Social Capital as Obstacle to Development: Brokering Land, Norms, and Trust in Rural India

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ABSTRACT

Based on a study of how land brokers in rural Rajasthan mediate the arrival of a Special Economic Zone, this paper argues that theories of collective social capital cannot explain how networks, norms, and trust interact in a process of economic change. It then reconstructs Bourdieu's distinct theory of individual social capital by showing how better connected farmers are able to broker land and capture profits at the expense of fellow villagers—undermining trust, norms, and collective action. It argues that social capital is most plausibly seen as an aspect of class inequality that hinders inclusive development.

Keywords: Social capital; brokerage; Special Economic Zones; land; India; Bourdieu

1 INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, powerful development institutions like the World Bank came to see the social networks and norms of the rural poor in developing countries as 'assets' to be tapped for poverty alleviation. Defined by Robert Putnam (1995) as 'features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (p. 67), social capital was proclaimed the 'missing link' in development (Grooetaert 1997). Its contribution to various types of development outcomes became the subject of practical experimentation and scholarly research. The animating hypothesis of this large research programme has been that social capital, as an asset adhering in villages, regions, or even nation-states, is good for both democracy and development.

Based on an ethnographic study of how farmers in rural North India secure benefits from a Special Economic Zone (SEZ)[1] being established in their village, this paper argues that the Putnam-inspired theory of collective social capital is not able to explain how networks, norms, and trust interact in a process of socio-economic change. It then extends Bourdieu's distinct theory of individual social capital to provide an alternative model. While sociologists have largely adopted a macro-critique of the role of social capital in economic development, questioning its independence from and causal priority over government action (Tarrow 1996; Evans 1996; Fox 1996; Heller 1996; Lam 1996), this paper builds on research that questions its micro-foundations (Beall 2001). It argues that networks, norms, and trust should be treated not as composite stocks, but as independent variables that, *especially during processes of economic development*, often stand in considerable tension with each other.

This analysis proceeds from Portes' (2000) observation that there are two distinct meanings of social capital: as social networks that convey benefits to individuals or families, and as 'stocks' of networks, norms, and trust adhering in larger social units that enable collective action for mutual benefit (see also Harriss 2001; Schuurman 2003: 994). The first, which we might call the *individual social capital thesis*, looks at social capital as an unequally distributed private good and is associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The second, which we might call the *collective social capital thesis*, sees social capital as a public good adhering in social units above the individual and family and is associated with the work of Robert Putnam.[2] While a few scholars have deployed the first conception to understand

[1] A Special Economic Zone (SEZ), to be explained more fully later, is an economic enclave that offers a more liberalised business climate than what prevails in the rest of a country.

[2] The work of James Coleman (1988, 1990) arguably constitutes a hybrid position: while he saw social capital as a public good adhering in multiple kinds of social relations (as Putnam later did), his focus (like Bourdieu's) was on how it facilitated the actions of individuals. While he recognised that it was not distributed equally (1990: 314-315) and was used for individual ends, he did not emphasise as much as Bourdieu that social capital was a source of power rooted in class inequalities. This paper focuses on Putnam and Bourdieu's conceptions of social capital because the former has been the most influential in the sociology of development and the author finds the latter most useful for research.

development outcomes (Jeffrey 2001; Beall 2001; Cleaver 2005; Jeffrey, Jefferey, and Jefferey 2008; Desai and Dubey 2011), it is the latter that has dominated the study of development (cf. World Bank 1997; World Bank 2000; Grootaert 1997; Woolcock 1998; Narayan 1999; Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Krishna 2002; Adrianzen 2014).

As Portes has observed, however, there is substantial tension between the Bourdieuian concept of social capital as unequal networks that convey advantages to individuals, and the Putnamite conception of social capital as a collective property of groups. This is because individuals often use their unequal access to social networks to pursue their individual interests at the cost of social norms, trust, and collective solidarity (Portes 2000: 4). The two versions of social capital reflect distinct conceptions of social structure and can thus be expected to have different implications for development. Which social capital is more useful for understanding contemporary processes of economic development and social change?

This paper attempts to demonstrate the limitations of the collective social capital thesis and advance the individual social capital thesis by showing how networks, norms, and trust come into increasing tension with each other as farmers in the state of Rajasthan, India engage the land markets created by a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). In 2005, one of India's largest SEZs was established in previously rural villages outside of the city of Jaipur, and began to attract some of the largest Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) companies operating in the country. Government officials proclaimed that the project, as part of the Indian government's flagship SEZ programme, and one of the largest private investments in Rajasthan's history, would bring development and prosperity to a rural area that was largely dependent on rain-fed agriculture. I conducted over one year of ethnographic fieldwork in the villages adjacent to the SEZ, including participant observation, informal interviews with farmers, land brokers, and real estate investors, and a random-sample survey of 93 families in four villages. Based on this fieldwork, I show how

(1) inequalities in *individual social capital*, rooted in the agrarian class structure, enabled a section of farmers to capture substantial rents as brokers of the dramatic real estate speculation that the SEZ generated; and

(2) how this use of individual social capital came at the expense of fellow villagers, violated collective norms, undermined trust and removed any possibility for collective action around shared grievances towards the project. Through the case of rural land brokerage, I thus show how individual social capital (unequal connections) undermines features of social life associated with collective social capital (trust, norms and collective action), and can contribute to a development tragedy for the rural poor.

My argument is not that there is a 'dark side' to social capital. Such an argument presumes an agreed upon concept of social capital that produces opposite results under different conditions. It would be more correct to argue that there are two kinds of social capital that have different developmental implications. I wish, however, to make a somewhat stronger argument: the existence of individual social capital challenges the conception of society that underlies the collective social capital thesis. The latter, I argue, is untenable to the extent that it collapses aspects of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that should in fact be separated. If networks, norms, and trust do, under certain circumstances, cohere into a collective 'stock' available to the members of a given social unit (a village, for example), the collective social capital thesis fails to specify those conditions. Once the significance of individual social capital is fully recognised, the collective social capital must explain the conditions under which collective norms and trust can contain, and under what conditions they are undermined by, the self-interested exploitation of individual networks. I suggest that the collective social capital thesis is least likely to apply to inegalitarian rural societies in the process of economic change. It is above all when new forms of wealth and economic activity are being introduced into inegalitarian rural contexts that established norms and trust are challenged, undermined, and opportunistically exploited by more powerful and better connected individuals. In such situations, individual social capital is more likely to win the day and be an obstacle to inclusive development.

2 TWO MODELS OF NETWORKS, NORMS, AND TRUST

In what follows, I present the two models of social capital and their assumptions about the relationship between networks, norms, and trust. I show how theories of collective social capital falter when confronted with the power of individual social capital and its potential tensions with norms and trust. I then reconstruct Bourdieu's theory of social capital to provide an alternative model of how networks, norms, and trust dynamically relate to each other in a context of socio-economic change.

2.1 The Collective Social Capital Thesis

It is Robert Putnam's theory of collective social capital that has captured the imagination of social scientists, development institutions, and political leaders in a way that few sociological concepts have (Woolcock 2010). Subsequent studies have tried to show that uneven endowments of 'networks, norms, and trust' at various social units matter for development. The general contention is that villages or regions with greater propensities for cooperation and collective action—higher 'stocks' of social capital—have higher levels of socio-economic development (World Bank 1997; World Bank 2000; Grootaert 1998; Woolcock 1998; Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Krishna and Uphoff 1999; Uphoff and Wijayaratna 2000; Krishna 2002).

While this argument has an intuitive plausibility, it is based on an assumption about how networks, norms, and trust relate to each other in any social milieu. In *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam (1993) refers to social capital as 'norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement' (p. 167). In a subsequent article, he defines it more precisely as 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam 1995: 67). While the causal arrow between these three features of social life is not always specified, Putnam's argument is that dense networks of horizontal exchange tend to be associated with strong norms of reciprocity and high levels of social trust (Putnam 1993: 172–177). In this sense, networks, norms, and trust constitute a locally available 'stock': a composite asset that represents a community's capacity for cooperation and collective action. In this view, the world is comprised of villages, cities, regions, or even nations that have uneven endowments of social capital (clusters of networks, norms, and trust); these endowments are a significant, if not primary, cause of uneven development.

In one of the most rigorous and influential applications of the social capital thesis to development, and rural India specifically, political scientist Anirudh Krishna (2002) offers support for an amended social capital thesis based on a survey of 69 Indian villages in the states of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Because Krishna's geographical focus overlaps with that of my own study (in Rajasthan, India), and because it instructively exposes the lacunae of the collective social capital thesis, Krishna's book warrants more detailed scrutiny.

Correctly observing that formal associations have limited scope in rural India, Krishna constructs his own 'locally relevant' Social Capital Index based on measurements of informal networks and norms—levels of cooperation in work and agriculture, assessments of trust and solidarity—that are meant to capture each village's 'aggregate potential for mutually beneficial collective action' (Krishna 2002: 67). Krishna finds that, with one important intervening condition, villages with higher scores on this index also score higher on various development indicators, measured by villages' success in implementing government development programmes and their overall quality of basic services. The condition, however, is that villages' endowments of social capital only translate into better development 'performance' if there are also exist appropriate agents to 'activate this stock and use it to produce a flow of benefits' (Krishna 2002: 29). Specifically, the social capital effect only holds in villages blessed with a stratum of 'new leaders', or educated but often unemployed village youth who mediate fellow villagers' interaction with government agencies and the market. These new leaders, having 'regular contacts with state officials and market operators', and being well versed in their practices and procedures, 'help villagers organise themselves in ways that are more likely to succeed' (Krishna 2002: 9), thus activating their social capital for development and democracy.

