."

In the case of financial brokering activities (and also business loan brokering activities) "keeping an ear to the ground" includes frequently choosing to assist entrepreneurs in positions of community prominence by enlarging and consolidating their financial power, at the expense of other competing enterprises. This can, in part, be traced to the personal ambitions of the NGO employee who see the possibility of leveraging favors into considerable financial gains and political support in the future. As one field officer noted, "You work to help all fabricators and distributors of *chulah* but not all of them are capable of returning the favor." As a result of what Jeffrey and Lerche (2000) have alluded to as expressions of market opportunism and predation, many rural artisans in southwestern Maharashtra have found their formerly profitable businesses failing in the commercial marketplace, having been crowded out by new, larger artisan enterprises with numerous comparative advantages. Many of the struggling enterprises in the region describe what they see as a deepening artisan class structure constituted by a sharp disparity in economies of scale and profit margins between small and large enterprises.

¹¹ NGO employees include program managers and field officers at both ARTI and a series of smaller, regional NGOs. All of the program managers and field officers interviewed were male and ranged in age from late 20s to over 50. Program managers tended to come from wealthier middle-class families holding political influence in village affairs. Many lived in the greater Pune metropolitan area. Field officers were generally from less prominent families and nearly all lived inside my study area. These employees played a crucial role in program organization, administration and outreach.

Form	Description	Application
Financial	When the brokering entity makes financial expenditures and stove allocation decisions on behalf of another actor. Agents meet the demands of both the lending and receiving actors. While the main objective is to meet terms put forth by the lending agency, the mediating agent will use a more nuanced understanding of the receiving agency to modify applied expenditure and allocation decisions.	<i>NGO program manager and field officer:</i> Armed with an intimate knowledge of local political, social and ecological conditions, broker helps create demand in the market for entrepreneurs by using Shell Foundation money to fund various marketing strategies, including the publication of brochures, public awareness camps and radio spots. Also make revolving funds available to village artisans in the form of raw materials.
Merchandise	The process of brokering the sale of stove merchandise (full stove or parts) between the entrepreneur and household. The brokering unit serves as an agent of the entrepreneur aiding in both the recruitment of potential clients and the negotiation of sales. The entrepreneur can engage in merchandise brokering by extending his/her activities beyond typical sales duties, and assuming an intermediary position between other interest groups. These negotiations may involve single or multiple households in one or more villages. The brokering process does not actually involve the sale and transfer of cookstoves.	<i>Artisans:</i> Takes on the role of facilitator and coordinate meetings and actions required to strike an agreement between village <i>panchayat</i> , stove users, self-help groups, <i>grama sevak</i> and others. <i>NGO field officer:</i> Involves brokering the sale of both whole cookstoves and stove parts between artisans and stove user.
Employment	The practice of securing employment opportunities for artisans and self-employed workers through village-level networking. The key difference between merchandise and employment brokering is that in employment brokering the entrepreneurs labor is marketed. He or she is still responsible for implementing a full array of sales activities including the solicitation and receipt of cookstove orders. Merchandise brokering on the other hand involves brokering stove sales, so the entrepreneur is only required to 'fill' the order.	<i>NGO field officer:</i> Through village-level networking. The brokering entity utilizes previous contact with <i>sarpanch</i> , self help group members or others to mediate stove construction and installation contracts on behalf the entrepreneur.
Business Loan	When a brokering entity intervenes to help beneficiary receive financial loans from a third party – such as a banking agency. Typically, the broker aids entrepreneurs who have difficulty securing business loans on their own. The broker may provide administrative assistance to the entrepreneur and/or may meet independently with the loan-bearing organization to vouch for the borrowing entrepreneur.	<i>NGO program manager:</i> The broker may provide administrative assistance to entrepreneurs or self help group members and/or may meet independently with a third party – usually a state or private bank to vouch for the borrowing entrepreneur. <i>NGO field officer:</i> Brokers the transfer of small loans (200–400 rupees) between SHGs and individual stove buyers.
Individual Subsidy	The practice of securing subsidies for individual household <i>chulah</i> purchases. When microcredit organization or other ad hoc assemblage appeals to an intra-village or external personal-subsidy issuing agency. The broker must first garner interest from both the potential beneficiary and donor, before negotiating a feasible subsidy amount.	<i>Female stove users (SHG Members and non-members):</i> Brokering entity gets groups in region to take an interest in, and help finance, improved <i>chulah</i> programs- predominantly with the goal of lowering stove prices. SHG members persuade village <i>panchayat</i> to provide partial-subsidies on improved <i>chulah</i> . Also, persuade village members to adopt 'lifestyle' changes in order to receive subsidies from the NGO Art of Living.

