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DOCUMENTING SILENCES - AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY INTO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL LABOURS IN MAHARASHTRA

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***Abstract:** The paper is an ethnographic account of women migrant sugarcane cutters and their negotiations for survival in a labour market shaped by neoliberal forms of agriculture and embedded patriarchal structures, as well as of their agency over their bodies. The investigation explores the invisibility of structural violence perpetuated by systems rooted in social inequalities, injustices, and coercion. This violence is legitimized and rendered “natural” through conceptualizations of structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 2004). Such an investigation deconstructs the dominant narrative of the neoliberal regime, which is ostensibly equated with a free and competition-driven market. This market, however, thrives not by reducing economic and social inequalities but by managing and furthering them. Drawing on Gramsci’s ideas of hegemony (1971) and Althusser’s concept of ideological state apparatuses (1971), the paper illustrates how dominant discourses and institutions normalize and render this structural violence invisible. The victims of such structural violence are left with very little or no agency over their bodies and minds, as revealed in their silences and denials.*

***Keywords:** agriculture, gendered bodies, hysterectomy, migrant sugarcane labours, Maharashtra, neoliberal regime, structural violence*

1. Introduction

There is an enormous difference between seeing people as the victims of innate shortcomings and seeing them as the victims of structural violence. Indeed, it is likely that the struggle for rights is undermined whenever the history of unequal chances and oppression is erased or distorted. (Farmer, 2003, p. 2).

What is invisible never happened, what is never said is never heard, and in this process, violence goes undocumented, unheard, and even not understood or categorized as violence. In

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2019, one Indian newspaper covered a small story of hysterectomies on a massive scale happening among the women migrant cane cutters in a few districts of Maharashtra (Goyal, 2019; Jadhav, 2019; Oxfam, 2020). This created a stir; hence, many newspapers started covering stories of hysterectomies happening among women of the sugarcane community in Maharashtra. Then came the reactions of the media, politicians, doctors, civil society, owners of sugar mills, and other stakeholders, blaming each other and all blaming the victims themselves. Several narratives emerged: these hysterectomies were unavoidable, there was a risk of cancer, improper menstrual hygiene and other vaginal infections were the cause of hysterectomies, and the decisions taken by women were voluntary and consensual in nature.

What was not understood was never spoken about, because these women were not going through any direct form of violence in which the onus of violence could be put on one stakeholder. The decision of hysterectomies was taken by the migrant women themselves, and at least not forced upon them officially. Violence was neither direct, immediate, nor intentional as mostly understood. This form of structural violence is mostly built within the unjust structures of society and often legitimized within them (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969).

As the narratives in this paper unfold, what Farmer (2004) calls *structural violence* refers to the systemic inequalities embedded in social and institutional arrangements that gradually produce suffering. Rather than defining it abstractly, this paper traces how structural violence is lived and endured in everyday life.

The concept of structural violence goes beyond agents and intentions. It investigates more pervasive forms of violence, which may not be observable but rather ‘tools of oppression’ that may have been internalized in the repressive structures, institutions, ideologies, and histories (Dilts et al., 2012; Galtung, 1969). Galtung’s work examines how violence modifies and reshapes human experiences in ways that liability-based conceptions of agency and force are unable to explain. These women migrant cane cutters agreeing to get their bodies mutilated and hysterectomies done have a lot more to do with the unequal and unjust structures of poverty, gender, deprivation, and exploitation than any stakeholder. But does it account for ‘violence’?

In his work on *An Anthropology of Structural Violence* (2004), Farmer defines the concept as any form of indirect violence that is exerted systematically by anyone who belongs to a certain social order, and individual actors cannot be held responsible or blamed. It is the internalized social oppression and the structures of oppression that make it so obscure.

Oppression is a result of many conditions, not the least of which reside in consciousness. We will therefore need to examine, as well, the roles played by the erasure of historical memory and other forms of desocialization as enabling conditions of structures that are both 'sinful' and ostensibly nobody's fault. (Farmer, 2004, p. 310).

