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Gendered Labour, Migratory Labour: Reforming Sugar Regimes in Xinavane, Mozambique

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Sugar has played a contentious historical role in the development of Mozambique. Following the country's 16-year civil conflict, the industry has re-emerged as an important sector for investment and national rebuilding. This article explores how the industry's narratives of technical efficiency and success in increasing production mask dynamics of agricultural labour in the country's largest sugar estate at Xinavane, southern Mozambique. Based on archival and ethnographic investigation, the paper interrogates the recent transformation of sugar cane production by South African investment and management. The paper identifies gender- and migration-based labour management practices that are not only consistent with a trend toward labour 'flexibilisation' within South African agribusiness practice, but also constitute rules and orders that reiterate Portuguese colonial practice. This analysis undermines current ahistorical narratives of the Açucareira de Xinavane – or Xinavane Sugar Mill – that depict the company as a beneficial exemplar of industrial production and technological advance. It suggests that the search of South African agribusiness for cheap labour north of its borders not only reinforces the low social and material valuing of Mozambican rural life and labour, but also reconstitutes labour relations from the country's colonial past. This paper argues that these insights are critical to an understanding of the country's post-conflict reconstruction, and its re-emerging linkages with South African capital.

Introduction

Sugar has played a major and contentious role in Mozambique. Since 1996, the Mozambican government and private enterprise have capitalised on the idea of Africa as a 'last frontier' of investment,¹ to reinvest in and 'rehabilitate' an economy devastated by civil war. With seven per cent growth and in recent years one of the highest rates of foreign investment in Africa, Mozambique has been presented as poised for explosive growth. Sugar has played a crucial

1 As indicated by, e.g., the recent World Bank 'Investing in Africa Forum' in June–July 2015; see also M. Diop, Y. Li, L. Yong, H.E.A.A. Shide, 'Africa Still Poised to Become the Next Great Investment Destination', *World Bank News/Opinion* (30 June 2015), available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2015/06/30/africa-still-poised-to-become-the-next-great-investment-destination>, retrieved on 3 August 2015; 'The Hottest Frontier: Strategies for Putting Money to Work in a Fast-Growing Continent', *The Economist*, 'Investing in Africa' (6 April 2013), available at <http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21575769-strategies-putting-money-work-fast-growing-continent-hottest>, retrieved on 15 December 2014; C. Sizemore, 'Africa: The Last Investment Frontier', *Forbes* (August 2012), available at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/moneybuilder/2012/08/08/africa-the-last-investment-frontier/>, retrieved on 15 December 2014.

role in transforming the supposed potential of the Mozambican landscape into productivity, and restoring the nation's ability to compete in global markets. The Açucareira de Xinavane² has been the outstanding example of this rehabilitation effort. Formerly a minor colonial estate, the present joint venture between the Mozambican government and South African corporation Tongaat Hulett has made the Açucareira the country's largest sugar plantation. Between 2005 and 2013 the area of sugar cane cultivated tripled from 6,000 to over 17,000 hectares (ha), with a corresponding increase in production of sugar cane from 500,000 to 1.5 million tonnes.

Xinavane's new production approach emphasises quantification, calculation, and management techniques originating in South African sugar research institutes. Representatives of the company and the national industry describe the mill's rehabilitation as a straightforward implementation of standard industrial practice despite a challenging 'development' context. In government and industry narratives, sugar will provide jobs, necessary infrastructure, and rural centres with banks, schools and hospitals, from which all Mozambicans will benefit. In order to achieve this, regional industrial experts have been brought to Xinavane to train Mozambican managers, oversee the industry's re-establishment and growth and, ultimately, enable economic and social 'progress' for a country emerging from conflict, to build a competitive capitalist economy.

This article interrogates the tensions within this technically framed approach. In particular, it analyses emerging labour management strategies and identifies how these 'new' practices manage a large and previously unruly labour force. This management has been wrought through gendered and geographical division, which not only reinforces low social and material valuations of rural Mozambican life and labour, but also re-establishes a labour regime that has deep associations with the violence of the colonial past. Interrogating the material and discursive dynamics of 'industry science' and 'technology' in practice, I call into question the claimed modernising impacts of this 'new' approach in a postcolonial Mozambique.