Fig. 2. Forms of brokering.

Commercial frameworks for distributing improved cookstoves have generated a number of hardships for artisans and have led many to adopt *merchandise brokering* activities. Artisans can no longer count on guaranteed production cost assistance from the state nor can they plan around predictable production schedules and annual distribution forecasts put forth by the NPIC. Moreover, many artisans describe the challenge of balancing intensive marketing campaigns that are necessary in a market economy with stove fabrication duties and quality craftsmanship expectations that are constantly subject to peer scrutiny. For smaller enterprises, all of these challenges are further heightened by the emergence of a petty bourgeoisie community comprised of large, highly efficient stove manufacturers. Mr. Mahadev Shankar Kumbhar, an artisan in the village of Takawade noted how post sector liberalization, he is "unsure month to month what the future will bring." This stands in contrast to conditions under the NPIC where, according to Mr. Kumbhar "Artisans had a sure market – bulk money and orders from the NPIC equaled assurance." As a result of these uncertainties many artisans shape informal structures of market governance by actively intervening in supply chain activities, reworking exchange transactions and aligning different commercial actors (Tsing, 2007). Merchandise brokering involves forming new relationships between stove technicians, marketers, producers, suppliers, decentralized state outlets and stove users. In order to reach potential customers and other interest groups, mediating agents deploy a diverse and creative set of marketing strategies such as flyers, public demonstrations, CDs, radio spots or arranged multi-household discussions. One commonly cited contact group for artisans are female *anganwadi* employees, or sponsored child development workers. *Anganwadi* centers are part of the state of Maharashtra's Integrated Child Development Services Program. These state employees serve as useful interlocutors on behalf of the

artisan and detail the benefits of improved *chulah* to women and children at their center.

Merchandise brokering also involves targeting stove users in order to convince them that improved *chulah* are worth the purchase price, and also *panchayat* and *grama sevak* in order to confirm adequate financial support for cookstove subsidies. Artisans will make routine village visits, eventually culminating in a group meeting with interested parties because as one artisan put it, "the many interest groups do not make agreements themselves". One of the many programs used by artisans to maintain interest in village-wide cookstove programs is the *Sant Gadge Baba Swatchata Abhiyan* or Clean Village Campaign of Maharashtra. According to Mr. Sheshlina Khumbar an artisan based in the village of Bhudgaon, "If I want to sell stoves to a village. I have to convince the stove users. Yes, this is necessary. But I must also convince the village government. There are monetary prizes for issuing smokeless *chulah* that will be attractive to the *panchayat*." Artisans remind *panchayat* members that providing partial stove subsidies to households will increase stove uptake in the village and may result in the receipt of Campaign 'smokeless village' monetary awards. For artisans like Mr. Sheshlina Khumbar pursuit of smokeless village awards may precipitate more purchase orders. Merchandise brokering by artisans and the purposeful targeting of *Anganwadi* centers and the Clean Village Campaign of Maharashtra (via *panchayat* administrations) elucidates how neoliberal state resources are activated by actors within civil society.