However, it becomes more than difficult to understand and document such a form of structural violence where the perpetrator is faceless and the victims are voiceless (Farmer, 1996).

2. Negotiating survival in the neoliberal agrarian setting

To understand structural violence in the lives of migrant women sugarcane cutters, one must situate it within the broader political economy of Maharashtra's agrarian crisis. Maharashtra is India's second-largest sugarcane producer, despite being home to some of the country's most water-stressed regions, particularly Marathwada and Vidarbha (Goncalves et al., 2024; Solomon, 2016; Kelkar et al., 2020). The state's uneven geography of water availability has created an ecological paradox: water-intensive crops like sugarcane and cotton are grown in the same state that has drought-prone zones, leading to chronic water scarcity, agricultural distress, and mass seasonal migration (Dhanagare, 2016; Deshpande, 2022; Kendre, 2011; Mishra, 2021; Mohanty, 2018; Sainath, 1996, 2013).

As per 2023–2024 data, Maharashtra produced over 113 million tonnes of sugarcane (Chand & Singh, 2023), consuming massive amounts of water. The expansion of sugarcane cultivation, despite limited water resources, reflects not just ecological mismanagement but the logic of neoliberal agriculture: profit-oriented, export-driven, and governed by global markets rather than local sustainability.

Neoliberalism fundamentally reconfigures the state's role from a provider of welfare and regulator of inequality to an enabler of markets and economic rationality. As articulated by Peck and Tickell (2002), neo-liberalisation is characterised by 'rollback' policies that dismantle state protections and 'rollout' strategies that impose market-oriented governance. The result is a systemic retreat from public responsibility and an increased emphasis on individual accountability for structural failures.

In this framework, deregulation, privatisation, and the removal of safety nets are not incidental; they are more strategic. As Wacquant (2009) argues, the neoliberal state ‘abandons’ the lower classes by dismantling social welfare, while simultaneously disciplining them through precarious labour regimes. The condition of migrant women sugarcane cutters in Maharashtra is not a policy failure; it is a deliberate design of governance that renders vulnerability productive.

The migrant women sugarcane cutters are ensnared in a brutal paradox: their labour, vital to the very survival of the sugar industry, renders them both indispensable and invisible. They are trapped in a cycle of extreme vulnerability, where the very systems that depend on their bodies for profit simultaneously erase their existence. Employment is not just precarious, seasonal, contractual, and overwhelmingly exploitative, subjecting these women to a gendered violence that cuts across every facet of their lives. Stripped of agency and autonomy, they are forced to navigate a landscape where their work sustains an industry built on their backs.

What Bourdieu (1998) calls ‘symbolic violence’ becomes critical here in relation to the imposition of social hierarchies in a way that they appear natural, even acceptable, to the oppressed themselves. Women cutters undergo hysterectomies not because they are directly coerced but because their survival in the labour market makes menstruation an ‘Adchan’ (a term in the local language which means hindrance). The uterus, in such settings, becomes a burden, a site of ‘unproductive pain’ in these androcentric feudal markets.

Foucault’s concept of biopolitics (1978) helps illuminate this shift. Power no longer operates only through repression but through the management and optimisation of life itself. These women’s bodies are not only disciplined but recalibrated to serve labour demands. Medical discourses often legitimised by doctors, contractors, and even civil society actors render these surgeries not as violence, but as solutions and medical necessity. In this way, governance operates not through overt coercion but through intimate, embodied decisions. It is in this dense terrain of abandonment, medicalisation, gendered labour, and survival that structural violence unfolds.

In such a regime of neoliberal agrarian production, where the state withdraws and markets exploit, women’s bodies become sites of optimisation and violence. But how is such violence lived? And more crucially, how is it rendered invisible, normalised through silence, consent, or denial? To understand this, one must move beyond political economy into the terrain of lived experience.

3. Documenting violence and silences - Mapping the methodology

The silent, often unseen violence faced by migrant women necessitated an ethnographic approach. To capture the lived experiences of these women migrant cane cutters and to bring to light the realities that remain obscured within their everyday environments, I found ethnography to be the most fitting method.

