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FLOWERS OF DECEPTION: The Expert's Nostalgia for a Future's Past and its Occlusion of Agrarian Labor

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SIGHTING A PARASITE: A Story of Experts' Affects

On a cloudy day in January 2016, a fortnight into harvest season, I accompanied a group of government officials—officers of the Tobacco Board, the regulatory authority that oversees the production and marketing of cigarette tobacco in India—to a Flue-Cured Virginia (FCV) tobacco-growing village in Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh.[1] The party spent the day liaising with farmers, inspecting the standing crop for pests and blights, and confirming that the post-harvest curing of leaves was proceeding as planned. We were midway through our journey back to town when the auction superintendent, the most senior official present, abruptly asked the driver to pull the government vehicle over to the side of the road, breaking with the itinerary. The officials then stepped out of the jeep onto a dirt track, flanked on either side by tobacco farms, and began a heated discussion. I couldn't immediately decipher the cause of their alarm, but neither cloudy skies nor bright red soil could hide the purple flowers on yellow stalks blossoming beneath the tobacco plants that had set them off. The farm was rife with these flowers, and above them, the tobacco was wilting.

Orobanche cernua, also known as broomrape and, colloquially, as *malle* (after Jasminum flowers) is a holoparasite—a total root parasite that depends entirely

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on its host for food and water. The plant draws nourishment by inserting suckers, called haustoria, into a host plant's roots under the surface of the soil, and feeds on *Solanaceae* (nightshades) like tobacco and chilies, dominant cash crops in the region (Baghyalakshmi et al. 2019, 96).[2] An unfettered *Orobanche* infestation can cause anywhere from a 20 to 100 percent reduction in crop yields. Worse still, *Orobanche*'s tenacious pollination—via humans and farm machinery—not only has immediate adverse consequences for neighboring farms but can also produce a hostile environment for cultivation far into the future.

Figure 1. *Orobanche Cernua* on the parched soil in the Flue-Cured Virginia tobacco farms in Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh. Photo by Amrita Kurian, Andhra Pradesh, 2016.

Justifiably concerned at the sight of the parasite on a field ready to be harvested, the junior field officer in charge of the village sought to get hold of the owner of the affected farm over the phone. With great vigor, he attempted to impress on the farmer the urgency of dealing with the infestation at the earliest. Yet he did not manage to elicit an adequate response. After he'd hung up, he recounted his exchange to the auction superintendent. The latter then spoke to the farmer directly, hoping to elicit a more favorable response. But he too ended his conversation in exasperation. Surprised to learn that the farmer had refused to cooperate with the request of a senior bureaucrat, I enquired about the nature of their conversation. "What can he do?" the auction superintendent said, resentment and despair contorting his voice. "There are no laborers for hire!"

This article investigates the affective responses that accompany experts' day-to-day technoscientific management of environmental sustainability initiatives. It argues that experts' affects, which derive from a particularly postcolonial experience of market relations, play a determining role in deciding who gets to be the expert's public and, thus, who gets to benefit from state support and expert environmental sustainability initiatives. Following the environmental sustainability initiatives of the Tobacco Board in the wake of the Orobanche infestation, the article finds that landowning farmers are defined as the experts' primary audience and "public."

Experts in the Indian FCV tobacco sector share an affective attachment to farmers, which I show to be part of a uniquely postcolonial emotional regime based on a shared cultural milieu of caste-based landownership, a history of state protectionism—which officially mandates experts to protect farmers' interests—and a common experience of their unequal status in markets (cf. Clarke 2019a, 2019b). This affective attachment to farmers contrasts sharply with experts' passive neglect of and active resentment toward laborers, which I claim highlight the experts' investment in maintaining the rural hegemony of landowning farmers, on which agrarian relations in India are largely based. Like untimely cyclones and parasitic infestation, my opening vignette suggests, the laborer becomes visible only when she disrupts the smooth flow of cash crops to the market.

Experts' definitions of publics have important implications for who benefits from the state's actions and investments—and who suffers on account of its neglect. The experts' contrasting treatment of landowning farmers and landless laborers suggests that sustainability measures to ensure agrarian futures are not necessarily directed at all the people affected by anthropogenic climate change (Paprocki 2022). For instance, FCV tobacco farmers receive inordinate attention from the state and state experts even by the standards of Indian agriculture. The tobacco sector in India has historically received significant state investments in physical infrastructure, as well as subsidies and financial relief or support. This is because, although a relatively minor crop by both acreage and number of livelihoods sustained, FCV tobacco remains highly lucrative and contributes significant revenues to tobacco farmers, traders, manufacturers, and the Government of India.[3] Thus, despite the stagnation of the global tobacco market in recent decades, India is one of the top three producers of the crop, alongside countries like China and Brazil.

Formed in 1975, in the heyday of India's protectionist planned economy era, the Tobacco Board brings under one umbrella all those it considers stakeholders

in the Indian FCV tobacco economy. The Board maintains a registry of every Indian tobacco farmer, trader, and manufacturer, and charges them for state services. Within these groups, farmers hold special importance for Board officials. The Board was originally constituted in response to farmers' protests against exploitation at the hands of buyers, who possess inordinate price-setting powers in the historically oligopsonistic cigarette tobacco market (Duvvury 1986). Moreover, the interests of domestic traders and manufacturers are covered by the protectionist policies of the central government. Thus, tobacco farmers make for the main recipients of the Board's knowledge and extension services, which aim to produce a high-quality, standardized FCV tobacco crop for the market and, in doing so, to lift farm incomes. For the same reason, inadequate returns in the market drive populist pressures against experts and become a source of shame for the senior experts of the Tobacco Board, who have been molded by the ethos of protectionism. Affects like nostalgia, which accompany experts' sustainability initiatives, mark a turn from their historically protectionist stance. They work as disciplining forces to tailor farmers' subjectivities to neoliberal markets.

The exclusion of laborers from the experts' purview seems curious considering that laborers are indispensable to the cultivation of the FCV tobacco crop and vital to the Indian tobacco economy's ability to produce cheap tobacco. As the early literature on *Orobanche* eradication in South Asia stresses, laborers are not only vectors in the pollination of *Orobanche* but also essential in framing solutions to handpick the parasite for effective eradication (Dhanapal 1996). Furthermore, in the face of mounting attacks from public health activists, laborers have long been used to discursively legitimize the FCV tobacco sector as a source of employment generation. The central government, the Tobacco Board, and private tobacco companies all recognize the crucial role labor statistics play in legitimizing the continued production of FCV tobacco and regularly publish information regarding the number of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled laborers—which hovers around the 20 million mark—employed in the tobacco sector.[4] The experts' passive neglect of laborers is only offset by an active resentment that they justify using a perverse riff on Marx's notion of primitive accumulation. Here, landless laborers, predominantly women and Dalits (oppressed castes), are seen as "free" to sell their labor or to collect welfare benefits beyond the tobacco economy.[5] Their situation is contrasted to the plight of tobacco farmers, who remain tethered to degrading lands.