Despite adding the mediating variable of local agency, Krishna's conception of social capital is similar to Putnam's: 'social capital is an asset, a functioning propensity for mutually beneficial collective action, with which communities are endowed to diverse extents' (Krishna 2002: 2). In this view, networks, norms, and trust are coterminous with village or regional boundaries, and with each other. While Krishna's 'new leaders' are villagers whose networks are not contained by village boundaries, he maintains that it is not the norm for these leaders to exploit their mediating role for rent-seeking (Krishna 2002: 49). Rather, these more savvy and better connected individuals simply activate their villages' composite stocks of networks, norms and trust for the collective good. Combining Putnam and Krishna, we might state the amended *collective social capital thesis* as follows:

> Networks, norms, and trust are mutually coterminous and can constitute a 'stock' or 'asset' for various supra-individual social units (neighbourhoods, villages, towns, regions or even countries). This stock of social capital represents a social unit's ability to cooperate and act collectively to obtain collective developmental benefits from states and markets. However, this may require mediating agents who facilitate the connection between members of their community and outside institutions, activating social capital for the public good.

2.2 The Breakdown of the Collective Social Capital Thesis

Several critics have pointed out the danger of circularity in this argument (Portes 1998, 2000; Harriss and De Renzio 1997; Fine 2001; Harriss 2001). If social capital is a social unit's propensity for cooperation and collective action, and if it is then measured by people's existing engagement in collective action (Putnam's membership in associations or Krishna's informal modes of cooperation), it becomes tautological. And if one cannot specify in advance what kinds of networks and norms produce collective action for mutual benefit, then the hypothesis is unfalsifiable. Indeed, those studying the role of social capital in development have found that in different places, different *types* of social networks constitute social capital—in some places they may be horizontal and involve homogenous actors, in others they can be vertical and heterogenous (Krishna 2002: 56, 63). Given this inability to consistently define what constitutes social capital, it becomes unclear whether this research has in fact identified a consistent cause for its desired outcomes.

The second troubling feature of the collective social capital thesis, found in both Putnam and Krishna, is its ad hoc treatment of anomalous outcomes. When social capital is found to produce what are regarded as 'negative' outcomes (exclusion, exploitation, or monopolisation of resources), and the types of networks and norms that gave rise to it are not retroactively redefined as 'not social capital', it is then conceded that social capital can have a 'dark side'. This dark side is explained by a sub-categorisation of social capital into 'bridging' and 'bonding' capital, with pathologies arising from an over-abundance of the latter (Putnam 2001: 350–363; Narayan 1999). The dark side of social capital forms a residual category for anomalous outcomes not predicted by the theory, but does not explain them (Riley 2010: 11). Krishna's need to introduce well-connected village leaders into his explanation is another version of the same strategy: where collective social capital does not have the presumed effects, another variable capturing different kinds of networks is introduced, but its relationship to the networks that really count as social capital remains under-theorised.

My argument is that these conceptual problems arise for the collective social capital thesis because, on a micro-level, it treats networks, norms, and trust as a composite 'stock'. First, we know that networks connect individuals across scales and are not confined to any social unit (Bebbington and Perreault 1999: 401).[3] The distinction between bridging and bonding capital is a recognition of this, but it considers both forms of capital to be the property of groups not individuals. Krishna's analysis of local leaders who are well connected to outside actors, though not explicitly theorised as such, points to the fact that different individuals within a social unit have different 'connections' that vary in their extent and utility. His reconstruction of the collective social capital thesis thus paradoxically exposes its main lacunae: what is the relationship between networks that connect individuals within a social unit like a village, and those that connect them to actors outside a village? Are both part of the 'stock' of social capital?

Krishna's characterisation of well-connected village leaders as public spirited activators of their villages' collective social capital is necessary for the social capital thesis—if they were otherwise then their mediation of development resources could be interpreted as patronage, typically seen as the opposite of social capital (Putnam 1993). However, this assumption, which is not supported by long-term ethnographic research, sits awkwardly with the well-established sociological insight that individuals derive significant power and benefit from connecting or 'bridging' diverse groups (Simmel 1950: 154; Burt 1992; Burt 2002: 157–158). It also stands in tension with the significant historical and sociological research on brokers and middlemen in India from the colonial period to the present. Whether it is connecting villagers to government resources and 'fixing' bureaucratic problems for commission (Reddy and Haragopal 1985; Srivastava and Chaturvedi 1986), peddling influence and patronage (Plunkett 1984), brokering labour (Breman 1996; Mosse, Gupta, Mehta, Shah, and Rees 2002) or otherwise acting as market intermediaries (Bayly 1983: 371, 412), few doubt that such well-connected mediators use their position for financial or political gain, often in alliance with corrupt officials.[4] For these reasons, brokers and middlemen have long attracted moral opprobrium (Bayly 1983: 412; Bailey 1960: 185). Krishna's puzzling assumption that well-connected 'leaders' are public-spirited servants of the greater village good reflects the inability of the collective social capital theory to grapple with extra-local 'connections' as a source of individual power rather than collective utility.

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[3] In their study of civil society and development in the Quichua regions of Honduras, Bebbington and Perreault (1999) argue that social capital should be seen on multiple scales, from local to national. However, they do not consider social capital as something unequally distributed among individuals, which is surprising given their observation that slightly better-off families received more development benefits from the activities of civil society organisations (1999: 411).

[4] In a comprehensive study of rural middlemen in Uttar Pradesh, Srivastava and Chaturvedi found that these mediators connected villagers to government programmes and services for commission—not philanthropy (1986: 61), and that 90 per cent of their clients paid them money to influence government officials (1986: 57). In another illuminating study, Reddy and Haragopal (1985) found that such 'fixers' in Andhra Pradesh exploited the difficulty that less educated rural groups encountered when engaging a distant and complex bureaucracy. These fixers provided distorted information, steered resources to political allies, and ensured that rural people had to pay extra for a fraction of the development benefits to which they are entitled. Reddy and Haragopal thus persuasively conclude that the existence of fixers reflects a *failure* of development (1985: 1154). For an excellent analysis of how student *dalals* play a similar role at a provincial university, see Kumar (2012). These studies, along with the present one, cast great doubt on Krishna's characterisation of such mediators as public-spirited servants of their village.

Second, there is an unclear relationship in the collective social capital theory between the structure of networks and their content. Given the inability of this literature to identify consistent kinds of networks that generate the norms and trust amenable to collective action, why are networks, norms, and trust treated as a cluster rather than as a set of independent variables? Why not observe how networks, norms, and trust interact in any given setting to produce a variety of development outcomes (and not exclusively positive ones)? This would require addressing a question that a methodological focus on pre-conditions and outcomes occludes: *how do norms and trust change over time as networks are mobilised in the process of development?* The static picture of norms and trust as initial 'stocks' begs the question of how these change as people utilise networks for various ends in a changing social context. Understanding the dynamic relationship between networks, norms, and trust requires greater ethnographic attention to micro-social processes that are obscured when these distinct phenomenon are collapsed into indices.

2.3 Bourdieu's Individual Social Capital Thesis

These problems in the social ontology of the collective social capital thesis lend support to Portes' (1998) claim that 'the greatest theoretical promise of social capital lies at the individual level' (p. 21). This paper argues that Bourdieu's theory of social capital, when combined with his larger theoretical framework, is better able to capture the dynamic ways in which networks, norms, and trust relate to each other in a context of socio-economic development.

For Bourdieu, social capital cannot be isolated from the other species of power that constitute social structures. Like economic and cultural capital, social capital refers to an unequal distribution of a particular social power. Whereas economic capital refers to control over material resources, and cultural capital to acquired knowledge and credentials, social capital refers to 'connections' that enable individuals to accrue material or symbolic benefits based on 'who they know'. Bourdieu defines social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1986: 248). Social capital arises not simply from the fact of connectedness, but from the quality of one's connections—the economic, cultural, and other forms of capital possessed by those in one's network (Bourdieu 1985; Portes 1998: 3–4). Social capital ultimately derives from other forms of capital: it is a product and feature of class inequalities (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119; Wacquant 1998a; Bourdieu 1990: 180; Harriss 2001; Cleaver 2005). It arises from the uneven ability of different people to cultivate and maintain social connections that may be of some future use (Bourdieu 1990: 180). Like other forms of capital, social capital is partially fungible and thus an object of 'reconversion strategies': individuals can use economic assets to builds contacts, and use contacts to accumulate more economic capital (Bourdieu 1984; Wacquant 1998a). Acquiring and maintaining social capital is one of the principal strategies of class mobility and reproduction (Bourdieu 1984: 110, 142, 150; Bourdieu 1990: 180).[5]

While connections might be based on trust or norms of reciprocity, they might equally be based on calculative self-interest or, following Bourdieu, an unacknowledged fusion of the two in actors' *dispositions*. Crucially, there is no necessary relationship between an individual's social networks, trust, and norms at any larger social unit (village, neighbourhood, or country). Social networks can just as easily be used for individual self-advancement rather than collective benefit, and in ways that violate social norms or exploit the trust of others (see Wacquant 1998b: 23–24). In these cases, following Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, which is the ability to portray one's possession of other forms of capital as legitimate (Bourdieu 1990: 118; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119; Bourdieu 2000: 166), we might even expect those benefiting from the violation of such norms to engage in *symbolic* struggles to redefine the norms themselves: in effect, to *morally launder* the individual gains derived from utilising their social capital. For Bourdieu, norms are not static 'stocks' but rather the malleable stakes in dynamic strategies to maintain and accumulate capital. As he shows in his study of rural Algeria (Bourdieu 1979), and James Scott (1985) illustrates even more powerfully in his study of rural Malaysia, symbolic struggles over norms are of particular relevance to rapidly changing societies—such as rural villages in the developing world—where new modes of economic behavior often stand in tension with pre-existing norms.[6] In sum, economic change in rural areas of the Global South is just as likely to unleash divisive struggles *over norms* as to unleash collective action based on shared ones.