The immersive and detailed approach using methods such as unstructured interviews, informal conversations, observations, capturing silences, and denials was crucial. As the participants primarily belong to one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, a simple qualitative approach, without spending a significant amount of time with them, would not have led to similar findings. A deeper understanding of the context and meaning behind their consent and silence towards the violence could not have been better addressed by any other method.

The research was conducted in two phases: a pilot study from November 2019 to March 2020, discontinued due to the national lockdown, and the second phase, from January to May 2021, resumed post-COVID. The first phase allowed me to build initial rapport, develop the semi-structured interview guide, and understand the setting. During both phases, I maintained field notes, participated in their daily routines, and focused on menstrual health, violence, hysterectomy, and broader issues of caste, occupation, landlessness, and credit.

The study was conducted near two of the major sugar factories: Ajinkyatara Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd. and Sahyadri Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd, Yashwant Nagar, Tal Karad, in Satara district, Maharashtra. This district was chosen as it had 2–3 major sugar factories in proximity and was among the highest eight sugar-producing districts. At first sight, one can locate huge settlement camps of these cane cutters residing near the proximity of the factory gate. I could find about 25 huts on each side of the gate made of straw, grass, and plastic sheets, which were the temporary houses of the migrant cane cutters who migrate every year for 6–8 months to harvest sugarcane (Rai, 2020). They mostly migrate from the drought-hit regions of Maharashtra due to lack of alternative employment (Asawa, 2020; Jugale, 2012). The terms *muqaddam* (contractor), *koyta* (couple-based labour hiring), and *tol* (migrating group) are crucial to understanding the context of this study, and I now clarify them early in this section to aid reader comprehension (see also glossary). Migrant cane cutters typically travel in a *tol*, a collective group, and are hired on a *koyta* basis, where couples are employed

together only. The term *koyta* itself is symbolic of the sickle, a tool used for harvesting cane. Even though on the outside both men and women work as migrant agricultural labourers, their lifeworlds and realities are very different, which I have attempted to document through this study.

My interaction began with factory officials and muqaddams, local men from higher castes who initially denied any knowledge about hysterectomy. However, these conversations revealed the exploitative terms of labour contracts, especially for women's labour. Language was another crucial dimension. I conducted the research primarily in Marathi, the regional language, and Hindi. Though I am not a native speaker, I navigated with a working knowledge of Marathi, supported by a key informant who translated or clarified when needed. These linguistic efforts were not merely transactional; they were essential to building trust. The hesitation or warmth in response to my imperfect accent shaped how participants perceived me: not as an authority figure but as an outsider trying to understand.

While participating in the respondents' daily experiences, unstructured dialogues and silences emerged as critical ethnographic moments that offered deeper insights into these women's lives. Although each woman who underwent a hysterectomy narrated her experience differently, prolonged engagement and repeated interviews revealed recurring patterns across their narratives. These patterns were consolidated into three key themes: observing the 'gendered' everyday, the invisibility of violence, and internalised structures-harvesting consent. Before engaging with the central themes, it is essential to first situate myself as an ethnographer and reflect on my positionality within this research.

4. Locating the ethnographer

"How much have you studied?"

"Are you married? How many children do you have?"

"Which village do you belong to?"

Curiosity, suspicion, smiles, fear, and even anger were certain gestures and reactions I was greeted with during the early days of fieldwork. However, as rapport was gradually built and comfort established, these reactions shifted. The cane cutters would often respond with:

"Why do you want to study us?"

followed by sarcastic laughter, and then:

“Ask what you want to know.”

Being a woman researcher from an urban, northern Indian background made me seem unfamiliar to the participants. My caste, class, language, education, and even the technology I carried (smartphone and notebook) marked me as an outsider. The ‘native’ versus ‘outsider’ binary wasn’t just symbolic; it shaped how participants engaged with me. Despite my attempts to build rapport through informal conversation and personal disclosures, the differences in our positionalities were evident, though they became more blurred with time and familiarity.