The visceral and unconscious affects revealed in encounters such as the one described in my opening vignette capture underlying modes of engagement that go well beyond the official imperatives laid out in the technoscientific mandates

Figure 2. Laborers harvesting Flue-Cured Virginia (FCV) tobacco leaves on a farm in Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh. Photo by Amrita Kurian, Andhra Pradesh, 2016.

and training of state experts (Massumi 2002). They provide windows into the ideologies that lie behind experts' loyalties to their publics and to the boundaries they draw and maintain around their technoscientific interventions (cf. Gieryn 1995; Mahony 2013). The expert's affective attachment to farmers in the FCV tobacco sector derives from a postcolonial empathy with the figure of the farmer sustained by the racialized hierarchies of liberal markets, where Indian FCV tobacco has a long-standing reputation for low quality. As the chief scientist of the largest domestic cigarette manufacturer, Indian Tobacco Company Limited (ITC Ltd), pointed out in a 1995 report, "India produces neutral filler like China . . . and its cost of production is low as in China [*sic*]" (Subramaniam 1995, 19). The constitutive "lack" (of quality) of Indian tobacco, defined by buyers to maintain the low cost of its FCV tobacco, encapsulates India's tobacco markets, state experts, farmers, and the terrain. This sense of lack produces an emotional regime made up of "a unique set of official rituals, practices, and emotions" that structures the

subjectivities of the experts and their publics (Reddy 2001, 129; quoted in Clarke 2019b, 251; cf. Clarke 2019a).

Such an emotional regime is decisively postcolonial in that it is renewed by postwar economic development discourses that characterize postcolonial nations like India as developing nations, perpetually plagued by state corruption and miseducated farmers, which distort the transparent functioning of liberal markets (Wedel 2015). In seeking advancement in the global economy through self-improvement, this emotional regime combines a sensibility of victimhood with cultures of blame based on a shared sense of "plighted citizenship" (Berlant 2011, 13; Benson 2011, 21). "The [FCV tobacco] product offered is unclean due to farmers not properly understanding the importance of cleanliness," the ITC scientist referred to earlier suggested in the same report, a testament to the internalized racialization of farmers' cultivation practices that characterizes liberal markets for FCV tobacco (Subramaniam 1995, 20). The blighted modernity that sticks to postcolonial nations does not stop at racializing farmers and laborers along graded hierarchies; it also fuels a Sisyphean endeavor among state experts to scientifically improve the quality of Indian FCV tobacco toward facilitating greater market integration.

In defining the boundaries of experts' publics, affects work as forces of production, mediating gender, caste, and national roles, and reproducing not just capital but also bourgeois subjectivity (Yanagisako 2002; cf. Rofel and Yanagisako 2018). As culturally mediated expressions of deep-seated ideologies, affects reveal "the interfolding of the impersonal and the intimate" that binds experts to specific publics (Mazzarella 2017, 201). In the FCV tobacco economy, the neutrality of the Tobacco Board expert's scientific mandate is shown to mask the common cultural milieu the expert shares with the Indian tobacco farmer, rooted in landownership and landownership-based rural hegemony. The expert's fealty to the landowning farmer sustains the economic agency of upper-caste farmers amid rapidly changing dynamics of village life and reproduces farmers' subjectivities in accordance with the requirements of neoliberal markets (cf. Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009).

As historically cultivated, intersubjective dispositions, affective sensibilities sustain in-group caste loyalties in India, while maintaining difference through blame, resentment, touch avoidance, and a refusal of commensality (Mitchell 2021; Lee 2021).[6] Not seen as active participants in the region's agrarian economy, laborers do not pay for rent and services to the state. They do not obtain subsidies from the Board or corporations, nor do they receive disaster relief in the face of erratic weather patterns and parasitic infestations. At the same time, laborers become

hypervisible in the expert's affective registers as objects of blame and resentment when seen as disruptions to the smooth flow of tobacco to markets, even, as in the case of the opening vignette, in absentia (see Spillers 1987 on "hypervisibility";[7] Davis 1981;[8] cf. Benson 2008;[9] Cheng 2015). Despite the relatively privileged position of Indian tobacco farmers, the auction superintendent's despairing utterance—"What can he do?"—suggests that Indian tobacco experts consider farmers helpless when faced with the willful absence of laborers. The experts' neglect of and resentment toward laborers perpetuates the caste-based division of labor that facilitates the production of cheap commodities for the market.

In what follows, I draw on parallels between experts' environmental sustainability pedagogies developed in the wake of the parasitic infestation in the fields of Prakasam and *Orobanche*'s concealed entanglement with the tobacco plant to structure my arguments. The section following the introduction uses the complex (and invisible) entanglement of the tobacco plant and the parasite beneath the soil's surface to trace the historical production of actors and their affective and symbolic orders in Prakasam's FCV tobacco economy (cf. Carr 2015; Besky and Padwe 2016). The section called "Deceptive Bloom," a play on *Orobanche*'s purple flowers, shows that, despite their benign appearance, experts' pedagogies in teaching farmers sustainable farming conceal as much as they reveal. "Invisible Haustorium" explores the nostalgia that marks experts' pedagogies—collapsing traditional boundaries between science, authority, politics, and society—and produces a geographically situated epistemic community between state and market actors geared toward shared agrarian futures. It also reveals experts as culturally embedded actors who share the landed farmers' anxieties and resentments, not only vis-a-vis accumulating capital but also in maintaining the status quo of the agrarian relations that enable it. A brief epilogue, "Tobacco Wilting," tells the story of Ravannamma *Garu* to show how the body of the laborer—like the tobacco crop under siege by *Orobanche*—wilts, capitalized for exchange by parasitic agrarian relations. Considered free agents, laborers like Ravannamma are abandoned by experts and exposed to new forms of climate precarity.

As an ethnographer in the field, my privileged position as apprentice expert gave me access to otherwise exclusively masculine spaces, structured along caste-based socialities. Like the handful of female Tobacco Board officials and scientists, I was usually referred to as "Madam *Garu*," a signal of perceived status.[10] As a result, despite my gender and ambiguous caste affiliations in the eyes of Prakasam's village residents, I was able to seamlessly navigate across socially segregated production zones, allowing me to work with farmers and laborers on tobacco farms

and grading halls, as well as alongside Tobacco Board experts on auction floors and in the course of field visits like the one with which I opened this essay. It is in this capacity that I first met the labor contractor Singaiah *Garu* and befriended his wife, Ravannamma *Garu*, their daughter-in-law, Parvati, as well as the women who worked in his *muttah* (the labor gang). My position allows me to note the physical, material, and figurative absenting of laborers from experts' narratives and spaces and to spell out the consequences for laborers and the tobacco economy.

