SOCIAL GEOGRAPHIES OF SEASONAL LABOR MIGRATION IN RURAL WESTERN INDIA

BY

PRONOY RAI

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Trevor L. Birkenholtz, Chair
Associate Professor Susan Koshy
Professor Emeritus Thomas J. Bassett
Associate Professor Sara Smith, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I study the seasonal migration of landless communities in rural western India. My research explains how labor migration has transformed gender, caste, and class relations in the drylands of Maharashtra state in India. I study labor migration as a social process, which accommodates the flows of capital yet expands the literature to account for the flows of ideas and norms. I conducted research for this dissertation during Summer 2014 and 2015-16 in six villages by applying qualitative field research methods and archival research at two archives in India.

In this dissertation, I find that the impacts of seasonal labor migration on class and caste-based social relations in rural Maharashtra in labor home communities are illuminated in quotidian class and caste politics that have reconfigured rural social relations of production. Second, through a gendered spatiotemporal analysis of seasonal migration of rural laborers, I show how masculinity at the margins of the society is iteratively constructed both in opposition to dominant forms of masculinity, as well as through the continued exploitation of women's productive and reproductive labor. Lastly, by focusing on the migration infrastructure, including brokers or labor intermediaries who facilitate labor recruitment, intra-rural labor migration, and disciplining of labor on the cane fields of western India, I show how the intermediaries are embedded in the labor geographies of sugar production, which belies the stereotyping of brokers as exploitative. Relatedly, I also show how migration infrastructure or brokers can be a novel optic to reconcile the split within the interdisciplinary field of migration studies (i.e. those between international and internal migration).

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To My Parents, Asha Rai and Shyam Sundar Rai

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the Global South, the working poor pursue their household reproduction through a complex combination of marginal self-employment and wage employment. This across multiple sites of the social division of labor that includes both rural and urban, and agricultural and non-agricultural (Bernstein, 2010). The agricultural sector is not producing adequate employment opportunities. This is prompting laborers to seek work elsewhere, often in urban centers (International Labour Office, 2011). Work opportunities for unskilled laborers in cities tend to be seasonal and informal (Breman, 2013), while gaining access to the formal economy often requires substantial social and cultural capital (Jeffrey, 2010) that the laborers lack. Note that agricultural laborers own neither land nor any productive property and sell their labor power to eat. They are distinct from farmers who produce agricultural commodities as a business or peasants who are tillers of their own land or who treat it so as a distinctive way of life (Mintz, 1985). Thus, migration is vital for the social reproduction of landless agricultural laborers.

Globally, the number of internal migrants is about 740 million (Bell & Muhidin, 2009). While there is no consensus on the global number of rural-urban migrants, we know that 3.4 billion people live in rural areas in the world, and with the largest share of the rural population (approximately, 860 million) living in India (UN DESA Population Division, 2014). In the global South, circular migration is the inevitable consequence of increasing mobility among rural populations and the lack of decent and sufficient employment opportunities in urban areas. At the same time, improvements in communication have revolutionized access to urban areas and

employment even for people from remote regions (Rigg, 1998), thus aiding the mobility of rural populations. In India, nearly 68 percent of all workers are employed in agriculture, yet growth in the agricultural sector has stagnated since the early 1990s. Today, it only accounts for 16 percent of GDP (Gupta, 2012). Moreover, the share of agricultural employment with respect to total rural employment has declined by almost 10 percent between 1993 and 2010 (Chand & Srivastava, 2014). Therefore, India is an ideal place to study the impact of seasonal internal migration on social change in rural areas.

Rural laborer households are among the most economically, socially, and politically marginalized because of the high incidence of poverty and because these households often belong to the "lower" castes. The Indian constitution renders the thousands of marginalized castes in India visible by categorizing them into groups, such as "scheduled castes" and "backward castes." In this dissertation, I refer to these groups as "lower" castes, following the hierarchal arrangement of caste categories in India. Seasonal migrant laborers in India are one of the most disempowered of all categories of laborers (Lerche, 2010); half of these laborers are hired through labor contractors through advance cash payments (Srivastava, 2005). These laborers work under extreme conditions involving physical abuse and often irregular payment of wages (Prakash, 2009). These laborers, migrant or non-migrants, constitute the "classes of labor" or the increasingly large numbers of laborers who rely both directly and indirectly on their labor power, which they sell for their social reproduction. (Panitch & Leys, 2000).

The dominance of capital in contemporary times directly shapes social relations. The concept "classes of labor" includes wage laborers and those who depend indirectly on the sale of their

labor power, thus encompassing labor reproduced through insecure, oppressive, and scarce wage employment as well as a precarious small-scale activity like farming (Bernstein, 2008; Lerche, 2010). Over the last decade, landlessness has continued to increase in India as have the proportions of agricultural and non-agricultural laborers in the rural workforce (Chandrasekhar, 2014). Taken together, these factors have induced migration from dryland villages to irrigated villages (Ramamurthy, 2010) and from rural areas to urban areas where rural laborers seek out new work opportunities. Yet it is unlikely that migrating laborers find secure employment opportunities in urban areas given that the 'informal' economy in India employs 92 percent of the workforce (Breman, 2013). Of these informal sector laborers, at least 30 million are estimated to be circular migrants (Breman, 2007; Deshingkar, 2006)

The phenomenon of circular migration has been studied from the lens of remittance flows and net-loss-and-gain-of-labor between regions. Seasonal or circular migrants engage in a regular and repetitive series of outward and return movements between an origin and a destination/s, and they are free to return to their home at any time (Skeldon, 2012). However, few studies have examined how the marginalized people in the world employ their personal experiences, ideas, and sensibilities in the process of circulating between their home and destinations to contest their historic, unequal power relations in their home villages (Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003). Thus, this research seeks to understand internal seasonal migration in the world as a social process and expand the scope of current knowledge of the impact of migration on "development" in the sending communities. To analyze these social changes, I bring together three bodies of literature: development and migration, geographies of gender and sexuality, and agrarian change. I do this to understand whether seasonal migration affects laborers' relations with rural elites,

whether seasonal migration interrupts place-based gender ideologies of rural migrant laborers, and how rural migration brokers are produced through the organizing of intra-rural seasonal labor migration. This focus on labor flows as an optic to understand rural transformation is inspired by Shanin's observation (1986) that "rural problems are inexplicable any longer in their own terms and must be understood in terms of labor and capital flows which are broader than agriculture. (page 19)"

In this dissertation research, I examine the social geographies of seasonal labor migration to investigate three interrelated questions. First, how does the seasonal migration of landless rural peasants in western India produce changes in historical caste and class-based rural social relations in migrant home communities? Second, how does the social construction of masculinity and its relations with women's and men's labor vary across time and space? Third, how is the infrastructure of migration brokerage embedded within the labor geographies of seasonal rural labor migration?

To answer these questions, I draw, theoretically, on research in development and labor migration, geographies of gender and sexuality, and agrarian studies. Methodologically, I employ semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, participant observation, and archival research to study seasonal labor migration in the rural Yavatmal district of Maharashtra state in western India, where the representation of landless peasants is high in the rural workforce (Nathan, et al., 2010). While I do not draw on the archival materials to advance the arguments made in this dissertation, I intend to use the archival sources for future publications. In this chapter, I first present the theoretical framework employed in this dissertation. Then, I introduce

the study area and describe the fieldwork. Followig this, I highlight the preliminary research conducted by me in the region, while laying out the research design, research questions, and methods of analysis. I conclude with a brief note on the research timeline and the organization of the dissertation.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I seek, first, to understand whether seasonal migration *impacts* laborers' relations with rural elites. Critical literature in development and migration cautions us against seeing circular migration as a "silver bullet" in the sense that it may not be a long-term solution to the development of migrants' home communities (Skeldon, 2010). The nature of the labor recruitment process that results in migration may involve false promises, deception, and passage into debt bondage, which may lead to 'unfreedom' of the migrants (Breman, 2013). Laborers who work under conditions of bondage are from tribal communities (called, *adivasi* in India) or from the formerly untouchable castes (called *Dalit* in India) because of the ease of hiring and controlling them; these laborers find employment in brick kilns, stone quarries, construction, and agriculture (Lerche, 2010). Seasonal labor migration triggers the spatial segmentation of labor across cities and the countryside, which may, while resulting in marginal socio-political gains for the laborers, disallow changes in substantive class relations (Picherit, 2012). Seasonal labor migration has implications for farming and landowning farmers. In rural southern India, to cope with labor shortages due to seasonal labor migration from their home villages, landowning farmers have opted to mechanize their farming practices, reduced dependence on cattle for farming, and shifted from labor-intensive crops like cotton and groundnut to less labor-intensive crops like paddy (Pattenden, 2016).

Seasonal migration, however, allows new spatialities to be brought to bear upon rural areas. Seasonal migrants are "dislodged from place", have multiple place-based attachments, and have a sense of nostalgia and uncertainty about life in their home villages (McHugh, 2000). The process leads to forging of new livelihoods and new identities (Borras Jr., 2009). Opportunities to work outside of their home villages - notably in urban areas - helps migrants acquire new perspectives and skills, such as a new language or a dialect (de Haan, Brock, & Coulibaly, 2002). Seasonal migration also provides some flexibility in the social reproduction of labor households. For instance, despite the lack of social mobility, Nepali migrants in Delhi, India, use the informal nature of work in Delhi to navigate multiple life-worlds that include agriculture and festivities at home in Nepal and employment in India (Thieme, et al., 2005). Young people in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand began to choose migration for brick kiln work in peri-urban areas because living spaces in the brick kilns were not subject to the same kind of surveillance and social control as were living spaces at home. Migration to the kilns, therefore, serves as a "temporary space of freedom" (Shah, 2010).

Rural-urban migration, in addition to an outcome of agrarian transitions, is also a driver of change in rural areas. The role of remittances – cash money sent by migrants to their families in their home communities - from transnational and internal migration as investment capital and the impact of the remittances on social change in rural areas has been the subject of growing attention from international financial institutions and development agencies (World Bank, 2006). For instance, capital derived from earnings abroad, especially in the Middle East, represented a major source of funds for migrant families in the Philippines to purchase farmland and farm machinery in their home villages (Banzon-Bautista, 1989). Higher earnings derived from

migration may lead to mobility into or within a land-owning class, i.e. mobility within a class hierarchy that is rooted in relations of production (Kelly, 2011). Indeed migration, rather than land ownership, may, in some places, become the marker of a superior class position (Aguilar, 2009). So, landless rural workers, who can migrate but are unable to buy land in their home villages, also find an opportunity of class mobility.

However, a broader understanding of development resulting from seasonal migration should include a study of the changes in social relations in the sending communities. For instance, returning migrants from urban centers may bring with them new expectations and new ideas about politics and struggle, as in the case of one of the causes of peasant movements in West Java in Indonesia (Fauzi, 2005). In my dissertation, I examine the changes in social relations in rural eastern Maharashtra resulting from the construction of new caste and occupational subjectivities arising from the seasonal migration of laborers.

Second, in this dissertation, I examine whether seasonal migration interrupts place-based gender ideologies of rural migrant laborers. My research, in line with feminist contributions to migration studies, unpacks the household and analyzes the hierarchies and power relations therein (Lawson, 1998). I examine whether masculinity and femininity are transformed in the course of seasonal migration, how these transformations result in changes in the division of labor, and the meanings of the categories of "female" and "male" laborer. To do this, I apply gender as an analytic of power (Ramamurthy, 2010; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011). Following Gutmann (1996:21), I understand that masculinity and femininity "are not original, natural, or embalmed

states of being; they are gender categories whose precise meanings constantly shift, transform into each other, and ultimately make themselves into whole new entities."

In villages, the "feminization of agriculture" (Deere, 2005) has not resulted in a corresponding improvement in women's household decision-making roles (Gunawardena, 2010), as wage differentials between women and men continue to be prevalent. In fact, the widely held consensus that agriculture in the global South is feminizing because of increased male migration from rural areas is often critiqued. Parnwell and Arghiros (1996) examine the process of agricultural mechanization in Thailand to find that agriculture has, in fact, "masculinized" as a result of mechanical innovations selectively displacing women from agricultural work. Further, the income-earning activities that are taken up by women are ideologically constructed as "female" (Francis, 2002) and the spaces of work at home and at migrant destinations become sites for disciplining sexuality and for the reproduction of the normative heterosexual family (Preibisch, K. L. & Grez, E. E., 2010). Migration has a notable impact on gender subjectivities of women and men. Migration by Malaysian men in Sarawak, for instance, has left rural Malaysian women behind and has led to the emergence of new gender identities, such as the *Indai Blue*, a rural sex worker who is "exploited by affluent men, despised by other women, and stigmatized by the community at large" (Hew, 2011).

Migrants' temporary stay in cities, however, provides them with unique cultural exposures and an opportunity to view their roles as men and women differently, i.e. situated masculinities and femininities are configured in unique ways. For instance, rural Guatemalan women with access to urban migrant relatives in the country were likely to be more aware of contraception

(Lindstrom & Muñoz-Franco, 2005), thus have greater control over their bodies. Mexican male peasants working in Mexican ranches find their masculinity measured in their homes in terms of their ability to migrate north to the United States, yet, find their masculinity stripped from them as they leave behind their roles as farmers to work in low-wage jobs (Boehm 2008: 20). In my dissertation, I examine the connections between migrant work in multiple destinations and the social construction of "masculinity," how masculinity is used to express resistance against elite men and old forms of worker-labor relations, and the exploitation of women's productive and reproductive labor.

Lastly, I explain in this research how the organizing of intra-rural labor migration produces migration brokers who play a critical role in sugar agro-capitalism in western India. It has been argued that migration can help challenge agrarian hierarchies and alter traditional oppressive structures in the home villages of these migrants (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003). A case in point is that of village labor contractors, or *Muqaddam* as they are known in western India (Breman, 1996; Mehta, 1999). *Muqaddams* are rural laborers who "rise up" in the ranks from laborers to labor contractors for sugarcane factories. They facilitate the hiring and employment of rural laborers on sugarcane plantations. Mosse et al. (2000) argue that a combination of "capital, charisma, and luck" helps *Muqqadams* exit the conditions of stark poverty and caste subjugation in which most rural laborers live. Omvedt (1980) refers to the *Muqaddams* as a kind of "labor aristocracy" and seeks the greater engagement of scholars in understanding the rise of *Muqaddams* among workers in India and similar labor contractors in China during the early 20th century (Chesneaux, 1968).

The figure of the migrant broker in the context of agro-capitalism, however, can be traced back to pre-colonial labor arrangements. Omvedt (1980) explains that during the middle of the 19th century, labor migration was organized through indenture, which came to replace slavery as the primary method of supply and maintenance of labor on the West Indies sugar plantations and plantations in colonial Sri Lanka and the Malaya Peninsula. However, prior to the abolition of indenture in 1920, the system of labor contracting had already started giving way to a system of informal debt bondage through intermediary rural labor contractors, who belonged to the same social background and region as the laborers and controlled the recruitment and the work of laborers on plantations. This transition happened with the development of monopoly capital and corporate (rather than individual) forms of control of plantations. For instance, in the Caribbean (West Indies, in particular) corporate ownership of sugar plantations happened in the 19th century. Therefore, the labor-contractor form of organizing the supply and control of labor coincided and was perhaps required for the control of plantations by business corporations. However, much has changed in the cultural and political-economic landscape of rural and urban global South.

The nature of contemporary communications, transportation, and money transfer facilities means that rural migrant laborers are now much more closely connected (socially, financially, and physically) to their homes (Kelly, 2011). In an era of increasing corporate control of sugarcane fields, agricultural mechanization, increasing modes of communication, and increased exposure to work opportunities in the urban informal sector, both intra-rural labor migration and the role of rural labor contractors are undergoing changes. In this dissertation, I extend the scholarship in agrarian history and agrarian change in India by studying workers as “active geographic agents

of change" (Coe 2012). I examine how rural labor contractors organize intra-rural migration for sugarcane harvesting, how this process may have changed, and if labor contractors as upwardly mobile laborers are socially produced through this process of migration.

1.3 RESEARCH SITES

This research project is grounded in three sites in India, viz., the labor-sending communities, the sugarcane fields, and the archives. The labor-sending communities are five villages in the Yavatmal district in eastern part of Maharashtra state in India. The sugarcane fields are in the relatively more prosperous Kolhapur district of Maharashtra, while the archives are housed in the Giri National Labour Institute in Delhi and the archives in Nagpur in India. India is an excellent place to conduct this research given many rural landless and seasonal migrants in the country (See Figure 1).

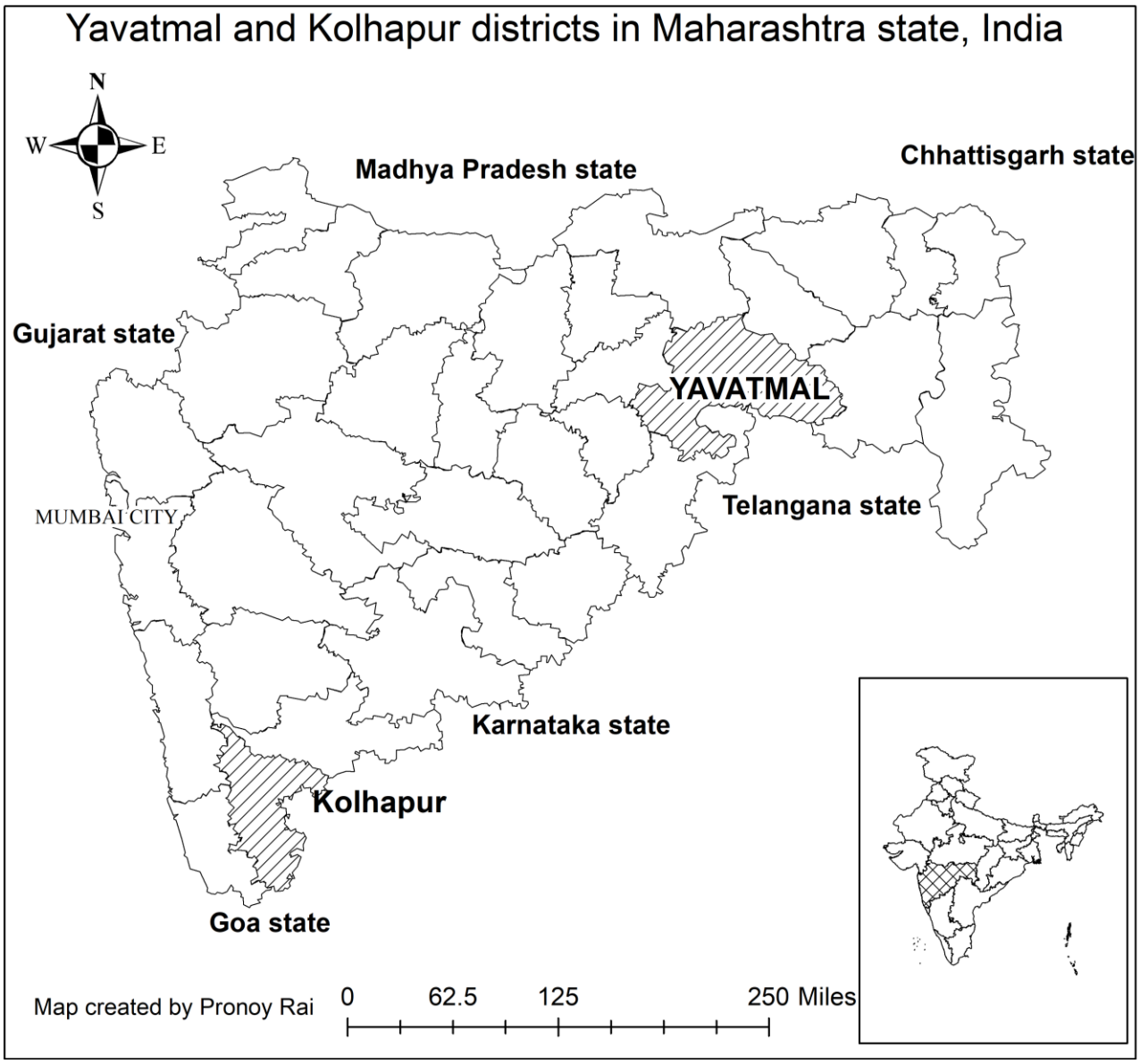

Figure 1: Map of field sites (districts) in India

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), in collaboration with India-based Institute for Human Development, published a comprehensive atlas of food security of Maharashtra state in 2010. This report is useful to locate the field site within the Indian development context. Eastern Maharashtra, where Yavatmal district is located, is part of the semi-arid plains of India and therefore, receives limited annual rainfall [the average rainfall in the district is 911 mms

(District Collectorate of Yavatmal, n.d.)] and is vulnerable to drought. The region has been suffering from a prolonged agrarian crisis. One reason for this is dependence on cash crops like cotton and oilseeds for cultivation, which are primarily rain-fed. According to the WFP report, only seven out of 36 districts in the state have a poorer irrigation network than Yavatmal. Further, only two districts in the state have lower agricultural wage rates than Yavatmal.

Most migrant laborers in Yavatmal find work on construction sites in cities within the state such as Mumbai, Pune, and Aurangabad. This process is similar to trends found elsewhere in developing countries. The construction sector in cities across the world employs close to 110 million laborers, mostly poor and marginalized since there are limited barriers to entering this sector especially in the developing countries where most tasks are undertaken manually (Zeitlyn et.al, 2014). Laborers from rural Yavatmal also migrate to irrigated villages within the state to work on sugarcane plantations. Sugarcane is harvested in approximately one million hectares of agricultural land in the state, which is about five percent of the total land in the state that is being used for agriculture (Directorate of Sugarcane Development, 2012). Cane farms in Maharashtra provide employment to several thousands of workers during the harvest season.

