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# Introduction: The Crucial Role of Mediators in Relations between States and Citizens

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## Introduction

This book sets out to answer a deceptively simple question: how do citizens and state engage in the global south? The answer is not simple; it is indeed complex and multifaceted, but we argue that much of the time this engagement involves a practice of intermediation. From local to international level, citizens are almost always represented to the state through third parties that are distinguished by the intermediary role that they play. These intermediaries include political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations, social movements, armed non-state actors, networks and individuals. For its part, the state often engages citizens through intermediaries from private service providers to civil society activists and even local militia. Intermediation is thus both widely practiced and multi-directional in relations between states and citizens in the global south. Indeed, so significant is the role of intermediaries in the engagement between states and citizens that it may well be useful to unpack the commonplace conception of 'state-society relations' in terms of the term 'state-intermediary-citizen' relations.

Of course, the observation that third parties play a role in representing citizens to states and vice versa is not a new one, and indeed it is central to the mainstream conception of civil society in democracies, where trade unions, interest groups and lobbies champion the interests of their constituencies in the political process (O'Donnell 1999). While clearly important, this book draws attention to a different kind of intermediary between states and citizens, that is, actors that 'speak for' citizens without formal or even explicit authorisation (Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 2003). Thus unlike politicians or trade union leaders who can point to

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an election or legally based authorisation to speak for a constituency, mediators claim legitimacy to speak or act for citizens on a variety of grounds, but none of them is institutionally recognised by formal political authority. Examples include militia who claim to provide security against drug gangs that the state cannot, or professionalised NGOs that speak for the health rights of poor people on the basis of expert knowledge, or advocacy groups that speak for marginalised groups as they would otherwise have no access to power.

Key objectives of this book are to highlight the importance of mediators to state–society relations in democracies of the global south and to raise the question of what this means for understanding politics in these contexts, most of which are new democracies. As illustrated in different ways in the chapters that follow, mediation is a practice that sometimes reflects, and indeed may reinforce, a lack of democratic relationship between states and citizens. This is most obvious in the case of coercive mediators like militia, but also applies to forms of brokerage where the interests of the mediator are served by becoming the main conduit through which engagement between groups of citizens and states happen. Sometimes, however, mediators may work to overcome democratic deficits, such as the social marginalisation of women or minority groups, or to empower citizens to live better and claim their rights from the state. In sum then, mediators may be coercive, clientelistic or democratic, but the possibility of practicing mediation reflects a context-specific form of democratic deficit.

The reason for this, simply put, is that in many contexts in the global south, accessing the democratic state through elected representatives or bureaucracy or formally authorised civil society actors like trade unions or some social movements is simply not effective for large swathes of citizens. The book identifies a range of different potential reasons for this democratic deficit. Some point to lingering forms of pre-democratic representational practices such as the role of traditional and religious leaders; others to enduring relations of social exclusion for minority groups like Uyghur in China or the lack of a shared social contract between majority and minority nations as in Brazil; others to new forms of political exclusion for the urban poor who cannot live by the rules of the neoliberal city; others to a lack of recognition as citizens bearing rights as in women’s organisations in Delhi, pro-democracy NGOS in Angola and NGOs working with the rural poor in Bangladesh. Whatever the reason, mediation emerges where the efficacy of democratic representation through formal institutions or formally authorised actors is limited.

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Notably, we are not the first to use ‘mediation’ in this way in the context of state–society relations; we borrow the term from Lavalle, Houtzager and Castello (2005) who identify mediation as one of a range of representation claims advanced by civil society formations in Sao Paulo to justify their right to represent the poor. The other grounds commonly cited were ‘electoral’, ‘identity’, ‘membership’, ‘proximity’ and ‘service’. The appeal to ‘mediation’ was understood by Lavalle et al. (2005) as ‘open[ing] up access to public decision-making institutions that otherwise would remain inaccessible’, capturing the sense of ‘third-party’ intervention we like. Notably, for Lavalle et al. (2005), mediation is used in a very specific sense of overcoming marginalisation, and in some kind of constructive or democratic way according to the self-understanding of civil society actors.

This conception of mediation stands in some contrast to the much broader way it is used by most authors in both the mainstream democratisation and participatory democracy literatures. Thus, in respect of democratisation, Peruzotti (2012: 1) follows O’Donnell in arguing that the ‘delegative democracies’ of executive rule in many Latin American countries should be deepened through both enhancing ‘horizontal accountability’ by introducing more liberal-democratic institutions and ‘vertical accountability’ by enabling ‘adequate linkages between society and the state to ensure political responsiveness’ to citizens (2012: 18, footnote 19). Peruzotti (2012: 13) understands all of this as deepening democracy through extending representational politics, thereby enhancing accountability, beyond the idea of elections through ‘the promotion and development of a broad field of mediated politics’. On this view mediated politics includes ‘private interest representation’; ‘public interest representation’ including new actors and themes; new state institutions like policy councils, indigenous councils and institutionalised participation; and the combination of the above in ‘an autonomous and pluralistic public sphere’ (2012: 14). This broad conception of mediation as encompassing all the forms of representation and accountability between state and society is echoed in a recent work on participatory budgeting in Brazil (Baiocchi et al. 2011).