We can summarise this Bourdieuian model of *individual social capital* thus:

> Individuals within any social unit are endowed with social networks of unequal quality and quantity, which are rooted in class inequalities (economic and cultural capital). These networks are not necessarily coterminous with any social unit, and have no necessary relationship with the norms or levels of trust within it. In fact, individuals more often than not use their networks for individual gain (converting it into other forms of

[5] In *Distinction*, Bourdieu discusses the upper classes' skills in maintaining 'connections' as an important means of reproducing their class position (1984: 110). He also suggests that low social capital can be responsible for 'downclassing': in other words, the inability to maintain connections can prevent the inter-generational transmission of economic and cultural capital (1984: 150). Finally, Bourdieu posits social capital as an explanation for why those investing in devalued diplomas tend to be the last ones to recognise it; low social capital provides the lower classes with inadequate access to timely information (1984: 142). In *Algeria 1960*, Bourdieu writes that the sub-proletariat's 'less extensive and less strong network of social relations' is both a cause and consequence of their unstable employment (1979: 36). In all of these instances, social capital acts as a mechanism of class reproduction or mobility.

[6] In his study of the impact of colonial capitalism on the Kabyle, Bourdieu (1979) writes, 'With growing adaptation to the capitalist economy and growing assimilation of the corresponding dispositions comes increasing tension between the traditional norms which impose duties of solidarity towards the extended family and the imperatives of an individualistic, calculating economy' (p. 48).

capital) rather than collective good. This use and conversion of social capital can often conflict with norms and undermine trust, creating conflict and symbolic struggle rather than collective action. This is particularly likely to occur in rapidly changing economic contexts where new forms of economic activity clash with pre-existing norms.

Understood in this way, social capital has a very different relationship to development than what is most commonly attributed to it. If social capital is an unequally distributed form of power that allows certain people to differentially exploit new economic opportunities or government programmes because of 'who they know', then it will tend to reproduce or expand existing class inequalities. Such individual use of social capital may in fact violate collective norms and trust in ways that undermine collective action towards securing collective development outcomes. If development is taken to mean a broad-based and inclusive improvement in economic and social well-being, particularly for the poor (Sen 2000), then social capital may be one of the most significant obstacles to its realisation. The implication is that development interventions should aim to undermine or check social capital rather than harness it.

In the following analysis, I will lend empirical support to this vision of social capital. I show how unequal endowments of social capital determine the ability of rural residents to appropriate rents as land brokers in the new real estate economy generated by a Special Economic Zone. The ability of brokers to forge connections based on at least an instrumental trust between socially distant parties (fellow farmers and outside investors) enables them to appropriate significant commissions on the sale of their fellow villagers' farmland. Examining the social background of these village brokers, I then trace their social capital to the economic inequalities bequeathed by incomplete land reforms in rural India. Finally, I show how the utilisation by villager brokers of their social connections for individual gain cannibalised the trust that made their work possible in the first place, violated previously held social norms regarding land and economic behaviour more generally, and thus initiated a symbolic struggle over the normative status of brokers and their newly acquired wealth. Brokers' manipulation of their social capital exacerbated economic inequalities in the village, created extreme economic distress for many poor villagers, and undermined any potential that may have existed for collective action based on widely held grievances towards the SEZ. In the conclusion, I draw out the implications of the findings for social capital as a concept and its application to development.

3 CONTEXT: SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES AND DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL INDIA

There are two senses of the word development: one refers to programmes of poverty alleviation and social welfare implemented by governments and NGOs; the other refers to the overall process of political-economic change. While many studies of social capital have focused on the ability of rural people to access government programmes, fewer have focused on their ability to obtain benefits from the major economic changes that are sweeping their countries. While access to government programmes is important to many rural livelihoods in India today, a related and clearly significant question is how rural people are able to benefit from the overall growth trajectory of the country. Post-liberalisation, India's growth model has de-prioritised agriculture while placing greater emphasis on fostering a knowledge-based economy, attracting private investment, and nurturing a booming real estate market. Reflecting these priorities, the Indian government passed the Special Economic Zones Act in 2005, which allowed for private companies to build highly liberalised enclaves that would offer a host of tax and tariff incentives to exporting firms, and allow the zones' developers to construct lucrative housing colonies (in effect, satellite cities) on the land not being used for production. Almost two-thirds of India's nearly 600 approved SEZs are in the IT and BPO sector (Government of India 2014). Almost all of them are being located on land acquired by the government on the rural periphery of cities, or near ports. Special Economic Zones thus provide a perfect opportunity to study how rural Indians—who constitute 72 per cent of the Indian population (Census of India 2001)—are able to benefit from the core features of the country's economic development.

Because their establishment often entails the forcible acquisition of large amounts of agricultural land from farmers, SEZs have run into serious opposition across rural India (Sampat 2010; Jenkins 2011; Levien 2012; Levien 2013a; Chakravorty 2013). However, some have argued that these political struggles could be averted and farmers made to benefit from SEZs and other land development projects if only they were given a larger stake in them (Bardhan 2011; Chakravorty 2013). The political pressure that these farmers' movements have generated has led several states to adopt more generous compensation policies that seek to build consent from farmers by giving them a higher share in the escalating real estate values that large corporate projects inevitably generate in previously agricultural areas. In Rajasthan, for over a decade, a policy has been in place of giving farmers small, developed land parcels next to industrial or commercial projects for which their land is acquired. When Rajasthan became home to one of the first large SEZs to be built in North India, it provided an ideal case in which to observe the developmental consequences of India's growth model for rural farmers, under the most favorable conditions.

4 FIELDWORK: A SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE IN RURAL RAJASTHAN

In 2005, the state government of Rajasthan announced the acquisition of 2,000 acres of private land and 1,000 acres of public grazing land from nine villages outside of the city of Jaipur for the Mahindra World City SEZ (MWC). The multi-purpose SEZ, part of the efforts of the Rajasthan government to lure major IT/BPO companies to the state, was to be anchored by a large campus for the Indian IT giant Infosys. As developer, Mahindra would sell developed land parcels to IT/BPO companies and other industrial users who would be provided with a host of tax and regulatory incentives by the Indian government (as part of the SEZ Act) and use approximately half the land to build residential housing and other urban amenities. The MWC, like most of India's new privately developed SEZs, was not to be an oldfashioned industrial estate, but an 'integrated business city'. Land acquisition for the project began in 2005 and the zone became operational by 2008.

I arrived in the villages in December 2009 after spending the previous three months in Jaipur interviewing government officials, SEZ developers, and other key informants. After a one-month stay in the pre-dominantly Brahmin village of Shivpura[7] where I had managed to make a contact, I settled into the home of a Dalit (lower caste) family in the larger, mixed-caste village of Rajpura where I remained for most of the next 13 months. Because of its diverse social composition, and because it was the largest village to have its land acquired for the SEZ, Rajpura provided an ideal base for my fieldwork (which also extended regularly, though in less depth, into the other surrounding villages). While my research question was broader than the role of social capital in development, it became immediately apparent that land brokers were key figures in the villages' post-SEZ life. I came to know which farmers had been acting as land brokers from fellow villagers, or by their own admission in conversations at tea (*chai*) stalls, in village alleys, or in people's homes. My methods were necessarily opportunistic. When I met a broker, I asked them how the transactions worked, how they got into the business, how they made their contacts, how many deals they had facilitated, how much money they had made, what they reinvested their earnings in, and other details about the local land market. From hundreds of such conversations I formed a consistent and coherent picture of the nature of land brokerage. While brokers' forthrightness about the size of their earnings varied (and depended on whether the conversation was in public or private), and some were hesitant to admit to being a broker until pushed by fellow villagers, their account of the business was often frank and independently confirmed by others. Because the bulk of my ethnographic fieldwork consisted of hundreds of conversations with different farmers about how they fared from the SEZ, and particularly the outcome of selling their land and compensation plots, I also collected many accounts of other people's dealings with brokers. Opinions about brokers were not hard to solicit.