Methodology

This paper draws on historical and ethnographic investigation conducted during 16 months between January 2013 and July 2014.³ I include archival materials from Mozambique, Portugal, and England.⁴ Intensive ethnographic research conducted between October 2013 and May 2014, in Xinavane, southern Mozambique included interviews, participant observation, and home visits with 85 individuals, including agricultural workers, residents in the area, union representatives, and Açucareira de Xinavane management staff. The Açucareira de Xinavane facilitated substantial interview, observation and data access on the company's factory site and fields from November 2013 onward.

In this particular paper I focus on an interview with a middle-/upper-level manager at the Açucareira de Xinavane, for two primary reasons. First, this interview typifies views expressed by other Açucareira managers I interviewed, regarding the company's narrative of Xinavane's success. Second, this interview addresses in detail both gender- and place-based ideologies that are central to the company's recently implemented labour recruitment policy. To analyse this 'company narrative' I compare the interview with others conducted with managers, workers and residents, and with company data and archival materials. These comparisons allow a

2 The Xinavane Sugar Mill in southern Mozambique.

3 Preliminary research in 2009 and 2011 also centred archival investigation in Maputo, and interviews with national-level sugar industry executives and government representatives, civil society organisations, and national union offices.

4 Archival research in Maputo was conducted at the Mozambique Historical Archive (*Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique*); in Lisbon with the Lisbon Geographical Society (*Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*) and Overseas Historical Archive (*Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*); and in London at the British National Archives.

multifaceted reading of the Açucareira's 'new' technical production and its implications for agro-industrial labour organisation, transformation and practice in Xinavane and Mozambique.

I structure this article as follows: I first contextualise Xinavane sugar's historical significance in Mozambique. I next outline the Açucareira de Xinavane's new 'technical' approach, and trace how its narrative is rooted in colonial-era associations of South Africa–Mozambique relations. I then analyse employment data from 2014, and identify three emerging worker categories in Xinavane's sugar cane agricultural labour force: local female field workers, migrant male cane-cutters, and local male agricultural workers. I discuss the significance of these agricultural worker categories in relation to a gender- and place-based labour management strategy which evokes colonial practice, particularly with respect to cane-cutter recruitment.

Colonial Sugar and Reinvestment

While primarily a British capital enterprise, sugar was a keystone of the colonial economy, providing nearly one-quarter of the colony's exports in the early twentieth century.⁵ Portugal's need for foreign investment and territorial administration on the one hand and anxiety over economic and political legitimisation on the other⁶ shaped a colony that in the north and centre was administered largely via vast company concessions. Sena Sugar Estates, headed by British entrepreneur J.P. Hornung, was considered the 'outstanding success story of Mozambique's plantation capitalism'.⁷ The company was also one of the most infamous for its association with *chibalo*, or forced-labour practices.⁸ Among its violences, the Portuguese system of *chibalo* contributed to highly gender-segregated labour and migration systems, wherein men were pressed into forced labour or migrated for waged labour to pay hut taxes, and rural women became further tied to subsistence agriculture.⁹

In contrast to the concession-based economy to the north, the historical literature has emphasised the role of southern Mozambique as a labour reserve for Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) recruitment to the South African mines, with less attention to land concessions granted in the area. Many smaller parcels, however, were granted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to former Portuguese generals, civilian settlers, and small-scale foreign entrepreneurs.¹⁰ In this context, the Incomati Estates sugar plantation was established in 1911 on the banks of the Incomati river. Registered to London managing directors,

5 J.F. Head, 'State, Capital, and Migrant Labour in Zambezia, Mozambique: A Study of the Labour Force of Sena Sugar Estates Limited' (PhD thesis, Durham University, UK, 1980); B. Neil-Tomlinson, 'The Mozambique Chartered Company 1892 to 1910' (PhD thesis, University of London, UK, 1987); M.D.D. Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi: Exploration, Land Tenure and Colonial Rule in East Africa* (New York, Africana Publishing Company, 1973); L. Vail and L. White, *Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique: A Study of Quelimane District* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1980).

6 This ambivalence is demonstrated, e.g., in the writings of E. de Saldanha Almeida, *A Indústria Açucareira: Importancia excepcional da nacionalização e do desenvolvimento da indústria açucareira em Moçambique e Angola, para a prosperidade económica, regeneração financeira, autonomia e dignidade política de Portugal* (Lisboa, Tipografia Minerva, de Gaspar Pinto de Sousa & Irmão, 1929).