While following Lavalle et al.’s (2005) more specific account of mediation, in this book we use the concept in a slightly broader way. There are several dimensions to this. We do not limit mediation to the self-description of actors only, but use it to describe all actors who behave as third parties in ‘speaking for’ (and sometimes ‘speaking as’ citizens to follow Mische 2009), in the engagement between citizens and the state,

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whether they explicitly frame their representation in these terms or not. This is also important because mediation is not necessarily democratic, nor just limited to bringing citizens into decision-making. It is this focus on mediation as a particular practice of 'speaking for' citizens *within* the wider set of intermediary politics that distinguishes our conception from the all-encompassing usage by Peruzotti and Baiocchi et al.

Further, while reminiscent of the concept of 'brokerage' as used in the anthropology literature of the 1960s and 1970s (James 2011), mediation is used here in three distinct ways. First, 'mediation' is used in a narrower sense in being restricted to explicitly political engagements between states and citizens, rather than the economic and cultural dimensions often invoked in anthropological accounts of brokerage. Of course there are economic, cultural and identity aspects to particular modes of mediation, but the field of action described relates to relations between particular groups of citizens and particular forms of public authority or state. Second, the term mediation is used to describe political engagements in formally democratic political systems in the global south, whereas brokerage was used to describe relations under colonial or transitional regimes.<sup>1</sup> Third, the field of practices captured by intermediaries 'speaking for' citizens is much broader than brokerage, although it would include it too.

Notably, the ubiquitous presence of intermediaries at the intersection of engagements between states and citizens, and the frequency of mediation as part of this, suggests that understanding what is currently termed 'state-society relations' ought to explore more significantly the role of intermediaries and the relations between them and other actors – that is networks. This theme emerges in a number of chapters in this volume (Piper and Bénit-Gbaffou, Kingston, Wheeler, Waisbich), but is most obvious in Chopra's account of the politics around the introduction of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in India in 2008, an account that also demonstrates how networks define who is considered a political insider and outsider in ways that redefine and help constitute 'state-intermediary-citizen' relations. Thus a focus on the role of intermediaries, including mediators, and their engagement between states and citizens, helps understand context-specific ways in which who is 'the state' and who is 'the citizen' are defined. It also draws attention to the agency of intermediaries who may often be central to animating relations between states and citizens – indeed this is a distinctive feature of mediation where it is the intermediary who often takes the initiative to 'speak for' citizens to the state or vice versa.

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Lastly, this volume demonstrates that mediation can be more than coercion and clientelism. Hence, intermediaries who ‘speak for’ various groups of citizens can also secure democratic outcomes. Indeed, a key form of this is the attempt to ‘turn subjects into citizens’ as it were, by explicitly teaching people about their rights in the democratic political system, and organising and mobilising on this basis. Good examples in this book are found in the chapter by Fleisch and Robins on the Equal Education (EE) social movement in South Africa, Huq and Mahmud’s work on gender NGOs in Bangladesh and von Lieres’ reflections on NGO activity in Angola. The implication of these chapters is that, at least for key groups of citizens, democratic political representation can be facilitated by third-party mediation, either to bring marginalised groups into state decision-making processes or to construct forms of political agency or citizenship among marginalised groups that the state can recognise and to which it will respond. Hence, in respect of the literatures that affirm democratic deepening mainly through the reform of representative institutions (Schumpeter 1942; Dahl 1972; O’Donnell 1999) or through new forms of participatory governance and strongly organised civil societies (Avritzer 2002; Heller 2001; Fung and Wright 2001; Baiocchi, Heller and Silva 2011; Cornwall and Coelho 2007), we suggest that mediation can, at times, be a form of democratic politics, capable of addressing some of the weaknesses of both liberal representative democracy and participatory governance.

In sum then, mediation refers to informal forms of representation by intermediaries who speak for groups of citizens to the state, and vice versa. It is a subset of the wider representational regime in the new democracies of the global south, and mediation thus exists alongside more commonly recognised representational practices that have been formally authorised. Taking mediation seriously is important because it points to the ubiquitous role of intermediaries in engagements between states and citizens, and the agency of these third parties in defining who is included in, and excluded from, decision-making. Consequently it speaks to larger debates about the challenges of democratisation in the global south. This emphasis on multiple actors, each with significant agency, existing in networks of engagement that contest inclusion and exclusion challenges the institutional structuralism and dualism imagined in the notion of ‘state–society relations’. Further, recognising the significance of mediation suggests that liberal-democratic institutions do not exhaust the forms of political practice in democracies of the south, and that various informal and non-democratic practices

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endure or have emerged. Crucially, however, mediation is not necessarily undemocratic and indeed may have an important role to play in deepening democracy, as much as it is also a symptom of its shortcomings.

### The nature of mediation

The argument of this book is developed through an emergent analysis from a series of 12 case studies, mostly from countries of the global south (Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, Lebanon and South Africa) and one from an underdeveloped community in the Canadian Yukon. Our focus is on *how* citizens and states engage, that is on the actual practice of representing citizens to the state, or related form of public authority, and vice versa. The actors who mediate on behalf of citizens are diverse, ranging from local and national civil society organisations who mediate between unorganised citizens and local states (in Angola Bangladesh, India and South Africa) to international and national advocacy NGOs that campaign on behalf of indigenous groups to influence public policy (Brazil, Canada and China), and social movements that broker the inclusion of poor communities in policy decision-making (South Africa). These actors often engage in diverse mediating practices, ranging from advocacy for the inclusion of representatives of marginalised groups to the advocacy of the interests of marginalised groups themselves.