Personal subsidy brokering activities are employed by some female household members in response to increased improved cookstove prices. Within two years of the NPIC's closing, prices rose by nearly 300% for one and two pothole *chulah* in Southwestern Maharashtra, making them unaffordable for many households. In response, many households cook outside arguing this reduces

exposure to smoke “for free.” Others like Ms. Yashuda Chavan note the price would not be so bad if it was a one time or infrequent purchase. “I express my anger on the stove by banging my pots on it.” She explained, “I would need to build a new stove every few months because it keeps breaking!” In response to such concerns, some female stove users initiated programs seeking to secure financial aid from third party entities with the intent of generating more equitable cookstove distribution.¹² In the village of Pharandwadi female Self-Help Group members from primarily middle-class backgrounds served as personal subsidy brokers bringing multiple interest groups together to forge subsidized stove delivery initiatives. To strike a village-wide agreement, SHG members convened numerous villagers, artisans, the village *sarpanch*, and employees from two NGOs in the region. The purpose of the meeting was to garner political, financial and technical support from each group so as to assure high quality stove products and reduce concerns over the feasibility of subsidization at various price points. Female stove users specifically targeted resources within the developmental state in order to safeguard against perceived regressive outcomes resulting from market reforms. Self Help Group members suggested to the *panchayat* that they reallocate a portion of money mandated by the State of Maharashtra for health and education programs for the proposed improved *chulah* initiative. As a result of their persuasive appeals, SHG members generated an agreement between the *panchayat* and other community members entailing increased village funding for health related programs, including 50% subsidies for improved, smokeless cookstoves.

Meanwhile in the village of Kapshi, a group of half a dozen women not formally identifying with any self help group carefully brokered an informal agreement amongst villagers, *panchayat* members and the NGO *Art of Living* to subsidize smokeless *chulah* distribution throughout the village.¹³ These women from middle-class, land-owning households were also largely motivated by high baseline stove prices which prohibited improved stove acquisition for many poorer households. In order to reach a village-wide agreement, the group of women first brought various interest groups together, described the benefits of smokeless *chulah* and secured initial interest from all sides for a stove dissemination campaign. “We had to propose a loan plan that was best for everyone.” Ms. Varsha Gorakh Pawar, a villager in Kapshi said, “We also showed why a plan was needed at all. Then we brought a representative from ARTI to help show the improved stoves to villagers and members of the *panchayat*. Some were not easily convinced, but after some time the villagers and *panchayat* began to like the idea.” Ms. Pawar and her associates then coordinated the terms of agreement, which involved convincing members of the community to become a ‘model village’ for the *Art of Living* by adopting the organization’s core ‘lifestyle’ principles, such as maintaining a smoke and alcohol-free environment. Eventually,

after some drawn-out squabbles between different community members, the village agreed on a Rs 250 subsidy for each household leaving only Rs 50 to be paid by each stove user. Many previously marginalized households thus gained entry into the smokeless *chulah* market and experienced the health benefits of a cleaner cooking environment. Like other previously described techniques, personal subsidy brokering in both Pharandwadi and Kapshi transformed the commercial distribution process and significantly shaped safeguarding activities in the absence of any formal regulatory state apparatus.

The mediating agent in post-liberalized economies

Theories of how rural development is achieved on the ground in post-liberalized economies can be improved by explicitly detailing the various identities, activities and business networks of intermediary operatives. Accounting for the multiple strategies employed by rural brokers is an important first step. Mediation has many guises and should not be reduced to a single type or short-list of procedures. The liberalization of improved cookstove production and distribution has created new market actors, business transactions and political alignments at the village and regional level that have in turn generated a new set of opportunities and tasks for the mediating agent. ‘Geographies of mediation’ highlight this complex network of actors encountered by community brokers. This research has offered a detailed account of five different brokering activities with the intent of helping other researchers and practitioners examining post-liberalized economic sectors accurately grasp how market development is responded to and reworked by local actors. Subsequent to the cessation of the NPIC and in response to the marketization of the improved cookstove industry in southwestern Maharashtra, intermediaries have been shown to coordinate counter regulating activities within segments of civil society by linking village interests to a host of emerging market entrepreneurs, loan agents and latent, decentralized neoliberal state resources.