It is important to acknowledge here that the experts' absenting of laborers does not determine laborers' ontological projects of dignity and survival. In the face of the mundane slights that characterize rural and agrarian lives, laborers were very present in Prakasam's village economy, living lives of their own. One day, on our way back from harvest, we were all invited by a tobacco farmer's wife to celebrate the death anniversary of a close relative at her residence. Already fond of Andhra food, I was excited at the prospect of attending the midday meal and asked Parvati, whom I'd befriended by then, about the food we would be served. She smirked, shook her hands in the air, and told me that "we" ("*memu*" is exclusive in Telugu and does not include the listener) don't attend such events. Taking her curt response to indicate her own mood, I went ahead and attended the meal the next day. Then, as I sat among the older farmers enjoying spicy mutton curry, I realized that the few women I knew from the farms were seated at a different table, far from mine. Through her words and actions, Parvati had made her stance against caste-based commensality crystal clear.

COMPLEX ENTANGLEMENTS BENEATH THE SOIL: The Origins of the Indian FCV Tobacco Sector

Orobanche germinates under the soil, inserts its haustoria into the tobacco host plant, and only emerges into visibility above the soil surface once both plants have set down deep roots. For experts from the Tobacco Board, this complex entanglement, hidden beneath the soil, makes developing targeted solutions for eradicating *Orobanche* particularly challenging. Relations between experts, farmers, and laborers in the Indian FCV tobacco sector, I argue, mirror these concealed entanglements. The origins of all three can be traced to colonial projects of agricultural improvement which led to the formation of Indian tobacco markets in the late nineteenth century, and the later postcolonial responses to these infrastructures (Arnold 2018).

State experts in the Indian tobacco sector draw their lineage to the "men of science" imported from Britain into the Indian Civil Service for their "superior

technical and scientific knowledge of practical agriculture" in the late nineteenth century (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014, 331–32). Beginning in Bihar, these early tobacco scientists worked primarily with local European planters and native landlords (*zamindars*) who were seen as possessing the resources necessary for growing the capital-intensive tobacco crop and the suitably "progressive" attitudes required for driving farm innovation. These enduring relations continue to structure state experts' affective attachments to landowning farmers to the present day.

Later, in the early twentieth century, Indian tobacco agriculture was molded by the interests of large global tobacco companies looking to source raw materials from beyond the Americas and expand into newer consumer markets, as well as by the colonial government of India, which sought to earn taxes on international trade and boost revenues locally. The local manufacture of cigarettes also got a boost from nationalist movements in Bengal that campaigned against the consumption of foreign goods (e.g., the *Swadeshi* movement) (Biswas 1995). The most prominent of the large international tobacco companies to set down roots in India was the transnational conglomerate British American Tobacco Co. (BAT Co.). The company established an Indian offshoot, the Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC), and a leaf-development and procurement wing, Indian Leaf Tobacco Development Co. (ILTDC) (Cox 2000). The Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC) was renamed the Indian Tobacco Company Ltd. in 1974, and ILTD became its leaf-procuring wing. It continues to remain the largest domestic buyer and exporter of FCV tobacco, purchasing up to 80 percent of the FCV tobacco sold in certain regions. Today, ITC's dominance continues to give it outsized influence with tobacco farmers and the Tobacco Board.

Dominant market players have reinforced the capital intensity of FCV tobacco cultivation over the years. By the 1930s, Virginian varieties of tobacco were indigenized by crossing them with darker *deshi* or native strains. The resulting hybrids needed to be rendered bright to fit demand in global cigarette markets for "golden leaf" tobacco, which was achieved by flue-curing harvested tobacco leaves in brick barns using heat from wood fires distributed through flue pipes (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014; cf. Hahn 2011). Flue-curing proved complicated and expensive compared to the traditional air-and sun-curing methods that it replaced in India.

In the early colonial era, farmers were incentivized to produce tobacco through the provision of agri-extension services by the state and private experts. Curing, grading, and storage were the responsibility of tobacco buyers, and the cost of farm inputs, such as seeds and fertilizers, was deducted against the

purchase of green leaves at harvest (Duvvury 1986). Likewise, barns were initially owned and maintained by tobacco dealers and companies. However, gradually, the burden of producing a quality crop was shifted onto the shoulders of the region's tobacco farmers. Today, all tobacco farmers need to own or lease barns to cure their harvested tobacco, and must find separate spaces to grade and store cured tobacco leaves. Such infrastructures prove critical to producing standards of tobacco accepted at the Tobacco Board's auction platforms. These factors, along with stipulations of the minimum acreage required per barn, exclude many marginal and small farmers from participating in the lucrative tobacco economy.[11] Thus, except in a handful of districts, FCV tobacco is a market cornered by large landowning farmers.

The production of FCV tobacco also proves incredibly labor intensive. It requires a dedicated workforce of skilled seasonal laborers through all stages of cultivation, harvest, and curing. Daily wage laborers are essential for transplanting saplings, planting, furrowing, and eliminating weeds. Skilled laborers are contracted as a gang (*muttah*) for the entirety of the harvest period to pluck and prepare harvested leaves for curing, to cure harvested leaves, and to bulk, condition, grade, bale, and load and unload cured tobacco leaves. In the early decades of the twentieth century—when FCV tobacco cultivation moved from Bihar to the plains of coastal Andhra Pradesh—the region was lauded not just for its fertile soil, irrigated by dams on the Krishna and Godavari Rivers, but also for its amenable labor, shielded from the fervor of nationalist and peasant uprisings in Bihar and Bengal (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014). At the time, local missionaries sourced tobacco labor from Yerukula Adivasi (tribes) women (Radhakrishna 1989). Today, the skilled tobacco labor force that harvests and grades FCV tobacco consists predominantly of women and exclusively draws from Dalit communities.

Colonial modes of production have not only produced categories like experts, farmers, and laborers in the tobacco economy but they also inform relations of production in the sector. The extraction of cheap raw materials from the colonies has led to a partial breakdown of erstwhile feudal relations of production in Indian agriculture (Banaji 1977; Patnaik 1983). However, capitalist expansion has also relied on feudal relations of production, specifically, the exploitation of caste-based labor enforced through land alienation and caste endogamy (Mohanty 2016). Thus, whereas primitive accumulation has elsewhere been associated with social solvency, caste-based land alienation means that laborers in Prakasam remain predominantly landless and have little access to capital and other resources. Exploitative colonial taxation, on the other hand, proletarianized poorer tenants and encouraged

absentee landlordism, leading to poor technological development in smallholder lands (Patnaik 1986). These historical conditions, by default, exclude laborers from stakeholdership in the tobacco economy on the basis of landownership.