1.4 FIELDWORK AND PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

This dissertation advances feminist standpoint theory that explains the historical co-constitution of the production of knowledge and male supremacy, thus challenging scholars to examine often unrecognized women's lives, agency, and their social power (Harding, 1997). Further, steering clear of universal claims to objective knowledge and unlocatable and irresponsible claims to knowledge made by cultural relativists, I argue that partial perspectives and situated, embodied experiences can make rational knowledge claims (Haraway, 1988). Indeed, approaching this

project from the feminist standpoint allows me to both center historically marginalized voices and read them in the context of broader social processes and social relations.

My association with field research in rural Yavatmal district began in Summer 2012, when, as a Master's candidate, I conducted six weeks of research for my thesis in one village by employing qualitative research methods to examine the distribution of endowments among classes of labor and the politics of access to food-based entitlements (Rai and Smucker, 2016). I returned to the same sub-district to conduct follow-up fieldwork in two additional villages in Summer 2013 to understand labor livelihoods, more broadly, with the purpose of setting up a long-term research agenda to study rural social change. These research visits helped me understand that seasonal migration is an integral and iterative part of social reproduction for the classes of labor in rural Yavatmal.

I conducted preliminary dissertation research in two villages in the district during July through August of 2014, followed by long-term research in June through December 2015. The preliminary research allowed me to clarify labor – farmer relations, various destinations where migrants travel, and the typical cycle of migration as it corresponds with harvesting periods and availability of work in the cities. Most villages within the sub-district are homogeneous in terms of the composition of farmers, laborers (migrants and non-migrants), and other non-agricultural workers. While in Yavatmal district, I lived and worked out of the guest house of a rural community college, called the *Gopikabai Sitaram Gawande Mahavidyalaya* (college) in Umarkhed sub-district. Most of my field villages are to the Northeast or Northwest of the college and the college is attended by students from the villages. Therefore, living in the college has

allowed me to meet with students in the villages in classrooms where I would teach ESL classes and provide career counseling and build trust with the students and their parents.

During my dissertation research, I was assisted by a part-time field assistant who was also a Senior at the college and fluent in Marathi and Gormathi, the local languages spoken in the region. I am fluent in Hindi-Urdu and have a working knowledge of Marathi, which allowed me to be actively involved in the interviews and the focus group discussions. Most interviews took place in the homes of farmers, laborers, and labor intermediaries, typically early in the morning before work (around 7 – 11 am). These one-on-one interviews were preceded by extensive introductory sessions with the village government (*panchayat*) in each village where the *panchayat* members asked me questions about my research, my own background, and ultimately gave their permission to conduct research in their home villages.

To conduct research in Kolhapur district, I contacted the Head of the Department of Geography at the Shivaji University of Kolhapur, who introduced me to the administration of a sugar factory in the district. Subsequently, I made independent visits to the factory, established familiarity with factory staff, especially the agricultural officers, and visited two villages where two teams of migrant cane workers were employed on contract with the factory. I conducted field observations in the villages. Finally, I conducted archival research in the Nagpur archives in Maharashtra, which gave me a deeper insight into the organizing of labor migration both to the British tea plantations in northern India and to cane plantations within the empire by *Muqaddams.*

I interviewed fewer women laborers (migrants and non-migrants) as compared to men because of limited access given my own subject position as a cis-gendered man. Gender norms in rural Maharashtra disallow men's presence, especially men from outside of kinship network, in both intimate and public spaces that are co-habited by women, such as their homes and communal areas. Initial attempts by me to interview women resulted in both inconvenience to women participants and me, as men from the village would both surveille the interview sites and force their own participation. Yet, my subject position as a cis-gendered man gave me unfettered access to men's spaces, which would have been harder for women researchers. Therefore, the discussion in this dissertation emerges both from the need to address the research questions raised here and the access I had to research participants.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

I examine the social geographies of seasonal labor migration by analyzing the changes in the laborers' relations with the rural elite, the construction of new gender subjectivities of the laborers, and the production of the class of rural labor contractors who facilitate intra-rural migration. I do this by employing interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and archival research, as outlined in this section. Overall, I interviewed 52 farmers, 66 laborers (both migrants and non-migrants, women and men), 14 labor intermediaries (truckers and *Muqaddams*, all but one men), and one agricultural officer of a sugar factory. I conducted one focus group discussion with *Muqaddams* and truckers (all men) and three observations (one village government meeting in Yavatmal and two harvesting field sites in Kolhapur district). I conducted archival research at the Giri National Labour Institute in Delhi and at the Nagpur archives in Nagpur, India. Through the rest of this section, I outline individual research questions

and connect them with specific sites where I collected data to answer the questions. Further, I describe the data collection process in detail for individual research questions.

Research question 1: Does the seasonal migration of landless laborers impact changes in social relations of production in their home villages? If so, how?

Sites of fieldwork: Five villages in the Yavatmal district in Maharashtra state, India

Methods: (1) Semi-structured in-depth interviews with large landholding farmers, and female and male laborers. I obtained lists of large landholding farmers and laborers from the local village government. I, then, selected prospective informants through random stratified sampling (stratified by caste to provide representation to as many "lower" caste laborers as possible). As a starting point, I interviewed five farmers and five female and male agricultural labor contractors. I interviewed more informants until theoretical saturation of the themes emerging during the interviews was reached.

(2) Participant observation of village government meetings. Village government meeting places are important sites for farmers and laborers alike to raise their grievances and access entitlements. I conducted two participant observations during these meetings.

Research question 2: What, if any, are the connections between work in migrants' home communities and at various rural and urban employment destinations, the relation of work to the social construction of masculinity, and gender negotiations across space?

Sites of fieldwork: As in RQ 1.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews with migrant and non-migrant laborers (both women and men) in each village.

Research Question 3: How are migration brokers socially produced through the organizing of intra-rural cane labor migration?

Sites of fieldwork: 1) In Yavatmal district, five villages as in RQs 1 and RQ 2, and one additional village in the district; 2) In Kolhapur district, one sugar factory and two villages; and 3) archival research at the VV Giri National Labor Institute Archives in Noida and Nagpur archives in Nagpur, India.

Methods: 1) In Yavatmal district, I conducted semi-structured interviews with all labor intermediaries/ migration brokers and one focus group discussion in a sixth village with the intermediaries;2) In Kolhapur district, I conducted interviews with the agriculture officer of one factory and observations of two teams of sugarcane workers in two villages; 3) In the two archives, I documented the reports of the colonial (Royal Agricultural and Labor Commissions) and independent Indian government on the change in labor contracting from slavery to indenture and then to labor contracting, and how these may have shaped contemporary labor brokerage practices.

1.6 METHODS OF ANALYSIS

I have outlined four methods of collecting data here: semi-structured interviews; participant observation; focus group discussions; and archival research. I recorded and transcribed interviews and focus group discussions and my notes from participant observation through the course of fieldwork in India. I coded the transcripts by developing a set of *analytic codes* based on emergent themes (such as 'unwillingness to work', 'women's work', and 'behavior of migrant laborers in *panchayat* meetings') that relate to each research question (Cope 2005). I developed this set of codes based on the pre-dissertation fieldwork that I conducted in summer 2014. I was,

of course, open to the emergence of novel responses to the various questions. I also coded using *descriptive in vivo codes* (open coding). The files that I accessed at the Nagpur Archives and the VV Giri National Labor Research Institute in India are from the colonial archives. Therefore, I approached these files critically, i.e. 'against the grain of the archives' (Prakash 1992) to avoid the error of reproducing colonial power relations entrenched in the files (Roche 2005). Collecting data through more than one research method and from different groups of participants allowed me to triangulate data in order to maintain the rigor of the research process.

1.7 TIMELINE

Period	Activities	Funding
07/14 to 08/14	Fieldwork in Ambali and Belkhed villages in Yavatmal district: semi-structured interviews with 20 migrant laborers, seven labor employing farmers, and six labor contractors. Archival research at the Giri National Labour Institute, Noida, India.	**Social Science Research Council** Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship
7/15 to 12/15	Fieldwork in Baldi, Marsul, and Piranji villages in Yavatmal district: 101 semi-structured interviews with migrant and non-migrant laborers, labor contractors, and labor-employing farmers.	**University of Illinois** Rita and Arnold Goodman Fellowship; Graduate College Dissertation Travel Award; Foster Graduate Fellowship; Due and Ferber International Research Award; Department of Geography Summer Research Grant
1/16 to 2/16	Fieldwork in one sugar factory and two villages in Kolhapur district: two interviews with officers of sugar factory and observation of two teams of cane migrant workers in two villages.	
3/16 to 4/16	Archival research at the Nagpur archives.	
8/16 to 5/18	Data analysis, and writing of the dissertation and peer-reviewed articles.	**University of Illinois** Graduate College Dissertation Completion Fellowship Joseph and Marion Russell Fellowship.

1.8 ORGANIZATION OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation proceeds in four further chapters. In Chapter 2, I examine whether the seasonal migration of landless laborers impacts changes in social relations of production in home villages, and if so, how. In Chapter 3, I examine the gender dimension of seasonal labor migration by focusing on gender negotiations among migrants both when they are away from their homes working in varied types of migrant destinations and when they are back in their home villages. In Chapter 4, I focus on the labor intermediaries who mediate a specific form of migration, i.e. those of economically and socio-politically marginalized rural communities in India on a seasonal basis to the sugarcane fields of rural western India, to understand their role in the labor geographies of cane harvesting and how through organizing this migration, this class of migration brokers is produced. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I conclude by summarizing the results of this five-year-old research project, outlining the research contributions of my dissertation, and briefly outlining my emergent post-doctoral research project that advances the central question that has informed by current and past projects, which is, how are historically marginalized agrarian populations in the Global South responding to rapidly changing social, environmental, and political-economic conditions and how are relations of gender, caste, and class being renegotiated to build a more sustainable and just society? This dissertation is an attempt at addressing this question through a critical geographical study of seasonal labor migration in rural western India.

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CHAPTER 2: THE LABOR OF SOCIAL CHANGE:
SEASONAL LABOR MIGRATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE
IN RURAL WESTERN INDIA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the global South, the agricultural sector is not producing adequate employment opportunities prompting laborers to seek work elsewhere often in urban centers (ILO 2011). Work opportunities for laborers in cities tend to be seasonal and informal (Breman 2013) while gaining access to the 'formal' economy often requires substantial social and cultural capital (Jeffrey 2010) that these laborers may not possess. This paper focuses on internal migration, which is migration within the borders of states and territories (Skeldon, 2015). Bell and Muhidin (2009) estimate that globally, the number of internal migrants is about 740 million. In the global South, the lack of decent and sufficient employment opportunities in urban areas is resulting in laborers to engage in seasonal migration, where laborers migrate from their home communities to one or multiple locations for a short period to work (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2004). A large body of evidence shows the importance of migration to the livelihoods of rural populations and the dynamics of rural economies (Rigg 1988).

The relations between labor migration and development have been empirically understood both as beneficial and as disadvantageous to the migrants and their home communities. On one hand, it has been shown that development and migration are linked through a "virtuous circle" where development drives mobility and the other way around (Portes, 2009). On the other hand, underdevelopment and migration have been linked with a similar "vicious circle" where uneven

development fosters conditions for laborers to migrate away from their economically "underdeveloped" home communities in search of work, resulting in the loss of skilled labor and further underdevelopment in their home community (Gamlen, 2014). Critical literature on development and migration is skeptical about seasonal migration being a long-term solution to the development of migrants' home communities (Skeldon, 2010). So too, the labor recruitment process that results in migration may involve passage into debt bondage, which may lead to "unfreedom" of the migrants (Breman 2013; 66). It has also been shown that migrant remittances are often expended on "conspicuous consumption" in their home communities, resulting in inflation, increased inequalities, and little economic production, thus, leading to a lack of creation of any new opportunities for returning circular migrants to apply their skills (Appleyard, 1989).

Internal migration, in addition to being an outcome of these interconnected agrarian transitions, is also a driver of change in rural areas. For the migrant families in the Philippines, capital derived from earnings in the Middle East represented a major source of funds to purchase farmland and farm machinery in their home villages (Banzon-Bautista 1989). Higher earnings derived from migration may lead to mobility into or within a land-owning class (Kelly 2011). Indeed, migration, rather than land ownership, may, in some places, become the marker of a superior class position (Aguilar 2009). Migrants returning from urban centers may bring with them liberal-democratic values (Shain, 1999) and new expectations and ideas about politics and struggle, as in the case of one of the causes of peasant movements in West Java (Fauzi 2005).

The phenomenon of seasonal migration has been studied from the lens of remittance flows and net-loss-and-gain-of-labor between regions. However, there remains a paucity of studies that examine how marginalized people employ their personal experiences, ideas, and sensibilities in the process of circulating between their home and destinations to contest their historic, unequal power relations in their home villages (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003). This research is an effort to fill that gap. This study of migration as a social process is an intervention in a longer arc of geographers' engagement with migration studies. The orthodox focus in geographical engagements with migration research has been on methods and theories that explore causal factors for migration, the characteristics and distribution of migrants, and migration flows, marked by "an obsession with precise measurement, numbers, and sophisticated statistical techniques" (Robinson, 1996). This was succeeded by a new period when migration geographies encountered a "cultural turn," one where migration has come to be understood as "an extremely cultural event" (Fielding, 1992).

The markers of this cultural turn in migration geographies is epistemology sensitive to culture and consciousness and the role of migrants' agency; however, the bulk of research in this post-quantitative paradigm in migration geographies centers on Europe and North America, and second, this cultural turn in migration geographies has not yet engaged with internal migration within countries (King, 2012). This paper on changes in social relations in the migrants' home communities resulting from seasonal migration of landless rural laborers is an attempt at filling the gap in scholarship in migration geographies. The Indian drylands provide a fertile ground for this research because factors that encourage outmigration of labor and the informal nature of the urban labor market has resulted in the circulation of large numbers of rural laborers (Deshingkar,

2005). These laborers return to their home villages, seasonally, to encounter a complex mosaic of social relations of class and caste, within which, the laborers often occupy a subaltern position. Subalterns are subordinate in terms of their class, caste, gender, and culture, and occupy a historically dominated position vis-à-vis another group, i.e. the elites (Prakash, 1994).

In India, nearly 68 percent of all workers are employed in agriculture, yet growth in the agricultural sector has stagnated since the early 1990s; today, it only accounts for 16 percent of GDP (Gupta, 2012). The rural laborer households are among the most economically, socially, and politically marginalized because of a high incidence of poverty in the households and because they often belong to the "lower" castes within the hierarchal arrangement of caste categories in India. Over the last decade, landlessness has continued to increase in India as have the proportions of agricultural and non-agricultural laborers in the rural workforce (Chandrasekhar 2014). Taken together, these factors have induced migration from dryland villages to irrigated villages (Ramamurthy 2010: 412) and from rural areas to urban areas where rural laborers seek out new work opportunities. Yet it is unlikely that migrating laborers find secure employment in urban areas given that the informal economy in India employs close to 92 percent of the Indian workforce (Breman, 2013). Of these informal sector laborers, around 30 million to a 100 million are estimated to be seasonal migrants (Breman 2007). Note that in rural India, a typical "poor" person is not a farmer but a casual wage laborer dependent upon irregular wages (Harriss, 1992). When migrant landless laborers return home to their villages, they do so to a place where they have been not just economically disenfranchised but also socially and politically marginalized. Rural India, thus, provides a compelling locale to understand the relations between labor migration and social change, or how migration fosters conditions for

historically subjugated communities to redefine their relationships within their own home communities.

This research draws on a Gramscian approach to socio-political change by focusing on the mechanics of counter-hegemony especially how marginalized groups resist historic relations of class and caste wherein these groups occupy a position of subjugation. These relations reproduce an agrarian society where caste and gendered hierarchies have long determined land and asset ownership, claim to dignity and respect, and, the consent of lower caste landless laborers to the social, economic, and political power geometries in the rural society that peripheralize these groups. This research provides an insight into *how* migrants resist their subjugation in their places of origin, how these changes in the relations of production impact rural elites, and explore the limits to the politics of the subaltern. In other words, the central question this paper seeks to address is, does the seasonal migration of landless laborers impact changes in social relations of production in their home villages? If so, how? While this paper explicitly engages with agrarian class and caste relations, it is unable to do so with gender relations. To the extent that this paper links migration studies and critical theory within geography, it is important to mention that feminist geographers have led this endeavor. Feminist geographers have highlighted missing scales such as the body and the household within studies of migration and the relevance of these to the analysis of migration at scales such as the nation and the region; in the analysis on mobility, theorized migration and mobility as a political process, thus, questioning the masculinist assumptions about the political-economic forces that create conditions for labor migration; illuminated the cultural struggles of migrants resulting in their interpretation and experience of spaces; brought to bear an understanding of subjectivities and identities that allow

migrants to be constituted through intersecting and competing processes; and given credence to migrant agency (Silvey, 2004). These contributions have created possibilities for the study of internal migration as a social process such as the one undertaken in this research.

The paper is organized into nine sections. I start by discussing development indicators in eastern Maharashtra in India to discuss the suitability of the research sites. This is followed by a brief description of the research methods applied for data collection. I then examine the existing literature on the relations between labor migration and social change, which, while a significant step forward from traditional approaches in geography, lacks an explanation of how migration reconfigures social relations of production. I argue that Gramscian notion of counter-hegemony provides the theoretical apparatus most suited to explain migrants' work in reshaping the cultural life of village society by positing challenges to the "common sense" of social conduct and mounting a "war of position" against the hegemony of the ruling bloc of landed farmers. This follows a longer narrative of observations from the field or the "results" of this research, which I contextualize with the existing literature through a discussion. The conclusion summarizes the findings of the research and their implications for migration policy.

2.2 DEVELOPMENT AND LABOR MIGRATION IN INDIA: STUDY VILLAGES AND RESEARCH

I study this relation between development and migration in Maharashtra, where long-term agrarian distress has adversely impacted rural populations (Vasavi, 2009). In Maharashtra, 55 percent of the population of 61.5 million lives in villages (Census, 2011), where the average size of landholding per household is only 1.4 hectares (Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India,

2014). In Yavatmal district in Maharashtra, where this research was conducted, around 740,000 people identify as “agricultural workers” while around 334,000 people are “cultivators” (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Maharashtra, 2014). Note that agricultural workers or laborers cultivate farmers’ lands for a wage. The limited employment opportunities in agriculture act as an impetus for poor rural populations to migrate out.

Around 10 percent of the state’s population lives in the Amravati division and 75 percent of this population works either as agricultural workers or as cultivators. Yet, Amravati division’s contribution to the primary sector of the economy of the state is 13.6 percent, which is low given the proportion of the population engaged in the primary economic sector; further, the Compound Annual Growth Rate in agricultural incomes over the period 1999-2012 in eastern Maharashtra has been 0.3 percent (Planning Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2013). This means that agricultural incomes have stagnated at least over the last decade and a half. Labor migration, therefore, is one of the outcomes of the limits of the rural labor market to absorb labor regionally.

Migration is an important element of the social life of people in rural Maharashtra. In rural India, 12.5 million people migrate seasonally to urban areas and to productive rural areas (Chandrasekhar & Sharma, 2014). In Maharashtra, almost three-quarters of the migrants migrate out to work in unskilled occupations, i.e. low paying temporary or seasonal jobs (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Maharashtra, 2010). Further, 63 percent of the migrants in the state migrate from a rural location to another rural location. (Chandrasekhar & Sharma, 2014). The conditions under which labor migration leads to forms of social change is

clearly important to understand the full impact of labor migration on social relations in sending communities, and is yet unexamined.

The villages chosen for this research were largely a homogeneous sample of farm villages with large number of agricultural laborers and smaller number of landholding farmers, with caste generally being a marker of land ownership. I carried out research for this paper in rural Yavatmal district in summer 2014 and summer through fall in 2015. I carried out village surveys to create lists of landowners and landless laborers by caste. The landless laborers were stratified by caste and then sampled using random sampling within the stratified groups.

I carried out research by applying qualitative methods in five villages which involved ethnographic research in three of the five villages in Summer and Fall 2015. The choice of the district and the villages hinged on two factors. First, Yavatmal is representative of eastern Maharashtra in terms of the agro-ecological factors described in this section. Second, I chose this area because of the lack of empirical inquiry of labor migration in this region where no long-term studies of rural social change exist to my knowledge.

Research for this paper involved conducting interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussion in five villages. I conducted 133 interviews with landless laborers of various lower castes, laborer-employing farmers, and labor intermediaries (*Muqaddams*) who organize intra-rural labor migration to sugarcane fields to harvest cane. For the interviews, all farmers who employ laborers were selected as well all *Muqaddam*. Given the proportionately large numbers of agricultural laborers to farmers and *Muqaddams*, agricultural laborers were stratified by caste

to ensure representation of all major lower castes in the region such as *Mahars* and *Banjaras*, and then randomly sampled.