7 M.D.D. Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (London, Hurst and Company, 1995), p. 423.

8 See E. Allina, *Slavery by Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville, VA, University of Virginia Press, 2012); Head, 'State, Capital, and Migrant Labor'; Neil-Tomlinson, 'The Mozambique Chartered Company'; Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi*; Vail and White, *Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique*.

9 A. Isaacman, *Cotton is the Mother of Poverty: Peasants, Work, and Rural Struggle in Colonial Mozambique, 1938–1961* (New Hampshire, Heinemann, 1995); B. O'Laughlin, 'Proletarianisation, Agency and Changing Rural Livelihoods: Forced Labour and Resistance in Colonial Mozambique', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, 3 (September 2002), pp. 511–30. As Isaacman in *Cotton is the Mother of Poverty* investigated, this later incorporated forced cotton production directly for the Portuguese state, on peasants' own fields.

10 For Mozambican land concession documentation, see M.L.C.M. Abrantes, M.P. Miguel, J.F. Nascimento and C.A.F. da Silva, *Concessão de Terrenos Moçambique: Catálogo* (Lisboa, Ministério da Educação, Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, 1989).

by 1920 it had received backing from Barclay's Bank and the National Bank of South Africa, and sold over 215,000 shares mostly to British shareholders.¹¹ In the 1920 shares proposal, production was assured to be 'exceptionally favourable' due to 'cheap working conditions' and profits estimated at £174,500.¹² Extreme forced-labour conditions, however, led to high rates of starvation and mortality, as documented in the Mozambican journal *O Brado Africano*.¹³

While the establishment of cane fields was a major undertaking and highly susceptible to failure, the operation continued, and by the 1940s the estate was awarded a Portuguese Order of Industrial Merit by President Carmona.¹⁴ Established on a battle site between Portuguese forces and southern Mozambique's last indigenous ruler, Gungunhana,¹⁵ Incomati Estates was described as a 'heroic economic occupation' of formerly African lands, giving 'life to Xinavane and a good part of the commerce of the *Sul do Save* province'.¹⁶ Despite British ownership, the Estates were important to the southern Mozambican economy and Portugal's tenuous hold on its African territory.

To ensure a steady supply of labour, male workers from the areas of present-day Inhambane and Gaza Provinces were sent to the Incomati sugar cane plantations under *chibalo*. In Xinavane itself, as elsewhere in the region, men were 'recruited' and 'contracted' through WNLA – or fled – to the South African mines. Forced recruitment was enabled through the *Indigenato*, colonial law granting traditional authorities jurisdiction over 'natives' under their own territorial reserves.¹⁷ Women's labour was also subject to both the colonial state and traditional leaders,¹⁸ but had different contours: since women were generally not conscripted for forced labour and only rarely granted permission to travel outside of the 'native reserves', this reinforced women's roles as producers on subsistence plots, or *machambas*, for family consumption. Nonetheless, in the 1940s women began working in the plantation doing jobs considered men's work, including in cane-cutting. According to Xinavane elders, Incomati Estates faced increasing taxes and administrative restrictions during the 1940s, and was sold in the 1950s to the Incomati Agricultural Society (SAI).¹⁹ After the end of *chibalo* in 1961 mechanisation was increasingly introduced and this favoured ex-mine labourers, who were employed as full-time technicians rather than on seasonal contracts.²⁰ Work conditions and remuneration remained poor, however, as highlighted in a two-part series in the Mozambican journal *O Tempo* in 1974.²¹

After independence, Portuguese flight dramatically reduced Mozambique's managerial and technical classes, though the Portuguese SAI retained ownership. Sugar was resigned

11 British National Archives (hereafter BNA) BT 31/37506/133811, 'Incomati Estates Limited (Sugar Cane Planters and Manufacturers)', 22 March 1920; BNA BT 31/37506/133811, 'Summary of Share Capital and Shares of Incomati Estates, Limited, Form E, The Companies Acts, 1908 to 1917', 2 February 1921.

12 BNA BT 31/37506/133811, 'Incomati Estates Limited'.

13 See V. Zamparoni, 'Da Escravatura ao Trabalho Forçado: Teorias e Práticas' *Africana Studia*, 7 (2004), pp. 299–325.

14 A.A. Costa, 'Açúcar de Moçambique: Incomati Estates, Limited', *Moçambique: Documentário Trimestral*, 9, 34 (June 1943), pp. 91–103.

15 A. de Campos Júnior, *Victórias d'África: A defeza de Lourenço Marques e as Campanhas do Valle do Incomati e do Paiz de Gaza, 1894–1895* (Lisbon, Typographia da Rua do Norte, 1896).