I attempted to systematise these ethnographic findings with a survey of Rajpura and the three neighbouring villages of Shivpura, Neempura, and Jatpura. These four villages were chosen because they are all close to the SEZ and together capture the full range of caste-groups in the area. The survey of 94 households was based on a random sample generated from local voting lists, which include all adults over the age of 18 in each village. I personally conducted a household survey of each individual selected from the list.[8] The survey sampled 12 per cent of the households in each of the four villages.[9] The survey questionnaire consisted

[7] All village and individual names have been changed.

[8] While generating household data from individuals has the risk of slightly over-sampling large families, there were no complete household lists available for the villages (which is common in rural India), and there is no reason to expect that this biased the results in any particular direction.

[9] The total number of households was taken from Census of India (2001).

of 29 questions that captured household socio-economic status before and after the SEZ (occupation, education, landholdings, livestock holding, agricultural assets, extent of wage labour, relative income and food security, and subjective assessment of well-being) and asked for details of their land transactions: how much land they sold (or were forced to sell), how much money they received, how they reinvested their money, and whether someone in the family was a land broker. Of the 94 families surveyed, 13 reported having one family member engaged in land brokering. When possible, I informally interviewed these brokers or, failing that, their families. The paper also draws upon an analysis of ten years of village land records and in-depth interviews with several large brokers, real estate investors, and local government officials. Methodologically, this research employs the extended case method (Burawoy 2009), which seeks to reconstruct theory—in this instance, social capital—through the prolonged ethnographic study of strategically chosen cases.

5 A REAL ESTATE BOOM IN RURAL RAJASTHAN

The establishment of the SEZ on the agricultural and grazing land of Rajpura and surrounding villages had some immediate negative consequences. While it enabled a 'knowledge economy'—including campuses for Infosys and Deutsche Bank—to take root in the zone, it triggered a disaccumulation of productive assets in the surrounding villages. Not only did people lose their agricultural land, but the loss of fodder triggered a massive selling-off of livestock, which decimated total livestock holdings by 66 per cent (including 56 per cent of buffalo and 76 per cent of goats). Meanwhile, the zone's IT/BPO industries provided employment to only 14 per cent of dispossessed families who lacked the requisite education for all but the temporary, sub-contracted positions as guards, gardeners, or janitors that were also few in number.

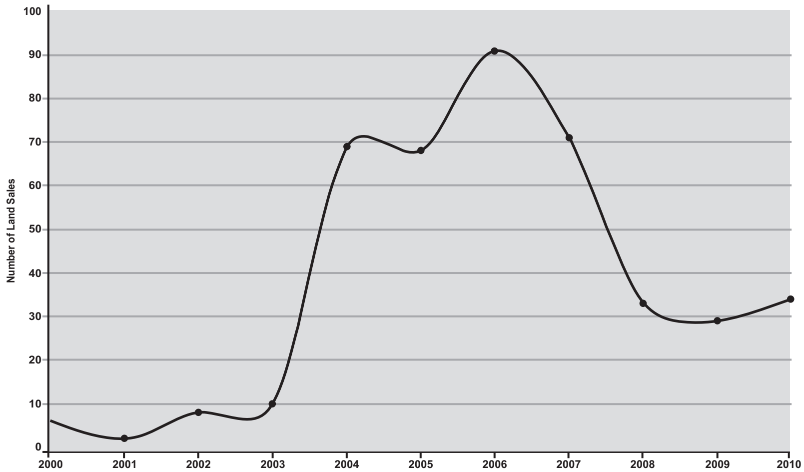
Without significant employment, the main potential benefit of the SEZ for the surrounding villages was a dramatic real estate boom, as the prospective arrival of multi-national companies (MNC) enticed speculative real estate capital to leapfrog from the immediate peripheries of Jaipur into rural areas. Major real estate companies bought up land around the SEZ to build high-end housing colonies to cater to the zone's prospective middle-class professionals. Other real estate concerns and individual investors from Jaipur, Delhi, and Mumbai bought up farmland as speculative investments. As Figure 1 shows, annual land sales in the main village Rajpura where I concentrated my fieldwork increased by a factor of 10 as land prices soared from about Rs. 2 lakh ($4,000) per *bigha* (one quarter of a hectare) to over Rs. 34 lakh ($68,000) per *bigha* at its peak.[10]

The compensation policy offered by the Rajasthan government to farmers who had their

[10] What the graph also shows is that this speculative interest began in 2004, a year before the SEZ was announced. This is because politicians and bureaucrats with inside information about the coming SEZ, and those they tipped off, bought land cheaply from unsuspecting farmers through dozens of *benami* (ghost) companies (of which the author has a list). Once the SEZ was announced, the land's value immediately multiplied.

land acquired for the SEZ incorporated them into this real estate boom. Instead of providing the usual, government-fixed, below-market rate, the government tried to, in the words of one official, 'buy peace' from the farmers by giving them small developed land parcels—zoned for commercial and residential use and installed with basic infrastructure—adjacent to the SEZ that were a quarter of the size of their original agricultural land. This market-based compensation model gave farmers a small stake in the SEZ's enhancement of property values, and was thus more generous and inclusive than in most cases of land acquisition.

Figure 1 Land sales in Rajpura



Long before they ever physically materialised, a market emerged for the rights to these compensation plots (conveyed through power-of-attorney contracts) and real estate investors began rapidly buying them in anticipation of future appreciation. Today, at least three-quarters of these plots are in the hands of outside investors.[11] This process of real estate speculation in both compensation plots and in the agricultural land surrounding the SEZ gave rise to a large stratum of local land brokers (*dalals*), themselves from farming backgrounds, who facilitated these transactions in coordination with Jaipur-based brokers. Such brokers are a pervasive feature of land markets in rural India.

6 BROKERING TRUST

Land brokers use social connections to solve a problem that arises when outside urban parties look to buy land in rural areas: there is great social distance, as well as ingrained mutual distrust, between buying and selling parties in a situation where much can go wrong. The role

[11] While this is an estimate, and government agencies keep no records of this, multiple brokers involved in buying and selling these plots consistently gave this as their estimate.

of *dalal*s is to bridge this social gulf and reduce this trust deficit, at least until the transaction is concluded. There are typically several layers of *dalal*s—a buyer from Delhi might have a Delhi-based *dalal*, who deals with a Jaipur *dalal*, who then contacts a village *dalal*. But as one real estate investor put it, 'The local *dalal* is the most important link among the chain' (Interview, 22 March 2010).

From the buyer's point of view, this is because, in this investor's words, 'it is difficult to communicate ... [and] have confidence in the local people' (Interview, 22 March 2010). To an urban outsider, village life is opaque, and there is a concern that 'clever farmers' will try to rip off middle-class city-dwellers. In land transactions, the specific fear is that investors will provide the advance money at the time a purchase agreement is signed, but the farmer will subsequently decide to demand more money before the transaction is concluded and registered. There is also the very real danger that the investor buys land that is disputed or not properly divided among heirs—a common phenomenon in rural India—and therefore does not get clear title. Both of these scenarios can create a situation of legal ambiguity that might take a decade to solve in backlogged courts, or may necessitate hefty bribes to judges. In such a situation of deficient structural trust, the village *dalal*—presumably trusted by the urban *dalal*—provides the interpersonal trust (Luhman 1979; Lewis and Weigart 1985) and local knowledge (about who owns what, and whose property is in dispute) to minimise the risk of duplicity on the village end.

But the village *dalal* is even more important for his role in making the selling farmer trust the outside buyer. Farmers have good reason not to repose their faith in unknown urban people from a higher class. The buyer could provide the advance money, but fail to pay the full purchase price, creating a legal ambiguity that will prevent the farmer from selling the land; this sort of ambiguity is difficult to resolve (and could very well be resolved against their favour by judges or land mafias).[12] Given low levels of literacy, there is also the fear of being cheated by contracts that they do not fully comprehend. The local *dalal*, crucially, has to be someone trusted by the farmer. This often means not just a fellow villager, but an acquaintance, or someone from the same caste. If the village *dalal* contacted by the urban *dalal* is not a sufficiently close acquaintance of the farmer, he may bring in another village *dalal* into the chain and split the commission. The greater the social distance between the *dalal* and farmer, more the work that needs to be done at building trust. One *dalal* from a small nearby town explained to me how he would, over the course of several months, pay daily visits to the home of a potential seller, drinking *chai*, smoking *beedis* (country cigarettes) and building confidence in the farmer that he was a trustworthy person (not unlike an ethnographer). This kind of symbolic work, which I observed continually throughout my fieldwork, is a necessary component of extending trust across social space. While Granovetter (1985: 490) argues that personal ties of this kind are particularly important in

[12] A land mafia, in rural India, refers to a group of people that routinely applies coercion and intimidation to produce, or take advantage of, legal ambiguities in land holdings to obtain control of land, often at a discount.

markets involving repeated transactions, in the case of rural land sales, it is the one-off and momentous nature of the decision to sell one's patrimony that makes trust all the more significant.