Colonial modes of production have persisted in postcolonial India through inherited infrastructures and attendant "structures of feeling" that mediate productive relations. In agriculture, failed attempts at modernization, most notably, the abandonment of post-independence efforts to redistribute land through land reform, have selectively benefited specific middle-tenant and peasant-caste farmers (Siegel 2018; cf. Gidwani 2008; Sud 2007). In areas like Prakasam, dam projects and cash-crop agriculture have distributed prosperity more widely among specific caste groups who were formerly tenant farmers, such as Kammas, Kapus, and Reddys (A. V. R. Rao 1958). Kamma farmers dominate in Prakasam, constituting not just a distinct culture but also the dominant political voice of Andhra state politics (cf. Upadhya 1988; Benbabaali 2018). It is these dominant peasant castes that have mainly benefited from the Tobacco Board's agri-extension services, Green Revolution technologies, and government aid.

To better understand the structures of feeling inherited by the various actors in the tobacco economy today, we must also understand the history of the constitution of the Tobacco Board. This history explains the strong bonds between experts and farmers today. As larger numbers of international buyers and intermediaries emerged in the postcolonial era, Indian tobacco farmers found themselves increasingly exploited by more powerful market participants. On several occasions, local traders were guilty of pilferage and reneged payment (Duvvury 1986). A significant political bloc by then, farmers organized to demand government intervention in the sector, leading to the establishment of the Tobacco Board under the Tobacco Board Act of 1975. The act mandated that Board experts assist Indian tobacco farmers in becoming competitive in markets. To this end, the Board would work to improve the quality of Indian FCV tobacco crops and better integrate Indian tobacco farmers into global supply chains. They would also regulate Indian tobacco markets by monitoring the grading and pricing of crops through Board-run auctions. In doing so, the Board was to safeguard the Indian tobacco farmer's livelihood, while effectively increasing state revenues.

Both experts and farmers share an understanding of the perceived low status of Indian tobacco in the global market. Lack of quality constitutes baggage that Indian tobacco has carried for more than a century. The colonial improvement projects that indigenized Flue-Cured Virginia tobacco varieties occurred in parallel with a discourse on the inherent lack that supposedly characterized Indian

nature, native populations, and their culture. As early as 1907, Albert and Gabrielle Howard—a scientist couple appointed by the Imperial Government of India to a research institute at Pusa, Bihar—wrote that "despite the importance of the crop and its money value, some rather surprising weaknesses in cultivation methods were prevalent. . . . Above all, there was no attempt whatever to aim at quality" (Howard 1953, 83). While Albert Howard later conceded that the burdens of the peasantry—suffering from taxes and debts—were factors behind the lack of quality in Indian tobacco, most European merchants of the time continued to see low-quality tobacco as representative of the "'slovenliness and ignorance of a semi-barbarous people'" (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014, 45).

This sensibility of lack extends beyond tobacco and agriculture and attaches itself to the postcolonial nation's imaginings of itself. While a notable aspect of postcolonial India's counter-hegemonic reaction to being relegated to the "waiting room" of modernity has been to constitutionally grant universal franchise to every Indian, such political modernity remains fraught with contradictions (Chakrabarty 2008, 9). Both colonial and postcolonial development projects have viewed peasants and villages as seats of superstition that education alone can change. These ideas prove central to the post-independence state's efforts toward rural development and its alliance with landowning farmers to achieve these ends.

Yet even as affluent landowning farmers embraced the virtues of self-reliance and market integration, they have vigorously opposed egalitarian land redistribution, sequestering the largest share of the benefits of state infrastructural and welfare projects (Siegel 2017). Thus, despite the counter-hegemonic valence of Gandhian ideals aimed at uplifting villages, the chosen path to a distinct Indian modernity has been reduced to technological improvements aimed at increasing agricultural productivity. This history explains regulatory experts' and agri-scientists' enduring focus on researching and developing seeds and improving cultivation, grading, and curing technologies, at the cost of, say, measures aimed at protecting the interests of agricultural laborers.

State experts' affective attachments to farmers, as with their experience of modernity vis-à-vis markets, are built around a contradiction. Like European scientists and early Indian modernizers, experts at the Tobacco Board have naturalized the lack-of-quality discourse, incorporating it into their technical interventions and extending it to descriptions of Indian farmers and tobacco-growing geographies. However, unlike their British counterparts, and like Indian tobacco farmers, Board experts also experience racialized hierarchies in markets that view their work, as bureaucrats of the Indian state, as inefficient. The conceit of

economic developmentalism of the post–World War II era is that while Europe and the United States provide ample subsidies to their tobacco farmers, state mediation of Indian markets is widely seen by buyers as a corruption of liberal free markets—a lack of a different kind (cf. Wedel 2015). Like tobacco farmers, Indian state experts experience markets as the perpetual other, inflecting affective attachments with postcolonial emotions of nationalist solidarity, counter-hegemonic to the West.

A final factor that cements the solidarity between state experts and tobacco farmers is their shared cultural backgrounds. Most of the experts I interacted with in Prakasam were central government bureaucrats—but also natives of the region. They had been recruited, among other things, for their Telugu-speaking abilities, key to facilitating smoother expert-farmer relationships. This assignment of bureaucrats lines up with the Indian Civil Service's agenda of territorially and socially integrating a nation with high linguistic and cultural diversity by using state bureaucracy to distribute welfare and enact planned development (Benbabaali 2008). These bureaucrat-experts (as well as the state scientists and domestic tobacco company executives they worked closely with) also most often hailed from the same dominant caste groups that made up the bulk of FCV tobacco farmers in the region, and many of the experts I quote in this article personally traced their lineages to current or erstwhile landowning agricultural households.

The experts' cultural, linguistic, and affective attachment to farmers were not accidental but essential to effectively performing their roles as bureaucrats. Experts were emplaced in farmers' cultural and political milieus and shared their cultural bias against labor mobilization in favor of maintaining the status quo in rural social relations rooted in landownership and market integration. Unsurprisingly, then, most of the Tobacco Board's subsidies for sustainable practices and their reparations in the event of environmental catastrophes largely benefit landowning farmers. The positioning of farmers as the experts' public is crucial to this outcome.