2.3 SEASONAL LABOR MIGRATION AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE

The role of seasonal labor migrants in ushering in social change in labor home communities has a long history of political and academic attention. Lenin (1964) refers to the migratory workers as pioneers of progress for the regions that they come from, and that migration helps them "acquire new wants and new ideas". Further, migratory workers "awaken among the backward peasants' consciousness, a sense of human dignity, and confidence in their own strength" (Patnaik 2007: 304). The opportunities to work outside of their home villages, notably in urban areas, helps migrants acquire new perspectives and skills, such as a new language (de Haan et. al 2002). Rural young people in Jharkhand state in India began to migrate to brick kilns in peri-urban areas because living spaces in the brick kilns were not subject to the same kind of surveillance and social control as were living spaces at home. Migration to the kilns, therefore, served as a "temporary space of freedom" (Shah 2010). Women's independent migration in Bengal state in India allows them to dismantle old meanings associated with gendered work and assert a new sense of selves (Rogaly, 1998). Elsewhere in India, increased incomes through labor migration have resulted in greater freedom for women to pursue productive employment (Kapadia, 1999; Sen, 1999).

To understand migration as a social process, I examine the underlying tensions in rural social relations, especially those between labor-employing landowners and landless laborers. To do so, this paper builds upon the writings of Antonio Gramsci on the cultural politics of class conflicts

in the early 20th century Italy. Gramsci's work provides a theoretical apparatus to develop a sophisticated understanding of the interrelations between rural labor migration and rural social change.

2.3.1 Social Change and Common Sense

Building on the work of Lenin, Gramsci describes "hegemony" as the process of forging dominance by consent rather than by force and by leadership instead of rule (Procter, 2004). Three points further clarify the formulation of hegemony (Hall, 1986). First, hegemony is a dynamic social process that requires both active construction and positive maintenance. A crisis could mark the end of hegemony. Second, hegemony represents a degree of mastery over different positions, i.e. not just over the relations of production but over cultural, ethical, moral, and intellectual fields. Lastly, leadership in a period of hegemony is exercised by a historic bloc that includes a fraction of the dominant economic class, and in a subordinate role, strata of the dominated classes won over by the dominant classes through compromises and concessions.

Hegemony is created through class struggle and its exercise demands winning, securing, and a constant defense of this form of social power (Hall, Lumley, & McLennan, 1977) against counter or alternate hegemony. Counterhegemony or alternate hegemony is "real and persistent elements of practice" (Williams, 1977, p.112) that indicate continuous resistance and limits to hegemony. The struggle against hegemony is mounted, in among other ways, through the "war of position," which is conducted in a long-drawn-out way across varied fronts of struggle or the sites of socio-political discord. The focus here is the "enemy's" background and foundational socio-economic infrastructure, i.e. structures and institutions of the civil society and indeed the structure of the

society itself. These sites of antagonism could include cultural politics, as well as civil society institutions such as the family and schools. One of the terrains through which this battle between hegemony and counter-hegemony is fought is that of "common sense." The everyday consciousness of the masses, common sense is fragmentary and contradictory. Common sense is a product of history that masquerades as received wisdom. It is this apparent rigidity of the intellectual terrain of common sense that counter-hegemony must contend with, to bring to bear new conceptions of the world. For instance, in Rajasthan state in India, adoption of neoliberal water conservation technologies by farmers as common sense has been produced through policy instruments of the state and state water awareness campaigns (Birkenholtz, 2009). In this paper, I deploy a Gramscian understanding of counter-hegemony, which goes beyond the Leninist conceptualization of counter-hegemony crystallized within the conjuncture of an organized political force attempting to win state power (Carroll & Ratner, 1994: 10).

Through this paper, I show how Gramsci's theorization of hegemony and strategies of counter-hegemony help us understand the relations between seasonal labor migration and social change in migrant home communities. David Harvey argues that subaltern rural people migrate because migration provides an opportunity to escape from tyrannical relations and provides a chance to "hope and strive for a better life, even if that striving plays into the hands of capital as workers respond to the material incentives capital offers" (Harvey 1982). In this paper, I show how subaltern rural people seek to construct a "better life" in their home communities.

2.4 WEAKENING THE LORD: FARMERS, AGRARIAN DISTRESS, AND RURAL LABOR RELATIONS

In the villages of Yavatmal district, farmers and laborers have historically shared a mutual relation of occupational dependence, which is being transformed as laborers migrate out. In rural Maharashtra, erosion of real incomes has led to a decrease in the ability of farmers to meet their consumption expenditure (Posani, 2009). Food-based entitlements that are meant to reduce vulnerability to hunger for poor populations are further intensifying the antagonism in farmer-laborer relations as laborers' dependence on farmers for food has significantly reduced.

Wages: Farmers are unable to pay competitive wages to laborers, especially in rainfed regions, due to successive droughts resulting in reduced farm incomes. Agricultural scientists have established reduced farm incomes, conflicts over ecological resources, and changes in food preferences as the direct result of recurring droughts in recent years in Maharashtra (Udmale et. al 2014). While farmers and laborers agree about the hardships brought on farmer households due to successive droughts, farmers believe that the wages they pay are adequate for the survival of the laborers and that the laborers would spend any more earnings on alcohol and tobacco, which the farmers claim, are luxurious vices. Farmers find it difficult to increase labor wages to incentivize farm work for laborers. Farmers noted that if they did increase the wages over the standard rates paid out in the village, other farmers would berate and shame the farmers into reducing the wages. Hence wage competition is difficult to actualize.

Food entitlements: Launched in 1997 in India, the Targeted Public Distribution System or PDS is an income-based food entitlements program, through which, subsidized wheat, rice, sugar, and

household fuel is sold by the government to households earning incomes below the Indian poverty line. Farmers argue that PDS has created conditions for laborers to decline work from farmers or to provide limited male labor from their households because they do not any longer need to work for the farmers under exploitative work conditions for food grains or a wage. A farmer suggested,

> "I hope the government scratches the PDS system and instead transfers money into the laborers' account. This way, they will understand how hard it is to buy food with less money. When laborers go hungry because they're unable to buy food, they will come to work for us." (Personal communication with a farmer, October 26, 2015.)

Laborers contest this claim. They argue that PDS does not cover their households' monthly food budget. Also, there are other expenditures like healthcare, groceries, and children's school tuition. Laborers also believe that scrapping PDS would reintroduce old feudal relations in the village. Farmers once exercised greater control over the laborers' productive labor in the past because working on the farmers' fields was the only way to obtain food grains; this is no longer the case with the introduction of PDS, increased means of transportation to the nearest market, and a well-developed grains market. A laborer explained, "farmers want things to go back like they were in the past. They want us to be submissive, to accept their demands and not negotiate wages; that's why they want the PDS gone." (Personal communication with a landless laborer, October 20, 2015.)

Laborers are not buying food grains from local farmers. Farmers note that this is slashing profits for them and inconveniencing them by removing buyers in the proximity of the farms. The changes in rural social relations affected by labor migration are, thus, foregrounded in a social landscape where agrarian distress has already diminished the clout of culturally and economically dominant groups i.e. landed farmers. This, along with the reduced vulnerability of laborers to hunger through their access to food entitlements, has produced a fertile social environment for laborers to assert themselves leading to changes in rural social relations of production and indeed what it means to be a "farmer" and a farm laborer.

Farmer Subjectivity: In rural India, the distinction between the peasantry and agricultural laborers is one of class understood through ownership of means of production but also one that is socially produced through caste. In Maharashtra, only around 10 percent of rural landholdings are larger than three hectares in size (Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Government of Maharashtra, India, 2016) and 45 percent of the rural households do not own any land other than the homestead (Rawal, 2008). The differences between the minority population of labor-employing farmers and the majority population of laborers are economic because it is based on class differentiation but it is ascriptive because these two classes have been historically reproduced through their castes (Pavlov, 1978). In India, farmers had lower caste formerly "untouchable" laborers cultivate land while preserving the "purity" of their position in the caste hierarchy by not cultivating and instead supervising the cultivation of agricultural lands (Omvedt, 1980).

Farmer subjectivity, thus, is rooted in the privilege of extracting value from the land without laboring on it justified through the long-held cultural, hierarchical norms associated with the social classes of farmers and laborers. Seasonal unavailability of laborers is transforming the landscape of rural work relations and agroecology by stretching out the agricultural cycle and converting farmers into tillers of the soil. Seasonal migration of laborers is not merely imposing more work on farmers but is positing a challenge of identity. The inability of farmers to hire full-time laborers is similarly bringing into question the meaning of farmer as a social and economic category and subject position.

2.5 RURAL SOCIAL RELATIONS AND LABOR MIGRATION: RUPTURES

Seasonal labor migration has further exacerbated existing tensions in farmer-migrant labor relations in three ways: first, through the collapse of the *saldari* labor contractual employment system; second, through new performances of social relations in the village; and lastly, through the splintering of laborers into new categories.

2.5.1 The withering of the Saldari system

An important disruption in the labor arrangements in the villages in Maharashtra is the almost complete collapse of the yearlong labor contracting arrangement called the *saldari* system. *Saldars* or contracted laborers worked under conditions of serfdom with large landowning farmers. This system of bondage, during the colonial period, transformed into an annual labor contracting system where *saldar* families worked for the same farmer families over generations (Keatinge, 1921). This rural contractual system has collapsed because of the increase in the

bargaining ability of *saldars* in the context of low farm incomes by farmer households and the opening of better-paying work options outside the village through migration.

Saldars would generally approach farmers a month in advance of Hindu festivals to request for employment. Employment conditions included securing advance payments from the farmers that could be used for expenses for major social events in laboring households such as weddings. However, unlike in the past, farmers are unable to hire *saldars* for multiple reasons. First, reduced farm incomes due to recurring droughts is preventing farmers from paying the expected annual salaries of INR 70,000 to 100,000 to the *saldars*. Second, the labor requirement in agriculture has increased due to the increase in the number of rounds of crops being cultivated and planting of newer crops like wheat and sugarcane. *Saldars* are, as a result, choosing to migrate out for shorter durations instead of working for longer periods for farmers. A young laborer, who followed in his father's footsteps by working as a *saldar,* explained the relation between increased seasonal migration of *saldars* and changes in their work conditions in their home villages in the following way,

> "When my father was a young *saldar* several years ago, he had to work very hard. My father would wake up at 4 am, walk over to the farmer's dairy to clean the farmer's cowshed, and milk the cows and buffaloes. Thereafter, he would come back home, bathe, and eat food that my mother would prepare. He would then return to the farmer's fields to do agricultural work. He would work until late in the evening. As a *saldar*, I don't have to do all that. There are fewer *saldars* now. So, I can set limits to the amount of work expected from me by the farmers; they can't force me to work unlike in the case of my

father decades ago." (Personal communication with a landless laborer, September 9, 2015.)

Younger *saldars* now clearly articulate their increased negotiating ability with farmers as liberating. They are unwilling to do what they consider as demeaning work such as cleaning cowsheds or walking through the fields in the middle of the night in pitch darkness to operate water pumps. Farmers note that the *saldars* now have the power to bargain for higher salaries and that farmers need to ensure that *saldars* are happy employees. To cope with a shortage of *saldars*, aging large landholding farmers are employing sharecroppers who pay half the input costs and claim half of the profits.

The breaking down of the *saldari* system has had a lasting impact on the relations of production and social relations as they connect younger farmers and *saldars*. As I will fully engage in the next section, the Gramscian notion of counterhegemony through challenging of commonsense is rooted in these historic, agrarian economic relations of production. My interviews with farmers and *saldars* suggest that the farmers' "labor contract" with the *saldars* that should typically obligate *saldars* to provide labor for the farmers, is informal and thus legally untenable, and *saldars* are often accused of siphoning off advance payments made to them by the farmers as part of the contracts and migrating away to other villages to find work. Older farmers understand that younger laborers, just like the children of the farmers themselves, desire the life of middle-class city dwellers that includes, owning a mobile phone and wearing clean western clothing. The life of a rural *saldar* does not match with these aspirations. However, some laborers continue to work as *saldars* because of the lump-sum advance payment in the *saldari* system and

when *saldars* with infants choose to stay back in the village to attend to their children and young wives.

Saldar – farmer negotiations: Instead of signing yearlong contracts that if not legally, at least socio-culturally obligate *saldars* to provide their labor to farming families for several hours each day and gives almost no time for social reproduction, they are working as daily wage laborers for the farmers. They provide this labor upon returning from working away (through migration) in other urban and rural areas. In this new labor arrangement, *saldars* now take the liberty, while at work at farmer lands, to come back to their homes several times during the day, take breaks as they please, and demand and gain higher salaries and flexible work hours. *Saldars* are now able to break their old annual contracts with the farmers without any consequences. In the past, when a *saldar* broke a contract, no other farmer would hire them.

The tensions between farmers and *saldars* represent both a continuity and a change in the relations between landowning farmers and contractual laborers. In British India, Yavatmal district was part of the colonial Central Provinces and Berar province. In regions to the west of the colonial province, called the Bombay Presidency during British India, labor employing farmers complained about the lack of interest among laborers to work as *saldars* and increasing adoption of daily wage and piece-rate work as early as the end of the First World War (Keatinge, 1921). However, what is new is that this agrarian transition is being experienced, albeit belatedly, outside of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency in neighboring areas and that opportunities made available to migrate to urban construction sites and irrigated cane fields are playing a key role in allowing for these changes in labor arrangements to happen.

The specific changes in contractual labor arrangement, the new calculus of farmer – laborer relations, and the role of labor migration in the realization of these changes draw on the influence of subaltern studies on human geography. This influence has materialized in the excavations of the geographies of the subaltern groups and subjects (Jazeel, 2014: 91). By focusing on *saldars* here, we are presented with an opportunity to understand the migration-development relation from below.

2.5.2 Performance of social relations

The tensions in farmer-laborer relations resulting from the seasonal migration of laborers are animated in the changes in negotiations around work and the ability of the laborers to seek leisure.

A farmer has the following complaint about the travails of finding agricultural laborers to work in their fields,

> "The first thing that laborers ask these days is for us to tell them what work we are hiring them for. We would never be asked to spell out the work to the laborers. If the work sounds difficult, laborers make excuses to not work; they say that they're busy or unwell." (Personal communication with a farmer, October 27, 2015.)

Farmers are now forced to scour every hut in the labor quarters of the village to plead with the laborers to work for them. Another farmer added to the concern around hiring laborers by reminiscing hiring practices from his childhood, "We never had to do this when I was younger.

Laborers were always available and they would come to us to find work." (Personal communication with a farmer, October 26, 2015.)

Laborers argue that savings brought from the city last only a couple of weeks, during which, the laborers have some room to negotiate wages and work. Additionally, to avoid working for the farmers upon their return, labor households stretch their savings. Laborers argue that they do sit and chat for long hours in the village square "idlily" because men (laborers) have little work in the village and when recruiting farmers venture out to hire laborers, the village square is the easiest way for the farmers to find the laborers. Second, farmers notice that the struggles to survive in the city make young village laborers more brash and tough, and upon return to the village, the laborers no longer show any "respect" to the landlords. Farmers see this as a problem for peaceful co-existence in the village.

In rural Yavatmal, I found that the formerly untouchable castes (called *"Dalits"*) migrate generally only to the cities. Per a farmer,

> "*Dalits* return to the village after working away to refurbish their home, buy necessities, attend to any other needs of their family, and then, go back to their workplaces in the city. These boys don't work for us. They're ashamed of working in the fields in the village." (Personal communication with a farmer, July 19, 2015.)

A woman *Dalit* laborer further explained, "people in our generation don't want to hear the abuses of farmers. It's easier working in the city – we get paid for the work we do or we don't

get paid. It's just about money there." (Personal communication with a woman landless laborer, November 1, 2015.)

Laborers are often welcoming the breaking of clientelistic and patronage relations. Migration is facilitating these changes in social relations by opening doors of access to alternative work opportunities outside the social space of home communities that is sutured through unequal agrarian relations of caste and class. These changes become visible when migrant laborers return to their home villages to occupy the same social space inhabited by the dominant group of farmers, thus, illuminating new tensions in these groups. While migration is a proximate cause that both farmers and laborers identify, the Indian hinterland has been witnessing "New Social Movements" since the early 1970s. These movements have mobilized lower castes and the former outcastes, women, people affected by ecological and environmental crises, and farmers confronting new market production issues to demand equitable outcomes of national development processes (Omvedt, 1994). The social changes being witnessed in rural western India are located within the longer historical arc of these social movements.

2.5.3 Labor categorizations: migrants and non-migrants

To understand the production of categories within the class of landless laborers because of seasonal migration in rural Maharashtra, it is necessary to account for both the material changes in migrant labor households and the construction of new subjectivities and cultural metaphors by migrants and farmers to differentiate migrants and non-migrants within the laboring classes. Migration has facilitated this splintering of a class of landless laborers into various categories and has resulted in the production of difference.

Farmers note that non-migrant agricultural laborers as people who are hard workers who know how to work the fields. During harvest season, when labor requirement increases, non-migrant laborers organize themselves into groups and work on piece rate[1] for the farmers. In other seasons, laborers work for a daily wage. Farmers are not always enthused about this practice. Farmers complain about laborers no longer working 12-hour shifts and increasingly preferring to get employed in groups to work on piece-rate, which is, payment made for piecework instead of a daily wage.

Some farmers recruit a group of loyal non-migrant laborers who the farmers employ annually to work in the farmers' fields. This system of providing assured annual employment to a group of laborers ensures farmers a guaranteed supply of labor. Non-migrants, however, are not "incorruptible." Farmers blame migrants for passing on information to the non-migrants about the availability of high-wage earning jobs in cities, thus, influencing the decision of the formerly non-migrants to migrate. Farmers note that this leads to labor shortages in the village.

The impact of earnings and expenditure: Non-migrants in their home villages earn lower wages in comparison to the migrant wages in cities and other rural work sites. Non-migrants and intra-rural labor migrants are frugal in their spending, while rural – urban migrants spend money on travelling and buying clothes, expensive food, alcohol, and cigarettes, which, farmers consider as luxury goods for the laborers. Migrant laborers who can find stable longer-term jobs in the city

[1] Piece rate (Dictionary.com Unabridged, n.d.) is the "compensation based on a worker's quantitative output or production, usually an agreed sum per article of work turned out." This is an alternative way to make payments instead of standard daily wages or a salary.

credit their urban employment as responsible for some of the changes in their households back in their home village. A migrant explained,

> "It is because of the wages I earn in the cities that I am able to support my children's education, pay for my utilities, buy food, and will eventually arrange my daughter's marriage. I can't earn enough in the village to pay for these things." (Personal communication with a migrant landless laborer, July 28, 2015.)

Farmers consider migrant men as worldly-wise but they also note that exposure to a social work-environment where migrants find that they can earn higher wages than they are used to in their home villages turns migrants "greedy" for higher wages and material goods. Farmers also note that laborers who return home from working away become more questioning and inquisitive of village social norms. Newly returned migrant men talk like city-based working-class folks, which is different from the tone and tenor of conversations in the village. They see work in cities as "better" than agricultural work. Upon returning, migrant men often dress like urban working-class people, for instance, farmers note that migrants wear shorts in the village, which they argue is culturally inappropriate.

Farmers allege that migrants spend their time in the village square playing poker during the day instead of working for the farmers. Migrants, however, are merely frustrated with working in their home village and with being between jobs. A former migrant explains,

> "Migrant men back from working in the cities are getting ready to leave for other villages to work in cotton or cane fields. They don't want to work for the low wages offered in the village as much as they are tired and frustrated with working hard outside of the village. So, they don't want to work here too." (Personal communication with a non-migrant laborer, October 31, 2015.)

Farmers find that upon returning, migrant men behave like urban "tough men" in the village, threaten people, and show dominance. This unsettles the existing power relations in the village, where until recently, only farmers displayed power and dominance. A former migrant (now commuter) explained the difference between those who migrate and those who do not, "Non-migrants are less confident. They can go to government offices, medical shops, hospitals, etc. but they don't know how to communicate confidently. Migrants are more confident and worldly-wise. They get their work done; they can speak Hindi too." (Personal communication with a non-migrant laborer, July 29, 2015.)

When they are back in the village, migrants ask farmers questions about the work they are being hired for while non-migrants do not. Migrants have also introduced the concept of "work hours" in the village. Toward the end of the workday, migrants back in their villages start looking at their watches or phones and ask farmers' permission to leave. Per farmers, laborers asking to leave at a set time in the evening marking the end of their workday is a new phenomenon in the village. Laborers typically worked until 7 pm. Today, while non-migrants still do not mind putting in a few extra hours (often at no cost to the farmers), migrants do mind. Migrants, therefore, are playing a key leadership role in heralding the transition of an agrarian economy

and society that operates on market logic of the structuring of workday into regimented hours for production and social reproduction.

On the lines of the cosmopolitans who access multiple lifeworlds in their travels, the cosmopolitan sensibilities in this case are the new sensitivities and responses to old social relations of caste and class that the migrants bring to their home villages. It is at once emancipatory and constricted. Marginalized people challenge dominant social formations, such as the caste-class complex in rural Maharashtra, by engaging in forms of "cosmopolitanisms" (cf. Ferguson 1999, Jeffrey and McFarlane 2008) that I have outlined here, including, embodied practices that show a desire for new urban commodities, questioning old social norms and practices, changes in the tone and tenor of conversations and ways of addressing village elites, and new ways of negotiating informal work agreements that include workhours and a fix time to end work, all of which are atypical of performative rural social relations. Migrant laborers are more worldly than non-migrants, even if this migration is not transnational. The focus in this paper is not on how the subaltern become cosmopolitan, which has been discussed by others (see, Englund, 2004; Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003) but how subaltern cosmopolitanism is brought into the service of challenging dominant cultural formations and the limits of this resistance which has remained largely unexplored in the studies of cosmopolitanisms especially in the Global South. In rural Maharashtra, migrants are challenging cultural constructions of expected social behavior and conditions of servitude. Farmers are grappling with laborers seeking fixed work hours, having to explain what work they intend to hire laborers for, and confronting laborers who are no longer subservient to the farmers. Non-migrants remain marginally affected by these changes. While important, the cosmopolitanisms that travel with the

migrants do not affect the material conditions of life for all rural laborers. However, seasonal landless migrant laborers help explain what exactly constitutes cosmopolitanism from below (Pieterse, 2006), which is necessary to understand how the subaltern resist when few avenues exist.