As a relatively privileged, educated woman with access to academic spaces, I stood in stark contrast to these women migrant cane cutters. It would be misleading to suggest that no hierarchy existed during the pilot study. The curiosity surrounding my presence was palpable. For them, I was an outsider, and they were equally eager to learn about the lives of women beyond their world. As I spent more time in the sugarcane fields, my initial sense of ease, given by my identity as a woman, began to give way to a deeper understanding of the structural inequalities that shaped my interactions with the migrant women. While my presence was facilitated by gendered expectations, it quickly became clear that these dynamics were only one layer of a much more complex web of caste, class, and labour exploitation. Over time, the ease of those initial days gradually revealed the extent to which these entrenched inequalities continued to define the boundaries of our interaction.

Rapport building was an extremely delicate and challenging task. It is not always easy or even welcome to study someone’s realities. This study also began with much scepticism as the violence was invisible and silent. The key informant, a muqaddam, helped me understand the surface-level realities labour contracts, wages, and hours, but was in absolute denial about hysterectomies or any form of exploitation.

I often witnessed how gender, caste, and occupation intersected to shape not just their lived experiences but also how they received my questions. Their eyes would search for their husbands or toli members before responding, signalling their limited agency and deep-rooted power structures. Worries about their children were one of the areas that made them talk. None of them wanted their children to continue their occupation, but helplessness and hope of help from either the government, laws, or even from me, the ethnographer, were visible. What was common was the denial of any kind of violence happening to them.

This immersive ethnographic approach, attuned to the subtle and often silenced dimensions of daily life, illuminated how the women's experiences were profoundly shaped by gender, where the line between enduring violence and enduring oppression was often blurred and ingrained.

5. Observing the 'gendered' everyday

Gender is structured into the organisation of social relations of production and reproduction of every known society; Gender is not just one of many inequalities but the most pervasive. (Kabeer & Natali, 2013, p. 48).

As an outsider, getting close to these migrant women and understanding their lifeworlds was challenging, and their acceptance of my presence was not very quick. The initial days were spent introducing myself and explaining the purpose of the study. I observed that the daily routine of women began as early as 3 a.m. due to a lack of sanitation facilities, forcing them to use open fields for defecation and makeshift saree (Indian dress) enclosures for bathing. After this morning routine, the chores of cleaning, cooking, fetching water, and managing children were all performed before they walked into the cane fields for 14–16 hours of labour.

These entries were notably absent from my field notes on the lives of male cane cutters. Even though both men and women were engaged as migrant cane cutters, the women's responsibilities were disproportionately heavy and invisibly normalised. During the field visits, I came across approximately 40–60 migrant couples near each factory, mostly from drought-hit districts like Beed, Jalgaon, and Ahmednagar. These women belonged to caste groups such as Vanjari, Dhangar, Lamani, and Mahar (lower-caste communities, as listed in the annexure) that were landless, marginalised, and structurally vulnerable. Around 22 open-ended interviews were conducted, each lasting 1.5 to 2 hours, and 15 in-depth interviews with women who had undergone hysterectomies, lasting up to 4.5 hours. I also conducted 7 focused group discussions and interviewed key informants and factory supervisors.

While contributing to the participants' daily experiences, unstructured dialogues and uncomfortable silences helped me get deeper insights into these women's lives. Silences were not mere absences of speech; they were shaped by fear, stigma, and the internalised belief that what they endured was 'normal'. In these silences, I began to understand the pervasive presence

of structural violence. The dismissals, the quiet shame, the downcast eyes all encoded a system of power, deprivation, and denial.

One participant, while referring to the inevitability of norms, told me:

Because we are born as women and we are destined in such a way, we follow these norms because we have no alternative other than to be a conformist.

A young participant narrated:

It is difficult to work in the fields when I'm bleeding, with a wet cotton pad (cloth) for such long hours in such scorching heat. They don't care, and every break means a wage cut. We take money in advance, and the pain doesn't stop, but I have no choice.