THE DECEPTIVE BLOOM: Pedagogies of Sustainability as a Diversionary Tactic

Orobanche's colloquial Telugu nomenclature—*malle*, synonymous with flowers of the *Jasminium* species in the language—offers testimony of its alluring appearance. But the purple blooms that crown the parasite's stark yellow stalks also hint at a more obvious trait of the plant—an absence of chlorophyll. Just as the *Orobanche*'s bloom conceals complex entanglements with the tobacco plant beneath the soil surface, the neutral stance that state expertise uses to bolster its authority

also hides a unique set of dependencies and constraints. In their public engagements, pedagogies, and the interactional skills that experts harness to perform these duties, the expert's neutrality masks the Indian tobacco economy's collective subservience to markets and its indispensable dependence on low-cost agricultural labor.

In meeting their mandate, which requires them to protect tobacco farmers' livelihoods by improving the quality of FCV tobacco in line with market preferences, Tobacco Board experts have created a discursive register to package and present information to farmers and have fostered specific sites from which to disseminate this information. Events such as field visits and other one-on-one meetings with farmers are not just occasions for experts to share information; they also allow experts to express solidarity with tobacco farmers. Such "spatialities of technoscientific knowledge" create epistemic geographies, communities with farmers built around shared in-depth knowledge of the tobacco-growing geographies (Mahony and Hulme 2018, 396).

As part of its efforts in public engagement, the Tobacco Board funds and organizes agrarian seminars every year. Big-tent events, the Board's agrarian seminars bring together a diverse group of stakeholders—including farmers, traders, and scientific experts—under one roof. They are sites where stakeholders renew their commitment to each other and, if the 2016 iteration offers any indication, a stage for Tobacco Board experts to showcase their formidable ability "to finesse reality and animate evidence through mastery of verbal performance" (Matoesian 1999, 518). Both state and tobacco company experts who participated in the event visibly enjoyed delivering customized and highly animated pedagogic stories, taught using both English and Telugu and tailored to their local audience. A local scientist compared the combination of nutrients essential to growing FCV tobacco, *naitrōjan-potash-bhāsvaraṁ* (nitrogen-potassium-phosphorous), or NPK, to a typical Andhra meal of *annamu* (cooked rice), *kūra* (curry), and *perugu* (yogurt), demonstrating that experts used civic epistemologies or culturally specific and historically grounded ways of knowing in their public engagements (Jasanoff 2012).

For the experts at the seminar in 2016, the emergence of *Orobanche* also indexed a longer-term pattern of erratic weather and rising environmental degradation in the region. The untimely precipitation that year resulted from stark differences in day- and nighttime temperatures in the region in previous years. Together with degraded soil conditions resulting from prolonged monoculture, this had created conditions rife for the parasite's germination and spread. Mahesh Rao, the Tobacco Board's administrative head for Prakasam district, explicitly made

the connection between current and long-term challenges, opening the seminar with the bold claim that "climate change" had been the leading cause for decreasing profits from FCV tobacco in the region in recent years—despite widespread acknowledgment that demand for Indian FCV tobacco was depleting annually in any case.

Inevitably, the 2016 agrarian seminar focused primarily on sustainability measures developed to counter the parasitic infestation and the climate change it portended.[12] To steer farmers away from chemical pesticides in dealing with the infestation, Dr. Reddy, a senior ITC scientist, employed anthropomorphic metaphors. *Orobanche* was *mondi pattuthala* (stubborn) and intelligent, he suggested. He cautioned farmers against impulsive, heavy-handed actions, such as using kerosene to kill the *Orobanche*. Drawing on international relations metaphors, he explained that the parasite demanded a "diplomatic" approach, one involving tact and attentiveness. Dr. Reddy claimed that, in the long run, traditional "cultural methods" of cultivation would prove more effective in combatting *Orobanche* infestation. To counter problems of soil degradation and groundwater salinity, he prescribed deep plowing, crop rotation, and using cattle and green manure (*eruvu*) as fertilizers in place of artificial chemicals. Chemical fertilizers killed the life of the land, or the *sookshma jeevigal* (microorganisms) who live on the land, he declared, marking a shift toward sustainability in tobacco monoculture in recent years.

Accompanying this new sustainability ethos were several references to "our forefathers" (*mana poorvikulu*), marking them as worthy of imitation. These accounts rhymed well with the turn to cultural methods in renewing farm health. Repeatedly, in private interviews and at seminars, I came across experts commenting on the poor work ethic of farmers today, criticizing them for leaving the fate of their farms in the hands of labor contractors. Dr. Reddy, for instance, suggested that the ancestors of today's tobacco farmers had been less distracted by non-farm endeavors, allowing them to be more attentive to their crops. Echoing Dr. Reddy's nostalgia, Mahesh Rao told me that his grandfather's generation had been known for their superior work ethic. Wives then diligently raised cattle and physically collected manure for fertilizer on their farms. Today, by comparison, even when they owned buffaloes, women were too proud to do menial work, he complained.

As salaried bureaucrats with scientific mandates, the experts' distance from the land allows them to reproduce differences between experts and farmers and critique the latter along the same rubric of "lack" previously employed by European experts. By referencing their common ancestors, experts reinforce epistemic community through their shared cultural milieu and experience. In sharp contrast

to Mahesh Rao's claim that climate change principally lurked behind decreasing profits, Indian exporters have come under increasing pressure from international buyers to reduce the presence of excessive Crop Protection Agents (CPAs) in exported tobacco. These allegations have reduced prices of individual FCV tobacco bales in the market and even led to the outright rejection of export consignments. Seen from this perspective, the direction of experts' advice advocating "diplomacy" and attendant nostalgia are motivated not only by the desire to secure farm futures but also by the need to assuage international buyers' concerns. Ultimately, however, despite experts' claims, the revival of cultural methods of farming, with all their attendant cultural and nationalist affects, without any change in the terms of trade, only serves the market.

The constrained motivations of tobacco experts were highlighted for me by my farmer friend, Krishna *Garu*, a local FCV tobacco farmer, who raised several objections in response to my summarization of Dr. Reddy's recommendations. From Krishna *Garu*'s perspective, to implement measures like crop rotation and deep plowing in the absence of adequate rainfall, farmers would have to buy non-saline irrigation water throughout Prakasam's prolonged summer droughts, when even drinking water was a scarce resource. In asking farmers to implement sustainability practices in line with their forefathers' practices, neither Dr. Reddy nor Mahesh Rao had spelled out the quantity of livestock required to produce sufficient manure, the labor required for this task, or the water needed to raise cattle and irrigate land fertilized by natural manure.