In sum, the farmer wants to get fully paid, the investor wants to take clean possession, and the village *dalals*, in the words of one urban investor, 'generate faith between both parties and make possible the deal' (Interview, 22 March 2010). They use locally available relations of trust and try to extend them to an outside party. It is not simply that there is a structural hole (Burt 1992, 2002)—a lack of overlap between village and urban networks—that needs to be bridged: potential buyers know where the land is and theoretically could come to the village and approach farmers directly. But, in the absence of interpersonal trust (Luhman 1979; Lewis and Weigart 1985) between the buyer and seller and structural trust in the legal system, there is a need for local mediators who can mobilise and extend their own relations of interpersonal trust. Brokers *construct* the 'non-contractual basis of contract' (Durkheim 1984), allowing rural land to become treated as a commodity. In exchange, they take a commission of 1–2 per cent of the sale price, which can be quite substantial in a market where land values became as high as Rs. 40 lakh ($80,000) per hectare.

Attracted by the possibility of easy gains in the lakhs of rupees (hundreds or thousands of dollars) per deal (where most wage labour pays around Rs. 3,500 ($70) per month), many young men try their hands in the *dalali* (brokerage) business. While it is a bit of an over-statement, it was a common saying in the villages that every family had a *dalal* ('*ek family, ek dalal*'). My survey found that 14 per cent of families had a *dalal* in the family—though it is quite possible, for reasons that will become clear, that there was under-reporting.

7 THE SOCIAL CAPITAL OF BROKERS

Becoming a land broker requires above all social capital in the form of individual connections outside of one's village, and such connections are distributed unequally. When I asked them what it took to become a *dalal*, almost all of the dozens of *dalals* I spoke with said contacts (*sampark*) and associated information (*jankari*). Money does help because with it you can engage in the more profitable transactions that involve providing an advance to the seller, agreeing to purchase it at a later date, and meanwhile finding an outside buyer to conclude the purchase at a higher price. But money is not necessary for working on commission. While a certain amount of business savvy was clearly necessary—perhaps exaggerated by one *dalal* who boasted, 'the mind should be talented'—formal education was clearly not. I found only a slightly greater incidence of *dalal*s among those who had studied past Class 10–17 per cent compared to 11 per cent of those who had not. In fact, it was a common joke in the village that many *dalal*s 'don't know how to write their names, but know how to calculate commission'. Much more crucial were social networks spanning the village and city. As *dalal* Gangaram Sharma explained, 'You just make the connection (*samband*)'

(Fieldnotes, 10 March 2010). This was incidentally reinforced for me by the numerous attempts of local *dalals* to bring *me* into land deals, even though I told them I was not a businessman and I had no money to invest. I was repeatedly told that neither was necessary; I just needed to bring in an 'excellent outside party'.

When I asked *dalals* how they made the contacts that allowed them to become a broker, the vast majority told me that it was through connections from previous non-manual work or business experience in Jaipur (the nearest major city, and capital of Rajasthan). In my survey, I found that 29 per cent of families with formal employment or a business outside of the village had a *dalal*, compared to only 8 per cent of those families who did not. While this business/employment involvement also captures economic and cultural capital, participant observation and interviews made it clear that social capital, although arising from other inequalities, was the key proximate factor. By social capital I mean, following Bourdieu, the extent and quality of one's social networks.

As the acting village *sarpanch* (elected head) and land broker Mahinder Singh explained, 'If you want to be a *dalal*, you need contacts to sell the land' (Field notes, 9 July 2010). Contacts also facilitate the formation of brokerage partnerships, which allow one to mobilise more resources for more lucrative (non-commission) transactions. Brokerage, Mahinder explained to me quite sociologically, 'is a business of groups joining together' (Field notes, 9 July 2010). The ability to form groups and networks that matter economically is, of course, not distributed equally. The connections that matter are with those who either have money to invest or are connected to people with money to invest. In a village, that typically means having contacts in the city. One Brahmin *dalal* reported making his contacts through the customers of his sweet shop in Jaipur, in which he is a partner with the former *sarpanch* of Shivpura (also a *dalal*). He helpfully explained, 'If you have a business or work in Jaipur, you have more connections' (Field notes, March 10 2010). Another *dalal* made his contacts through previous work in a Jaipur jewellery shop, another owned a cement business in Jaipur, and many *dalal*s were previously milk middlemen—those who transport raw milk from the village to retailers in the city—adapting their old intermediary role to a new economic opportunity. Of the few who did not make their contacts in Jaipur, several did so as owners of village tea (*chai)* stalls—the obvious points of entry and information for an outside *dalal* looking to buy land.[13] I encountered only one case in which someone made his contacts through manual labour, highlighting the importance of the *quality* and not simply the existence of social networks. This lower-caste *dalal*, who runs a small pirate DVD shop in the village, explained that he was doing wage labour in Jaipur and told his boss that he could help him buy land near the SEZ. While his example demonstrates a certain amount of fluidity in who can entrepreneurially create a connection and tap into real estate rents, he was a small *dalal*, and had only managed to do two or three deals. For the most part, the networks that mattered were built through less menial work and business experience outside of the village.

[13] *Chai* stalls are key informal gathering points for men in rural India.

While these networks were not necessarily within castes (Jeffrey 2001; Harriss-White 2003),[14] the upper castes had more of them and were consequentially disproportionately represented among *dalal*s. As Table 1 shows, 58 per cent of the upper, or so-called 'general caste' families (mostly Brahmins) had a business or non-menial employment experience outside of the village before the SEZ came. Among the agriculturally dominant Jat caste, 44 per cent of families had such an economic foothold outside of the village. In contrast, only 19 per cent of what the Indian government classifies as 'Otherwise Backward Caste' (OBC) families and only 6 per cent of the lower 'Scheduled Caste' (SC) families had such business or formal employment experience beyond the village.[15] Correspondingly, 21 per cent of Brahmin families and 25 per cent of Jat families contained a land broker, compared to only 10 per cent of OBC families and 6 per cent of SC families. Within the SC castes, there were a few *dalals* among the slightly better off Balai sub-caste, but none among the generally poorer sub-castes of Raegars, Beirwas or the sweepers. The upper castes had more, higher-value social networks that they could mobilise to take advantage of a new economic opportunity, such as a hot real estate market emerging in their villages.

Table 1 Social networks and brokerage

Caste Category	Number and proportion of families in sample	per cent who have a business or formal employment outside of village	per cent who became dalas
General	24 (26%)	58	21
Jat	16 (17%)	44	25
OBC	21 (22%)	19	10
SC/ST	33 (35%)	6	6
TOTAL	**94 (100%)**	**29**	**14**

Note: While Jats are considered OBCs in Rajasthan, as a dominant agrarian caste they are socio-economically distinct from other OBCs, and thus I separate them here and throughout the paper for analytical purposes.

8 HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF PRESENT DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

This uneven distribution of the extent and quality of social networks within the village has its historical roots in the failures of post-independence land reforms to sufficiently transform

[14] Sitting amongst several brokers, one Brahmin broker explained to me, 'They are any kind of contact (or contacts made just like that), not caste contacts' (*Aise hi sampark. Jati ki sampark nahi hai*) (Fieldnotes, June 30, 2012).

[15] While Jats are now considered OBCs in Rajasthan, they are socio-economically distinct from other OBCs and thus I separate them here for analytical purposes.

highly unequal agrarian social structures. During the early 1950s, land reform in Rajasthan abolished feudal intermediaries (*jagirdars*) and brought former tenants into a direct relationship with the state as small-holding cultivators (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). However, as in most parts of India, the main beneficiaries were the larger cultivating castes (in this area, the Jats) and upper castes (like Brahmins) that were better able to manipulate land reform procedures to their advantage (Singh 1964; Chakravarti 1975; Rosin 1987). Meanwhile, the former Rajput lords evaded land ceilings and retained very large holdings by registering their land in the names of extended family members and loyal retainers (Singh 1964; Rosin 1987). The result was an incomplete reform of the feudal agrarian structure, and a legacy of large inequalities in land holdings between upper and lower castes. As seen in Table 2, when the SEZ arrived, Jat families in the four villages surveyed held 7.3 hectares of land on average, general castes (mostly Brahmins) 4.6 hectares, 'Otherwise Backward Castes' 3.3 (with 10 per cent landless), and the lower 'Scheduled Castes' 2.2 (with 15 per cent landless). The large outlier not included in the survey was the single family of the former Rajput lord (*jagirdar* or *thakur*), which, by the admission of its main heir, still controlled at least *375 hectares* when the SEZ arrived.