Her words were not resistance, but resignation, the voice of structural violence internalised.

Another participant, visibly distressed, spoke about the consequences of recurring medical expenses:

Several visits to the doctor and medical expenses due to white discharge made my husband angry, as it was an additional economic burden for him. With four children and a family of six, money cannot be wasted. I often blamed myself for my family's economic pressure because of me.

This interaction revealed how intimate bodily experiences are entangled with economic precarity, where reproductive health becomes a site of tension shaped by gendered expectations and material vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1991, 2027; Farmer, 2004; Qadeer, 2005).

A participant (new mother) described how economic necessity overrides everything else:

I don't have money to fill my stomach. I cannot think of education or anything else for that matter... I delivered my first child in the field. I couldn't work for a week. That entire week's money was deducted.

These narratives, when read together, do not just speak of individual suffering. They illustrate how structural violence hides itself in silence, in routines, in the body, and in the language of necessity.

6. The invisibility of violence

Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence...Ideology has very little to do with 'consciousness' - it is profoundly unconscious. (Althusser, 1971, p. 118).

The invisibility of violence, like ideology itself, is deeply layered and coded. It is not merely the absence of a visible perpetrator; it is the presence of a system that naturalises suffering. Structural violence is insidious because it works through structures that organise everyday life, labour, gender, caste, medicine, and operates through consent, silence, and internalised legitimacy.

Galtung (1969) introduced the concept of structural violence to refer to situations where human beings are influenced in such a way that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential. Farmer (2004) extended this to illustrate how institutions, policies, and social arrangements produce harm in ways that are deeply racialised, gendered, and classed. In this ethnographical study, structural violence emerged as the architecture within which women's bodies are negotiated, medicalised, and managed. The dominant narrative that surfaced from almost every stakeholder - muqaddams, doctors, factory owners, even family members - was that hysterectomy was necessary, medical, and unavoidable.

In this context, a Participant narrated, trying to justify her surgery:

My surgery was done after consultation with the doctor only... the doctor informed me that the uterus needed to be removed so that it would not develop into cancer.

Her explanation, though rationalised, reflected how authority and fear merged to make medicalised violence feel like an informed choice. The naturalization of violence is an indispensable mechanism for the legitimization of structural violence. The fact that these women view hysterectomy not as violence but as a necessity is precisely what reveals its power. The decision and aftermath of hysterectomy were also shrouded in silence, one participant shared:

I went through extreme pain after the hysterectomy. My body changed, and I did not feel like doing any work. I cry out of pain and sadness often, and I feel that is how life will be now.

The surgery was not forced, not violent in the conventional sense, but its consequences were lifelong and unquestioned. That is the violence of invisibility.

The lack of a clearly identifiable perpetrator perpetuates an illusion of neutrality. Medical professionals invoke their authority in medical expertise, families cite economic constraints, muqaddams justify their actions through contractual obligations, and the state maintains a deliberate silence. This disaggregation of responsibility transforms the violence into something both omnipresent and elusive. Farmer's work (2003) underscores that when victims are unable to articulate their suffering as violence and when observers fail to acknowledge it, this silence is not passive. It is systematically constructed, curated, and perpetuated.

The violence is also invisible because it aligns with hegemonic notions of sacrifice and endurance. It wears the language of motherhood ("She's had her children, so what is the uterus for?"), of 'Adchan' ('native term used for Menstruation as hindrance'), of bodies ('As a site of violence').

Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony helps here; this is not violence enforced by brute force but one reproduced through 'common sense', through what feels right and natural. Structural violence becomes inscribed in the intimate; external conditions are internalised as personal realities. Invisibility, in this context, is not incidental but systematically produced. It is the result of layered, sedimented power - medical, economic, cultural, patriarchal, all masking themselves as neutral, objective, or natural.