Together our cases take the practice of mediation as the unit of analysis, and our investigation is driven by four research questions; the first two are more descriptive and the latter two are more analytical:

1. What are the shared characteristics across the cases that allow us to constitute the concept of ‘mediation’?
2. What is particular to the nature of mediation in each case?
3. How does the context and history of state–society relations help us understand the nature of mediation in each case?
4. What are the processes and outcomes of mediation, and to what extent can mediation be said to be democratic?

In pursuing these questions the project began with cases that the researchers were already familiar with and that seemed to fit an initial description of mediation as a form of ‘speaking for’ citizens to the state, or vice versa. Then an iterative and dialogical process ensued, via reflections from face-to-face workshops and paper drafting, exploring for

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potential emergent common features and interrogating the appropriate boundaries of mediation in comparison with other forms of representation. Thus our cases explore in depth

- (i) the identity of the mediator,
- (ii) the objectives of mediation,
- (iii) how mediation is practised and thus its nature or 'mode' and
- (iv) the outcomes of mediation.

Identifying and reflecting on these questions was a dialogical and imperfect process of concept building. Furthermore, we identified certain typical, though not necessary, characteristics in respect of the goals, style and outcomes of mediatory politics.

In terms of the *identity* of mediators, a significant number of our cases involve some kind of civil society organisation, whether a professional NGO, social movement or more localised community-based organisation. However, in addition to the civil society actors, a range of actors in political society played mediating roles including political parties, state civil servants and the police. In some cases, even individuals were key actors. (Importantly, while political parties and civil servants are formally authorised to represent and act in various ways, these cases show how they can also become mediators when they take on representational roles not formally assigned to them.) Hence, in addition to the range of actors that played a mediating role, a notable feature of mediation is the coexistence of multiple actors playing more familiar representative *and* mediating roles for the same group or in the same place – a plurality probably enhanced by the informal nature of many mediatory politics. In sum then, a key insight of the book is that identity is not a useful means of identifying the practice of 'speaking for' citizens.

Further, as Chopra notes in Chapter 6, reflecting on mediation invites us to think about power relations in procedural rather than structural terms of state versus society, or state versus non-state. Indeed, rather than working with a simple state–society binary, it may be useful to think in terms of networks that include actors from the state, intermediaries and citizens. Further, it is also more effective to think about how representational practices like mediation construct and reconstruct state–society relations in the process of political contest. Mohanty also points out in Chapter 8 how the state responds to the same mediators making the same demands quite differently at national and local levels, confirming the disutility of simplistic assumptions about the coherence

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of state and society as two discrete sets of actors. Thus, as demonstrated in many of our cases, mediation can be both boundary-constructing discursively and boundary-crossing politically.

In terms of the *goals* of mediation, we identified three main kinds in our cases. First are those mediators who look to negotiate and secure access to state decision-making processes in the name of marginalised groups, such as first nations in the Amazon and Yukon, the rural poor in India and the Uyghur Diaspora. These we term the ‘diplomats’. Second are those who focus less on accessing the state and more on cultivating forms of citizenship that empower people to solve their own problems and/or engage the state more effectively. This was a common story from women’s NGOs in Bangladesh, urban rights NGOs in Angola, education rights movements in South Africa to some disabled movements in the Lebanon. These we term the ‘educators’. Third are those mediators who capture power obviously for their own ends. These range from coercive mediators in the favelas of Rio to clientelistic representatives on housing development in Cape Town and paternalistic sectarian representatives in the Lebanon. These we term ‘captors’. While it is possible to imagine a wider range of kinds of mediators including, for example, those that look to build networks and alliances or those that intervene as honest brokers in violent conflicts, our range of cases disclosed just ‘diplomats’, ‘educators’ and ‘captors’.

In respect of the *modes* of mediation, the main way in which representation is conducted, we identify four kinds: coercive, clientelistic, advocacy and empowerment, and often some combination thereof. Although the rarest of modes in our sample, coercive mediators were found in the militia that dominate important aspects of citizen’s lives in the favelas of Brazil, and coercion is an important element in enforcing the right to popular representation in many of our contexts including India and South Africa. Clientelistic mediation was common in the urban politics of many of our cases, including political parties trading support for housing and other social goods and local civil society organisations competing for state patronage. Advocacy mediation included social movements demanding better education in South Africa, land rights in Bangladesh, elite lobbying for rural rights in India and traditional leaders championing self-government in Canada. Empowerment mediation involves the building of forms of self-reliance such as elements of the disabled movement in the Lebanon and rights-based forms of citizenship across many of our cases. Again, some of our cases involved mediators who might have more than one mode or whose mode changes down time – another key finding of the book.

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A key insight in respect of mediation concerns the ambiguous position of the intermediary between the state and citizens, not least as each actor might operate according to different rationalities, reflecting the partial institutionalisation of democracy across the global south. This has at least two implications. First, the ‘negotiating’ nature of mediatory politics means that it is often a politics of bargaining, negotiating and compromise rather than militant confrontation, although there may be moments when the latter are used tactically or out of frustration. Second, mediators must confront the past and the future simultaneously. What is meant by this is that in an attempt to better understand the ‘double-dealing’ required of mediators, to use Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura’s (2012) appropriation of Bourdieu, each chapter locates the practice of mediation in the broader context of relations between states and citizens. In addition to help deepen understanding of each case, this approach also affirms the importance of historical evolution of state–society relations and the enduring forms of pre-democratic practices that linger into the post-colonial order, as best outlined in Shankar’s chapter on street trading in Hyderabad.