Table 2 Caste-wise distribution of economic, social, and cultural capital

Caste Category	Number and proportion of families in sample	Average size of family landholding (ha)	per cent who are landless	per cent who shop a or business	per cent who have formal sector employ	per cent who have a business or formal employment outside of village	per cent doing informal wage labor	per cent with family member educated to 10th class or higher
General	24 (26%)	4.6	0	54	50	58	8	83
Jat	16 (17%)	7.3	0	44	31	44	13	69
OBC	21 (22%)	3	10	43	14	19	48	43
SC/ST	33 (35%)	2.2	15	15	9	6	85	24
TOTAL	**94 (100%)**	**4**	**7**	**37**	**24**	**29**	**45**	**50**

Such unequal landholdings provided the basis for the uneven ability of different castes to diversify from agriculture after independence and up until the arrival of the SEZ.[16] As seen

[16] The average landholdings per caste presented above represent the distribution of land at the time of the SEZ in 2005. While land was subdivided and occasionally sold in the period between independence and the arrival of the SEZ, interviews, analysis of land records and other studies of land distribution in Rajasthan suggest that the overall-caste-wise distribution of land has not changed appreciably since land reforms.

elsewhere in India, the dominant castes have used the surpluses from their more extensive agricultural operations to invest in education, start small businesses, and obtain non-farm employment (Harriss-White and Janakarajan 1997; Jeffrey and Lerche 2000; Jeffrey 2001), giving them a foothold in the city. As Table 2 shows, the large landholding Jat caste invested substantially in small businesses (with 44 per cent of families having a shop or business before the SEZ arrived), many of which were extensions from their agricultural enterprises (such as becoming milk-middlemen or setting up tractor parts or repair stores). They also invested significantly in education and were moderately successful in obtaining formal sector employment (defined as salaried employment in either the public or private sector as opposed to temporary manual labour), with 31 per cent of families having one such position in the household. All told, this diversification provided 44 per cent of Jat families with a non-menial foothold in the city.

The upper or 'general' castes (mostly Brahmins) were also quite successful in diversifying, with 54 per cent of families having a shop or business and 50 per cent having a formal sector job. The latter reflects a more substantial investment in education than Jats, with 80 per cent of general caste families having a member educated past Class 10 (compared to 69 per cent of Jat families). This gave 58 per cent of general caste families a non-menial economic foothold outside the village.

The Rajputs always had a presence outside of the village, with the *thakur's* family maintaining a large ancestral home (*haveli*) in Jaipur, where they also owned several blocks of shops, and more recently turned one of their urban plots into a tourist hotel. The former *thakur's* grandson, Mahinder Singh, was given an elite private education, and subsequently became an investment banker with a large American bank in Mumbai before returning to enter politics as the nominal village *sarpanch* (his mother was actually elected). When the SEZ came, he utilised his business acumen to develop some of the family's land that lay adjacent to the SEZ into a high-end housing colony. He also utilised his family's many, high-quality urban connections—which include former nobility and prominent political figures—to broker the land of their former peasant tributaries (now constituents) (Interviews, 9 July 2010 and 16 February 2011).

While lower-castes also diversified out of agriculture, they did so mostly out of necessity as unskilled wage labourers. With little formal sector employment (9 per cent of families) and few businesses (15 per cent of families), only 6 per cent of Scheduled Castes had an urban economic foothold outside of the village besides casual wage labour, which 85 per cent of Scheduled Caste families were dependent upon. Such links to the city are not of the kind that typically generate relationships that can be profitably utilised for business activities like land brokering. The lower castes had fewer extra-village contacts of sufficient quality to utilise for entrance into the brokerage economy.

Today's unequal distribution of individual social capital thus has its roots in the caste and class inequalities bequeathed by the failures of post-independence land reform. I have shown that these unequal social networks created the opportunity for the unequal appropriation of rents from real estate markets. This is illustrated not simply by the incidence of *dalals* among different castes, but also, as the next section will show, by the hierarchy among them. I now turn to case studies of different categories of brokers, and the 'reconversion strategies' (Bourdieu 1984: 110, 142, 150; Wacquant 1998a: 27) that they use to turn social capital back into economic capital.

9 RECONVERSION STRATEGIES AND THE BROKERAGE HIERARCHY

Laduram Meena was the elected village head (*sarpanch*) of Rajpura when the SEZ arrived in 2005. At that time, he was a moderately large landholder and had a small real estate partnership operating in areas closer to Jaipur. While it is alleged that he took large bribes for not opposing the transfer of village-grazing land to the SEZ, what is definitely true is that he was very well placed to take advantage of the SEZ's effects on Rajpura's property market. His contacts from his previously existing real estate business, buttressed by his extra-village connections through the Congress party, gave him a rich set of ties with which to broker deals in the village. By his own estimation, at the height of the boom between 2005 and 2008, he was facilitating 50 deals a month. He explained to me that all of the real estate companies in Jaipur knew him, and his real estate partnership—operating from a formal office in Rajpura's market—was thus operating as a nodal point in the network, bringing in smaller *dalal*s to share in the commission when someone closer to the seller was needed. Other villagers claim that he used these property deals as a form of political patronage, distributing commission opportunities or information to gain the political support of key people in different castes. What is clearly true is that his possession of contacts and associated information about the real estate business (current prices, potential buyers, the plans of the SEZ) were assets that led many villagers to seek out his company and patronage, or 'to sit near him' in village parlance. While he dissimulates on the size of his newly gained wealth, he has recycled these real estate earnings into the purchase of at least 50 *bighas* (12.5 hectares) of new farmland, commercial and residential plots around the SEZ and Jaipur, a petrol pump license, a water tanker business, a large building he rents out as small shops and migrant labour accommodation in the Rajpura market, several more shops in a nearby town, and an expansion of his already large house. In Laduram's case, social capital derived from economic and political capital has generated substantially more economic capital, which he has partly recycled back into political capital and an 'expanded reproduction of social capital' (Bourdieu 1993: 33).

Beneath the big or meta-*dalals* like Laduram Meena are the moderate sized *dalal*s like Gangaram Choudhary, a young Jat from a family with 50 *bighas* of land in neighboring Neempura. Gangaram had been working as a driver in Jaipur and used those contacts to cut about 20–25 deals, netting, in his estimation, Rs. 6 lakhs ($12,000; though this is probably an under-estimate). Smaller than he is Mahinder Choudhary, also a Jat who leveraged his contacts as a milk-middleman to do four or five deals, netting approximately Rs. 5 lakh

($10,000), part of which he reinvested in a cold drink shop in Rajpura's market. These Jats had already begun to diversify from their significant agricultural holdings before the SEZ, and used the social capital from that diversification to make economic capital in the real estate boom, which they have now invested in other enterprises. Many of these medium and large *dalal*s are now applying their experience and contacts gained through brokering land around the SEZ to brokering agricultural land near other peri-urban development projects, such as Jaipur's new 'ring road'.

At the very bottom of the *dalal* hierarchy are those like Mahesh Bhunker, an uneducated lower caste (SC) small-farmer and labourer, who aspire, with very limited success, to tap into the brokerage business as a way out of dire economic circumstances. I lived with Mahesh, his wife Lada and their three young kids for most of my fieldwork. Mahesh and his two brothers lost their combined 25 *bighas* of land for the SEZ, but were only compensated for seven because 18 did not have an updated title. They sold their compensation plots quickly and consequently at a low price, and used the money to build concrete houses and buy 10 *bighas* of not very productive farmland 20 km away. Mahesh is unemployed and two kidney stone operations have left him physically unable to do hard manual labor as well as deeply in debt. The family's only income was Lada's periodic Rs. 100 ($2) per day from the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. The loss of their farmland and livestock has greatly reduced their diet, visible in the undernourishment of their children. While only partially literate and not particularly savvy in business matters, Mahesh saw a potential solution to their difficulties when Lada's young cousin Rajesh from another village expressed interest in investing his *dalali* earnings into a plot in Rajpura, for which he would provide the advance and then try to re-sell. Mahesh could act as his local *dalal* and earn 1 per cent commission.

As Rajesh's *dalal*, Mahesh helped to find a seller, an older lower-caste widow from his sub-caste and her son, who in turn were represented by the lower-caste *dalal* with the DVD store introduced earlier. After many meetings and affirmations of good will expressed over cups of *chai* and shared *beedis*, a purchase agreement was struck between the parties and their *dalal*s—though the widow herself sat on the floor outside with the women of Mahesh's family—to buy the plot for Rs. 13 lakh ($26,000). Within a few months, before the cousin had to deliver the full amount to the seller, he had found an outside buyer willing to take it for Rs. 23 lakh ($46,000), netting Rs. 7 lakh ($14,000) after registration costs and bribes to the land records official (*patwari)*. However, the cousin refused to pay Mahesh 1 per cent of the full purchase price, arguing that the transaction costs that he advanced should be subtracted from the total. After the exaggerated professions of good faith, kinship and camaraderie, Mahesh ruefully observed, 'the relationship has been ruined' (*rishta barbad ho gaya*) (Fieldnotes, 30 January 2011). His family ate better for a month or two, adding some milk products back into their diet, but given the size of their existing debt, the income was not very significant. The trust between Mahesh and his cousin, not to mention that between Mahesh and the widow, had facilitated the transaction but then quickly evaporated.

While people like Mahesh do not have what villagers call the 'hi-fi' contacts necessary to make many deals, and particularly the larger deals with outside investors, they may be lucky enough to plug into a smaller deal through kinship networks or because they are needed by another *dalal* to establish trust with a seller of his sub-caste. Mahesh has lower quality social contacts than the *dalals* mentioned above, and he was lucky to mobilise his tenuous connection with his wife's cousin—what Bourdieu (1990: 168) calls 'practical kinship'—to conclude one deal. Unfortunately, the meagerness of his social capital, combined with his lack of cultural capital (specifically business savvy), prevented him from converting this connection into economic assets of any significance. Real estate speculation is a social game that people have unequal abilities to play, and Mahesh's 'hand' is not very strong (see Bourdieu 1990: 188). But the prospect of making fast and easy cash from brokering village land is a tempting resolution to his economic hardships, giving him and others in his position what Bourdieu would call a 'stake in the game'.