7. Internalized structures: Harvesting consent

It is silent, silenced, and silencing. (Vázquez-Arroyo, 2012, p. 217)

During my interviews and focused group discussions with the participants, there was not a single mention of coercion, forced surgeries, or violence inflicted on them. Instead, almost all of the participants narrated the urgency and necessity of hysterectomies and surgeries done only after consultation and recommendation by the doctors. In these accounts, medical professionals played a dominant role in creating ideological state apparatuses, instilling a belief

that the source of medical treatment was legitimate (Althusser, 1971; Conrad, 2007; Zola, 1972; Friedson, 1970). This ideological framework obscured the possibility that violence and exploitation were happening to them (Brewster & Andy Blunden, n.d.). Even when confronted with questions about coercion and violence, responses were primarily denial, confusion, and, at times, anger. This phenomenon of harvesting consent is one of the new modalities in which violence manifests in modern societies (Siegmann, 2022), where exploitation and violence are implicitly enacted after consent is subtly built, largely through ideological control.

While violence against these women is structural in nature, its invisibility, as discussed earlier, remains the core issue. Their silence and confusion about the questions of violence raised more questions than answers. Bourdieu's concept of '*habitus*' as a 'structured and structuring' principle provides clarity here. *Habitus* confines the agency of its victims (Walby, 2014). Bourdieu's work suggests that large-scale social inequalities are not just a product of direct institutional discrimination but also arise from the subtle inculcation of power relations onto the bodies and dispositions of individuals (McNay, 1999). Through the internalized structures of *habitus*, these women come to perceive their subjugation as natural, as part of their lived reality.

While Bourdieu's theory emphasizes the internalization of social structures through *habitus*, Althusser (1971) offers a slightly different perspective on ideology. Rather than seeing ideology simply as absorbed within the individual, Althusser suggests that it operates through external forces, specifically through what he calls *ideological state apparatuses* (ISAs), such as the medical institutions involved in the hysterectomy process. Through these systems, individuals' behaviours are subtly shaped and directed. In the case of the women in this study, hysterectomy is framed not as coercion but as a necessary medical procedure. This framing, reinforced by the medical apparatus, limits their ability to recognize the violence embedded in the procedure, rendering it invisible as something other than a rational choice within their context.

Thus, the discussion of hysterectomies is framed as a necessity, an unavoidable circumstance, where any responsibility is placed upon the victim's gendered existence or their helplessness.

Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously 'born' in each individual: they have had a centre of formation, or irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the political form of current reality (Gramsci, 1971, p. 140).

Consent, in this context, is not merely an individual choice but is produced through the internalized structures of power (Bourdieu, 1990), hegemonic discourses (Gramsci, 1971), and ideological state apparatuses (Althusser, 1971), which collectively shape the women's understanding of hysterectomy as a necessary procedure dictated by their perceived medical conditions. The patriarchal structures in the male-dominated feudal agrarian system are reproduced, and these women are made to believe there is no alternative but to accept their fate.

While most of the women respondents blamed destiny and fate for the violence happening to them, many even denied that a hysterectomy was a form of violence. They have lost their agency over their bodies, and their social and economic vulnerability pushes them further beyond the margins, subjecting them to the will of those in power. "Imbalances of power cannot be erased without distortion of meaning or set of ideas" (Walby, 2013, p. 34). The interplay between an unequal structure, victims with no agency over their bodies, and the medical professionals exercising control through ideological state apparatuses dehumanizes the bodies of these women. Their bodies are viewed not as persons, but as sets of organs to be managed and regulated (Foucault, 1973).

8. Conclusion

Contesting the idea that violence declines with modernity, this ethnographic description proves that violence is capable of escaping capture and of re-emerging in new and unexpected forms (Shkliarevsky, 2015; Walby, 2013). Structural violence takes on new forms in every era, but the complexity is that with modernity, the invisibility of structured violence not only gets compounded by exploitative neoliberal patriarchal structures but also becomes internalised and individualised (Farmer, 2004). Ethnographic work relies on conversation and observation; both are precarious tasks in cases of violence where harm is not only invisible but also silenced.