16 Costa, 'Açúcar de Moçambique', p. 103.

17 On the similarly gendered dynamics of labour migration in the southern African region see C. Walker, 'Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System c.1850–1930', in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town and London, David Philip and James Currey, 1990), pp. 147–69. For detailed discussion of the *Indigenato* see B. O'Laughlin, 'Class and the Customary: The Ambiguous Legacy of the *Indigenato* in Mozambique', *African Affairs* 99 (January 2000), pp. 5–42.

18 See Walker, 'Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System c.1850–1930'.

19 Interview with Xinavane community representative, on the history of Xinavane area and sugar (Interview and translation from Portuguese by the author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 31 January 2014); Interview with Xinavane community representative, on Xinavane sugar production and work history (Interview and translation by author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 15 November 2013).

20 M. Bowen, *The State Against the Peasantry: Rural Struggles in Colonial and Postcolonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville, VA, University of Virginia Press, 2000).

21 'Açúcar Nem Sempre Doce' (Sugar is Not Always Sweet), *Revista Tempo* (July 1974), pp. 50–4.

as a national industry produced not via coerced labourers but Mozambican citizen workers. Today, Açucareira de Xinavane offices display photos of Mozambique's first president and his wife, Samora and Graça Machel, visiting Xinavane with its Portuguese managers, walking through fields in which women and men gather newly cut cane. In 1981 Armando Guebuza – then political commissar and deputy minister for defence²² – led an investment delegation to London. Identifying that FRELIMO's 'first concern is the economic battle', Guebuza's leading discussion item was its 'sugar campaign', 'fundamental because sugar is one of our strategic exports'.²³

The 16-year armed conflict in Mozambique devastated the economy of the country, including its sugar estates and production. While the Xinavane mill never closed, the town and plantation endured direct attacks and the cane fields were dangerous to work. Production faltered and the mill fell into disrepair. After the war's end in 1992 and post-1996 economic 'rehabilitation' proposals, the government of Mozambique again identified sugar as a strategic industry,²⁴ and invited newly disembargoed, post-apartheid South African capital for investment. In 1998, South African company Tongaat Hulett bought a 49 per cent stake in the Xinavane mill, with the Mozambican government holding the remainder – today ownership is 88 per cent Tongaat Hulett to 12 per cent government – and embarked on a strategy of investment 'reinvigoration' to increase cultivated area and milling capacity.²⁵ Nationally, four sugar mills have been rebuilt. Tongaat Hulett operates estates in Xinavane and Mafambisse, Sena Sugar has recommenced in Marromeu and Illovo Sugar manages the Maragra mill.²⁶ The Açucareira de Xinavane has far eclipsed Mozambique's other mills, producing 235,000 tonnes of sugar in 2012,²⁷ and today employing a total of nearly 10,000 workers per year to cultivate over 17,000 ha along 70 kilometres of the Incomati river.

Despite its large scale and impressive growth, however, the reconstruction process in the sugar industry has been far from easy. Charges of land grabbing and discontent around employment access, wages, bonuses and hours led to unrest and wildcat strikes between 2006–2011, by job seekers, farmer associations and seasonal workers in all four mills. Protesters damaged company property and fields, interrupting the industry during a sensitive re-establishment period. Since 2011, however, there have been few publicised strikes, and sugar production has steadily increased. In historical context, the Mozambican sugar epicentre has moved southward, from central Mozambique's colonial Sena to today's southern Xinavane, with new foreign investment and implementation, rapid expansion and, in the case of Xinavane, a unique gender composition. In 2010, of 29,900 sugar workers in Mozambique 5,100 (17 per cent) were women. Of those women, 3,200 worked in Xinavane, comprising 63 per cent of all female sugar workers in the country²⁸ and one-third of the sugar cane workforce in Xinavane. Sugar has undergone significant change, but its central role in Mozambique's symbolic and economic nation-building projects has re-emerged with new inflections.

22 Mozambique's president from 2005 to 2015.

23 'The Party in Mozambique: Vanguard Workers, Interview with Armando Guebuza', *People's Power in Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea Bissau (MAGIC)*, 19 (Winter 1982), pp. 15–23. FRELIMO was the party of the Independence movement and remains Mozambique's majority party today.