These facts were not unknown to Board experts. They were often sympathetic to the fact that most farmers engaged in other businesses, such as real estate, to buffer against recurrent losses on their farms. They were aware that the market price for FCV tobacco was driven more by the fluctuations of demand and supply in an opportunistic market than by ethical sourcing concerns or the environmental impact of tobacco production (cf. Benson 2008). Even so, the institutional and discursive force of expert pedagogy, and the affective and scientific labor of the experts, worked to discipline farmers. The state expert's encouragement of market-friendly sustainability measures is of a piece with larger patterns of self-reform that neoliberalizing governance promotes (Alaimo 2012; Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009). Their attempts to secure agrarian futures and mitigate the environmental effects of tobacco monoculture can be characterized as an effort by the government to mitigate problems created by the government (and market) (Hetherington 2020, 4). Seen in this light, experts' actions serve to divert farmers' attentions away from concerns over the unequal terms of trade set by tobacco

companies—where buyers increasingly have inordinate price-setting powers—and towards self-correcting behavior such as attending to the health of the soil and their crops.

THE INVISIBLE HAUSTORIUM: Nostalgia for a Future's Past

Changing patterns of rural lifestyles in India have in recent decades created a yearning for a less complicated time and melancholy over a home lost to rapid urbanization and state neglect (cf. Mathur 2014). In the FCV tobacco sector, experts and landowning farmers share such nostalgic feelings. In mediating expert-public engagement, such nostalgia speaks to lost rurality, ties farmers' subjectivities to the imagination of the postcolonial nation, and binds experts and farmers together based on their collective failure in markets. The gradual withdrawal of state support for tobacco markets, a stabilizing force in high-risk/low-return markets, has only increased the uncertainty over the future viability of the sector, further stoking these sentiments today (cf. Yarrow 2017; Piot 2019).

The nostalgia of experts suggests multiple ethical and political possibilities. In the wake of the *Orobanche* infestation in the fields of Prakasam, many experts told stories of a nobler past, demonstrating a discomfort with the present, itself a receding moment containing "expectations about a hoped-for future" and "experiences of the past" (Scott 2004, 39). Like other affective attachments, nostalgia has the potential to work its way into experts' spatio-temporal projects of revival, including attempts to restore more-than-human lifeworlds, such as microorganisms living in the soil (Angé and Berliner 2020; Angé 2020). It can produce labors of love that translate into care and solidarity projects in particular places (Tsing 2015). More immediately, the expert's nostalgia has succeeded in producing a geographically situated epistemic community geared toward shared agrarian futures.

Yet the nostalgia of experts also raises several important questions. To begin with, there is the question of why it arises. What questions do nostalgic his-stories answer in the context of the expert's work? And what does this say about the political and cognitive problem space from which experts tell stories of the past (Scott 2004)? Agriculture's contribution to Indian GDP has been on a downward trend since the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991. Tracking this trend, Indian farmers find themselves receding in importance in the nation's populist discourse. Today, despite policymakers' widespread acknowledgment of the harsh lived realities of farming, including inadequate compensation, highly speculative markets, and crushing debt, the ability of Indian farmers to operate within political society and arrest the working of government exists only as a form of vicarious

desire for the democratic process among liberal intellectuals (cf. Chatterjee 2004). Most recently, this growing government apathy toward farmers was on ample display in the Indian government's stubborn indifference to farmers' protests in response to attempts at deregulating agricultural markets (cf. Sethi 2021; Amnesty International 2024). Thus, despite being India's largest employer, the country's farm sector feels displaced in the national imagination by rapid urbanization and a burgeoning tech industry.

But—as with sentiments like love, concern, and work ethics—a sensibility of abandonment and lack can become unjust and selfish. In rural India today, it increasingly ties the loss of a future to exclusionary logics based on blame and resentment of proscribed others—features it shares with the rising tide of right-wing sentiment worldwide (cf. Govindrajan 2019; Franklin 2019). Here, the expert's nostalgia, a form of cruel optimism assuaging anxieties of loss, becomes aligned with the mania of exclusionary nationalism, barely concealing a yearning for a past when labor was more "amenable" to facilitating the capitalist expansion of tobacco markets (Boyer 2006).

Experts' and farmers' nostalgia for an ideal past also closely connects to their resentment of laborers today. Despite the failure of egalitarian and land-distribution projects, some of the benefits of welfare programs, affirmative action, communist and Dalit political mobilization, and FCV tobacco wealth have trickled down to the poorest and most oppressed caste groups. In the FCV tobacco sector, the wealth that FCV tobacco brought to villages has become a "money multiplier" for laborers (Chikkala 2015). As a result, several Dalit landless laborers have today turned into small landholders, rearticulating historical conditions of land alienation, albeit on highly precarious terms (cf. Ramamurthy 2011). And, even among those still landless, opportunities for selling their labor have improved. Moreover, the laborers' indispensability to farming FCV tobacco has empowered *muttahs* to negotiate better contracts. Thus, labor costs increase after every bumper harvest and do not recede in subsequent years, regardless of the hit to farmers' profits, making rising prices for labor a leading cause of farmers' and experts' resentment of laborers.

Reading the biography of "a born Virginia tobacco grower," an erstwhile member of Parliament and the Tobacco Board, recommended to me as a must-read for the accuracy of its observations by several Tobacco Board experts, I came across a similar story of nostalgia and resentment that resonated with stories I'd heard from farmers and experts, suggesting that neither nostalgia nor resentment were novel or inchoate affects. Written in English in 1985 by B. V. Sivaiah, the

book criticizes young farmers, who the author claims are lured into neglecting the health of their farms by city lights and television shows, signaling a village ethos lost to rapid urbanization.

Sivaiah reserves his harshest judgments for laborers. According to his narrative, the laborer is someone who would rather go hungry than miss the latest showing of their favorite movie. The men squander their money on alcohol while their families face perpetual penury. The new generation of laborers, unlike that of their parents, come late to the fields and—like "government officials"—leave early. Even when on farms, Sivaiah (1985, 194–95) complains, laborers "dragged their feet." He illustrates the suboptimal work ethic of laborers in a joke about a teacher quizzing his student on a math problem. The joke goes something like this: If a single laborer takes a day to complete a task, how long do two take? The naive student responds that the work takes two days. In Sivaiah's (1985, 137) text, such lousy math exemplifies the laborers' lethargy and lack of cooperation.