The invisibility of violence happens as structural violence increasingly appears to be a 'natural' phenomenon. The responsibility of these sinful structures is obscured, as indifference becomes fundamentally linked to the discursive boundaries of intelligibility and the construction of public knowledge. Silencing, in this sense, happens through the subtle harvesting of consent created through ideological state apparatuses and Gramsci's hegemonic

discourses. Silenced are those who not only lose agency over their bodies and minds but are also dehumanised into a set of organs that can be mutilated for survival.

Modernity does not eliminate violence; it reorganises and legitimises it. The forms of coercion may shift, but the exercise of domination intensifies through bureaucratised, medicalised, and institutional means. The phenomenon discussed here must also be situated within a global genealogy of reproductive regulation wherein marginalised women, be they Dalit, Indigenous, African-American, or Roma, have historically been subjected to coercive sterilisation regimes under the guise of public health, development, or demographic control. While this paper foregrounds structural violence to make sense of the routinised medical interventions on the bodies of women sugarcane cutters, these practices cannot be entirely divorced from wider regimes of biopolitical governance (Foucault, 1978). The medicalisation of reproductive labour, how ordinary experiences such as menstruation and women's bodies come to be framed as pathological and 'treatable', forms a crucial terrain on which this violence is legitimised. Although the present paper does not fully elaborate on this, it forms the basis of a broader engagement with medicalisation (Conrad, 2007a; Friedson, 1970; Zola, 1975) developed in a subsequent paper of this research, which is a part of my doctoral work.

Medicalisation and biopolitics used in the subsequent paper of this research are a useful lens to analyse how state and market logics converge on the reproductive capacities of marginalised populations, producing a form of violence that is both invasive and naturalised. In this context, biopolitics and medicalisation do not replace structural violence, they are its operational grammar. These frameworks help to situate hysterectomy not merely as an individual health apathy, but as part of a historically and socially embedded process of disciplining marginalised bodies under neoliberal care regimes.

However, the focus of this study suggests that the first challenge lies in understanding, categorising, and capturing these new modalities, which often go unseen and unheard. That violence must be re-examined as a mode of governance, a regime of disposability embedded within everyday institutional arrangements. The ethnographic method, by attending to silences, hesitations, and non-verbal cues, reveals the embodied nature of domination and the partial, fractured expressions of resistance that persist despite systemic constraint. The sugarcane fields in this analysis are not merely agrarian sites but contested social terrains where gender, caste, labour, and state power coalesce.

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ANNEXES

Glossary:

Native Terms (Marathi)	Meanings
Adchan	Menstruation, as referred in native terms (literal meaning hindrance)
Koyta	Hiring practices among the cane cutters- couple basis- Sickle
Muqaddams	Contractor
Pishvi	Uterus
Shet Mazdoor	Agricultural Labourer
Toli	Group that migrates together to cut sugarcane
Ustod Kamgar	Cane cutters
Ustod Kamgar Mahamandal	Name of the programme for the welfare of the sugarcane cutters

Certain Marathi caste names were referred to in the study:

Terms used for Caste (Marathi)	Traditional occupations translated into English	Caste Representation*
Banjara	Nomadic community trade and transportation	Tribal group
Bhil	Largest tribal groups in India. Traditionally, they are hunters, gatherers, and agriculturalists,	Scheduled Tribe
Chambhar	Cobblers and leather workers	Lowest castes
Dhangar	Pastoralism and sheep herding	Lowest castes
Hatkar	Manual labour- artisanal work.	Lowest castes
Kumbhar	Traditionally potters	Lower middle caste
Lamani	Nomadic community traditionally engaged in trading, weaving, and artisanal crafts	Lowest castes
Mang	Labour-intensive roles, including agriculture and manual work	Lowest castes
Maratha	Warrior and administrative roles	Middle castes
Mahar	Manual labourers and agricultural workers	Lowest castes
Nhavi	Barbering and related services	Lower middle caste
Vanjari	Forest dwellers trading and commerce	Tribal group

**Caste representations are sourced from the study on the socio-economic background and seasonal migration of sugarcane harvesting workers (Kendre, 2011).*