2.6 CAN THE SUBALTERN MIGRANT RESIST?

In rural Maharashtra, seasonal labor migration has caused ripples in the social lives of the villages, impacting farmers, laborers, and relations of production. These changes are visible in quotidian politics: in new farmer and laborer subjectivities, and in a Gramscian sense, challenges posed to the "common sense" of social conduct and migrant politics of resistance visible in the migrants' "war of position" against landowning farmers.

Farmer subjectivity in rural western India has historically been constructed and reproduced through their higher position in the caste hierarchy, ownership of farmland, and their ability to supervise labor and their control over labor power (Banaji, 1994). A farmer, thus, has been a landowner from the higher, dominant castes who employs laborers to work on his lands. Migration has opened new doors of opportunity for the laboring *saldars*. These laborers lived under relations of serfdom with landed farmers in colonial India and have found little space in the peasant movements of independent India (Mies, 1976). The ability of these subaltern communities to assert themselves against landed farmers is of consequence. Not only are farmers forced to negotiate wages and terms of work with and care for the laborers, they have had to modify the kinds of work they can expect *saldars* to do. The farmer subject is no longer interpellated by the figure of the "owner" of the productive and reproductive labor of *saldars*.

The Althusserian concept of interpellation (Gidwani, 2008) here is specifically used to note that the subjectivity of "farmer" i.e. the material and cultural signifiers that signify the "farmer" has changed.

Migrant laborers are asserting their will and their sense of selves back in their home village through myriad ways, many of which are causing strife in the village community. Migrants prefer not to work for the farmers upon return, and when forced to work because of conditions of penury, seek information from farmers about the nature of work they are being hired for. Migrants find agricultural work dishonorable. They contest existing tenets of "common sense" in the community. Individuals perceive the world around them and make sense of it through uncritical and unconscious ways that constitute "common sense". Common sense is the terrain where hegemony is exercised and resisted (Karriem, 2009). Counter-hegemony is a resistant set of common sense that opposes the hegemonic forms of common sense and redefines it. Note that the attempts by dominant social groups to control the approved meanings of objects and practices in the society are rendered incomplete as marginal social groups assert their own meanings on the objects and practices (Cresswell, 1993: 251).

Hegemony is never complete. People act in the world through these sedimented and contradictory ideologies (Ekers & Loftus, 2008). It is this "common sense" that seeks to rigidify relations of production and social expectations that migrants contest through their actions. Yet, if common sense has circumscribed the lives of the subaltern and has placed them in a subservient relation with the elite, I argue that the subaltern cannot challenge the tenets of common sense without transgressing from the space that they cohabit with the elites. In other words, seasonal

migrants' travels and work in and through challenging and unfamiliar social landscapes outside of their home villages provides them with the newfound ability to reimagine their own social position and their terms of social engagement with the village elites that they must confront upon their return. Season migration plays two roles in the social lives of the migrants; first, it facilitates this transgression, and second, it brings subaltern migrants back into the same social space as the elites. By resisting old common sense, subalterns seek to construct new social relations with the elite but challenge the elite to see themselves differently, specifically, as close to equals, and not with unending privileges.

Migration catalyzes the production of social difference within the class of laborers. Migrants are sources of frustration for farmers, especially because of their refusal to work and demonstrate subservience. Migration helps migrants both socially and materially. Earnings in the city help migrants pay off loans in their home village, buy urban commodities, and accumulate savings. Living and struggling in cities provides migrants, upon return, with the necessary experience to conduct business in local government offices, which the non-migrants find harder to do. To be clear, I do not claim that seasonal migration alone is transforming labor agency into a force for resistance and social change, nor do I wish to posit that non-migrants are compliant and subservient subjects. On the other hand, my ethnographic research does not muster enough evidence to claim that seasonal migrants are, in a Gramscian sense, "organic intellectuals" or grassroots, everyday intellectuals who are advancing broader social justice goals by harnessing the existing folk stories, realities, and emotions of the same people that they are situated amidst (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). I do claim, however, that seasonal migration is producing extra-

economic changes or changes in broader social relations of production in the home communities of the migrants resulting in the perceptible reconfiguration of social power geometries. Gidwani notes in his research in the early 1990s in central Gujarat, India, that several young lower caste marginal farmers and landless laborers were choosing idleness and loitering in the village over working for a wage (Gidwani, 2000). For Gidwani, this choice to not sell labor to higher caste Patel landlords in central Gujarat reflects a newfound quest for social distinction for the laborers. Distinction is attained through withdrawal of family labor power and/or various modes of resistance at work. Yet, almost a quarter of a century since Gidwani's research on rural labor processes in central Gujarat, I note a stagnation in the nature of social change in the agrarian societies in rural western India. The stagnation of changing farmer-laborer relations represents strong structural constraints that inhibit any major social transformations. These constraints are materialized in the form of reproduction of laboring households; the limits imposed by historical relations of caste and gender-based hierarchies; and the nature of unskilled, low-waged, informal sector work that constricts the ability of laborers to renegotiate their relations with landed farmers back in their home village in a lasting and meaningful way.

India has not witnessed the classical agrarian transition which would presuppose the robust development of the industrial sector. This has resulted in a "partially proletarianized" (Harriss 1980) landless rural laborer class to depend on a variety of livelihood strategies that include continuing to work as agricultural workers in their home villages (Lerche et. al 2013). I claim, therefore, that challenges to common sense are a mode of resistance and not an attempt at redistributive class politics; they are a claim to dignity and humanity, and not seizing of the means of production. Internal migration exposes rural laborers to an urban landscape where, at

the fringes of capital, laborers from villages and cities jostle to find work, negotiate with a variety of people, are cheated by urban labor contractors, and sleep in the night on the sidewalk with one open watchful eye. Suddenly, the world of rural social relations seems far smaller and easier to navigate. Therefore, while I acknowledge the role of migrant agency in advancing counter-hegemony, I view the unmaking of common sense with caution, to both fully understand the role of extra-economic changes that migration engenders and illuminate its limitations as transformative politics.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have examined labor migration as a social process. The purpose of doing so is not to minimize the role of economic well-being. Importantly, migration is exacerbating the already strenuous social relations in rural Maharashtra. This is happening in three ways. First, old labor arrangements that tied landless labor families with farmer families are crumbling under pressure from new opportunities that migration has opened for laborers. Second, the changes in farmer-labor relations are visibile in the performance of migrant politics, both in transactions as well as in expectations of conduct from the migrants. Finally, migration of laborers has produced difference and fractured the class of landless laborers into two groups with differing subjectivities, as understood both by the farmers and the laborers themselves.

In lieu of working for the farmers, *saldars* were given food grains by the employing farming families. The expansion of food-based entitlements in rural India in the 1980s (Mooij, 1998) has rendered this relationship of reciprocity of little use to laborers. In 2015, Yavatmal district was among the top two districts in Maharashtra, in terms of the number of times the legal provisions

that specifically protect *Dalits* and tribals were invoked by people from these communities, who in rural areas, are often landless laborers (Gaikwad, 2016). Subalterns in rural Maharashtra are embracing the state in their practice of politics and not resisting their subjectification by the state (Rai & Smucker, 2006).

The Gramscian conceptualization of counterhegemony in the forms of challenges to "common sense" of social conduct and the "war of position" against hegemonic dominant groups perform three key functions in this paper. First, they help clarify the nature of social change in migrant home communities that encompasses struggles around weaponizing new subaltern subjectivities in the service of reframing the terms of social relations between the subjugated and the subjugating. Second, in his eulogy to Gramsci, Ranajit Guha (2011) outlines the influence of Gramsci on the Subaltern Studies Collective's nuanced illumination of subaltern agency in contesting elite imaginaries of Indian nationalism and struggles against the hierarchies of class, caste, and generations that structure the Indian civil society. This paper draws inspiration from this body of scholarship to recognize the role of labor migration through space in producing new fractures in rural social relations in place i.e. migrant home communities. Finally, the marriage of Gramscian social theory with the geographies of seasonal migration provides new opportunities to challenge the orthodox assumptions in migration studies about the limited ability of seasonal migration to foster cultural and social change in sending communities (Portes, 2010).

The transformative potential of the subaltern politics that migrant laborers practice is limited by agrarian structures that reproduce relations of production over generations. As Stuart Hall claims

in the context of resistance exercised by black youths in post-second World War London through forging of new youth sub-cultural practices (1976: 47),

> "The problematic of a subordinate class experience can be 'lived through', negotiated or resisted; but it cannot be resolved at that level or by those means. There is no 'sub-cultural career' for the working-class lad, no 'solution' in the subcultural milieu, for problems posed by the key structuring experiences of the class."

Following Hall, the forms of resistance exercised by the migrants from Maharashtra in their home communities are not translating into redistributive class politics or even significant reversals of socio-economic roles in the home villages. Note, however, that the attention that is paid in this research to the cultural politics of subaltern migrants in rural Maharashtra, is intended to help illuminate how the uneven geographies of the development of capitalism (Hart, 2004) are actualized and experienced, especially by subaltern, historically marginalized communities. It is this focus on agency that the clear majority of geographic contributions to migration studies have missed, and thus, by focusing on embodied agency, this research seeks to consider the views and experiences of bodies as a starting point to examine migration, which is in line with feminist geographers' unique contribution to migration studies (Silvey, 2004). While migration and development policy, both in India and globally, has focused on the integration of internal migrants in their destinations (Abbas & Varma, 2014), the quotidian political conflicts in the home communities of internal migrants continue to remain largely unexamined. Home would be an appropriate avenue, for ethnographers and for policy analysists, to understand how social change begins.

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CHAPTER 3: SEASONAL MASCULINITIES:
SEASONAL LABOR MIGRATION AND MASCULINITIES
IN RURAL WESTERN INDIA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, 740 million people have migrated within their home geopolitical entities or countries of origin, i.e. they are internal migrants (UNDP, 2009). Most of these internal migrants live in the world's two most populous countries; a sixth of China's population (over 220 million) and over a quarter of India's population (around 326 million) are internal migrants (Hugo, 2014; Srivastava, 2012). In India, between 30 million and 100 million people migrate seasonally (Deshingkar, 2006): i.e. they are circular migrants. This type of migration refers to "the fluid and repeated movement of people … between national rural and urban areas including internal cross-country migration." (IOM, 2015, page 197). This article focusses on this important stream of population movement in rural western India in order to understand gender negotiations in the course of seasonal labor migration.

Feminist geographers' significant contribution to migration studies includes the development of "insight into the gender dimensions of the social construction of scale, the politics of interlinkages between place and identity, and the socio-spatial production of borders." (Silvey, 2006, page 66). A critical examination of migration provides a compelling opportunity to understand how gender subjectivities are constituted through the intersectional politics of class, race, and gender and sexuality in relation to mobility (McDowell, 2008). In addition, there remains a pervasive challenge within gendered approaches to studies of migration to disengage

"gender" from merely being about "woman" as a presumed concretized equivalence and to deepen the gendering of masculine migrations (Ahmad, 2009). Moreover, ethnographies of marginalized men and their performances of masculinities continues to remain marginalized. (Rogers, 2008). This paper responds to these existing opportunities for expanding the frontiers of feminist geographic engagements both with studies of masculinities and labor migration in the Global South.

The role of gendered migration for livelihood and for social reproduction in the Global South has been discussed at length by scholars (Francis, 2002). Women's independent migration from rural areas has been a cause for anxiety for their families; however, women are finding new ways to assuage men's and families' "fears" (Feldman, 1992). In Rural Bangladesh, on the one hand, independent migration of single women to the urban informal sector brings concerns to their families about family status and "appropriate" female behavior, on the other hand, these families' newfound access to modern consumer goods from the incomes earned by the women may soften the concerns with social norms that are based on religious and patriarchal ideologies. (Feldman, 1992). On these lines, Thai rural women prefer employment in the urban economy because it allows them to assist their families in need in their home villages and because they are afforded opportunities for personal autonomy and self-expression. (Mills, 1999). In rural Ghana, discouraging views about independent female migrants in the community have changed dramatically (Pickbourn, 2011). Over the past decade, at least amongst a small population, families have come to terms with the financial advantages of women's migration and that women are now increasingly selecting their own partners (Tufuor, Sato, & Niehof, 2016). In regions where there is little to no independent migration of women, such as in rural India, migration and

the role of women's agency cannot be understood without examining their interlinkages with how masculinities and femininities are negotiated and transformed in the process of seasonal circulation through multiple spaces.

The emphasis in this paper on masculinities and femininities instead of merely gender roles is intentional. An approach that focuses solely on "gender roles" could neglect the ways in which both social discourses and individual performances, which are often in contradiction, together produce these "roles" (JW Scott, 1988). In the case of subaltern women and men, i.e. the large numbers of people whose lives and livelihoods are determined by the informal labor market and its associated vulnerabilities, work plays an important role in the social construction of their gendered identities. In Latin America, the increase in women's participation in the formal labor market and the related decline in men's employment in the market have empowered women, added additional work on their shoulders and has often created a "crisis of masculinity" among men (Viveros Vigoya, 2001). Men's response to social changes around them is often conceptualized as a "crisis of masculinity". However, men's reactions are, instead, a reconfiguration of their dominant position when men who are involved in gender conflicts reconstruct hegemonic masculinity to meet the demands of new economic and political conditions (Rogers, 2008, Pgs. 91-92; Jeffrey, 2010). Note that within particular cultural and historical contexts, certain forms of masculinity achieve a hegemonic position, and other masculinities are hierarchically positioned in relation to the norms associated with such hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995). "Hegemonic masculinity", thus, denotes both the plurality and hierarchy of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) in various cultures and spaces.

For those without social and cultural capital, the practice of masculinity looks different. For instance, young Puerto Rican male gang members in New York rationalize their lack of social power by redefining their masculine dignity in terms of "promiscuity and conspicuous violence" (Bourgois, 2003). In Tamil Nadu state in southern India, *Dalit* or the formerly "untouchable" caste college students construct grandiose hyper-masculine identities perceived by them as the "authentic" markers of *Tamil* men's status to resist against their marginalization in the social environment of their colleges. This allows them to build status among their cohorts (Rogers, 2008, Pgs. 85-86). Such practices, however, reinforce gender inequalities when young women quit college because of the sexual harassment and intimidation they face from male college students (Jeffrey, 2010). The ability to earn an income and thus, provide for their families, also has an indistinguishable association with men and the construction and reinforcement of masculinity. Indeed, an important aspect of the performance of provider masculinity is earning income, but it also includes ideas around control over resources, homosocial activity, and participation in the public sphere. (Hodgson, 2003).

The informal sector (including agriculture), is now employing more people than the formal sector. In several countries in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, the share of informal sector employment is around 90% (Chen, 2005). Yet, informal work may not readily map onto a certain masculine construct. In Buenos Aires, both individual perspectives and the characteristics of work are key in determining to what extent informal work is read or signified as work. Therefore, in some instances, informal work is "real" enough to affirm a valid performance of masculinity while in other cases, it is not. (Whitson, 2010, page 170). Not all work is made the

same; “it is work, albeit work that is ‘suitable’ for a man, that confers and confirms the central attributes of masculinity” (McDowell, 2003, page 833).

In this paper, I explain the connections between work in migrants’ home communities and at various rural and urban employment destinations, the relation of work to the social construction of masculinity, and gender negotiations across space. I do this by first examining the breadth of literature on the relations between gender, work, and masculinities and femininities, and how these relations are embroiled in the processes of seasonal labor migration. Second, I outline the socio-economic profile of the sites in rural western India, where this research was conducted. Third, I discuss, in two parts, how gender negotiations take place in the home villages of migrants and during their work-lives in various rural and urban migrant destinations. Finally, in concluding this paper, I summarize my findings and offer possible policy implications of this study of gendered migration and production of gender subjectivities through migration.

3.2 GENDER AND WORK, THE WORK OF MASCULINITIES, AND GENDERED MIGRATIONS

3.2.1 Women, Men, and Work in the Rural Global South

Globally, in five out of eight developing regions, women’s share of labor in agriculture has increased, presenting new opportunities for men in higher-wage off-farm work or as migrant laborers in cities within their countries of origin or internationally (Pearson, 2000), thus, also resulting in feminization of agriculture. Indeed, agriculture is becoming “feminized” across the Global South, from India, where women are dominating the wage labor market to Zambia, where women are increasingly diverting their productive labor to their own farms (Jackson, 2013).

However, the feminization of agriculture (Deere, 2005) has not resulted in a corresponding improvement in women's household decision-making roles (Gunewardena, 2010, p. 374), as wage differentials between women and men continue to be prevalent.

Note that the widely-held consensus that agriculture in the Global South is "feminizing" because of increased male migration from rural areas is often critiqued. For instance, in Thailand, agriculture has in fact "masculinized" because of mechanical innovations selectively displacing women from agriculture (Parnwell, 1996, pp. 21-22). Further, the income earning activities that are taken up by women are ideologically constructed as "female" (Francis, 2002, p. 183) and the spaces of work at home and at migrant destinations become sites both for disciplining women's sexuality and for the reproduction of the normative heterosexual family (Preibisch & Grez, 2010). What is unclear is that as agricultural laborers, both women and men, circulate within rural and between rural and urban areas, how gender is negotiated during, before, and after migration and how are these negotiations are situated within the ambit of a rural political economy, where these laborers occupy a decidedly subaltern position within structures of agrarian class, caste, and gender relations.

3.2.2 The Role of Work in the Construction of Masculinity

Gender and power relations are better understood through an analysis of the social construction of masculinity (Campbell & Bell, 2000: 535). In the case of agriculture and rural life, the ability to harness nature for production is central to hegemonic masculinity (Bryant, 1999). There is a clear relation between productive work and masculinity. Men's work that gives them control over capital and property places them in a position of power; however, for working men, this is

not the case since they do not own either. Two examples further explain the connection between work and non-hegemonic forms of masculinity. The Mexican state, to reform the image of a macho working-class masculinity, associates manliness with provider roles, while in Kenya, a "good man" is a provider, protector, and counselor for his household (Jackson, 2013). However, as Kenyan men are becoming agriculturists while abandoning their former occupation of cattle keepers, they are encountering a contradiction of masculinity because *shamba* (farm) work was always considered feminine and men who do *shamba* work are not considered "real men" (Jackson, 2013).

The foundation of masculine predominance over women and children is the ability of men to sustain themselves and their families by engaging in work. Men meet their peers at work; so, work is the masculine field par excellence and work is the key dimension of masculine identity. Additionally, social and symbolic capital is accumulated by adhering to the standards of masculine behavior and attitudes (Fuller, 2000). For instance, the pressure on men to fraternize with other men and indulge in male-bonding "vices" such as drinking alcohol is an old marker of masculine identity (Chant, 2000). Masculinities, in and out of the household, which relates to controlling wives and daughters, however, is undermined by women's contribution to the household's economic needs. Paid-work itself is not enough to transform relations within the household. The brittleness of men's sense of masculinity is the cause for the masculine crisis that women's work engenders. Relatedly, many married women are unable to convert their access to paid-work to domestic authority (Vera-Sanso, 2000).

In South Asia, the distinctive "good man", outside of the minority, elitist *Brahmin* or priest caste, is one who engages in productive work and thus, provides for his family. However, upper caste elites, especially those who either earn from their land or from white-collar jobs, have a disparaging view of the manual labor of agricultural and other laborers, to the extent that they withhold the granting of "mature male" status on laboring men. Judged harshly for their heavy drinking and unplanned saving and spending habits, laborers are infantilized by the upper caste elites as irresponsible adolescents (Osella & Osella, 2006: 48-50). Jeffrey (2010: 475) has outlined how leisure practices differentiate and cause animosity among college-educated, urban, upper-caste/class youth and the middle and lower caste/class youth, because of the ability of urban, upper-class youth to convert their increased access to full-time well-paying jobs in a neoliberal economy to expensive acts of leisure such as eating out at restaurants and buying expensive sweets at grocery stores. For the middle and lower caste/class youth, however, "leisure" is the temporal waiting room populated by youth hoping to find employment in an economy of jobless growth.

Marginalization creates conditions for exaggerated claims of potency and hyper-masculinity embodied in "protest masculinity" (Connell, 1995). Indeed, men who do not find themselves associated with the dominant culture, construct their own gender identity by "negotiating the meanings and practices of their own original culture and that of the dominant majority" (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998, p. 146). Protest masculinity, thus, encapsulate embodied practices of men who are systemically deprivileged by the social hierarchies that these men find themselves enmeshed within.

The elite and the subaltern, however, are not fixed in place, geographically and culturally. As working-class women and men travel between places in search of livelihood opportunities, they confront new conditions under which they are forced to negotiate their gender identities. Seasonal migration and migrant work provide a unique and less explored opportunity to understand how masculinity is constructed, the role of work in the construction of non-hegemonic masculinity, and how migration reworks masculinity and gendered social relations, as women and men migrate between one exploitative labor market and another.