10 SOLVENTS OF SOLIDARITY: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EFFECTS OF BROKERAGE

Mahesh's fate at the hands of his cousin indexes the major social and political consequences of land brokerage in the villages surrounding the SEZ. The first is that the pool of trust that the locally situated *dalal*s exploited to facilitate the alienation of village land to outside investors has been undermined. Many sellers, particularly less educated ones in the lower castes, subsequently felt cheated by the *dalal*s who had more information than they about the SEZ and the land's value in the new context. Many sold at what were retrospectively very low prices, in part because they were under economic pressure to sell quickly, but also because they lacked information about what an SEZ was and what it would do to land prices if they waited. In the early stages, some did not even know that an SEZ was coming. As Brahmin *dalal* Ramlal Sharma explained to me, 'The farmers got very little; they didn't know what the price was. In the beginning, people didn't even know about the SEZ and were getting only Rs. 1-2 *lakhs* [$2,000-$4,000 per *bigha*]; 25 per cent sold without knowing that the SEZ was coming.' Anyway, he explained matter-of-factly, the Jaipur *dalal* and he, 'would each take 2 per cent' (Field notes, 23 February 2010). While brokers' connections with urban investors gave them privileged access to useful information about land markets, rather than share this information with fellow villagers, they used it for their own advantage. Some *dalals* actively cheated illiterate farmers who could not read the documents they were signing. Dinesh Raegar and his two brothers are illiterate lower-caste men who sold the compensation rights for their six *bighas* of land for a paltry Rs. 9 lakhs ($18,000), thinking that they were only selling three *bighas*. Now reduced to a landless labourer, Dinesh says, 'It has been a total loss for us. The *dalal* deceived us. The *dalals* take way too much advantage' (Fieldnotes, 15 July 2010). My survey shows that lower-caste (SC/ST) families fared the worst in navigating land markets, receiving on average over Rs. 6.5 lakhs ($13,000) less per hectare on their compensation plot sales than the upper (general) castes. While many brokers became fantastically wealthy and built rural mansions, many of those who sold cheaply through them became proletarianized and ruefully watched the value of their former land multiply exponentially.

This has created significant anger towards the *dalals,* who are seen as having benefited massively from the SEZ at the expense of their fellow villagers. Phrases such as 'the *dalal*s looted us', 'sold the village cheaply', 'fooled people', 'ruined us', 'snatched land', and 'took advantage of the common man' were very common in my many conversations with farmers. Of the former village *sarpanch*, 'the biggest dalal of them all', Dinesh Raegar expressed a common sentiment: 'He cuts people's throats after robbing their pockets. He completely takes advantage. The *dalal*s have benefited, not the farmers' (Field notes, 16 July 2010). Brokers were seen as guilty of violating social norms of reciprocity and fairness, which was particularly egregious in such a serious matter as people's land, the ultimate economic asset, and a source of honour in any village setting. As one youth put it, 'They sold off the whole village's land [to others] ... and ate commission' (Field notes, 8 April 2010). In this view, *dalals* had taken advantage of their fellow villagers for their own enrichment and that of 'outsiders' (*baharwalle*) who were now reaping fortunes from their former land.[17]

Such interpretations of the situation were not, of course, accepted by *dalals* themselves. To begin with, most brokers used the English term 'property dealer' to refer to themselves rather than the more stigmatised Hindi term *dalal*. In their eyes, they were not mere middlemen or fixers, but legitimate businessmen. While many of them privately admitted to me that they facilitated land sales at 'very low prices', they publicly dismissed the hostility of their fellow villagers as the envy of those who do not work hard and do not know how to get ahead. The licitness of brokerage earnings was thus the subject of a symbolic struggle between brokers who sought to portray their activities as normatively legitimate, and other villagers (especially the 'losers' from land sales) who saw them as self-seeking and exploitative.

An exchange at a village *chai* stall is illustrative. I was sitting with a group of mostly lower-caste farmers who were unanimously criticising the government for forcibly acquiring the land from them, the SEZ developers for failing to give them employment, and the *dalals* for cheating them when they went to sell their compensation plots. The *dalals*, they said, 'take advantage of the common man'. Then a plump farmer named Kalaram Choudhary got out of a new white Maruti-Suzuki car and walked over to the *chai* stall. As he approached, the others gave me a sly look, and for my benefit asked him the same question I had been asking them: 'Is there loss or benefit because of the SEZ?'

KC: The SEZ is good. There's excellent work inside it ... It's good for everyone.

Farmer 1: It's good for him because he gets rent.

KC: No, it's good for *everyone*.

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[17] For a similar example of brokers attracting the resentment of those at their mercy, see Wacquant's (1998b: 23) analysis of boxing matchmakers.

Farmer 2: He's a rich man. A big man.

Farmer 1: He's a property dealer.

KC (with raised voice): The SEZ is good for everyone. It's not bad for anyone. Very good work has been gotten… Hard workers get work. The rest are sitting here (gesturing to the *chai* stall benches).

Farmer 3: He got money from being a commission agent and selling people's land. Then he used the money to buy a JCB machine and rent it out to Mahindra.

At this point one of the critical farmers turned to me and, in answer to a question I had asked earlier, said, '*These people* don't let us start a protest organisation (*sanghatan*)' (Field notes, 22 February 2010).

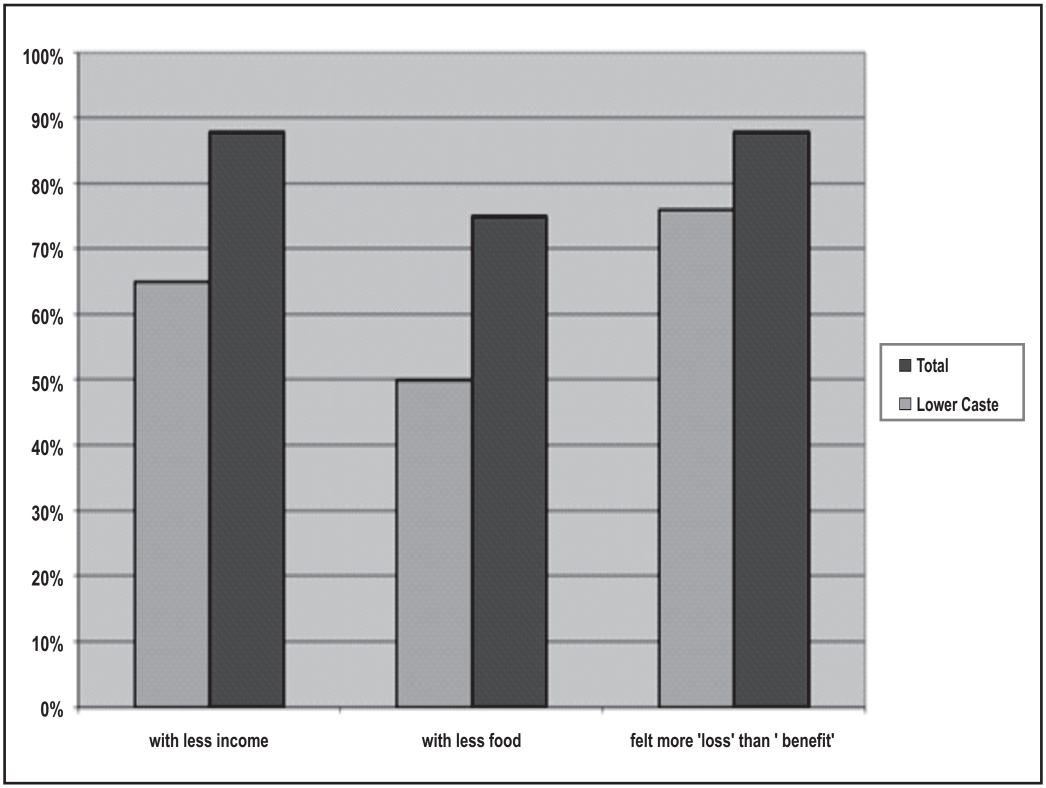
Brokers' attempts to morally launder their economic gains as normatively legitimate largely failed. In Rajpura, as in the Malaysian village studied by James Scott (1985), 'new opportunities for "profit-making" have far outpaced the normative means available to justify taking full advantage of them' (p. 225). Nevertheless, other farmers were under no illusion that the older norms still had any sanctioning power. Many simply took it as a fact that now 'everyone just builds their own house' (*sab apne apne ghar banate hai*). As the village economy shifted away from agriculture, there was anyway little need for economic cooperation across classes, making compliance with a peasant 'moral economy' (Scott 1976; Scott 1985) largely irrelevant for those doing well in the new dispensation. While brokers might still be sensitive to *chai* stall slander that eroded their symbolic capital, they were now starting to keep different company and had large houses to retreat behind. While norms of fairness, honesty, respect for land, and general village solidarity vis-à-vis outsiders might inevitably have fallen by the wayside as the village urbanised, brokers' alacrity in turning their social relations into capital greatly expedited the process.