Lastly, as regards the *outcomes* of mediation, most of our cases identified some kind of benefit for the marginalised group that could be described as democratic following Gaventa and Barrett’s (2010) grounded theorising of democratic outcomes as

- (i) the construction of empowered notions of citizenship;
- (ii) the strengthening of practices of participation;
- (iii) the strengthening of responsive and accountable states and the development of inclusive and cohesive societies; as well as
- (iv) tangible material benefits for poor and marginalised groups.

At the same time, many of the cases noted significant non-democratic outcomes, not least in the more coercive and clientelistic modes, and several noted the importance of changing roles of mediators down time and the tendency of many to try and cling on to the privileged position of being the ‘honest broker’ between state and society. While modest, these democratic gains are important because they warn against a blanket postcolonial pessimism about popular democracy and redeem the possibility and importance of democratic agency across class and identity lines.

Our findings suggest that mediating practices and actors can, at least at some times, trigger deeper forms of citizen action and can achieve the empowerment of communities. In particular, they often produce

non-instrumental outcomes such as a strengthened sense of citizenship and more effective citizenship practices, greater political awareness of rights and of one's agency. Citizen mobilisation brought about by mediating actors can sometimes entrench institutional solutions that favour the 'organised marginalised' – those whose claims are mediated through civil society formations – as opposed to less organised citizens with weaker links to civil society and state actors. Indeed if, as Mohanty argues, neoliberal globalisation increases the likelihood of the fragmentation of state power and the rise of a conservative discourse of 'public-private partnership' where the role of civil society is as service provider, then mediation that produces forms of citizenship and state responsive in these terms alone will simultaneously fail to produce inclusive and cohesive societal outcomes. Thus not only must assessing the democratic nature of mediation involve reflection on both the process and outcomes of representation, but the relationship between these means and ends must be reflected on as well. Indeed, generally speaking our cases suggest that democratic process of representation and democratic outcomes do not necessarily align. Notably not one case in our selection is unambiguously democratic in all respects (Table I.1).

### **Explaining mediation**

Emergent from the chapters in this volume are at least four kinds of explanation for the significance of mediation in the global south. Two of them look to enduring features from the past, and two to new forms of challenge to democracy. The first reason concerns enduring forms of pre-democratic representation as identified in Shankar's chapter on city politics in Hyderabad. Here she makes the compelling case that the political repertoires of slogan shouting, disregard for the law and the use of political party mediators and traders associations have a long history that gives lie to the idea of a political rupture with the advent of democracy in India. While the relative balance between these practices may be changing down time as democratic citizenship and state power grow slowly, the political story is more one of continuity than change.

Notably, this line of explanation echoes aspects of Mamdani's (1996) argument that decolonisation in Africa brought about the deracialisation of the political system with the eradication of white rule, but not necessarily democratisation for those who continue to live under 'indirect rule' by traditional leaders in rural areas. This governance remains authoritarian in nature, perpetuating colonial era imaginaries of rural people as 'subjects' governed by 'traditional law' rather than as 'citizens'

Table I.1 Summary of emergent features of mediation

Identity	Objective	Mode	Outcomes
Civil society organisations	Diplomat – secure access to decision-making	Coercive – impose authority through threat of punishment	Undemocratic Repress rivals Fragmentation of citizenship Diversion of resources to local elites
Political society organisations	Educator – build democratic citizenship	Clientelistic – trade support to patron for resources for client	Democratic Empowered notions of citizenship Strengthening participation Enhancing state responsiveness Tangible benefits for poor and marginalised groups
Individual citizens	Captor – secure strategic position for own ends	Advocacy – championing rights and needs of group to the state  Empowerment – building forms of self-reliance to solve groups' problems	Entrenched role of mediator

of democracy and rights-based law. Examples would include the lack of access to property rights, especially for women, as well as patrimonial basis for the distribution of land and other social goods. Some forms of mediation then reflect the enduring influence of pre-democratic era practices, although often hybridised in new ways in the formally democratic era.

The second kind of explanation also points to enduring, or perhaps unresolved, political legacies of authoritarian (and usually colonial) rule, more specifically the lack of a shared social contract between key groups in the state. This lack of consensus on the role and relationship of state and citizen undermines the legitimacy of the state authority in various ways. For instance, von Lieres in writing about Angola demonstrates how the construction of democratic citizenship by NGOs is not recognised by an authoritarian state that does not

share the same conception of rights and responsiveness to citizens. Similarly, Shankland's account of indigenous people's participation in the health system in Brazil reveals a profound normative disjuncture between how indigenous groups view the legitimacy of the Brazilian state and its institutions and how the state views these groups. Simply put, indigenous groups do not see the Brazilian state as the legitimate locus of political authority, which remains their community or nation, and treat the Brazilian and its institutions somewhat instrumentally. Lastly Rice shows how, in the case of the Yukon, mediators were able to secure recognition for the formal self-government of first nations in recognition of the lack of a common social contract, or a minimal social contract based on recognising national autonomy within a larger polity.