3.2.3 Migrant Subjectivities and Social Change

Feminist geographers argue that migration patterns, meanings, and experiences are produced as migrant subjectivities operate in conjunction with labor markets, wage differentials, and legal regulations (Silvey, 2004). Migration has a notable impact on gender identities. The migration of Malaysian men from Sarawak, for instance, has left rural Malaysian women behind and has led to the emergence of new gender identities, such as the "*Indai Blue*", or a rural sex worker who is "exploited by affluent men, despised by other women, and stigmatized by the community at large" (Hew, 2011). Independent migration of women to the cities in South Asia is rare although more women generally sustain ties with their home areas compared to men. In certain cases, women who migrate independently may be subject to social alienation or stigmatization. For example, in the Hausa region of northern Nigeria, women who migrate independently to cities are presumed to be engaging in *kurawanci* or prostitution in the cities for survival (Chant, 1992). On these lines, the moral status of South Indian Keralite women, who migrate independently to work as nurses in the Middle-East and the United States, is routinely questioned in their home communities (George, 2005).

To understand masculinities as a social construction and thus "flexible", it is important to understand how masculinity is constituted through migration. In case of the Mexican peasantry in San Marcos, men are expected to migrate to the United States and not doing so draws into question the masculinity of the peasant men. However, working in low-wage jobs in the US and leaving behind their roles as farmers strips the San Marcos peasants of their masculinity. Note that migrant men's sense of manhood is significantly affected by them performing work that is beneath their skill levels (Hibbins, 2000). Meanwhile, new meanings of "woman" are constructed as women who stay back start participating actively in masculine spaces that include farming and managing finances in addition to their roles in household social reproduction. Non-migrant masculinities are expressed through aggressive displays of masculinity that includes bouts of drinking, shootings and domestic violence, as well as men "joking" about their control over women in the community (Boehm, 2008).

Beyond cultural differences, men and masculinity come to be defined contra women and femininity. Among men, hierarchization centered on masculine characteristics produces the super-masculine or the dominant form of masculinity, which is hegemonic. In other words, "hegemonic masculinity" is an idealized or desired masculinity discursively produced in ideas and concretized in style and practices of dominance. The values associated with hegemonic masculinity, i.e. certain ways of being and behaving, is what all men measure themselves against (Connell, 1987). The association of masculinity with power, however, varies with cultural contexts (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994). However, hegemonic masculinity does not operate in a social vacuum; our understanding of the impact of the hierarchies beset within class, race, and

sexuality on men's lives would enable a clearer understanding of masculinities more broadly (Hibbins & Pease, 2009).

Osella & Osella (2006: 43), in their ethnography of international migration from Kerala, examine the connection between labor migration and the construction of masculinity. In Kerala, where migration is associated both with practice and aspiration, it has become a part of the male lifecycle where migration is a determinant in the transition from boyhood dependencies to manly wage-earning. The Keralite migrant men who are married and cannot afford to move their families with them to the Middle-East, justify their decision to not bring along their families in ways that both infantilizes women and children and constructs women as sanctified objects of honor who would change and "lose their culture" by being exposed to regions outside of their home state. Not only are the Muslim Middle-Easterners constructed as the dangerous other, the Middle East itself comes to be constructed as a place unsuited for hetero-patriarchal families. Thus, the association of adventure with migration allows for migration to be coded as uniquely masculine that men challenge themselves with as women and children guard tradition and culture back home.

While paid work constitutes a crucial element in migrant masculinity, women's duties are largely circumscribed to the household that includes the physical and emotional well-being of men and care for children, the elderly, and household – all work but non-remunerative (Conway-Long, 2006). In South Asia, productive work, earning and spending money, and the act of being in public spaces are all coded as masculine activities (Chopra, 2004). In Indian factories, women work in segregated areas or in a manner that is more restrictive in comparison to their male co-

workers. In these factories, a "worker" is often gendered as masculine and the presence of women in an arena that is coded as masculine is viewed with suspicion (Osella & Osella, 2006, p. 14), thus further concretizing the association of women and femininity with social reproduction. Migrants' temporary stay in cities, however, provides them with unique cultural exposures and an opportunity to view their roles as men and women differently, i.e. situated masculinities and femininities are configured in unique ways. For instance, rural Guatemalan women with access to urban migrant relatives in the country were likely to be more aware of contraception (Lindstrom & Muñoz-Franco, 2005), thus having the ability to exercise greater control over their bodies. In Kerala, remittances from male migrants in the Middle-East has resulted in women's withdrawal from agriculture. This withdrawal is understood as a marker of higher social status that poorer households also find themselves compelled to emulate (Hapke, 2013). Migrant men who bring with them to their destinations firm beliefs and well-established practices about manhood and gender relations, find themselves compelled to change their own understanding of masculine identity and their relations with their spouses and families (Donaldson & Howson, 2009, p. 210).

In this research, I focus on the type of migration that large numbers of the rural poor engage in for livelihood opportunities and seek to understand how masculinity and femininity are negotiated during seasonal migration. To do this, I apply gender as an analytic of power (Ramamurthy, 2000, p. 403) and understand that masculinity and femininity "are not original, natural, or embalmed states of being; they are gender categories whose precise meanings constantly shift, transform into each other, and ultimately make themselves into whole new

entities" (Gutmann, 2006, p. 21). I examine how these categories are constructed through seasonal migration.

3.3 SEASONAL MIGRATION AND GENDER NEGOTIATIONS IN RURAL MAHARASHTRA, INDIA

I study the negotiations around masculinity and femininity in the context of seasonal migration in the Indian state of Maharashtra, where rural populations have been adversely impacted by long-term agrarian distress (Vasavi, 2009). This paper is an outcome of my long-term engagement in rural eastern Maharashtra to study the social and agrarian change in rainfed areas. In the state, close to half of the population of 61.5 million live in villages (ENVIS Centre on Population and Environment, 2011), where farming households own an average of 1.4 hectares of agricultural land (Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, 2014). This research was conducted in Yavatmal district, where 334,000 people are landowning farmers. While these farmers own agricultural land, twice as many people in the region are landless laborers who work on farmers' lands (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Maharashtra, 2014). The dependence of a large population on small landholdings creates fertile conditions for out-migration.

Yavatmal district is a part of the Amravati administrative division in eastern Maharashtra where 10 percent of the state's population lives and three-fourths of this population is involved in agriculture. However, Amravati division's contribution to the overall agricultural sector of the state is a low 13.6 percent (Planning Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2013). This is in part because only six percent of the land where crops are grown is irrigated, while the rest is

cultivated with seasonal rains. The Compound Annual Growth Rate in agricultural incomes over the period 1999-2012 in eastern Maharashtra is a trivial 0.3 percent. This stagnation in agricultural incomes means that agriculture is not a reliable source of livelihood both for landless laborers as well as farmers who employ them. In rural Maharashtra, migration is central to social reproduction for the marginalized communities. It is important to note, however, that most of this seasonal labor migration is linked with the survival of rural households; in Maharashtra, almost three-quarters of the migrants migrate out to work in low-paying temporary jobs (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Maharashtra, 2010) and 63 percent of rural Maharashtrian migrants migrate to other villages (Chandrasekhar & Sharma, 2014). This paper provides a unique opportunity to understand how gender relations are negotiated at the margins of rural society and how these negotiations, in turn, produce new meanings of subaltern masculinity and femininity, circumscribed by structural power relations within which these women and men are situated.

3.3.1 Field villages and research methods

I conducted research for this paper by applying qualitative methods in five villages in rural Yavatmal district in 2014 (June through July) and in 2015 (June through October.) I created lists of landowners, most of whom are from upper Hindu castes, and landless laborers who are generally from various lower Hindu castes and Buddhists who have converted from Hinduism. Thereafter, I stratified the landless laborers by caste and then sampled using random sampling within the stratified caste groups. These villages were homogeneous and home to a large number of landless agricultural laborers and small landowning farmers. Caste often determined land ownership, with the higher castes often being the typical labor-employing, landowning farmer.

I conducted 133 interviews, with landless laborers of various lower castes (both women and men), landowning and laborer-employing farmers (almost always, men), and labor intermediaries (called *Muqaddams*, all men) who work on behalf of cane factories to hire, transport, and supervise labor on cane fields. I interviewed all 49 labor-employing farmers and 12 *Muqaddams* in the villages, given their relatively smaller number in comparison to the migrant and non-migrant laborers. Non-migrant laborers are those who live and work in their home villages. I interviewed a sample of agricultural laborers (both seasonal migrants and non-migrants) across caste to ensure representation of all major lower castes in the region such as *Mahars* and *Banjaras*. In rural India, agricultural labor is tied to an untouchability status and is a common occupation among the formerly untouchables or "*Dalits*" (Omvedt, 1993). Farmers, who own land and employ agricultural laborers are overwhelmingly not *Dalits*. Caste and class in rural India are therefore tied both through statistically and through imaginaries (Osella & Osella, 2006, p. 39).

The migration cycle of rural laborers in eastern Maharashtra follows the rhythm of the harvest timings of various crops grown in this region. Laborers typically migrate out across the state's southeastern border into Telangana state in October to pick cotton and thereafter in November to the cane fields in western Maharashtra and across the state's southwestern border into Karnataka state to harvest cane. Conducting research at the home villages of the laborers brought a certain semblance of equality in power relations between me, the researcher, and my research subjects, since I was the only "foreigner" in this case learning from my research subjects. The seasonal migrants of Yavatmal district are "still rooted" (McHugh, 2000, p. 79) in their home villages,

which they clearly identify with “home” through kinship networks, spatial familiarity, and cultural-linguistic knowledge. Given the importance of the home villages for the migrants and my own acquaintance with the region through my research projects in the region since 2012, I conducted this research while the migrants were in their home villages. Yavatmal district is an ideal choice for this research project because the agro-ecological factors mentioned in this section in Amravati division in eastern Maharashtra are congruent with similar conditions in the district. Further, to my knowledge, long-term studies of place-based changes in gendered social relations do not exist in this region, thus, presenting an opportunity for an empirical inquiry.

3.4 DURING MIGRATION: THE GENDERING OF MIGRANT DESTINATIONS AND WORK

Migrants in rural Maharashtra seasonally migrate out of their home villages to various destinations within and outside their home state to find work in rural, urban, and peri-urban areas. The key migration streams from rural Yavatmal district are to (a) farms in irrigated areas for agricultural labor; (b) cotton processing factories, popularly called cotton ginning and pressing factories; (c) cotton fields in other villages to pick cotton; (d) sugarcane fields to harvest cane; (e) brick kilns generally in peri-urban areas; and lastly, (f) to cities primarily to work on construction projects as day laborers. The work of production and reproduction in these spaces is highly gendered. I discuss the major migration streams, the gender distribution of work, and gender negotiations in this section.

Cotton fields: Laborers migrate to cotton fields in Telangana state and within Maharashtra seasonally to pick cotton. The cotton harvesting season in the southern and central Indian

drylands is from October through February. However, most of the cotton picking in the regions where these laborers migrate to is completed by early November.

On the cotton fields, women migrants are widely acknowledged as more efficient cotton pickers than men and thus, the principal earners in comparison to their husbands. Yet, male migrants are reluctant to code cotton picking as "women's work". Further, women and men are not paid individual daily wages; instead they are paid as a unit for the cotton picked by them. Married couples migrate to cotton fields, sometimes with their children. Both women and men find cotton fields to be a convenient location to migrate and live temporarily. A woman laborer said, "I prefer working in the cotton fields. We are given a place to stay, firewood, and water. It's much more convenient than any other place that I have worked outside." (Personal communication with a woman migrant laborer, September 03, 2015.) Women prefer to migrate to cotton fields also because cotton fields cause relatively less disruption to the work of social reproduction. A migrant woman laborer explained,

> "My husband and I migrate to the cities to work on construction sites and try to return home as soon as we can. If we stayed longer, we wouldn't be able to go to the cotton fields in Telangana to pick cotton. Everyone in the family can work together in the cotton fields. In the cities, it would be just me and my husband." (Personal communication with a woman migrant laborer, September 03, 2015.)

In the cotton fields, women find themselves responsible for cooking at home like they are in their home villages. While the work of social reproduction is performed by women, despite their labor

efficiencies, women gain little relative to men, in terms of their share of the exchange value of cotton. However, the proximity of several of these cotton fields to forests produces risky human-animal interactions. So, cotton fields are not risk-free migrant destinations but they are desirable because these spaces both valorize women's labor and create conditions for social reproduction of labor households identical to the ones at home.

Sugarcane fields: Laborers in rural Yavatmal district migrate seasonally to the highly irrigated Pune and Kolhapur districts in western Maharashtra to harvest cane. The cane harvest season generally begins around late fall (October/November) and ends around mid-spring (March/April). Sugarcane factories in western Maharashtra contract village-based male *Muqaddams* to hire migrant labor. Laborers are not hired individually; instead, migrant laborers are hired in *toley* (groups) of twenty laborers, often consisting of ten married couples. Widows are sometimes accommodated in the *toley* too. The payment for harvesting cane is made to each couple in the form of a large lump sum amount several months in advance of their travel to the cane fields, which guarantees labor supply for the sugar factories during the harvest season. Multiple *toley* migrate from one sugarcane field to another until they have worked off the payments that they are given. When laborers cut additional cane beyond the advance payment, they are offered additional payments.

The work of production (harvesting cane) and social production in sugarcane fields are highly gendered, thus, re-creating the patriarchal social power relations that suture social life in the home villages of the laborers. A male laborer explained, "men typically cut cane and women tie the cane into bundles. If men slow down or are unwell, women take over and cut cane instead. At

that point, men would need to tie the cane into bundles." (Personal communication with a laborer, July 2014.) Widows are expected to both cut and tie cane into bundles by themselves. Women also assist with cutting when men are exhausted. A male laborer explained, "it's easy to cut the first harvest but it's harder to cut the second and third harvests that grow from the cane stump. We need women's help with cutting the latter." (Personal communication with a male migrant laborer, September 2, 2015.)

Negotiation and bargaining on labor and wages happens between the men in the *toley* and the *Muqaddams*. Women in the *toley* sometimes negotiate with the wives of the male farmers whose cane fields the laborers are brought to harvest. Women's negotiations center around finding potable water and a location to erect temporary residential tents where laborers live while working in the cane fields and seeking a bonus amount for timely and efficient cutting of cane. *Muqaddams*, who supervise cane harvesting in the fields, make various concessions for the women in the *toley* so that they can take care of their household responsibilities. A woman laborer explained,

> "Men leave early in the morning to cut cane and we join them later after we have finished cooking for the day. When we arrive at the fields, we serve food to our men and then leave them to eat as we tie up the cane that the men would have cut in the morning, into bundles."

Laborers (both men and women) return to their tents at the same time in the evening. Women, however, are expected to cook and clean their tents in the evening.

Urban construction sites: Laborers migrate to work on construction projects in urban Maharashtra for short periods of time in summer. Typically, they rent out single rooms in the slums adjoining these construction sites. Male laborers prefer for the women in the families to not migrate to cities. One of the arguments they advance in support of their preference is their paternalistic understanding of cane fields and cotton fields as being more village-like and thus familiar for women, unlike cities that are unfamiliar for women, and thus presumed to be difficult to navigate.

Construction sites do not provide the kind of extended familial support that are available on cotton and sugarcane fields. A widowed woman laborer explained,

> "I went to Pune city near Mumbai several years ago to find work but never found any, even though I searched for around two to three weeks. When we exhausted our savings and my children and I were no longer able to buy enough to eat for two to three days straight, I decided to return to our village. We never went back to the city to find work." (Personal communication with a woman laborer, October 22, 2015.)

In urban factories, men work on machines or do the heavy lifting. Women are employed to cut, sew, and clean. On construction sites, rural migrant men are tasked with mixing concrete, which is considered arduous, while women are responsible for carrying concrete in baskets on their heads to the buildings under construction, which is considered relatively less strenuous. Women are paid lower wages than men (close to half of men's wages) regardless of the work done by them. In their temporary huts in the urban slums, women wake up earlier than men do, attend to

cooking and cleaning, and try to be at work at the same time as men. However, men who travel to cities by themselves, congregate and make meals together. More considerate urban labor contractors allow women to leave from work a bit earlier than men for them to attend to cooking and cleaning at home. However, when the women are late to work in the morning due to housework, their husbands are rebuked by the contractors.

Migrant experiences at various destinations explain multiple strands of gender negotiation during seasonal migration. First, in multiple rural destinations that include cotton fields and sugarcane fields, women's wages and men's wages are folded together into a "couple's wage". People in Hindu India do not think of either themselves or others as unified, indivisible beings or individuals; instead, the determining characteristic of people is that of "dividuals" or having the ability to be further divided, being formed of multiple strands, and being able to disseminate parts of oneself to others (Marriott, 1989). So, household labor and not individual labor is valued by the employers of the migrants. Yet, this tethering of the labor of women and men clearly renders marriage as a gendered social institution that is sine qua non, necessary not just for men to assert and claim masculinity, but also to be able to access particular labor markets for the migrants.

Second, the cotton fields where migrant male laborers work alongside women migrants helping them pick cotton almost as their assistants, are in stark opposition to farms in the home villages of the migrants where the men would not do weeding, which is considered women's work. Yet, cotton picking, which neither the men are efficient at nor does it involve the display of macho heavy lifting, is preferred by rural migrant men. Feminist geographers have theorized "flexible

and strategic masculinities" that allow men to put on hold characteristics of their gender identity while they are away working in foreign cities temporarily, while selectively emphasizing aspects of their gender identity that would benefit them in the labor market (Batnitzky, McDowell, & Dyer, 2009). I claim here that this could be easily said of seasonal migrant men in rural Maharashtra, and not just of foreign workers in London, but more importantly, I emphasize the social construction of flexible masculinities that does not merely involve the performance of flexible masculinity by migrant men, but the embroilment of migrant women and the employers who are often themselves men. On these lines, migrant destinations are socially produced gendered spaces where employers often allow migrant women and men to act as properly gendered subjects, where women cook and clean and attend to their children and men leave for work early in the morning, to mimic gender performances in the migrants' home villages.

Third, the widely-held consensus among seasonal migrants that rural women migrants prefer to work in rural destinations and not in the cities accounts for the weight given in the household to women's ability to continue to participate in social reproduction at and away from their home communities in the selection of migrant destinations. Second, it also accounts for how the " rural" is discursively produced as the virtuous other as compared to the cities, filtered through patriarchal assumptions of where women would become corrupted and where they could be better controlled. The connections between women's decision on where they choose to work and their ability to continue to participate in social reproduction have been explored by other scholars. In Buenos Aires, for women in the popular classes or the urban working poor, the selection of workplace was important in their gender performance, and these women, who are involved both in production as well as social reproduction justify their employment, since norms

of motherhood disassociate such women from the workplace, by incorporating paid work into the performance of mothering (Whitson, 2010, page 167). Women in rural Maharashtra, as do men, prefer rural destinations for women i.e. places where employers provide shelter and access to drinking water and electricity because it is easier for women to bring children along to these places. Rural employers who are, further, considerate enough to let women attend to other household needs such as cooking and cleaning, allow migrant women to perform their principal roles in social reproduction effectively. Note that other scholars have pointed to how international migrant women farmworkers' movements and sexuality are curtailed on rural destinations by restraining their movement, imposing curfews, and limiting visits from men. The people who impose these restrictions include supervisors, farm operators, and security guards (Preibisch & Grez, 2010). My research shows that at least in the case of internal migration to rural areas, male migrants' paternalistic sense of well-being for women justified through marriage or other kinship allows additional modes of policing and surveillance on women migrants, which is possible in rural destinations. Male migrants, thus, characterize rural areas using the same registers that are used to construct an "honorable" woman through the male gaze, which is, virtuous, untainted, and tamable.

3.5 BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION: NEGOTIATING GENDER

In rural Maharashtra, not all laborers migrate seasonally. Those who do not migrate at all, avail themselves of the limited work opportunities in agriculture in their home villages. Gender negotiation in the home villages of the laborers happens in three ways. First, through the active gendering of work in agriculture. Second, the masculinizing of "women's work" or the compensation for the loss of masculinity that comes with doing "women's work" by payment of

higher wages to non-migrant men who do these works. Lastly, through the role of gendered power relations that determine where and when women and men migrate.

3.5.1 Gendering work in agriculture

In their home villages, women's roles in agriculture are limited to weeding and harvesting, while men do the "hard labor" of tilling, plowing, spraying pesticides and insecticides, and digging drainage canals. Weeding, in particular, is gendered as marginal, "women's work" in agriculture. Migrant men, when they are back in their home villages, do manual weeding only when they are in conditions of penury. This work is reserved almost exclusively for women and occasionally for non-migrant men. A non-migrant laborer explained, "Non-migrant men typically join a women's group to work on piece-rate. There are generally around three men in a group of around 18 women." (Personal communication with a male non-migrant laborer, September 9, 2015.) Farmers concur with this common-sense consensus in the village about the gendering of weeding as "women's work." A large-land owning farmer explained, "Men (laborers) don't do women's work in our fields. It doesn't look good on men to do women's work." (Personal communication with a landowning farmer, July 19, 2015.) There is, however, nothing natural about the gendering of certain works as masculine and others as feminine. The stereotypes that masculinize certain works because of their relation to physical strength are a result of the gender segmentation of the labor market (Pineda, 2000).

Men do weeding, however, when they are offered higher wages than those offered to women. There is no consensus among farmers on why men are paid twice or more of the women's wages. A farmer commented, "men charge twice the wage of women but they don't do twice the amount

of work as women." (Personal communication with a landowning farmer, July 1, 2014.) A migrant laborer explained why these wage differences are not about the relative contribution of productive labor,

> "Farmers attempt to hire us to do weeding and other 'women's work' and pay us 'women's wages.' How can we work on women's wages? Would be it suffice for men to work on women's wages? So, we don't work here and find work elsewhere." (Personal communication with a landless laborer, September 5, 2015.)