As the statement of the last farmer suggests, brokers also helped to prevent collective action among the majority of farmers who felt aggrieved by the SEZ. While the initial aspirations generated by the prospects of easy real estate gains encouraged by Rajasthan's compensation model prevented initial organised resistance to the SEZ, as seen elsewhere in India,[18] the work of *dalals* and the trail of bitterness they have created has undermined any subsequent potential for collective claims making on the SEZ and state government. There is now widespread anger and disappointment in the villages, as the government still has not constructed the compensation plots allotted to farmers (even though most have already sold their rights to them). Only 14 per cent of families have received any employment in the SEZ (all of it temporary and low-paying work through sub-contractors), and the promised infrastructure improvements to the village never materialised (and indeed, the SEZ's plan

[18] See Levien (2013b) for an overview of land struggles in India, and a discussion of the factors affecting their emergence and character.

calls for cutting off the main access road to Rajpura's market). A substantial amount of money flowed through the hands of farmers who sold their compensation plots, but it was mostly the upper castes who were able to invest this money into profitable avenues—without productive linkages between the SEZ and the surrounding economy, this consisted almost entirely of further land purchases, small shops, and usury. After paying debts and building new houses, the majority of families—and especially SCs and OBCs—did not wind up with income generating-assets equivalent to what they lost (see Levien 2012). As Figure 2 shows, my survey found that 65 per cent of total families and 88 per cent of lower caste families reported having less income after losing their land for the SEZ. Even more disturbing was that *50 per cent of families and 75 per cent of the lower castes reported having less food. In terms of subjective well-being,* 76 per cent of farmers and 88 per cent of lower castes said that they received more 'loss' (*nuksan*) than 'benefit' (*fayda*) from the project. This is, to put it mildly, evidence of an extreme development failure. Yet, despite a majority of families being worse off than before and sharing strong grievances towards the SEZ, there has been little in the way of collective action.

Figure 2 Self-reported development consequences of SEZ for families (total and lower caste) who had land acquired



When I asked angry and distraught farmers why they did not start a *sanghatan* (a protest organisation) to press for their demands, the common response is that all unity has decreased ('*ekta kam ho gaya*') and everyone just looks out for themselves. *Dalals* often figure prominently in the explanation. An old farmer named Puranji, for example, attributes the lack of resistance to the fact that there are 'lots of *dalal*s' and, because of them, 'many have sold'. They therefore have nothing left to fight for. Moreover, like the farmer introduced earlier at the *chai* stall, he says that some of the *dalal*s are 'big men' in the village, implying that they would not tolerate other farmers organising against the SEZ, whose continued growth they have a large stake in. When I asked another farmer, whose family had been opposing the acquisition of their land, whether anyone in the village had supported them, he said, 'No, everyone has sold out' (Field notes, 18 December 2010). Another farmer explained: 'There is no unity. The people of this village are *dalals*' (Field notes, 3 February 2011).

So, while the project has undermined the economic well-being of a large proportion of farmers, collective action has been limited to one brief protest. It was orchestrated by village heads (who are also *dalals*) in front of the SEZ and was intended to pressurise the government to physically construct the long-promised compensation plots (something that would not help the majority of farmers who had already sold their rights to them). In the absence of any collective political action, resistance has been limited to isolated, 'everyday forms' (Scott 1985) like fence-puncturing, temporary re-occupations of land for agricultural purposes, and a few isolated skirmishes with government officials. On the intra-village level, it is limited to a dissimulated 'war of words' (Scott 1985), which in this case has no material force.

While it is impossible to know whether collective action would have been forthcoming without the actions of brokers, what is clear is that they have been agents of social dissolution, violating social norms and undermining the trust that *would be necessary* for collective action. Paradoxically, these *dalal*s match precisely the description of Krishna's 'new', well-connected village leaders who act as mediating agents between their fellow villagers and the state and market, 'activating' social capital for democracy and development. My analysis suggests precisely the opposite: far from activating social capital for collective good, these mediators between village and city use their endowments of social capital for private gain, exploiting the trust of their fellow villagers, and undermining the norms and trust that might enable collective action.

11 CONCLUSION

This analysis suggests that social capital is at least as plausibly seen as an unequally distributed form of individual power rooted in class inequalities than a collective group asset adhering at the level of a village, region, or nation. Rural India is hardly alone in being characterised by inegalitarian class structures.[19] The Bourdieuian conception of social capital

[19] See Bernstein (2010) for a good overview and analysis of the vast literature on agrarian class structures.

encourages us to see these agrarian class structures as constituted not only by unequal distributions of economic and cultural capital, but also by related inequalities in the extent and quality of social connections. Building on previous applications of Bourdieuian theory to rural inequality in India (cf. Jeffrey 2001; Jeffrey et al. 2008; Desai and Dubey 2011), I have used the case of rural land brokerage to show how individual social capital contributes to the ability of dominant classes (which correspond tightly with dominant castes) to monopolise benefits as the intermediaries of economic change.[20] In addition to expanding pre-existing inequalities, I have also tried to show that such monetisation of individual social networks is likely to cannibalise trust and undermine existing norms, and in the process reduce the solidarity necessary for collective action. It is especially in conditions of rapid socio-economic change, I would suggest, that networks, norms, and trust are *least likely* to hold together in ways that make them a composite stock of generalised potential for cooperation. In other words, it is precisely in the process of economic growth that networks are most likely to be used for individual advantage, trust used and abused, and old norms thrown into question.

It is not simply that different definitions of social capital, by focusing on different aspects of social life, lead to different conclusions about development. Rather, this analysis suggests that the collective social capital thesis lacks a plausible theory of how networks, norms, and trust relate to each other across various scales and over time. By collapsing different aspects of social structures—networks, norms, and trust—into a single collective asset of various social units, it is unable to see the tensions between these distinct features of social life and the ways in which they interact dynamically during a process of social and economic change.

By anchoring social connections in an analysis of social inequality, and separating—rather than conflating—networks, norms, and trust, Bourdieu's theory of social capital is better able to explain who captures the benefits of economic development. Instead of seeing villages with high or low social capital, this lens helps us to see different fractions of an inegalitarian society constantly cultivating and maintaining connections—what Bourdieu calls 'practical groups' (1990: 170)—of higher or lesser value, through which they might reasonably expect to receive material or symbolic advantages (see also Wolf 1966; Blok

[20] This study thus lends support to Desai and Dubey's (2011) inference, based on evidence of greater socio-economic inequalities between castes in developed villages and small cities compared to less developed villages, that inequalities between castes might be exacerbated in the process of economic growth. Desai and Dubey also identify the importance of social networks, which they also conceive in Bourdieuian terms as social capital. The India Human Development Survey (IHDS), on which they draw, operationalises this social capital as knowing anyone in school, the medical field, or government (2011 : 49). This ethnographic study complements their large-N survey analysis by illustrating the concrete ways in which economic capital is converted into social capital and vice versa in the process of economic growth, but also identifies the importance of social networks formed through businesses and work. While the connections measured by the IHDS are likely to be more important in accessing government services, the business and work connections examined here are more likely to be important in taking advantage of economic growth. The upper castes have more of both, allowing them to capture disproportionate resources from both government and market.

1974: 151). The practical groups that the poor are able to forge from their social networks are often less extensive, and are always of a lower quality: they are connected to people who can bring less material and symbolic advantages (Beall 2001; Cleaver 2005). When an outside source of wealth is introduced into a village—in this case an SEZ and associated property markets, though it could be an oil or mineral discovery, a government development scheme, or anything that introduces a new source of value—those with more extensive and cosmopolitan connections find opportunities for brokerage and rentiership, and are able to align with outsiders to the detriment of fellow villagers. In the case examined here, well-connected villagers were able to use their social capital to make possible, and thereby profit massively from, new real estate opportunities, exploiting what trust they could mobilise among their fellow villagers. Many who sold their land through them subsequently felt that these brokers profited at their expense, breeding distrust and unleashing a symbolic struggle over norms that undermined any kind of collective claims-making on the SEZ developers and the government. Those with higher social capital are, in this view, the ones who are *most likely* to violate existing norms and trust, dissolving solidarity in the pursuit of economic capital.

It might be argued that the Rajasthani villages studied here simply represented cases of particularly low collective social capital. But such an argument begs the question of how, in certain places and times, shared trust and norms can contain individuals' exploitation of unequal social connections. If it is the case that in other places intra-village relations of solidarity prove stronger than extra-village relations based on individual profit-seeking, then it explains very little to call these cases of high social capital. They might equally be called cases of low inequality in social capital. The difference is that only the latter conception allows one to acknowledge inequalities in social networks, study their historic roots, and examine how their use effects norms, trust, and collective action in a process of economic change. This requires separating the elements of social life that the social capital thesis collapses into composite indices. The conditions under which such a reduction is least tenable are precisely those that are of the greatest interest to the study of development.

It may be more promising, then, to hypothesise that uniformly *low levels of individual social capital*, rooted in more egalitarian social structures, lend themselves the most to social solidarity and to inclusive development. Given the high levels of social inequality in many parts of the agrarian Global South today, development would best be served by removing these inequalities of which individual social capital is an expression, rather than trying to harness elusive forms of trust and solidarity: redistributive land reforms, for example, rather than self-help groups. If social capital is an aspect of social inequality and a means of steering resources towards those who already have them, it is an obstacle—not an asset—for development.

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