The third kind of explanation links the emergence of mediation to new social relations that pose a significant challenge to the institutions of liberal democracy, rather than enduring pre-democratic forms. In this vein, Chatterjee (2004) notes that the rapid population growth in the cities of the south, and the even faster growth of the urban poor and slums, has profound policy implications as the urban poor must often live in violation of property, zoning, health and safety laws to survive. Arguing that living in violation of the law makes representation through conventional democratic means more difficult than for 'law-abiding' social groups, Chatterjee famously argues that the urban poor are typically represented to the state via political parties with whom they relate clientelistically, and thus constitute 'political society', rather than in terms of democratic rights and practices that remain the preserve of the middle classes who constitute 'civil society'.

Whatever one thinks of Chatterjee's specific conceptualisation of 'political' versus 'civil society', his view represents a larger set of arguments about the contradictions that new forms of poverty and inequality pose for liberal imaginaries of political subjectivity and representation in the post-colonial city. These themes are echoed in Wheeler's argument in this volume that links the emergence of militia in the favelas of Rio to the globalisation of the drug trade, developments only possible under post-colonial conditions. Concomitantly, the fragmentation of the sovereignty of the Brazilian state brought about by a loss of power over key social spaces means a loss of important components of democratic citizenship for residents of favelas who struggle to access the state without going through the militia, and vice versa.

The fourth set of arguments that could explain the emergence of mediation also point to new social changes, but in the more overtly

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political realm. Here we refer to the widely observed fragmentations of the state power brought about by the twin impacts of state-level neoliberal policy and globalisation. Thus as Gaventa and Tandon (2010) note, neoliberal state policies disaggregate citizenship between middle-class consumers who purchase their public goods, and are thus consumer citizens, and the working class and poor who rely mostly on the state for their public goods. At the same time, globalisation diffuses political authority both downwards and upwards from the state in ways that make accessing power more challenging. The combined effect of these processes is to make more opaque the locus of power for social groups who depend on the state to help meet their needs, complicating and compromising the practice of democratic citizenship.

For example, in this regard Waisbich reflects on the transformation of Uyghur politics brought about by the diffuse distribution of political power between national and international systems. Hence, on the one hand, overt resistance against the government is impossible in China, not least due to the government's portrayal of Uyghur nationalist movements as terrorist threats in the temper of post-9/11 global politics. On the other hand, while the international context offers opportunities for political representation not available in China, there are constraints imposed by the international system that require the transformation of political claims for the Uyghur cause to be seen and heard. More specifically, the key shift required is from the (violent) demand for national self-determination, a politics much in vogue globally 50 years earlier, to the (peaceful) call for the recognition of human rights by the Chinese state. In so doing, the democratic limitations posed by the 'double-dealings' undertaken in mediating global political institutions are revealed.

Of course, it may be the case that more of the conditions that enhance mediation are produced by a combination of the above factors – indeed it seems likely that this will be the case in most places. Hence, across the post-colonial world, forms of pre-democratic social power and their associated forms of political representation endure, as do the political identities of many nations and groups forced into boundaries of the colonial state. At the same time, urbanisation and the growth of slums are common developments across the cities of the South (Davis 2007). Further, the migrants who constitute a large part of the urban poor are often people from rural areas where the hold of pre-democratic social relations is stronger. Lastly, neoliberalism is the dominant approach of macroeconomic policy and practice across most states while globalisation impacts on virtually every society. It is not hard to see how this

intersection of pre-democratic political identities, practices and new forms of socio-economic exclusion and political marginalisation creates conditions difficult for the proper functioning of liberal-democratic institutions. It is this gap between the social reality and political institutions that makes mediation a more common – and even necessary – form of political representation.

### **Mediation and deepening democracy**

Mediation is a crucial form of political representation that manifests in addition to the formal institutions of liberal democracy, now hegemonic in the world. As such it is a symptom of the limitations of nominal democracies of the global south – for a range of reasons identified above – but all of which point to the significance of (often informal) political practices that help constitute the meaning of politics in places that share similar democratic institutions. Paying closer attention to mediation then – those intermediaries who ‘speak for’ citizens – is central to understanding the possibilities and limitations of democratisation in the global south.

In what follows we outline the case for a ‘democratic deficit’ across the globe and show how the three main approaches to deepening democracy, namely, building a diverse and vibrant civil society, empowering and mobilising citizens and introducing new participatory institutions all presume forms of citizenship that do not necessarily exist. Rather, what do exist are a variety of forms of intermediation, some of which explicitly aim to build the kinds of political subjectivities and strategies needed to secure these various democratic visions. In short, certain forms of mediation are best understood as necessary to deepening democracy, as much as other kinds reflect liberal-democratic failure.

### **The limits of liberal democracy**

It is widely understood that we live in the age of democracy. As noted by Huntington (1993) some 20 years ago, the ‘third wave’ of democratisation across the global south has made electoral democracy the dominant form of government in the world. Further, these institutional changes have extended beyond multiparty competition for office through free, fair and frequent elections to include liberal-democratic commitments to the rule of law, political and civil liberties including private property, and various checks and balances within the state such as the separation of powers functionally, spatially and in time. In large part a set of institutions captured in Robert Dahl’s (1972) *Polyarchy*, and inspired

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by Schumpeter's (1942) positivist affirmation of democracy as the electoral method for choosing leadership, the liberal-democratic model is the particular incarnation of democracy operationalised in mainstream political science work on 'transitions' from authoritarian rule and the subsequent 'consolidation' of democracy.