Despite the wage discrimination, men find weeding embarrassing and unbecoming as masculine work. Men (both farmers and laborers) justify laborers' unwillingness to do weeding by explaining the physical inability of men to bend down and work, which is required to do weeding.

In the Global South, within agricultural labor, men plow, sow, spray, fertilize, and transport, while women's work is transplanting seedlings and weeding. The gender dimension of the agricultural division of labor is reinforced by its ritual aspect, which implicitly represents the land as a female goddess, who is plowed, sown and fertilized (impregnated) by the men, while women nurture (grow, gestate) the seedlings. A masculine status apparently consolidated in one arena – work – requires reiterated performance to maintain its effectiveness (Delaney, 1992, page 41).

Another agricultural occupation that is coded as masculine and closed for women is the *saldari* labor contracting system, wherein non-migrant landless laborers hire themselves out to work with farmer households in an annual contractual system. Since women are principally involved in the work of social reproduction, including cooking and cleaning in their homes, they are not hired as *saldars*, who would spend around 16-18 hours every day working for a farmer, and hence, are not expected to contribute their labor at home.

3.5.2 Protest Masculinity and the Gendered Exploitation of Labor

In rural Maharashtra, in addition to spaces of work, the spaces for leisure are gendered as well. Farmers find migrant male laborers, upon their return, sitting in the village square and not working for the farmers or for anyone else. A farmer said the following disparagingly about migrant men, "unlike migrant men, migrant women work for us. These [migrant] men just eat and hang around in the village [upon their return]." (Personal communication with a landowning farmer, October 26, 2015.) Women laborers agree with this general assessment of farmers, though they do not agree on the reasons why men do not work upon their return. A woman non-migrant laborer explained,

> "Men [laborers], in general, don't find a lot of work around here [in agriculture]. Women, both migrant [upon their return] and non-migrant, are willing to work for the low wages that farmers give us, but men would not work for those wages." (Personal communication with a woman laborer, October 31, 2015.)

The male laborers' ability to migrate, however, has enabled them to decline work at home, as limited as its availability in the village. In a deeply racialized rural society, where *Dalits* have been expected to accept any work offered to them by the upper-caste landed farmers on any terms, laborers can decline work because of their ability to migrate and accumulate savings that they have previously never had access to. Landed farmers have little tolerance for migrant landless male laborers back from the cities and villages, spending their time idling and chatting in the village square. This performance of carefree aloofness by migrant male laborers against the historically dominant community of landed farmers has a resonance in the performative racial politics on the streets in the United States. As a defense against racism and poverty, Black men use postures of aloofness and fearlessness. "As a performance, cool pose is designed to render the black man visible and to empower him; it eases the pain of blocked opportunities. Being cool shows both the dominant culture and the black man himself that he is strong and proud. He is somebody. He is a survivor… in spite of centuries of hardship and mistrust." (Billson & Majors, 1992, page 6).

This resistance to historically dominant social relations, however, is gendered, and women are excluded, and this gendered social change is not limited to Maharashtra alone. In rural Gujarat, seasonal migration has transformed the political consciousness of young lower caste *Vankar* laborers. However, *Vankar* women are excluded from these changes because of their participation, unlike those of *Vankar* men continues to remain constrained (Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003). The village square, as a space for leisure, is masculinized. A woman migrant laborer explained,

> "Women do not hang out in the village square because they are busy throughout the day; they are weeding [farmers' lands], or cleaning, cooking, or taking care of their children at home. Migrant and non-migrant men [laborers] have little work in the village in these days. So, they hang out at the square." (Personal communication with a woman migrant laborer, July 17, 2015.)

In addition to the significantly higher exploitation of women's productive and reproductive labor, traditional patriarchal norms regarding gendered access to the village square for leisure occlude women's access to this space. A local commuting laborer explained,

> "It's not a tradition in this village for women to sit in the public and chat with others. Instead, when women have spare time, they sit together on the mud road in front of their houses and talk with each other. They talk as they peel garlic skin for cooking at home." (Personal communication with a local commuting laborer, July 19, 2015.)

Public spaces, including the village square and the mud road in front of huts, are not only gendered, women's access to their own space of leisure is merely an extension of their unending burden of reproductive labor in their households.

In their newfound ability to decline work and define leisure in their own terms by occupying the village square during "work hours", we find the performance of male labor migrants' protest masculinity. Migrant laborers are both asserting their selves as individuals who can make social and economic choices and who do not exist in old social relations with farmers. They are

declining work offered by higher caste farmers whose exploitation of the lower caste laborer families have left deep scars. The key characteristics of protest masculinities include independence and street space. These are important in creating hyper-masculine identities (Nayak, 2003), which are central to protest masculinities. I claim here that the association of protest masculinities with working poor men is partial and must account for how these acts of resistance against hegemonic forms of masculinities or class relations are sustained on the exploitation of women's labor, often with little acknowledgment. An important connection that binds together women's and men's labor and their social lives is that of marriage. Marriage, in turn, impacts migration decisions of men and women differently. I examine this in the next sub-section.

3.5.3 Marriage, Men, and Seasonal Migration

Researchers have written extensively about internal migration by women in India due to marriage, more commonly called "marriage migration". However, there is little evidence of how marriage differently affects men and their decision to migrate or where they migrate. First, after marriage, *saldars* or annual contractual laborers with farmers stop working for farmers and start seasonally migrating out because the familial demands of marriage conflict with the demands of being a *saldar*. A migrant laborer explained,

> "A *saldar*'s work is strenuous; we start working from 4 am until we go to bed in the evening. We are away from our families for several hours at a stretch despite all of us living in the same village. The farmers are very exploitative. After marriage, I stopped working as a *saldar* and started to migrate seasonally. One of the reasons I don't like

> working in the village is that farmers don't pay us enough while making us work very hard. They also treat us very poorly." (Personal communication with a male seasonal migrant, July 28, 2015.)

Marriage, therefore, burdens men with the responsibility to care for their own families and to participate in social reproduction, at the least, by being available at home. Second, marriages are important community events that bring migrant men back to their home villages, where they reconnect with their extended kinship networks. A marriage in the village is an important avenue for strengthening these networks that come to help during times of financial duress, to find potential suitable brides and grooms for families with adult unmarried children, and to form a sense of community which is absent in migrant destinations.

Two key points here help understand the significance of marriage in migrant masculinities. First, in South Asia, compulsory marriage and fatherhood signify compulsory active heterosexuality, which plays a significant part in the construction of masculinity (Osella & Osella, 2006, page 41). Second, more generally, for a man to start and maintain a family, he must meet three prerequisites. First, he must be in employment with remunerations; second, he must manage his earnings and savings responsibly; and third, he must ensure that the economic stability of his household brought on by his employment and access to wages is not jeopardized in any way (Pringle & Whitinui, 2009). The event of marriage, therefore, is a conjunctural spectacle in the lives of migrant men that enables men to make claims to heteronormative masculinity. However, beyond the event itself, migrant men must reinforce this claim iteratively by breaking relations of work (such as the *saldari* labor contracting system) that hinder them from consummating their

marriage and having children in the context of proper conjugal relations and form new relations of work that gives them access to a steady source of income, which, in this case, is through seasonal migration.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this paper, I examine the gender dimension of seasonal labor migration in rural western India. I focus on gender negotiations among migrants through the course of their travel, i.e. both when they are away from their homes working in varied types of migrant destinations and when they are back in their home villages. I discuss how masculinity is constructed, transformed, and flexibilized in the course of seasonal migration and how migrant work is intrinsically connected with gender negotiations and masculinities. I made the following two major claims in this paper. First, the politics of resistance of seasonal migrants can be understood by examining how seasonal migrant men deploy protest masculinities to subvert claims on their body and labor by elite men who have historically been in a dominant relation with the laborers. I find that protest masculinities do not emerge in a vacuum; they are buttressed by continued exploitation of women's labor, as subaltern men attempt to renegotiate their relations with elite men. On these lines, I also show in this paper the flexibility of masculinities, where migrant laboring men find it offensive to do "women's work" such as weeding in their home villages, but do not mind working alongside women in cotton fields to pick cotton given the monetary returns associated with cotton picking. More broadly, I show that migrant destinations themselves are gendered spaces that are constructed by the active consensual work of women and men migrants and employers alike.

Second, seasonal migrants enter migration cycles from rural spaces that are gendered, both in the arenas of production and social reproduction. In these spaces, masculinity is iteratively constructed through gendering of work and the masculinizing of "women's work" when performed by men through monetary incentivization. It is these spaces that seasonal migrants leave only to return at the end of the migration cycle. I find that rural migrant destinations are the preferred choice of destination for migrant women, both themselves and for them by migrant men. This is so because rural destinations are already gendered as spaces conducive for social reproduction and discursively constructed in the language of the idealized woman.

There are several policy implications of this research. First, gender relations are key to fully understand the relations between migration and development. Second, the emphasis here on masculinities of the poor as distinguished from hegemonic masculinity is important because it highlights how men across class benefit differentially from patriarchy; I show that seasonal migration itself is an outcome of uneven development that renders landless laborers in the drylands at a stark disadvantage in comparison to landed peasants and urban workers. Finally, through a comprehensive discussion on multiple migrant destinations – both rural and urban - this research seeks to destabilize the figure of the typical migrant in migration studies literature concerning the Global South, as a man leaving village life and agriculture for a formal sector job in the city, to populations that occupy a subaltern position both in their homes and at various destinations. Doing so would encourage policymakers to view migrant identities, homes, and destinations as not "natural", concrete, and thus, pliable to be changed through positivist developmental interventions. Instead, the interweaving of various spatial relations and the temporal distinctions of gender negotiations in the migrant work-lifecycle discussed here should

encourage future policy research into what specific policy interventions can socially and economically empower the migrants and whether these interventions must kindle a new “politics from below” that can convert migrant resistance into transformative change.

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CHAPTER 4: BROKERING MIGRATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: LABOR INTERMEDIARIES AND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF CANE LABOR MIGRATION IN WESTERN INDIA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Among migrant labor communities, it is common to have an intermediary or broker who mediates between parties, such as the labor migrant and an employer. A typical broker is a man who embodies multiple expertise, who could be a "professional" or an amateur involved in labor recruitment by chance or because of his social position (Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012). Unlike the extensive literature on the causes and consequences of migrant departure from their home communities and arrival in specific destinations, the literature on migration infrastructure, which is, the institutions, networks, and people that facilitate migrant mobility, is scant (Goss & Lindquist, 1995; Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012). Focusing on migration brokers instead of migrants allows for a conceptualization of the infrastructure that actualizes mobility. This focus on the infrastructure of migration and not on the migrants is a corrective to the "artifact of methodologies" in migration studies that have paid little attention to entrepreneurs and brokers in migration at the cost of illuminating migrants and their families and communities (Hugo, 2004). Further, through ethnography and application of qualitative methods, it becomes possible to problematize the binary view of brokers and brokerage as either altruistic social networks or profit-minded; it allows for the weaving of a more complicated narrative of brokering that fully incorporates profit, trust, and empathy, and not one or the other (Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012). In this paper, I focus on the intermediaries who mediate a very specific form of internal labor migration, i.e. those of economically and socio-politically marginalized rural communities

on a seasonal basis to the sugarcane fields of rural western India. By focusing on these intermediaries, called *Muqaddams,* and their facilitation of labor-capital relations, I make the following claims in the rest of the paper. First, I argue that the study presents a novel lens to reconcile internal and international migration within migration studies by showing how the migration infrastructure that has historically facilitated the international migration of labor through slavery and indenture for cane harvesting continues to be reproduced in the context of the migration infrastructure that facilitates the harvesting of cane. Second, in this paper, I show how the role of migration brokers or labor intermediaries cannot be understood by containing them within the villainous stereotypes associated with them. Instead, I show how the *Muqaddams* are embedded within the labor geographies of commodity production where capital accumulation requires the transferring of the risk of financial loss down to intermediaries and laborers.

Drawing on research in anthropology of brokerage, labor geographies, and the labor history of global sugar production, I situate labor intermediaries both as an abstracted type and as a specific figure transcending the spatial and temporal geographies of international and internal labor migration for cane harvesting. In the following section, I focus on the role of labor and labor intermediaries in the production of sugar agro-industry in India through the management of labor recruitment. I trace the history of cane labor intermediaries going back to the recruitment of indentured laborers from colonial India and their migration to the cane fields within the empire. Next, I discuss how scholars, especially, geographers, have tried to reconcile the split within the interdisciplinary field of migration studies between internal and international migration. This is especially important in the case of this paper because labor migration to cane fields is a historical

and contemporary phenomenon, internationally and internally, and it presents a unique opportunity for an empirical inquiry to aid the process of reconciliation in the discipline. I then discuss the methods employed for data collection and the study sites. In the second half of this paper, I discuss (a) how intermediaries recruit laborers in their home villages; (b) the social relations that the intermediaries enter into with other intermediaries like truckers, and with laborers, sugar factories, and cane farmers; and (c) the politics of labor control and disciplining on migrant destinations that sets up all the aforementioned actors in social relations of conflict and cooperation. Lastly, I outline the two empirical and theoretical contributions of this research and conclude with a discussion on the future of cane labor intermediation in India and more broadly, on agrarian change.

4.2 SITUATING THE INTERMEDIARY

A "broker" is best understood in a specific ethnographic environment; reading a broker as a "sociological type" (cf. Weber, 1978) allows the figure of the broker to be decipherable in multiple socio-historical contexts (Barker, Harms, & Lindquist, 2013). The identity of a broker relates to their location, temporality, and power, and is not fixed in space and time (Boissevain, 1974). Yet, the classic "broker" in literature and policy remains stereotyped as a ruffian who illegally entices migrants into exploitative conditions such as trafficking into sex work (Doezema, 2010). Scholars have stereotyped brokers as generally inherently amoral/immoral, untrustworthy, and intent on maximizing individual gains (James, 2011), "Janus-like" (Wolf, 1956), and as someone who manipulates people and information and profits from his work of communication (Boissevain, 1974). In the context of international migration, especially within Asia, migration brokers have occupied a distinctly demonized position that is connected to the

production of “free” and “unfree” labor (McKeown, 2008). For instance, brokers are central to the global concern on human trafficking, producing a priori the distinction between brokers as the perpetrator, contra migrant who is the victim (Doezema, 2010). However, this is not the case in all kinds of brokerage. The relations between donors and development recipients is mediated by NGOs that are widely considered as “grassroots” organizations manned by “moral fieldworkers” who do “good work” (Fisher, 1997). Functionally, labor brokers are key private (non-state) actors involved in the regulation of international migration. A stark example of this are the migrant workers that await in lines at Bangladesh’s Dhaka airport wearing the uniform of their future employers after having paid a substantial sum of money to the migration broker to purchase a passport, acquire visas, and to book flights and accommodation at the destination, often in the Middle East (Stalker, 2000). Migrants often pay the brokers a higher charge than the one expected of them from the government regulations (Stalker, 2000) thus muddling the difference between labor brokers and traffickers (Castree, Coe, Ward, & Samers, 2004).

Anthropologists have shown a keen interest in engaging with the topic of the broker. The classic “cultural broker” in Indonesia is the Javanese Muslim leader called the *kijaji* who harnesses his experiences and relationships with Mecca to seek legitimacy in his home community; the *kijaji*’s role has, however, now transformed into one of an amateur politician (Geertz, 1960). In the post-colonial context, the broker has emerged through shifts in the form of political authority and the transformations in village-capital relations (Wolf, 1956). The broker, however, was initially considered as a temporary agent necessary within a development framework visualized through the optics of modernization theory, who would vanish with the growth of rational organization forms (Geertz, 1960). Yet, despite the demise of this development paradigm in the mid-1980s

(Schuurman, 2000), brokers are around and find themselves deeply involved in development processes. This includes land reforms in post-apartheid South Africa, where brokers have continued to remain relevant (James, 2011) and the development industry dotted by NGOs which relies heavily on brokers (Mosse and Lewis, 2006). Migrants themselves are an important labor pool from where labor intermediaries emerge. So, both contemporary labor processes, as well as local social systems, produce intermediaries. Lindquist (2015) in his biographical narrative of the Indonesian rural migrant man who he calls "Muslim" describes how Muslim's temporary migration as an undocumented worker in the rural palm oil plantations and urban construction sites in Malaysia in the mid-1990s helped him earn the trust of his employers who tasked him with recruiting new laborers from his home region. The employers thus were able to bypass "professional" middlemen and control the labor recruitment process. Muslim lured a couple of friends to migrate to Malaysia by promising stable wages that were unavailable in rural Indonesia. Muslim eventually turned to working as a broker full-time by harnessing his experience of working as a migrant followed by a small-time migrant labor intermediary, and his collaborations with brokers with more extensive experience in labor intermediation such as how to access speedboats and how to bribe officials and thugs at harbors.

I argue in this paper that the role of brokers and intermediaries is not just to facilitate labor migration but to put into motion class relationships. The relationship between laborers and the capitalists who purchase the labor power of the laborers exists in and outside the workplace and this combination defines the labor market: that is, the quantitative and qualitative matching of labor supply with labor demand through labor market intermediaries who match workers with employers (Castree, Coe, Ward, & Samers, 2004). Migrant brokers or intermediaries are

precariously located in the midst of capital and migrant labor relations. Lindquist (2015) has shown that international migration intermediaries who broker labor migration from rural Indonesia to the palm oil plantations of Malaysia carry the risk of losing their savings because they provide loans to the laborers recruited by them in order to secure the contract. These loans carry the risk of being defaulted on. As labor and capital are set in motion by the intermediaries for the recruiters, Lindquist shows that the risks and debit/credit relationship are borne at the level of the home village of the migrants. Similarly, local NGO workers who rely on international donors risk losing their jobs as the global economic cycles of boom and bust impact donor funding to the NGOs. Yet the literature has little to say about internal migration and the migration infrastructure that facilitates it. In this paper, I show that it is the migration infrastructure that has historically been central to the global expansion of sugarcane cultivation. It has allowed colonial and post-colonial capital to penetrate the countryside in search of labor whose ability to migrate away from their home communities to harvest cane, historically under conditions of slavery and indenture, has reproduced sugar agro-capitalism.

Historically, sugar production has been a technical and political challenge, as well as a challenge in terms of labor recruitment. These challenges have materialized in the germination and expansion of the sugarcane industry in post-colonial western India. The early plantation system was agro-industrial because under one authority it combined agriculture and processing. It had three essential features. First was operational discipline or what is proximate to the modern-day vertical integration, because both the mill and the field needed to be productive together and not separately. Second, the labor force, part skilled and part unskilled was organized in terms of the plantation's overall productive goals. Third, time-consciousness was infused through all phases

of the plantation system life, which was a result of the nature of sugarcane and its processing requirements (Mintz, 1959).

In the 19th century, the successive emancipation of enslaved laborers in the Caribbean region by Denmark, England, France, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, and Cuba led to a decrease in sugar production as the freed laborers charted new lives independent of the plantation.
The commodity market which arose demanding sugar became an enormous global historical demographic force. It led to millions of enslaved Africans to reach the American South, the Caribbean and its shores, the Guianas, and Brazil. This period of migration was succeeded by the migration of Muslim and Hindu Indians, Javanese, Chinese, Portuguese, and other people in the 19th century to Natal and the Orange Free State (presently in South Africa), Mauritius, and Fiji. Sugar also brought people to Hawaii in the United States and continues to be a cause for labor migration in the Caribbean. By the end of the 19th century, the production of sugar continued to rise although the loci of production increased in number and dispersion and the techniques of labor coercion became less bare than those employed in the plantations full of enslaved and indentured laborers. Sugarcane, given that it has historically required proper cultivation, rapid cutting and grinding, and expert processing, especially to produce sugar, has been a labor-intensive crop. (Mintz, 1959). The problem of migrant labor recruitment and availability has been a historical one and continues to affect current sugar production, especially in India.

4.3 LABOR AND THE INDIAN SUGAR INDUSTRY

Starting in the late 19th century, the agrarian landscape in western Maharashtra in India (then, a part of the colonial “Bombay Deccan”) underwent rapid transformations due to the construction

of large-scale irrigation canals originally intended to provide famine protection through the extensive irrigation of subsistence crops like sorghum and millet. Farmers' less than the enthusiastic adoption of the irrigation infrastructure led, in 1909, to the enforcement of new irrigation policies which resulted in the more intensive use of canal water for cane cultivation, instead (Attwood, 1992). Specifically, the construction of the Pravara canal in 1920 and the Godavari canal in 1921 ushered in large-scale cane cultivation in western Maharashtra (Baviskar, 1980). In 1932, the Imperial Deccan Canals Financial Improvements Committee recommended the establishment of sugar factories to encourage cane cultivation. The state offered entrepreneurs facilities and concessions to secure land leases, rent fixations, and low-cost supply of canal water. Importantly, a protective duty imposed by the government on imported sugar in 1932 allowed for the modern Indian sugar industry to emerge (Baviskar, 1980). Note that in this period, Latin American countries like Cuba and Brazil and European Pacific island and African colonies dominated the global sugar industry (Sato, 2015). Toward the end of the first quarter of the 20th century, in villages where canal irrigation was implemented, demand for labor spiked. Irrigation led to double cropping and perennial cropping, which led to an increase in the demand for labor at regular intervals. Sugarcane cultivation in the Deccan generated annual employment for around 100,000 hired laborers annually (Attwood, 1992) When dry villages (that were not in the irrigated command area) in the region suffered from crop failure, the canal tracts absorbed laborers from these villages. The Deccan canals increased employment avenues in the region in two stages: first, through opportunities to construct the canal, later, these laborers who came to construct the canals stayed back to work as agricultural villages. More laborers migrated permanently from the dry villages thereafter especially farmers from the dry villages when rains

failed in the region. Rising demand for labor resulted in higher wages for laborers (Attwood, 1992).