Mediating activities are implemented largely as a result of market failures. The market has failed to make stoves affordable for poorer households and has placed considerable strain on artisan enterprises. Bottom-up subsidy schemes have therefore been coordinated by the low-level broker. For example, without subsidies, increased stove prices have led female stove users to organize in ad hoc collectives and formal self help groups. These groups seek out third parties capable of subsidizing village-wide stove distribution initiatives that bring health benefits to households of all income levels. Artisans have responded to market failures by actively brokering deals between sellers, buyers and money-bearing organizations that will bring cost share assistance to households and increase user demand. Employees at ARTI and its partner NGOs have been placed in the position of catering to the needs and wants of both international investors and village communities. They attempt to counter market failures by facilitating the equitable distribution of health benefits to households, and by helping artisans to grow their business enterprise. Yet they must also issue investments and make business decisions on behalf of the Shell Foundation and other distant money-lending agencies. The inability of nascent *chulah* markets, as designed by the Shell Foundation, to work in the best interests of stove buyers and sellers has led female head of households, artisans and NGO employees to implement a series of intermediary, social safeguarding activities that informally regulate *chulah* markets.

Anirudh Krishna states unequivocally that, “where parties and state bureaucracies are constructed largely from the top down... * mediating agency will emerge as an independent presence at the grassroots.” He goes on to note that its form and objectives will be

¹² The female respondents or ‘stove users’ ranged in age, class and caste and resided in four villages – Pharandwadi, Kapshi, Katkarwadi and Ganesh Nagar – spread throughout my research area. These women were all recipients of new cookstoves, with a few actively participating in product design and marketing campaigns. Some of the women were active members of self help groups, while others actively participated in *mahila mandals* (village women’s organizations).

¹³ The Art of Living is an international NGO participating in a variety of activities relating to health, education, sustainable development and conflict resolution. One of the main programs under Art of Living and co-supported by the International Association for Human Values is ‘Sustainable Rural Development’. Improved Cookstove delivery coincides with the Art of Living’s sustainable rural development agenda which promotes, among other activities, the healing breathing process of *Sudarshan Kriya*. Art of living funds many other projects that comprise Kapshi’s ‘model village’ status. These include projects to ensure the village is tobacco and alcohol-free and capable of supporting a healthy and educated village population.

influenced by factors “that are generated by state and market forces” (2002, p. 13) Indeed, conditions of economic liberalization and market entrenchment have created new market actors, business transactions and political alignments at the village and regional level. As a result, mediating development increasingly involves working within and between groups of community, market and state actors. 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; Dubash, 2002). As commercial cookstove markets have expanded in southwestern Maharashtra, NGO employees have taken on the role of market broker to help entrepreneurs secure loans and arrange transactions between sellers and households, while also undertaking strategies associated with the political fixer when working with *panchayat* members to allocate state money earmarked for health and education purposes. For female stove users, political fixing involved convincing *panchayat* members in Kapshi and Pharandwadi that using state resources to subsidize cookstove distribution initiatives could increase political patronage through lobbying and vote procurement – a model of development intervention that amounts to development by reciprocity. Many stove users also employed market brokering activities in order to promote artisan merchandise to potential clients and financiers. Meanwhile, artisans use market brokering and political fixing activities to reconfigure supply chains to fit their business practices. They act as market brokers by facilitating business deals and coordinating transactions between various suppliers, sellers and buyers. Yet they also serve the role of political fixer by helping local state outlets and villagers strike mutually beneficial deals that deliver improved *chulah* to all households and political patronage to local politicians.

Numerous studies have described how market reforms and a sharp reduction in formal regulatory frameworks can lead to conditions of flexible governance that support counter protectionist behavior within civil society that regulates and indeed transforms market transactions (Larner, 2003; McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Smith, 2004). However within these accounts very little attention has been given to systematically describing how precisely members within civil society actually go about regulating the market. While Corbridge et al. (2005) describe the important role mediating agents play in rural development programs in India, it has yet to be fully articulated how brokering activities are an important dimension of civil society responses to the advancement of pure market distribution frameworks. This study has revealed

the influential role of intermediary action employed by female stove users, artisans and NGO employees, and has endeavored to describe how they shape the sphere of informal, flexible governance that emerges in the absence of heavy state intervention (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2005). In the southwestern regions of Maharashtra, mediating agents use five brokering techniques to rework market transactions, distributional frameworks and social relations of production. These methods are used to coordinate activities between a diverse set of groups including representatives from local daycare centers, block development officers, untrained artisans, banks and other lending agencies, regional and international NGOs, and village households.