Democracy is also, as John Dunn (1992) points out, an idea that is now hegemonic, but also practically compromised, as the necessity of political representation undermines the promise of equal inclusion in decision-making: 'today in politics democracy is the name for what we cannot have – but cannot cease to want'. Thus while democracy may be an 'essentially contested' concept (Gallie 1956) with a large variety of historical (Dahl 1998) and an equal number of empirical and normative models (Held 2006), the idea here is that the inclusive promise of liberal democracy is often undermined by the exclusive experience of actual rule – in both new and old democracies. In some case this may be about limited institutional transformations, when the transition from authoritarian rule results in elections but no other 'horizontal' accountability mechanisms within the state (O'Donnell 1999) such as independent judiciary, the legal embrace of human rights, of other institutions of 'monitory' democracy (Keane 2009). Examples would include the 'delegative democracy' of executive rule in Latin America (Calleros-Alarcon 2008) or the 'illiberal democracy' of Singapore (Mutalib 2000) or alternatively 'competitive authoritarian' regimes such as Serbia, Zimbabwe and Russia (Levitsky and Way 2010).

In these contexts democratic deficit seems an institutional problem, and correspondingly, democratic deepening requires institutional reform. This is straightforward enough from a theoretical point of view, if not from a political point of view. However, more theoretically demanding is the appropriate response to the experience of democratic deficit in new and old democracies that appear to meet at least most of the liberal-democratic criteria – Dahl's (1972) polyarchy in effect. In many ways Dahl anticipates the debate by writing that the institutions of liberal representative democracy are necessary but not sufficient for democracy and much depends on developing a democratic culture that will defend democratic governance in times of crisis (1998: 158). Central to this process of deepening democracy, then, is the cultivation of values of political equality through participation in associational and political life (1998: 37). Notably, many of the critics of northern democracy focus on the decline of civil life, and hence its inability to provide the counterbalance to the interests of the state and market. Thus Gaventa (2006: 9) writes of 'declining patterns of political participation,

the “hollowing out” of politics and takeover of political processes by special interests’ in the North. More specifically in the United States, Putnam (2000) writes of the decline of social capital and participation in public life, Crenson and Ginsberg (2002) of the ‘downsizing of democracy’ and Skockpol (2003:11) of ‘diminished democracy’ where public involvement is disconnected from professionalised public life.

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### **Deepening democracy**

Implicit in all these criticisms is that deepening democracy requires a revival of civil society and democratic citizenship. In turn, democratic citizenship is something often done ‘for citizens’ by democracy NGOs, and hence through a process of mediation. For example, O’Donnell (1999) argues for the necessity of ‘vertical’ forms of accountability by civil society over the state, and Carothers writes of the idea that democratic consolidation involves not just ‘top-down’ supply of democracy – Dahl’s polyarchy – but also ‘bottom-up’ demand for democracy by citizens as expressed through civil society organisations. Notably, while affirming the role of civil society in deepening democracy, this democratisation literature does not explore *how* civil society actually operates and whether in fact it does achieve these accountability goals. Further, in addition to recent work questioning the idea that more civil society is necessarily good for democracy, it is also evident that diverse forms of social marginalisation make it hard for certain groups to engage directly the state, that is, that civil organisation and representation is often very difficult without some mediatory intervention. For such groups more is required to ‘deepen democracy’ than somehow ‘reviving’ civil society.

A similar line of argument around the need to nuance the notion of civil society democratic credentials emerges from a rich and diverse qualitative literature around state–society relations in the global south (Coelho and von Lieres 2010), where a strong case is made that democratic outcomes are produced through citizen mobilisation, often around a discourse of rights-based citizenship (Hickey and Mohan 2005), rather than through more elite forms of representation by parties or civil society leaders, or at least not just through elite representation. This literature gives more empirical substance to the idea of how democracy can be deepened by civil society by affirming the centrality of both popular mobilisation and citizenship building to the broader politics of holding states accountable. Although a critical advance on the more generic assumptions of the democratisation mainstream model, the citizenship literature is yet to grapple sufficiently with the issue of

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how mobilisation and citizenship building happens. The key point here is that many citizens 'always already' find themselves in a variety of political relationships with the state that are often undemocratic and may pose substantial obstacles to popular mobilisation and citizenship development without intervention by third parties.

Lastly, the vast literature on new participatory institutions (Avritzer 2002; Heller 2001; Fung and Wright 2000; Baiocchi, Heller and Silva 2011; Cornwall and Coelho 2007) suggests that, if properly designed, and with the right political will and popular mobilisation, participatory institutions can deepen democracy by distributing social goods more equitably, including poor and marginalised groups in decision-making, enhancing citizenship practices and incentivising popular mobilisation. Notably, the model is 'working both sides of the equation' that requires high levels of cooperation between state and society and, in respect of the latter, significant popular mobilisation (as learned from the citizenship literature) to make new institutions work (Gaventa 2006: 23). However, as noted above, popular mobilisation is not a simple process and may require mediation. Indeed, Cornwall and Coelho (2007: 24) suggest as much when they write that in addition to 'guarantee a place at the table' for marginalised groups, effective participation by these groups 'requires processes that can build the capabilities of more marginalized actors to use their voices'. Making participatory institutions effective for marginalised groups may well require third-party intervention to build citizenship capabilities; in other words it will require mediation.