Sivaiah's characterization of laborers and state experts' nostalgia for a nobler past are symptomatic of the "alternative hegemonies" crafted by postcolonial elites to counter colonial and market hierarchies (Shah 2008, 673). But their rhetoric of national pride also masks the postcolonial dependence on colonial legacies of "extractive statecraft" and "expropriation of surplus by elites" that has enforced penury and indignity on oppressed castes (Shah 2008, 673). Sivaiah's expectation of dedication from farmworkers echoes in experts' stories today. Laborers were once dedicated to the farmers they served, Mahesh Rao ruefully told me. They would report for work at their master's house at the crack of dawn. Masked in these nostalgic narratives is a historical relationality that actively dissuaded Dalit laborers from owning land, rendering them not just amenable but indentured to the farmers they served (Banaji 2003; Omvedt 1982). These blind spots allow postcolonial modernizers to continue to absent laborers from the scientific repertoire of expertise and exclude them from availing of the benefits of state patronage—most crucially, state-organized subsidies and credits and personal-injury and climate-disaster relief packages. The latter, in recent years, have helped farmers re-purchase and transplant tobacco saplings destroyed during erratic cyclonic rainfall and the root rot that ensues.

Whereas laborers are largely excluded from the experts' discourse, both Sivaiah's biography and the vignette that opens this article offer instances of special circumstances that render laborers hypervisible. The persistence of the status quo of agrarian relations has meant that even as rich peasant farmers become self-reliant and market-integrated, these same farmers expect laborers to remain welfare

subjects (cf. Viswanath 2014). But where the laborers' indispensability to the farmers' and state's profits and their ability to negotiate better contracts comes into visibility, laborers become hypervisible. They are seen as unruly political subjects, sources of exasperation, and subjects of disparagement. They are then demonized as disruptions to the smooth flow of crops to markets. In the worst cases, the laborers' hypervisibility as empowered agents subjects them to extralegal violence (cf. A. Rao 2009). The Karamchedu and Chunduru massacres of Dalits and agrarian laborers and the destruction of their property in Prakasam in the 1980s resulted from such contradictions of invisibility and hypervisibility (Berg 2014; Ilaiah 2004). These incidents also led to the largest Dalit mobilization against casteism in recent Andhra Pradesh history (Satyanarayana 2014).

CONCLUSION

Experts around the world are experiencing a crisis of legitimacy today. The gulf between the cultures of those who govern and those governed has become unmanageable (Riles 2018). As a result, there is a call from within the ranks of experts, as well as from beyond them, to expand and intensify public engagement to restore lost trust in the age of participation (cf. Lave 2015; Chilvers and Kearnes 2020; Jasanoff 2015). In this context, it is worth noting the major obstacles to improving relations between experts and the audiences they ostensibly serve. In Indian FCV tobacco agriculture, the gulf between experts and landowning farmers is perpetuated by the "market world" we live in and governed by vestigial colonial hierarchies, where regulated commons have been replaced by neoliberal self-governance; dialogic engagement, although still formally conducted, is no longer central to regulating technoscience (Pestre 2008).

In this article, I have further complicated the emphasis on participation by highlighting the complex histories that produce experts and their publics, and, more specifically, "the making and formatting" of publics through the analytics of affect (Pestre 2008, 104). I have shown how the performance of affects—like nostalgia, concern, and resentment—do important boundary-making work for experts. Indian state experts' affect toward tobacco farmers and their use of nostalgic stories of "our forefathers" in fostering environmental sustainability reveal the potential of creating shared epistemic geographies that enable experts to stake claims about representing farmers. Yet the goals of expert-public engagement continue to be geared toward market integration through increased productivity. Despite state experts' concern for farmers in the FCV tobacco sector, their moves to revive cultural methods are not simply motivated by visions of viable agrarian

futures. Rather, they are inflected by neoliberal ideologies underpinning markets that push mounting burdens of costs and risks onto farmers' shoulders.

In a reversal of destiny, laborers proletarianized by enforced caste-based land alienation are now considered free to escape the drudgery of agrarian labor and caste discrimination by working in rapidly expanding small towns and cities. However, ignoring labor when designing solutions to meet the challenges of environmental crises overlooks the causes of labor shortages in agriculture, which has feminized the labor force and produced a growing number of translocal householdings (Gidwani and Ramamurthy 2018). Climate change and other environmental factors play a crucial role in producing labor shortages in regions like Prakasam. In the past decade, Prakasam district has seen a drastic increase in heat-related deaths concentrated among those who work outdoors (Sumadhura 2019; Kumar 2015). The unavailability of labor constitutes a cumulative result of migration cycles away from the backbreaking work, pesticide poisoning, and heat-related deaths so integral to monoculture.

While experts' absenting of their lives and livelihoods further accelerates the exit of laborers from agriculture, the lack of state recognition and economic agency exposes those left out of experts' calculations to the contingencies of environmental crises, socially and psychoculturally impinging on their ability to thrive (Whyte 2017, 155; cf. Besky 2019). The women who grow and process FCV tobacco may be indispensable to the tobacco economy, but like the tobacco plants exposed to parasitic infestation, they are left to wilt under the sun.

EPILOGUE: The Wilting Tobacco

I will conclude this article with another vignette to highlight some of the consequences of experts overlooking laborers. The story of Ravannamma *Garu*, the labor contractor's wife, hints at how the neglect of state experts routinely plays out for laborers. Over the first couple of months that I worked on the tobacco farms alongside women laborers, Ravannamma *Garu* had reluctantly included me in farmwork—despite my strange appearance, awkward Telugu, and limited skills. As we transplanted saplings and removed weeds, it often seemed as if the women were conducting extensive research into my person, rather than the other way round. Generally wary of authority and village gossip, the women of the labor gang shied away from interviews. But as I spent months with them, discussing fashion, family, and films, they passed on the expertise they had gathered from their mothers. I learned how to transplant saplings, harvest leaves, sew them onto curing racks, and grade cured tobacco, as well as to remove *Orobanche*. Despite their knowledge

and insights, neither Maistree *Garu* nor Ravannamma *Garu* were ever invited to interact with experts. The experts didn't seek out their views, even though it was Maistree *Garu* who decided when laborers would pluck *Orobanche* from the farms he monitored. Despite the experts' absenting of laborers, the workers strove to make a living, challenging normative structures and creating alternative modalities of expertise. As Maistree *Garu*, the labor contractor and Ravannamma *Garu*'s husband, proudly declared, the "laborers did all the work, while farmers collected the money."

Figure 3. Maistree *Garu* monitoring the work of the *muttah* (labor gang) on the tobacco farm. Photo by Amrita Kurian, Andhra Pradesh, 2016.