Yet discussions of the transformative agent capable of shaping structures of informal market governance must not overlook the role of the neoliberal state in such affairs. This study reveals how mediating agents crucially rework strict market distribution mechanisms in order to engage developmental state resources. Examples of how and where mediating agents have engaged the state are presented in Fig. 3. This form of development undermines neo-classical dichotomies of state *or* market, public *or* private and, despite requiring limited State intervention in certain areas, still promotes a stronger, more interventionist state than perhaps most in neo-classical camps had imagined as optimal (Degnbol-Martinussen, 2001). In fact, even liberal Indian economists like Deepak Lal (1983) agree that under certain conditions, positive development could arise with forms of rational, albeit limited, state intervention. It is through this particular hybrid perspective on development that Barbara Harriss-White (2003) is proven correct in describing how liberalization may alter but not eliminate the state's influence in development affairs. In the post-liberalized improved cookstove distribution sector of Southwestern Maharashtra the market is shown not to merely replace the state but rather to work alongside it.

In this context, the state becomes an important resource for counter protectionist activity (Bakker, 2002). In southwestern Maharashtra, for example, a number of state outlets, including money-bearing health, education and clean village programs helped to offset patterns of commercialization-induced inequitable stove distribution. Yet very little has been intentional or particularly strategic in the establishment of these pathways for state re-involvement. This speaks to a more general lacuna besetting previous examinations of market development and the neoliberal state: until now it has been largely unclear how the roll out state, which does not necessarily make resources readily available to

State Resource	Activated By	Purpose
State of Maharashtra (Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Department), Clean Village Campaign	Artisans NGO field officers Stove Users	Instrumental use, to provide financial incentives for villages to promote smokeless <i>chulah</i>
State of Maharashtra Village Financial Allocation for Health and Education Programs	Artisans NGO field officers Stove Users	An important ready-source of funding earmarked for health and education based activities
State of Maharashtra Integrated Child Development Services Scheme, Village level <i>anganwadi</i> (childcare) centers	Artisans	Provide access to mothers and <i>anganwadi</i> employees for outreach and marketing purposes.
<i>Gram Panchayat members</i>	Artisans NGO field officers Stove Users	As a source of social capital for assisting artisan business expansion into villages. And to provide potential subsidies for stove users as determined at <i>Gram Sabha</i>
<i>Grama Sevak</i>	NGO field officers Artisans	For the purpose of influencing the allocation of funds as provided by Block Development Officers

Fig. 3. Sites of engagement with the neoliberal state.

community interests, is actually accessed by an assemblage of diverse informal governing actors. Karl Polanyi's enduring "double movement" thesis argues that increased economic liberalization will be predictably countered by expressions of State protectionism. It is impossible, Polanyi suggests, for a self-regulating market to be truly unbound and disembedded from social safeguarding activities and forms of market protection (Polanyi, 1944). But where exactly does so-called 'protectionism' come from in the case of improved cookstoves, especially in light of the NPIC's abrupt closing? One of the more remarkable findings from southwest Maharashtra is how rural brokers are key interlocutors and middlemen (and middle women) between civil society and the neoliberal state.

Low-level intermediaries in India have been previously acknowledged for accessing decentralized state outlets (e.g., Kaushik, 2005). Exclusion from government resources leads some members of civil society to become political operatives representing particular class and caste interests to state operatives (Jeffrey, Jeffery, & Jeffery, 2005). This study describes specifically how brokers help connect community groups to government resources amidst transformative conditions of market liberalization and state disinvestment. Many state resources remain locked away within bureaucracies and are only "rolled out" and used to safeguard against market forces once explicitly activated by community intermediaries. In this way, the neoliberal state may be viewed as latent. The idea of a latent government apparatus supports notions of state offices that are forever ready to expand their power, but require acts of opportunism and spontaneous intervention to unfurl their bureaucratic reach. State involvement becomes an unplanned side effect of development (Ferguson, 1995).