On all three accounts of democratic deepening then, the possibility for a role for mediation is implied although not fully recognised. Mediation is thus both a symptom of and solution to democratic deficit. Of course it is not the only solution, but a potentially important practice to help build the kinds of organisation, subjectivity and mobilisation crucial for effective civil society agency for democracy. In this way then, mediation can both be democratic and a form of leadership useful to catalyse popular agency. It can theoretically secure all four kinds of democratic outcome that Barrett and Gaventa (2010) identify, albeit in practice it secures usually one or two and unevenly at that. However, in terms of democratic process the issue is more vexed. As our cases below illustrate, the key challenge for the democratic mediator is how to empower citizens to take on leadership themselves and thus make the transition from being 'spoken for' to 'speaking with' to 'speaking for ourselves'. This is not a transition that many mediators make successfully, and the key vulnerability of democratic mediation.

**Overview of chapters**

The book is divided into three sections that correspond to the city, national and (post)national spheres of engagement between states and citizens.

**Mediating the city**

Laurence Piper and Claire Bénit-Gbaffou explore some of the dynamics of leadership at the community level in poor urban settlements of South Africa in Chapter 1. Drawing on a case study of South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) leaders from Imizamo Yethu, a poor black settlement in Hout Bay Cape Town, this chapter examines four challenges that confront leaders in representing the community. These challenges create a set of contradictory popular, party, state and personal demands such that SANCO leaders must demonstrate efficacy in service delivery from a local government ruled by the national opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, without compromising their standing with both allied organisations and the wider community in an African National Congress-dominated area. Further, leaders must resist the temptation to take (too much) personal advantage of service delivery success. In this case, the skilful practice of 'double-dealing' is extremely difficult to achieve. The outcome is that the effective leadership of the Imizamo Yethu community requires the leader to be a mediator: neither simply of the society nor the state but located between them as a (largely) honest broker.

Shylashri Shankar's chapter on the tussle over Hyderabad's Charminar Pedestrianisation Project between marginalised and poor groups and the municipal authorities highlights a context where the fragmentary nature of the state's political authority has limited its power, but where the citizens are neither fully empowered nor completely helpless. In **Chapter 2**, she demonstrates how notions of empowerment and weakness do not capture the range of negotiations between citizens and the state in independent India. Indeed, the distribution of power between the state and citizens is less unequal than what is generally presumed, and the forms of negotiation (slogan shouting, disregard for laws, use of political party mediators and traders associations) have deeper antecedents in history rather than being simply a response to weakness in democratic representation. The picture that emerges is messy, but there are clear links with history and with democracy that complicate narratives about the processes by which active citizenship can emerge in post-colonial India.

**Chapter 3** by Bettina von Lieres examines the politics of citizen participation in Angola, a fragile political context marked by state centralisation and weak civil society mobilisation. The chapter first examines how emerging forms of ‘civic-educative’ mediation by non-state actors play an important, if underestimated, role in enhancing marginalised groups’ claim-making capacities. While these in and of themselves do not necessarily lead to greater state responsiveness in Angola, they nonetheless play an important role in empowering marginalised communities to demand recognition as citizens. The chapter then shows how these ‘second-tier’ democratic outcomes such as greater rights awareness are crucial for the construction of political society and the building of a state–society ‘social contract’ in Angola. The chapter ends with a wider reflection on the challenges of building state responsiveness through citizen participation in the global south.

Joanna Wheeler writes about coercive mediation by militia in two favelas (informal settlements) of Rio in **Chapter 4**. This chapter examines the types of mediation that occur and how these mediators affect people’s lives within a context of violence. This chapter describes these mediators and explores their roles in relation to citizenship, drawing on participatory action research conducted in two favelas (Quitungo and Guaporé, and Morro dos Prazeres/Fogueteiro) from 2006 to 2009. It traces several examples of how people are able (or not able) to act as citizens and attempt to claim their rights, the ways that their rights are mediated by armed actors and how the state can respond to these claims given the influence of mediators. Mediation contributes to fragmentation of citizenship by reinforcing the unevenness of state power in the favela, filtering state interventions through highly local power arrangements, both enabling and constraining the access to rights for citizens.

### **Mediating the national**

**Chapter 5** by Paul Kingston focuses on the complex representational politics of disabled people in the Lebanon, examining the prevailing systems of ‘mediated representation’ for people with disabilities. Three ‘types’ will be delineated: the first revolving around ‘institutionalised’ representation (that in Lebanon has often taken an additional communal form); the second revolving around ‘medical’ forms of representation, revolving around the epistemic mediating power of medical professionals; and the third focussing on efforts by people with disabilities themselves to establish their own forms of direct representation. The latter occurs both within civil society through the establishment of

advocacy associations run by people with disabilities and within political society through their attempts to advocate for participatory forms of governance and policy-making institutions. The chapter demonstrates powerfully the different ways that different intermediaries pursue representational agendas that advance their own interests often more than the constituencies they claim to represent, some of which are clearly ‘rogue’ of capturing collective goals for personal ends, but also the possibility of pushing back against forms of co-optation even in contexts that limited democratic representation, and affirming forms of democratic citizenship.