In India, the first four sugar "cooperative" factories were set up between 1933-35 but only one of them survived. The first cooperative factory in independent India was the Pravara cooperative factory in western Maharashtra found in 1951 (Baviskar, 1980). Cooperative sugar factories are large industrial units with a membership/shareholding of 2000-4000 cane-growing farmers spread over 50 to 100 villages, where 200,000 to 400,000 tons of cane is crushed annually over seven months (Baviskar, 1980). These units employed between 1000 and 6,000 people directly or contractually and the organization of the cooperative is hierarchically structured. For instance, within the agriculture department of sugarcane cooperatives, the "line structure" begins at the top with the agricultural office and proceeds to "agricultural overseers" who are responsible for farm supervision and advising cane farmers. The overseers are also in-charge of cane harvest and transportation. The agricultural overseers are assisted by groups of fieldsmen who coordinate with individual farmer-shareholders and the *Muqaddams*, who, in turn, manage migrant cane laborers employed for cane harvesting (Baviskar, 1980). The history of the term or the designation, *Muqaddam*, however, precedes the rise of the sugar industry in India.

Muqaddam is an Arabic word, meaning one who is placed first. It came to be used in the specific sense of a village headman very early in medieval India. In 1353, Firuz Shah Tughluq, a 14th century Turkic Muslim Sultan of the Delhi Sultanate referred to *zamindars* (commonly understood as landlords employing tenant farmers) as comprising headmen (*muqaddaman*), government-appointed landholders (*mafrozian*), and landowners (*malikan*) (Habib, 2014). The

use of the title *Muqaddam* to refer to labor intermediaries goes back to the 19th century when *Muqaddams* were employed to recruit, transport, and then supervise labor on the sugar plantations of British colonies. In the report of the royal commissioners appointed to inquire into the treatment of Indian (South Asian) immigrants in Mauritius in 1875, the commissioners justified the employment of *Muqaddams* to recruit migrants by naturalizing the Indian village society as one built on the tendency of Indian rural laborers to defer to their headman or *Muqaddam* for guidance and direction to find work (Bates & Carter, 2017).

Intermediaries in India who recruited migrant laborers during the period of the British colonization were known as *Muqaddam* or *Mukadam* in western India, Sirdar in eastern India, *Duffadar* or *Arkati* who arranged labor migration to the tea estates of northeastern India or via the Calcutta ports to the British sugar colonies, and *Maistri* or *Kangany* in southern India. The jobs of the intermediaries ranged from labor hiring and transportation to the employer or shipping agent and in some cases, traveling and working alongside the recruited laborers as overseers in factories or plantations (Bates & Carter, 2017). In the context of labor recruitment and supervision in the colonial jute mills of Bengal, the phenomenon has been described as pre-capitalist which includes brutal discipline exercised by Sirdar over their workers (Chakrabarty, 1989). Recruitment was "personalistic" and involved channeling personal relations by the Sirdar, of which, he would be a part (de Haan, 1996). These personal relations were important for overseas employment. For instance, on the plantations in colonial Malaya in Southeast Asia, a typical plantation *Kangany* was a plantation foreman or a laborer with some standing among his employers. The intermediary selected for the job would be trusted with funds to recruit and arrange for the transportation of labor families to Malaya. Upon arrival and until their return to

their home country, the migrants would be overseen by the recruiting *Kangany* (Arasaratnam, 1970). Labor recruits and the *Kangany* were often of the same caste; in other cases, caste-homogeneous emigrant "bands" headed by a leader, were directed by a higher caste *Kangany*. On behalf of the migrant laborers, these intermediaries negotiated with plantation managers regarding wages and work conditions; indeed, *Kangany* and laborers shared a patron-client relation that transcended relations of production (Jain, 1993). At the root of the belief for the need for intermediaries in colonial India was the assumption that the Indian peasantry was static and immobile and needed a special effort in the form of an intermediary for labor recruitment to urban areas internally in colonial India, overseas plantations within the Empire, and the tea estates of Assam in northeast India (Chandavarkar, 1994).

Laborers aspired to become *Kangany*. In the tea plantations of British Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka), Tamil migrant laborers from southern India who could return home to recruit and bring more laborers to the plantations or who were selected by the plantation managers to supervise migrant plantation laborers became *Kangany*, thus, being able to earn substantially higher incomes. On these tea plantations, *Kangany* relied on moral influence instead of coercion to discipline labor (Peebles, 2001). Others, however, claim that Sirdar and contractors perpetuated the abuse of labor in plantations elsewhere, such as in the Assam tea plantations (Sen, 2010). The labor intermediary was an important figure in the migration infrastructure of colonial India. This includes tribal "hill coolie" in India who sought the help of village headmen to organize their migration to the Assam tea plantation and the sugar colonies of Mauritius and Fiji. This process transformed the village headmen into Sirdar, thus, playing a key role in the context of mobility on the plantations (Roy, 2008). On these lines, between the 1820s and 1860s, local contractors

institutionalized the system of hiring returnee Sirdars in Calcutta to recruit fellow villagers and transport the laborers to the Mauritius depot on the banks of the Hooghly river to be shipped to Mauritius. This institutionalization was driven by the realization among overseas sugar planters that this targeted method of recruitment was more effective and the trust that the local emigration agents in Calcutta who would recruit for the Mauritius plantations had on returnee Sirdars who had risen through the ranks on the plantations (Bates & Carter, 2017).

The colonial Sirdar recruited and transported laborers from their home villages, acted as their agent on the ship and at the depot, functioned as the foreman and spokesperson for laborers on the plantations, and was among the first in the plantation settlements. The Sirdar were moneylenders, assisted in re-engaging laborers at the end of their contract periods, and negotiated with the planters to maintain labor discipline on plantations. Off plantations, the Sirdar were shopkeepers, market gardeners, drivers, landlords, small planters, and established villages and local social services for South Asian settlers in Mauritius. To become a Sirdar, a migrant laborer, in addition to winning the trust of planters and recruiting agents, would have to invest his savings from at least a decade to hire a labor gang of 20 recruits. Sirdar offered interest-free loans to the recruits to keep them engaged in the work over multiple recruitment cycles and bore any financial hardship emanating from delayed payments on the plantations due to the late sale of the crop (Bates & Carter, 2017).

In this paper, I question if this migration infrastructure that facilitated labor migration to international sugar plantations has endured the test of time to facilitate similar movement and perform similar roles of labor recruitment, disciplining, and control in the context of internal

migration to cane fields. Theoretically, how can the study of migration infrastructure help reconcile the split within the interdisciplinary studies of migration between international and internal migration? In the next section, I discuss this split to foreground the theoretical importance of focusing on migration infrastructure, or in the case of this paper, *Muqaddams* and truckers, in migration studies.

4.4 LABOR MIGRATION: INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL

The fields of internal and international migration have been reconciled previously first through the Zelinsky model of mobility transition (Zelinsky, 1971). Zelinsky drew on modernization theory to connect internal and international migration by proposing that as societies undergo demographic transition, so too personal mobility advances systematically and sequentially through various stages of internal migration (rural-rural, rural-urban, inter-urban and circulation) and international migration. This over-reliance on modernization theory led to the model being critiqued for the same shortcoming that modernization theory suffers from, i.e. the modernist teleological notion that non-western societies are best served by adopting western technologies, norms, and institutions as they pass through stages of development (King & Skeldon, 2010). Second, a "systems approach," that accounts for structural conditions, flows of migrants, a control subsystem, adjustment mechanisms, and feedback loops, was devised by the geographer Mabogunje to model rural-urban migration in West Africa (Mabogunje, 1970). Yet, the model has been critiqued for drawing on the physical-mechanistic approach of energy in the system instead of giving due credence to the social elements of migration network (Boyd, 1989).

A third theoretical tool to reconcile international and internal migration is by focusing on the social integration of migrants in their destination, where researchers have demonstrated that in

Europe, the socio-spatial pathways followed by internal migrants are eventually followed by international migrants (Iosifides & King, 1998). In a more recent attempt at studying internal and international migration in an integrative way, King and Skeldon (2010) propose that these linkages can be seen in the way internal migration leads to international migration (such as the migration from Mexico to the US being preceded by internal migration within Mexico) and international migration leads to internal migration (such as internal migrants moving into the home communities of international migrants who have left for international destinations or international migrants moving internally within their destination countries.) This breadth of literature does not address the role of migration infrastructure, or how the systems of recruitment, transportation, and control of migrants on destinations remain the same or change between internal and international migration. I address this gap in this paper.

4.5 NOTE ON METHODS: CANE LABOR MIGRATION IN MAHARASHTRA

The 14 *Muqaddams* and truckers who participated in this research through interviews and 16 in one focus group discussions were between 40-50 years of age and belong to a variety of agro-economic backgrounds including farming households, full-time agricultural laborers, and migrant laborers, i.e. laborers who migrate seasonally to harvest cane and work on urban construction sites. They were almost entirely from the formerly nomadic (*Banjara* and *Mendke*) and tribal castes.

This research is part of a larger project to examine labor migration and social change in rural western India, in a district called Yavatmal in the state of Maharashtra. For this paper, I interviewed all the truckers and *Muqaddams* in five research villages where this research project

was based and I conducted a focus group discussion among truckers and *Muqaddams* in the sixth village in Yavatmal district. Additionally, I conducted interviews with one *Muqaddam* in a migrant destination in Kolhapur district in western Maharashtra and with an agricultural officer in a sugar factory in Kolhapur. I was introduced to the sugar factory by the Head of the Department of Geography at Shivaji University in Kolhapur, which is a large public university, and one of his Ph. D. candidates. The *Muqaddam* I interviewed in Kolhapur was employed on contract by the sugar factory, which is standard practice. I, also, observed the work of harvesting in two cane fields in the region, where the harvested cane is transported to the factory for processing.

4.6 RECRUITING AT HOME: STRATEGIES

In the Indian state of Maharashtra, labor recruitment by *Muqaddams* typically happens during the relative lull in the summer season when seasonal migrants are back in their home villages from working in the cities and there is limited farm work in the drylands. Laborers are hired as groups with generally an equal number of women and men. The group (called *toley* in Marathi) consists of 16-20 laborers, who are generally from the *Muqaddam*'s kinship network. Prior to departure to the cane fields, *Muqaddams* facilitate the signing of work contracts between the truckers and the laborers. During migration, a *Muqaddam*'s primary responsibility is to ensure that laborers accomplish their daily goals of cane harvesting set out by the cane factories.

Muqaddams generally rely on their relatives and friends to recommend other laborers to be hired. A *Muqaddam* explained the reason, "we generally only recruit relatives or close friends. It's important we do so, otherwise, people we don't know very well could leave the cane fields

without finishing the harvesting work, for which, we would have already paid them." *Muqaddams* are generally men, though in rare cases older women laborers in villages organize caste-homogeneous women's groups for local harvesting jobs, like picking cotton and soybeans, within their home or neighboring villages. *Muqaddams* adopt various strategies to recruit laborers. A *Muqaddam* explained,

> "[Migrant] laborers are poor. They need large sums of money to plan weddings in their households and to organize other such major social events and festivities. So, we pay them a significant advance and hire them out. Thereafter, we drive them in large trucks to the cane fields later in October or November toward the beginning of the harvest season." (Personal communication with a *Muqaddam*, July 10, 2014.)

Recruitment through advance payments cuts both ways; it ties up laborers with *Muqaddams* in exploitative labor arrangements, as I explain later in this paper, but provides laborers larger sums of money in a context where such payments, through credit included, are hard to access. *Muqaddams* also make loans to marginal farmers to buy seeds, which the farmers pay by hiring themselves out to *Muqaddams* to harvest cane commensurate to the principal and interest. How do *Muqaddams* counterbalance urban labor market as a potential pull factor for rural migrants?

Muqaddams are deeply aware of the distinct disadvantages that non-local, migrant laborers have in urban labor markets. A *Muqaddam* explained,

> "We pay a lump sum amount in advance to the laborers. Here in the village, and in the cities, laborers are paid wages. When the [rural] laborers work in the city, they are not guaranteed to receive these wages. The builders and contractors in cities are thugs. Individually, rural laborers just don't have the confidence to bargain for or demand fair wages from these people. The laborers are all alone in the city without friends and relatives to socialize with. In the sugarcane fields, wage payment is guaranteed and is made in advance." (Personal communication with a *Muqaddam*, July 2, 2014.)

Following from the quote above, *Muqaddams* understand that their potential recruits have two options. First, is to find work in urban workplaces where wage theft – or the denial of wages rightfully owed to the laborers - is common and migrants, foreign to urban worksites and labor relations, are unable to bargain for better wages or act against wage theft. *Muqaddams* understand that the laborers, adept at and familiar with working in caste and gender homogeneous social groups in their home villages and other rural sites, find themselves in the absence of this sociality in the cities. On cane fields, it is unclear if laborers are adequately compensated for any extra cane harvested beyond the amount paid in advance. Also, in the cane fields, laborers work under physically and mentally exploitative work conditions. As laborers make their decision whether to sign contracts to migrate out to work in the cane fields, laborers weigh these against the guaranteed advance payment of a "salary," additional wages paid in return of surplus cane harvested, and an opportunity to work in a familiar rural landscape with people from the laborers' extended kinship network.

4.7 BEING RECRUITED: *MUQADDAMS*, TRUCKERS, AND SUGARCANE FACTORIES

The migration infrastructure that facilitates labor recruitment and migration include one other important actor in addition to *Muqaddams,* the truckers. Truckers who are often owners of large haul trucks mediate the relations between *Muqaddams* and sugar factories. The factories sign legal contracts with the truckers to have cane supplied to them. Harvested cane is required to be transported from the cane fields to the factories for processing into sugar and other by-products. Additionally, the truckers work with *Muqaddams* to transport cane laborers from their home villages to sugarcane fields, from one field and another, and back to their home villages at the end of the harvest season.

Truckers are embedded in the agrarian economy in other, deeper ways. Truckers who are affluent landowning farmers buy their trucks by investing their savings generated over many years. In other cases, *Muqaddams* "graduate" to become truckers by investing their savings from working for several years as *Muqaddams* into buying a truck. Truckers receive wages for migrant cane cutters from sugar factories and distribute these wages to the laborers through *Muqaddams*. However, the advance salary payments that *Muqaddams* make to the laborers to incentivize their migration to the cane fields is loaned to the *Muqaddams* by the truckers. Therefore, the truckers retain as much of the labor wages as necessary as reimbursement for the advance payment. *Muqaddams* cover all other labor expenses. A *Muqaddam* explained,

> "We are paid in advance by the truckers but there are incidental expenses. Sometimes laborers don't have enough money to buy food, alcohol, medicines, and such while in the cane fields and they expect to be paid in advance for these expenses too. Not all cane

truckers pay for this costs in advance or at all." (Personal communication with a *Muqaddam*, July 23, 2015.)

To be clear, all advance payments made to the laborers are recovered from their wages. So, these payments, while a generous gesture from *Muqaddams* and truckers are not "benefits" or bonuses earned by the laborers. Second, there is no standard formula for the calculation of the percentage of the total wages to be paid in advance to the laborers. Instead, the lumpsum advance is determined to a large extent by availability of funds with *Muqaddams,* their general estimate of the extent of harvesting work that would be available for the laborers, and the negotiations between laborers and *Muqaddams.*

Truckers and *Muqaddams* may not be in the same kinship network or practice the same religion but for the truckers, it is important to be able to trust *Muqaddams* with finances and labor management. Often, *Muqaddams* and truckers would have worked for several years together or have been friends or close acquaintances for some time. This trust is critical for the trucker-*Muqaddam* relationship to operate. A *Muqaddam* explained the following about his business relationship with a trucker, "Initially, I worked with the trucker for seven years as a cane migrant laborer. He and I started getting to know each other and he eventually started trusting me with [managing] the laborers. That's how he came to hire me." (Personal communication with a *Muqaddam*, October 28, 2015.) Beyond this trust, *Muqaddams* sign a legal contract with truckers that obligates *Muqaddams* to employ enough labors in specific sugarcane fields to harvest the amount of cane agreed to in the contract.

Sugar factories do not measure individual labor productivity. Instead, sugar factories measure the quantity of cane harvested by a group of laborers by weighing the trucks that transport harvested cane to the factories and deducting the weight of empty trucks. Factories provide receipts certifying the quantity of cane received to the *Muqaddam* of the group, the trucker, and the farmer whose cane is harvested.

Sugar factories offload all risks related to labor productivity on to the truckers and *Muqaddams*. The risk that *Muqaddams* bear due to harvest loss caused by labor inefficiencies are in the form of loss of reputation in the market and risk of losing future contracts. So too, the truckers are expected to absorb and manage any wage-related grievances. For instance, laborers expect to be paid for the period when they are "on the bench" between one round of harvest in a cane field or a group of fields and the next round. Sugar factories sometimes delay this payment to the laborers leading to increased tensions between the laborers and the truckers on the cane fields. Truckers, in these cases, pay the laborers out of pocket and are eventually compensated by the factories.

Sugar factories employ multiple managerial measures to minimize the risk of loss due to labor productivity. This includes signing legal contracts with groups of truckers instead of individual truckers that enforce harvest delivery requirements on the truckers. A group is led by a trucker with longstanding professional relations with the sugar factory and substantial collateral to offer, often in the form of a couple of trucks, in case of harvest loss due to labor issues. Any such loss is distributed equally within the group of truckers, although the cost recovery from the truckers is not equal. A trucker explained,

> "Cane factories sign contracts with us as a group. A group generally consists of three to six truckers and we share the risk [of financial loss resulting from labor inefficiencies.] Factories ask us to offer our trucks and tractors as collateral. So, if my *Muqaddam* is unable to oblige the contract and harvest the agreed upon acreage of cane, I may lose my vehicles to the sugar factory and in some cases, the other truckers in the group would also have to pay a penalty. If they are not able to pay the penalty, they are never hired again and get entangled in court cases and lose a lot of money." (Personal communication with a trucker, July 10, 2014.)

Thus, sugar factories offload risk in a complex web of risk-sharing that allows them to place the highest risk on the specific *Muqaddams* whose employed laborers "cause" the loss of harvest. The rest of the relatively lower risk is distributed among the remaining truckers in the group. In signing contracts with the cane factories, truckers, therefore, carry the risk of losing income, collateral, reputation, and future contracts. Note that while the truckers and the sugar factories enter into these contracts freely, the terms of the contract are similar between the factories.

Upon satisfactory completion and delivery of harvested cane, *Muqaddams* and truckers are paid commissions. Sugar factories pay laborers INR 190 for harvesting a ton of cane; 18% of this is paid to *Muqaddams* as commission while transportation costs are reimbursed to the truckers and they are paid additional bonuses. Since the laborers would have already received an advance, truckers and/or *Muqaddams* who may have made advance payments to the laborers retain labor wages as reimbursement. These payments are withheld if sugar factories are not satisfied with the laborer groups' quantity or quality of harvested cane. Note that while laborers are paid in

advance, *Muqaddams* and truckers are not. While this section is generally focused on the capital end of the capital-labor relations, to understand how labor intermediaries like the truckers and *Muqaddams* actualize these relations, I focus on how labor is managed and disciplined by the intermediaries on their migration destinations or the cane fields of Maharashtra.

4.8 MANAGING MIGRANTS: LIVING AND WORKING IN THE CANE FIELDS

In the distant and remote sugarcane fields, accessing affordable food is a challenge. Laborers generally buy subsidized food grains through the government's subsidized food distribution stores in the laborers' home villages and transport it with them to the cane fields when they migrate. When the laborers exhaust the food grains that they bring along, they appoint one person in the group to travel back to their home village to purchase and bring back to the cane fields more grain bags for all laborers in the group. Note, however, that each laborer has access to a limited quantity of food entitlement. Laborers also buy food grains from local stores that are relatively expensive. Since the government stores only sell wheat, rice, and sugar, laborers often have *Muqaddams* travel to the markets nearest to the cane fields to buy additional groceries for them. The cost of the food items is credited to the laborers' accounts that they pay off by harvesting cane and *Muqaddams* retain the cost of this harvested cane.

In the cane fields, *Muqaddams* must ensure efficient cane harvesting that recovers the advance payment made to the laborers through harvesting and meeting the harvesting demands of cane factories. *Muqaddams* continuously supervise work on site; live in the same tented area alongside the cane fields where the laborers camp for the duration of the harvest; chaperon sick laborers to clinics; and when laborers depart from the fields without harvesting their share of

cane, *Muqaddams* locate and persuade the laborers to return. Camping near the cane fields invites unique risks and inconveniences. A *Muqaddam* explained,

> "The cane fields are near forests and the laborers are always at risk of being bitten by insects and scorpions. The laborers live in temporary tents made of tarpaulin or plastic which make it difficult for the laborers and their families during rains. Our home villages are better to live and work." (Personal communication with a *Muqaddam*, July 4, 2014.)

Since a *Muqaddam* and his hired laborers are often from the same kinship network, *Muqaddams* find it easier to discipline the laborers, which would be harder to do among a group of unfamiliar employees.

The distinction between *Muqaddams* and the migrant laborers is complicated when *Muqaddams*, in addition to supervising laborers, work alongside their labor group to harvest cane. Doing so allows *Muqaddams* to earn both a commission and receive wages as a laborer. *Muqaddams* argue that labor efficiency tends to increase when they work alongside the laborers. However, generally only poorer *Muqaddams* work the "second shift" as a migrant laborer for additional income.