The demonstrated ability of low-level brokers to coordinate community governance efforts and access state resources raises questions concerning whether substantive rural market-based development – that is, increased equitable distribution of health and financial benefits – is actually aided or hindered by their mediating intervention. In most cases it depends on the village and broker in question. While mediating agents use the market to secure personal gains and consolidate wealth among privileged villagers, relatives and well-connected entrepreneurs (See Harriss-White, 1999, 2004; Jeffrey, 2002), many have opened up new markets for intervention that are capable of delivering development benefits to otherwise marginalized village communities and households (Corbridge et al., 2005; Krishna, 2003). Most frequently however, intermediaries from each analytic group tend to operate as agents of benevolence/equity and corruption/wealth accumulation. They act opportunistically to bring benefits to both advantaged and disadvantaged village members. In fact, such development objectives quite frequently work in concert with one another. In order to garner positive development outcomes for poorer communities, brokers will frequently promise political and financial support to the more well-connected and influential community members capable of coordinating the delivery of development benefits. And, in an effort to establish ties and reparative relationships with powerful politicians and local producers, the mediating agent will seek out and serve communities in need of development intervention. In southwestern Maharashtra an unyielding pattern of political fixing is woven into the market distribution process. It is through these relationships of collusion, patronage and reparation that social structures of accumulation are most obviously re-inscribed (despite their frequently progressive distributional outcomes) thereby contributing to class reproduction and reinforcing patterns of social organization (Jeffrey & Lerche, 2000; Krishna, 2003).

Yet this study also diverges in many respects with Jeffrey and Lerche and contradicts Krishna's evaluation that the capabilities of mediating agents "will be reinforced by those relatively stable

patterns of social organization that persist at the grassroots" (Krishna p. 13). Although many social structures are maintained and even reinforced by the actions of rural brokers, many mediating agents in this study are also attributed with transforming supply chain relationships, dismantling market hierarchies and channeling control over market behavior downwards to the community-level. Economic liberalization and the introduction of the CBFD program in southwestern Maharashtra have brought about radically new social relationships that have led to the adoption of brokering activities by unlikely parties. The tendency for community intermediaries to reconstitute commercial supply chains post sector liberalization reinforces Tsing's (2007) notion of "supply chain capitalism" where the flow of market commodities – in this case the resource extraction, production, manufacturing and marketing aspects of the improved chulah supply chain – is contingent upon the heterogeneous financial pressures, cultural practices and embedded relationships shaping everyday market transactions. This study has revealed how these brokers frequently act as transformative and empowering agents that alter preexisting structures of social organization by reworking market transactions and social relations of production. The village-wide subsidy initiatives in Kapshi and Pharandwadi for example illustrate how power has been recast downward to groups of villagers who shape market transactions in an effort to bring about more equitable stove distribution.

These findings reconfirm the importance of scrutinizing rural brokers when trying to assess how rural development is achieved on the ground. They point to the influential role mediating agents play within recently liberalized economic sectors and specifically to their ability to shape patterns of informal governance within civil society. Our understanding of the development process is improved by paying attention to how decisions and activities are routed through the complex set of relationships and transactions comprising the mediation process – what I have described here as geographies of mediation. Furthermore, their ability to locate and activate neoliberal state resources in order to safeguard against market induced inequities illustrates how the roll out state is actually "rolled out". These insights support notions of a latent developmental state that is viable yet requiring activation. Finally, this study has highlighted the dialectic relationship between market reforms and low-level intermediaries. New markets have altered the duties of the rural Indian broker while simultaneously being transformed by these local agents who coordinate deals and transactions between civil, market and state actors. Of course, the analytical and theoretical lessons learned from this study should not be confined to the State of Maharashtra and may be productively applied to a vast array of recently reformed economic sectors around India and beyond.

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