

Burning Cane: Sugar, Land, Work and Health in Southern Africa

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Work in progress

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Controlled cane-burning in Xinavane



Sugarcane production in South Africa 1996-2011



Source: USDA 2012 , p. 3

Sugarcane production in Southern Africa 1990,2000, 2010

Country	1990	2000	Percentage Change	2010	Percentage Change
South Africa	18,083,500	23,876,200	32.03%	16,015,600	-32.92%
Mauritius	5,548,290	5,109,500	-7.91%	4,365,830	-14.55%
Swaziland	3,841,800	3,884,600	1.11%	5,000,000	28.71%
Zimbabwe	3,092,890	4,227,500	36.68%	3,100,000	-26.67%
Madagascar	2,000,000	2,188,630	9.43%	3,000,000	37.07%
Malawi	1,790,000	2,100,000	17.32%	2,500,000	19.05%
Zambia	1,126,540	1,600,000	42.03%	3,500,000	118.75%
Mozambique	331,569	397,276	19.82%	2,800,000	604.80%

Comparison of sugar workers' wages, Tongaat-Hulett, South Africa & Mozambique

Wage band	Maidstone hourly wage ZAR	Maidstone Hourly wage\$	Imputed Maidstone monthly wage \$	AdX monthly wage MT	AdX monthly wage \$
A1A				2554	\$89.61
A1	26.95	\$3.29	\$411.83	3246	\$113.89
A2	28.5	\$3.48	\$435.51	3317	\$116.39
A3	30.56	\$3.74	\$466.99	3416	\$119.86
B1	33.06	\$4.04	\$505.20	3722	\$130.60
B2	36.31	\$4.44	\$554.86	4747	\$166.56
B3	41.36	\$5.06	\$632.03	5586	\$196.00
B4	47.11	\$5.76	\$719.90	6411	\$224.95
B5	55.32	\$6.76	\$845.35	7601	\$266.70
C1	62.04	\$7.58	\$948.04	8382	\$294.11
C2	69.67	\$8.52	\$1,064.64	9626	\$337.75
C3	79.37	\$9.70	\$1,212.87	10556	\$370.39

Xinavane: an agro-industrial sugar town



***the political instability of the class compromise:
going beyond wage and income questions***

- The wages and health of locally recruited seasonal workers
- The health of locally residing factory workers and administrative staff

Uncertain alternatives

- Brazilian: mechanisation of most of harvest with continuing dependence on migrant labour, seasonality, target wages
- of smallholder outgrowers employing local and migrant seasonal labour
- Salary upgrading of tasks of weeding and cleaning to level of cane-cutting, increased green cane production providing fixed jobs throughout the year

What we can learn

- The politics of alternatives to sugar should not focus just on the labour process in sugar nor on the construction of an autonomous smallholder agrarian life but on new ways of organising the intersections between agricultural, service and industrial work that are part of rural livelihoods today
- Contribution to our understanding of the consequences of the land act of 1913: belonging is an ongoing construction of ways of living and working that are shaped by the past but cannot recreate it