As time passed, Ravannamma *Garu*'s attitude toward me softened, moving from suspicion to nonchalance to warmth. She made sure I was not working too hard by making me sit beside her while she worked. But as the tobacco plants grew tall and ripe, it was she who looked increasingly worn out. Over the course of the season, she had been struck by the loss of her brother and father, and I chalked her

fatigue down to grief and sleepless nights spent unloading cured tobacco from the barns, tasks that formed part of the laborers' chores during harvest. Then, after several days' absence from farmwork, she visited the barn one day to tell us she was on her way to see the doctor. She complained that she had been tormented by nausea and persistent stomach pain (*kaduppunoppi*) for some time and explained that this was why she had missed work.

In a later conversation at their home, remarking on her deteriorating health, Ravannamma *Garu* stressed that pain and nausea were integral to agricultural work. Nausea and dizziness resulted from the lack of safety gear, which meant that laborers were always breathing in pesticides and fertilizers, critical features of cash-crop monoculture. They were also prone to Green Tobacco Sickness from physical contact with tobacco gum that rendered their hands purple-black and the food they consumed by hand bitter. Ravannamma *Garu* considered her condition part of the seasonal dues that cost the agricultural laborer in lost wages, medical bills, and ultimately health, a price she paid for her livelihood.

A few weeks later, when I returned to the field after a short Easter break, my farmer friend, Krishna *Garu*, told me that no work would happen on the fields that day. In an occupation where even Sundays are workdays for all but churchgoers, this was atypical. Ravannamma *Garu* had succumbed to her abdominal pain and passed away. Work on the farm was suspended for the next two days while Maistree *Garu* and his family mourned their loss. After a day or two of mourning, the laborers and I went back to the farms. The tobacco plants did not stop for death or mourners; they followed seasonal and market rhythms, and the potential for losses made farmers less empathetic. Though Maistree *Garu*'s family took a couple of additional days off, the seasonal work meant that neither he nor they could take too long to mourn Ravannamma *Garu*. There were mouths to feed and work to be done caring for the crop. Regardless of whether Ravannamma *Garu* was killed by pesticide use or the backbreaking work and unhealthy working conditions of agricultural labor, her status as a free actor placed her death outside the agrarian experts' purview and their schemes compensating for loss.

ABSTRACT

Using the lens of affect, this article argues that understanding the sensibilities and allegiances of postcolonial experts is vital to determining who constitutes the expert's "public" and, thus, who benefits from state interventions and who doesn't. Following environmental sustainability initiatives in the wake of a parasitic infestation of tobacco in Andhra Pradesh, I analyze experts' concern for landowning farmers in

contrast to their passive neglect and active resentment of landless laborers. The article draws parallels between the experts' pedagogies and the parasite's deceptively attractive bloom, which hides complex entanglements between parasite and plant beneath the soil surface. I show that a postcolonial emotional regime idealizes landowning farmers and renders invisible the experts' and farmers' common cultural milieu of landownership and collective dependence on caste-based labor. Invoking nostalgia for a lost past, experts' pedagogies are productive, subsidizing monoculture while neoliberalizing farmers' subjectivities. By their absenting, laborers face climate precarity and the reproduction of resentment against them. [experts; expertise; affect; nostalgia; caste; environmental sustainability; India]

NOTES

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1. Flue-Cured Virginia (FCV) tobacco is the primary variety of tobacco used in most popular cigarette blends worldwide.
2. The parasite attack leads to carbohydrate and inorganic ion loss and reduced water uptake by the host plant, skewing key chemical ratios of nicotine, sugars, and nitrogen in the cured leaf, and affects tobacco prices at auction. Its spores adhere to farm machinery and the extremities of humans, enabling their rapid spread from farm to farm (Puzzili 1983).
3. India produces various types of tobacco, including FCV, Bidi, Hookah, Chewing, Cigar-wrapper, Cheroot, Burley, Oriental, HDBRG, Lanka, Pikka, Natu, Motihari, Jati etc. (https://ctri.icar.gov.in). Among these, FCV tobacco is a minor crop, grown on just 140,000 hectares, by only 100,000 farmers, and exclusively in the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (Tobacco Board 2022), yet FCV tobacco comprises 80-85 percent of India's tobacco exports. The Indian government earned about 876 million dollars from FCV tobacco in 2022 in foreign exchange alone, apart from taxes and excise revenues (Tobacco Board 2022). Tobacco accounts for 4 percent of India's agri-exports by volume and earns 10 percent (14,000 crores) of agri-export incomes.
4. This labor statistic encapsulates farm labor employed for all varieties of tobacco agriculture in India. The statistic is corroborated by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and online resources such as Statista. However, since it draws on the National Sample Survey 2011, the figure is dated.
5. The term *Dalit* means "broken" or "downtrodden" in Marathi and is a chosen name of self-empowerment by members of the most oppressed castes in India.

6. Lee's work exemplifies how unconscious and visceral affects, like the disgust that characterizes human responses to bodily effluence, or matter out of place, are culturally cultivated. Caste in India is perpetuated by extending these culturally mediated affects to categories of humans based on their enforced proximity to matters out of place.
7. The Black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers points to this paradoxical hypervisibility of the figure of the Black woman in liberal humanist discourse, subsumed as a derivative of objectified masculine labor in the Atlantic slave trade archives and doubly oppressed as Black and woman on slave plantations (Spillers 1987; see also Davis 1981). Yet when she finally becomes visible to normative history, she becomes hypervisible as disrupting normative heteropatriarchy, as evidenced in the infamous Moynihan Report of 1965.
8. Peter Benson (2008; 2011) writes about how tobacco corporations have mobilized global health advocacy to demand "clean" tobacco from producers in the United States. These corporate mechanisms discipline farmers by informing cultivating ethics and shaping their relationships with racialized immigrant workers, who are seen as the source and point of contamination.
9. Cheng's archival study of tobacco shows how, as early as the nineteenth century, refracted ideals of proper race and sexual reproduction tied to scientific eugenics and national security were used in plantation agriculture. The characterization of tobacco infected by the tobacco mosaic virus as "el tabaco se ha mulato" ("tobacco has become mulatto"), implying the ruin of once "exquisite" tobacco, provides a testimony to the fears of contamination via miscegenation (Cheng 2015, 1, 3, 4).
10. *Garu* is a gender-neutral term of respect in Telugu indexing age and/or social status.
11. The minimum acreage in the FCV tobacco sector is assigned in accordance with curing-barn capacity. It changes annually depending on market demand. Currently, it stands at around 8 acres, which is more than what marginal and small farmers own.
12. Experts and farmers are equally aware of the carbon footprint caused by using wood fires for flue-curing. The deforestation that results, experts speculate, makes for one of the causes of erratic rainfall. One of the urgent agendas in both state and private company research and development seeks to replace firewood with other heat sources. Thus far, these interventions have failed either due to the inability of alternative sources to provide the same levels of heat or because of their cost to farmers.

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