Persuasion plays a key role in labor management. A *Muqaddam* explained,

> "Laborers would simply return home [to their home villages] if I tried forcing them to work in the field using violence or coercion. Whenever they are angry, annoyed, or just

> don't want to work, I sweet talk them into working. There is no other way." (Personal communication with a *Muqaddam*, July 23, 2015.)

Muqaddams exercise caution in hiring laborers to ensure labor compliance. As a *Muqaddam* clarified, "A *Muqaddam*'s work is not about brawn. We never hire people that can't take orders from us." (Personal communication with a *Muqaddam*, July 23, 2015.) Yet, both to calm tempers at work site and to keep laborers interested in harvesting cane, *Muqaddams* resort to gifting laborers meat, liquor, and tobacco.

When laborers leave without harvesting their share of cane and they cannot be cajoled into returning to work, sugar factories, through *Muqaddams*, freely deploy violence. One *Muqaddam* explained,

> "If we can track the laborer down, we try to forcibly hand them over to the sugar factories who get the laborers arrested by the police. The laborers sign a contract with the truckers to harvest cane. Police beat up the laborers in the prison and only let them free when the laborers compensate the factory for their loss. Of course, if the laborer just vanishes and we can't find them, we can't do anything." (Personal communication with a *Muqaddam*, July 23, 2015.)

Just like sugar factories transfer risk down to truckers and *Muqaddams*, the *Muqaddams* do the same to discipline labor groups. When a laborer from a group departs to their home village without harvesting enough cane to pay off the advance they would have received, *Muqaddams*

require the remaining members of the labor group to compensate for the loss of labor power by forcing them to harvesting more cane.

When migrant laborers return from the cane fields to their home villages without completing their harvesting job, *Muqaddams* and truckers resort to both pleading and threating the laborers to bring them back to the cane fields. Truckers often confiscate any belongings of such laborers left behind in the cane fields but the price of these belongings of the extremely poor laborers is often insufficient to compensate for the loss of labor power. Yet, this return migration of the laborers without fulfillment of contractual obligation is not because the laborers have a better job offer. During a focus group discussion, a trucker recounted this poignant incident,

> "Last year, one of the migrant laborers that I had transported to the cane fields committed suicide in the cane fields. I had paid him an advance of INR 100,000 to harvest cane. So, I lost the money. After his death, his friends also left the cane field in shock and sorrow. During that harvest season, I ended up incurring huge losses." (Focus group discussion with truckers and *Muqaddams* on September 15, 2015.)

Muqaddams are expected to have funds to cover significant incidental expenses for laborers during the harvest season, and therefore, must have enough savings. A *Muqaddam* explained,

> "*Muqaddams* should have the cash to pay laborers, regardless of whether *Muqaddams* themselves have received due payments from truckers. For example, laborers take a break from work and return to their home villages to attend their relatives' weddings. Before

> leaving, the laborers ask us for a loan and we are expected to have the money to make those loans out to them. The truckers won't give us a loan immediately for us to in turn pay the laborers." (Focus group discussion with truckers and *Muqaddams*, September 15, 2015.)

Muqaddams must also have savings to make loans to the laborers for them to access clinics, buy medicines, and expensive food items such as meat. To be clear, loans must be paid back and *Muqaddams* eventually make the laborers harvest equivalent quantities of cane to pay the loans. However, for *Muqaddams* to be successful in recruiting and retaining labor, they must fulfill the expectation of a credit provider from him. Migrant laborers who work in labor groups and acquire both enough savings to support such labor expenses and earn the trust of truckers over time eventually "graduate" to become *Muqaddams*.

4.9 DISCUSSION

I show in this research that the orthodox stereotyping of labor intermediaries or brokers as exploitative is simplistic. The *Muqaddams* in western India are entangled in a complex capital-labor relation that starts from sugar factories and connects truckers and laborers. Sugar factories bear minimum risks of loss due to labor inefficiency, transferring it down to the *Muqaddams* and the truckers, who attempt to transfer it down to the laborers by enforcing a regime of incentives (advance payments) and discipline (physical abuse and labor exploitation). What makes possible the *Muqaddam* – laborer relation is the fact that they are often from the same kinship network and the same village, while the sugar factory is the "foreign" entity. The spatial labor relationships that this research captures includes those between *Muqaddams* and laborers,

Muqaddams and the truckers, and among truckers over a vast rural landscape that includes sugar agro-capitalism and cane fields in western Maharashtra and migrant home villages in the drylands of eastern Maharashtra. The narrative in this research clearly privileges the making of capitalism not entirely through the themes of accumulation but through the eyes of laborers who are actively involved in the production of spaces of (agro-) capitalism thus coding *Muqaddams* within and central to the labor geographies (Herod, 1997) of sugar production in India.

Second, this paper has introduced a novel way to reconcile the split in the interdisciplinary field of migration studies, i.e. those between internal migration and international migration (King & Skeldon, 2010). Existing studies that seek to forge a reconciliation do not fully capture the role of migration infrastructure or labor intermediaries in the connections that exist between old forms of international migration (such as from India under the British Raj to sugar plantations in the British empire) and newer forms of internal migration (such as from eastern to western Maharashtra). I show in this paper that the migration infrastructure made available through historical, colonial forms of labor migration to cane plantations have been readily used by cane factories to access rural labor for cane harvesting, thus, assigning a quality of endurance to the migration infrastructure itself as international migration of cane labor ended to create new pathways for internal migration of labor for cane harvesting.

4.10 CONCLUSION: WESTERN INDIA'S CANE LABOR MIGRATION INFRASTRUCTURE – FUTURE?

Research participants have informed me that farmers in western Maharashtra have started using sugarcane harvesters manufactured by New Holland, a Fiat-owned brand. This was especially

propelled by state subsidies provided to farmers for the purchase of these harvesters. However, these subsidies have been undercut by the lack of applicability of the harvesters in small and increasingly fragmenting sugarcane fields in the state. Other measures are being employed to change the terms of labor hiring on cane fields. The Sugar factory agriculture officer interviewed for this research anticipated increasing the commission paid out to truckers to 40% and potentially eliminating the provision of advance payments made to migrant cane cutters to reduce losses due to laborer inefficiency in favor of payments made on piece-rate. Yet, *Muqaddams* continue to find interest if not keenness among younger laborers to work in the cane fields. A *Muqaddam* explained, "Rural young boys these days try to attend school if they can. If they cannot find a job in the factories in the cities, they hire themselves out to cut cane." Another *Muqaddam* explained why the possibility of laborers' migrating to the cities does not pose a palpable threat to the *Muqaddams*' efforts to recruit laborers,

> "There is work available in the cities but most rural laborers like working in groups with their friends and relatives. In the cities, groups are not hired; finding jobs in cities is an individual endeavor. But this [cane harvesting] is the only occupation where laborers get an advance lump sum payment and they can work with their relatives and friends. So, they continue to hire themselves for me."

In India, given that circulation at the bottom of the employment hierarchy does not create avenues for accumulation for labor (Picherit, 2018), cane labor is socially reproduced without any upward mobility in sight. So, what remains unclear is both the future of this form of labor migration as well as the nature of agrarian change in India as landless laborers find fewer sources

of employment with the introduction of labor-saving technologies in traditionally labor-intensive farming. No change is possible in migrant labor conditions until the logic of the capitalist mode of production that puts into motion the annual seasonal cycle of labor migration, steered by the *Muqaddam*, is questioned.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Landless rural laborers have played a central role in studies of agrarian change within the field of agrarian studies. In the early 20th century, as agrarian capital developed in Europe leading to the peasantry experiencing processes of fragmentation and change, among the rural classes that emerged from within this peasantry, the "agricultural proletariat" that earn their livelihood by selling their labor power to capitalist agricultural enterprises found their place at the bottom of this class structure (Lenin, 1966). This class numerically dominates the Indian agrarian landscape: as of 2003, just over 60 percent of households in rural India were effectively landless, i.e. they owned less than 1 acre of land, with 90 percent of this land being used as a mere homestead and not for agricultural production (Basole & Basu, 2011). Indeed, a typical "poor person" in India is not a farmer but a wage laborer who is dependent on irregular wages (Harriss, 1992). Globally, forms of globalization, through ongoing absolute processes of dispossession by displacement are creating an enormous reserve army of migratory labor, thus, nurturing a "planet of slums" (Araghi, 2009; Davis, 2006). This dissertation, by illuminating the social relations of production that weave landless migrant laborers with their employers at home and in migrant destinations, the intermediaries that suture migration networks, and the social relations among landless laborers, presents these laborers as "active geographic agents of change" (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011) or laborers with constrained agency who actively shape landscape and in turn, the landscape inspires labor actions.

In this dissertation, I sought to examine the social geographies of labor migration in rural Maharashtra in western India by focusing on changes in historical class and caste-based relations in migrant home communities, how migration unravels the social construction of masculinity and its relations with women's labor, and the production of a class of labor intermediaries or migration brokers who navigate class, kinship, and gender relations to mobilize labor in the service of sugar agro-capitalism.

5.2 SUMMARY OF SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION

In this dissertation, I draw on relatively incongruent literatures in migration and development, feminist geography, and agrarian studies to examine labor migration as a social process. First, I show how internal labor migration has produced difference and unsettled historical agrarian caste and class relations. Therefore, as against most of the literature that has examined such socio-cultural changes triggered by international migration, this dissertation expands the scope of our knowledge to include internal migration, which is the scale of most of human movement. Second, this dissertation contributes to the broader gender and development literature by focusing on non-hegemonic masculinities and its relations with the social division of labor, gendered exploitation, and internal migration. This contribution broadens the traditional focus in the literature, which has traditionally been on women as gendered subjects and the transnational migration of men. Lastly, few newer studies have examined intra-rural labor migration in India and there has been little research on migration infrastructure in the context of internal migration. This dissertation presents an opportunity to examine the continued sustenance of this old form of migration in the context of rapid urbanization in the Global South and the connections between

historical and contemporary forms of labor migration brokerage. In the next section, I provide a detailed description of the contributions of this dissertation by chapter.

5.3 CONTRIBUTIONS BY CHAPTER

In the second chapter, I examined whether the seasonal migration of landless laborers impacts changes in social relations of production in their home villages, and if so, how. I showed that in rural Maharashtra, seasonal labor migration has caused ripples in the social lives of the villages, impacting farmers, laborers, and relations of production. These changes are visible in quotidian politics: in new farmer and laborer subjectivities, and in a Gramscian sense, challenges posed to the "common sense" of social conduct and migrant politics of resistance visible in the migrants' "war of position" against landowning farmers. Labor migration is not just burdening farmers with more work but reconstituting the meaning of the "farmer" subject, returnee migrants are contesting through their actions the tenets of long-established rural common sense that seeks to rigidify relations of production and social expectations, and labor migration is catalyzing the production of social difference within the class of rural landless laborers in migrant home villages. I, however, cautioned that challenges to common sense is a mode of resistance and not an attempt at redistributive class politics; they are a claim to dignity and humanity, and not seizing of the means of production in a classic Marxist sense of transformative politics. What remains unexamined in this chapter is labor as gendered subjects: how do we explain the connections between work in migrants' home communities and at various rural and urban employment destinations, the relation of work to the social construction of masculinity, and gender negotiations across space? This question is taken up in the third chapter.

In the third chapter, I examined the gender dimension of seasonal labor migration by focusing on gender negotiations among migrants both when they are away from their homes working in varied types of migrant destinations and when they are back in their home villages. I discussed how masculinity is constructed, transformed, and rendered flexible during seasonal migration and how migrant work is intrinsically connected with gender negotiations and masculinities. I showed in this chapter that the politics of resistance of seasonal migrants can be understood by examining how seasonal migrant men deploy protest masculinities to subvert claims on their body and labor by elite men in their home villages. I show that protest masculinities are bolstered by the continued exploitation of women and their labor. Moreover, these same women are removed from the conflicts between subaltern men and elite men. I demonstrated the flexibility of masculinities, as migrant men declined to work with low compensation in their home villages that they code as "women's work" in favor of work in migrant destinations like cotton fields that are gendered spaces where men do not mind working as their wives' assistants given the relatively higher monetary returns. Second, migrant home villages are gendered, both in the arenas of production and social reproduction. In these spaces, masculinity is iteratively constructed through the gendering of work and the masculinizing of "women's work" when men are monetarily incentivized to do this work. I find that rural destinations are preferred for and by migrant women because these are already gendered as spaces conducive for social reproduction and discursively constructed in the language of the idealized woman. An important rural destination for Maharashtrian labor migrants, both rural men and women, are the cane fields of western India, where around 800,000 migrants travel seasonally to harvest over 37 million tons of cane (Biswas, 2018). How is this labor migration organized and how are chains of labor

intermediation produced by capital to seek access to migrant labor for the annual harvesting of the cane? I examined this question in the third and final substantive chapter of this dissertation.

In the fourth chapter, I focused on internal labor migration and the labor intermediaries who mediate a specific form of migration, i.e. those of economically and socio-politically marginalized rural communities in India on a seasonal basis to the sugarcane fields of rural western India. By focusing on these intermediaries, called *Muqaddam* in rural western India, and their facilitation of labor-capital relations, I made the following claims. First, I presented a novel lens to integrate internal and international migration, two areas of scholarship that have been studied separately within migration studies. I did so by showing how the migration infrastructure that has historically facilitated the international migration of labor through slavery and indenture for cane harvesting continues to be reproduced in the context of the migration infrastructure that facilitates the harvesting of cane through internal labor migration. Thus, I pointed to the migration infrastructure itself as a unique entry point to examine the interrelations between international and internal labor migration. Second, I showed how the role of migration brokers or labor intermediaries cannot be understood by containing them within the villainous stereotypes associated with them. Instead, in the context of labor migration for cane harvesting in rural western India, I showed how the intermediaries are embedded within the labor geographies of commodity production, where capital accumulation requires the transferring of the risk of financial loss down to intermediaries and the laborers.

5.4 SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation, through the application of qualitative methods in fieldwork conducted over a year in rural western India, makes three broad contributions. First, in the broad area of development and migration, by marrying Gramscian social theory with the geographies of seasonal labor migration, I challenge the orthodox assumptions in migration studies about the limited ability of seasonal migration to foster cultural and social change in sending communities (Portes, 2009), while pointing to the limits of migrants resistance as radical politics. Second, I contribute to the geographies of gender and sexuality through the examination of the gender dimension of seasonal (internal) labor migration and expanding the frontiers of feminist geographic engagements both with studies of masculinities and labor migration in the Global South.Through a critical examination of migration, my dissertation provides a compelling opportunity to understand how gender subjectivities are constituted through the intersectional politics of rural class, gender, and sexuality (McDowell, 2003). By focusing on men as gendered subjects and masculinities, my dissertation responds to a pervasive challenge within gendered approaches to studies of migration to disengage "gender" from merely being about "woman" as a presumed concretized equivalence and to deepen the gendering of masculine migrations (Ahmad, 2009). Lastly, the ethnographies of marginalized men and their performances of masculinities have continued to remain marginalized in the literature (Rogers, 2008). My research responds to this opportunity through an explicit engagement with the work and performative masculinities associated with subaltern men, and its relations with subaltern women's productive and reproductive labor.

The third and final substantive chapter of this dissertation draws insights from migration studies, labor geographies, and agrarian studies to read the figure of the migration broker or labor intermediary, specifically the brokers who help rural migrants in India find employment on the cane fields of western India called *Muqaddams*, as not merely exploitative as the stereotype associated with them suggests (Doezema, 2010). In this dissertation, I sketch the labor relationships between *Muqaddams* and laborers, *Muqaddams* and the truckers, and among truckers over a vast rural landscape that includes sugar agro-capitalism and cane fields in western Maharashtra and migrant home villages in the drylands of eastern Maharashtra. The narrative in my dissertation privileges the making of capitalism through the eyes of laborers who are actively involved in the production of spaces of (agro-) capitalism thus including *Muqaddams* as within and central to the labor geographies (Herod, 1997) of sugar production in India. Lastly, my dissertation responds to the critique of migration scholars that unlike the extensive literature on the causes and consequences of migrant departure from their home communities and arrival in specific destinations, the literature on migration infrastructure, which is, the institutions, networks, and people that facilitate migrant mobility, is scant (Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012). It does so by theorizing the infrastructure of cane labor migration brokerage in western India as a unique lens to reconcile international and internal labor migration.

5.5 EMERGING RESEARCH THEMES

My future research project extends my dissertation research to examine the political ecology of sugarcane in rural India, as it embroils vulnerable communities such as migrant cane laborers, cane farmers, and sugar factories in India. My project draws on the literature on the

environmental politics of cane cultivation and agrarian studies to examine the connections between discourses of (agricultural) sustainability, migrant livelihoods, and cane cultivation.

The expansion of cane cultivation in the Global South has produced political conflicts. The literature on the environmental politics of cane cultivation has highlighted expansion of the sugarcane frontier into indigenous lands. For instance, the global agribusiness firm Bunge is buying sugar that comes from cane grown on land being cultivated by Guarani Indians in Brazil. Landless and precarious, the Indian migrant laborers have been struggling to seek tenure over this land (Survival International, 2013). In other areas, sugar cane production by multinationals is draining areas of ecological resources, in particular, agrarian water, in Valle del Cauca region of Colombia and in the Indus delta region in Pakistan, where cane cultivation is creating an agrarian crisis. These same firms are engaged in the greenwashing of the crisis of replacement of food crops with cane cultivation for biofuels in the global South, by awarding of carbon credits to cane mills in Brazil and India for generation of electricity from bagasse. Further, the costs of sugarcane cultivation have manifested in the form of long-term environmental degradation. For instance, deforestation in the Amazon for the cultivation of sugarcane has led to crop damage in Brazil's São Paulo state because the deforestation has impacted the regional water cycle, especially the frequency of rains in the south of Brazil, thus creating a threat of desertification (Richardson, 2015). This literature on environmental politics, however, does not explain the connections between environmental degradation and its impact on agrarian labor dependent on cane harvesting work globally. The implication and exploitation of agrarian labor in these environmental conflicts have been taken up by agrarian studies.

Research in agrarian studies has highlighted the exploitation of rural labor in the cane fields of the Global South. Cane cutters often migrate from poorer regions within their countries, such as from northeast Brazil to south-central Brazil, or from outside, such as from Myanmar to Thailand (Richardson, 2015). In Brazil, cane cutters are not paid daily wages; instead, they are paid on piece-rate which depends on the quantity of cane cut by the workers (Rocha, Marziale, & Hong, 2010). Cane fields are highly gendered workplaces, with women laborers merely supporting men on the farm. Further, cane cutters are harassed and exploited by prolonging their apprenticeship or initial hiring period and using threats of unpaid suspension and non-renewal of contracts (Guérin, 2013). Recent studies in the political ecology of agrarian change point to the fact that environmental change does not affect rural communities uniformly; external shocks are cushioned by subordinate rural social groups that include landless laborers and sharecroppers (Taylor, 2015). Therefore, the effects of climate change or simply, an increase in the number of extreme climatic events would be experienced differently amongst cane farmers, migrant laborers (women and men), and cane factory owners. What is unclear is how is the expansion of cane cultivation in a changing climate and other ongoing political economic processes like the growth of the urban informal economy in the Global South is having an impact on the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable rural migrant communities like the cane cutters?

Sugarcane cultivation in the Global South has aggravated droughts and the effects of anthropogenic climate change. Globally, 85 percent of surface and groundwater is used in agriculture and sugarcane is the sixth-biggest worldwide consumer of agrarian freshwater, thus, leading to the crop often being referred to as a "thirsty crop" (Mekonnen & Hoekstra, 2011). In Maharashtra in India, sugarcane is grown on over one million hectares of land and it consumes at

least 70 percent of the state's irrigated water. The droughts of 2013, 2014, and 2015 in the state were intensified due to (agrarian) water being diverted in the state toward additional sugarcane cultivation (Menon, 2013). Consequently, in India, the debate on the sustainability of sugarcane cultivation has intensified over the last decade. Rural Maharashtra is a land of both plenty and scarcity. While it is the richest state in India (calculated based on Gross State Domestic Product), successive droughts every summer since 2013 have ravaged agriculture and rural livelihoods.

Globally, India is second only to Brazil in producing sugar. In 2016, an estimated 85,000 metric tons of sugar was produced in Maharashtra, which is around a third of the sugar production in India. The focus of social science research on sugarcane production in India has been on the "cooperative" organizing of sugarcane production through sugar mills controlled by local politicians; agrarian water management strategies (such as drip-irrigation) in cane cultivation; and freedoms and unfreedoms of seasonal migrants who harvest cane for landowning farmers. While these contributions have produced invaluable knowledge about the political economy of cane and the agricultural sciences of cane production, the current conjuncture presents an important and unexplored opportunity to examine how is sustainability understood differently by the stakeholders involved in sugar production and what are the implications of adoption of sustainable cane cultivation (such as the adoption of sub-surface drip irrigation technologies) and harvesting practices on a socially differentiated agrarian community that is reliant on cane cultivation and harvesting for their own social reproduction.

In summary, my future research will address newer dimensions of the larger question that has motivated my dissertation and past research, which is, how are historically marginalized agrarian

populations in the Global South responding to rapidly changing social, environmental, and political-economic conditions and how are relations of gender, caste, and class being renegotiated to build a more sustainable and just society? Responding to this question is of urgency both for sound policymaking as well as advancing ethnographically informed social science research in a rapidly changing rural Global South.

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