**Chapter 6** by Deepta Chopra critically examines the role of various actors and their interactions in the making of a social policy in India. The process through which India’s MGNREGA of 2008 came about will be discussed through the lens of state–society interactions, highlighting the variety of actors involved in the mediation between the Indian state and its citizens for recognising a Right to Work. The chapter highlights different kinds of mediation that were used by these actors during the different phases of policy making – mediation to generate and highlight the demand for the Act, mediation used to negotiate with the state around specific provisions in the Act and finally, following the passage of the Act, mediation that staked claims to implementation and monitoring activities associated with the Act. Through this case study, the chapter provides analytical reflections on potential outcomes of mediation for the most marginalised.

**Chapter 7** by Brahm Fleisch and Steven Robins explores civil society-driven processes of mediation in a setting characterised by a relatively well-resourced state and a constitutional democracy that, at least rhetorically, respects political freedoms, active citizenship and liberal-democratic rights. The case study describes how a South African social movement, Equal Education (EE), has used a variety of tactics from the courts to protests to alliances with trade unions. EE has initiated campaigns from local demands to repair broken classroom windows to wider engagements to change national regulations. At the same time, this movement has developed a critical pedagogy concerned with establishing the rights of citizens to mobilise for decent public schooling, in particular secondary school learners in under-resourced schools in Khayelitsha in Cape Town. It is these learners who act as the mediators of the pedagogy of active citizenship that is at the heart of this rights-based social movement.

**Chapter 8** by Ranjita Mohanty explores the critical mediating role that civil society can play in ensuring the effective implementation of

public policies in the Indian context. Illustrated through two case studies of civil society organisations that champion women's interests, this chapter shows how citizens can better access state policies by using the Right to Information Act (RTI) of 2005. More specifically, the cases show how poor women access various state-sponsored programmes related to subsidised food, livelihoods, water supply, loans and pensions and the like by accessing information about these programmes. The mediation process enables more effective pressurising of the state to deliver and the empowerment of the women who participate in this process. Notably, the latter seems to be more durable and cumulative than the former.

As with the preceding two chapters, Mahmud and Huq, writing about community-based organisations in Bangladesh in **Chapter 9**, affirm the link between popular mobilisation and citizenship-building work. Although a democratic state for the last two decades, people's experience of citizenship in Bangladesh is not one that fulfils the formal promise of equality, nor one that delivers an accountable and transparent state. Further, given the near absence of the state as a development actor, grassroots organisations appear as important actors between the state and citizens, taking on the responsibility of post-independence rehabilitation. The chapter focuses on three NGOs, Samata, Nijera Kori and Karmojibi Nari that build active citizenship by empowering the rural poor, including women, to demand rights and resources, especially land. Central to this is a process of conscientisation, organisation and mobilisation that form the heart of mediation in these cases. While clearly more effective than other NGOs in building active citizenship, there are ambiguities about the extent to which members speak for themselves or reflect the views of the professionals running the NGOs.

### **Mediating the post-national**

The final section includes three cases, beginning with Alex Shankland's account in **Chapter 10** of the 'diplomatic' engagement of representatives of indigenous societies of the Amazon in the local health councils of the Brazilian state. At first glance this may not appear as a case of international politics in character as it occurs between a state and a historically colonised people; however, as Shankland deftly shows, the first nation representatives engaged from a position of asserting their national sovereignty, in contrast to the assumptions of the Brazilian state, in a strategic manner closer to the logic of internal diplomacy than one of citizen participation in their national democratic processes. Shankland suggests that the lack of a shared social contract, and an asymmetrically bifurcated citizenship, embraced from below rather than

from above undermines the ability of even the first nations to exploit the state's health councils instrumentally. The failure by the Brazilian state to recognise 'mediation as diplomacy' increases the risk of health councils forcing through 'democratic' decisions that lack legitimacy in the eyes of indigenous groups.

In 1990, the representative of the Yukon First Nations signed an Umbrella Final Agreement with the Government of Canada and the Yukon Government that officially recognised a government-to-government relationship between First Nations peoples and the Canadian government. In **Chapter 11** Roberta Rice explores how the agreement established an innovative model for Aboriginal self-government in the territory. This outcome was the result of a 20-year campaign led by the Council for Yukon Indians (CYI) that mediated between the various First Nations and the federal and later territorial governments. Following this victory, the CYI transformed into the Council of Yukon First Nations, largely leaving the individual First Nations to represent themselves to the other levels of government. However, ambiguities and tensions exist between this central body and the representative role played by member First Nations. In sum, the study demonstrates both the representational benefits and risks of mediation in the context of relations between states and minority nations.

**Chapter 12** by Laura Waisbich explores Uyghur transnational mobilisation outside of China and its impact on Uyghur politics, over the last 60 years. By focussing on transnational forms of politics, this chapter expands mediation's contribution to understanding state-society relations to the international level. More specifically, the chapter identifies 'mediation as voice', that is, representation by diaspora communities on behalf of the silenced Uyghur inside China, and 'mediation as framing', that is, advocacy by international NGOs and states sympathetic to the Uyghur cause. The chapter demonstrates how the international context offers opportunities and limitations for political representation that require the transformation of political claims to be effective – in this case the key shift was from demanding or (threatening violent) national self-determination to the (peaceful) call for the recognition of human rights by the Chinese state. In so doing, the democratic limitations posed by the 'double-dealings' undertaken in mediating global political institutions are exposed.

### Note

1. Our thanks to Steve Robins for this point.