24 On sugar's role in maintaining FRELIMO's political power see L. Buur, C. Mondlane, and O. Baloi, 'Strategic Privatisation: Rehabilitating the Mozambican Sugar Industry', *Review of African Political Economy*, 38, 128 (June 2011), pp. 235–56.

25 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on outgrower association and company expansion projects (Interview and translation by author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 6 February 2014).

26 See this issue's introductory article, A. Dubb, I. Scoones and P. Woodhouse, 'The Political Economy of Sugar in Southern Africa – Introduction' (*Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 3, (2017), pp. 447–70), for a map of southern African mills.

27 Tongaat Hulett, 'Annual Report' (Company Annual Report, 2013).

28 Centro de Promoção de Agricultura (CEPAGRI), 'Balanço do PES 2010 no Sector do Açúcar', annual report (Maputo, Ministry of Agriculture, 2011).

The ‘Technical’ Approach: Standardisation, Expertise and History

In a number of interviews during my research in Xinavane, I was struck by a general emphasis on the estate’s rebuilding and expansion success. The narrative repeated to me was that ‘this time’, sugar worked because of the strong technical approach brought in by Tongaat Hulett and South African expertise.²⁹ Interviewees contrasted colonial forms of production, which they viewed as insignificant and sluggish, with Tongaat’s implementation of scientific South African standards to which they attributed growth and success in Xinavane. In this section I describe this ‘technical’ approach, which is framed as ‘correcting’ Mozambican unproductivity, and the historical tensions undergirding this narrative.

In interviews, many Açucareira managers emphasised two notable aspects of Tongaat’s standardisation of operations and the venture’s subsequent productivity. First, a factory-like approach to cane growing is governed by quantification of inputs and processes, operationalised through digitised technologies and constantly monitored personnel management. Second, it emphasises foreign, and particularly South African, knowledge and technical skill transfer. The first aspect is embodied in the Açucareira Agricultural Improvement Strategy, begun in 2008, to ‘improv[e] operational efficiencies and increas[e] output of cane and sugar’.³⁰ The Improvement Strategy targets worker, field operations, and equipment development. Staff development includes workshops on ‘new policies and operating standards and procedures’, and foreign training of Mozambican staff in regional Tongaat Hulett production sites – such as in South Africa – target ‘improving worker productivity’.³¹ The Improvement Strategy also includes field management and irrigation system upgrading, cane variety improvement, weed management and soil nutrition through sampling, surveying and controlled and improved fertiliser ‘application timing and efficiencies’.³² These measures, based on South African Sugar Association (SASA) and South African Sugar Research Institute (SASRI) research in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, have sought to regularise cane cultivation – whether regarding labour, chemical, or agricultural engineering inputs – through reorganising management of staff and fields.

Under the Agricultural Improvement Strategy, company management claims to have increased labour productivity ‘from less than 1.8 hectares per FTE [full-time equivalence] before 2007 to the current level of 2.21 hectares per FTE’ through labour input management and monitoring. The target is ‘to get to 2.7 hectares per FTE by 2016/17 and to [industry best practice] 3.0 hectares by 2020/21’.³³ The Improvement Strategy has also been credited for a ‘[g]reater than 20 per cent yield improvement’,³⁴ growing from 77.60 tonnes of sugar cane per ha (TCH) in 2007–2008 to 92.86 in 2013–2014, with the aim of 104.53 in 2018–2019 and 110 TCH the ultimate productivity goal in future.³⁵ In one interview with an agricultural manager, such land productivity figures were the primary reference point indicating the Improvement Strategy’s success.³⁶

29 Interview with Xinavane resident, on colonial Xinavane life and labour (Interview and translation by author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 11 November 2013).

30 Tongaat Hulett Xinavane, ‘Agricultural Operations Overview’ (unpublished presentation, 2013), p. 13.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

33 *Ibid.* Based on 3,000 agricultural workers covering 5,300 ha in 2006/7 and 6,892 with 15,252 ha in 2013/14.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

35 Tongaat Hulett, ‘Progress Report/Update on Tongaat Hulett’s Key Themes’, *Tongaatt Hulett Presentations* (November 2014), available at http://www.tongaatt.co.za/pdf/2014/Tongaatt_Hulett_Nov_2014_Progress_Report_A.pdf, retrieved on 13 January 2015; Tongaat Hulett Xinavane, ‘Agricultural Operations Overview’.

36 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on agricultural operations and improvements (Interview by author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 27 February 2014).

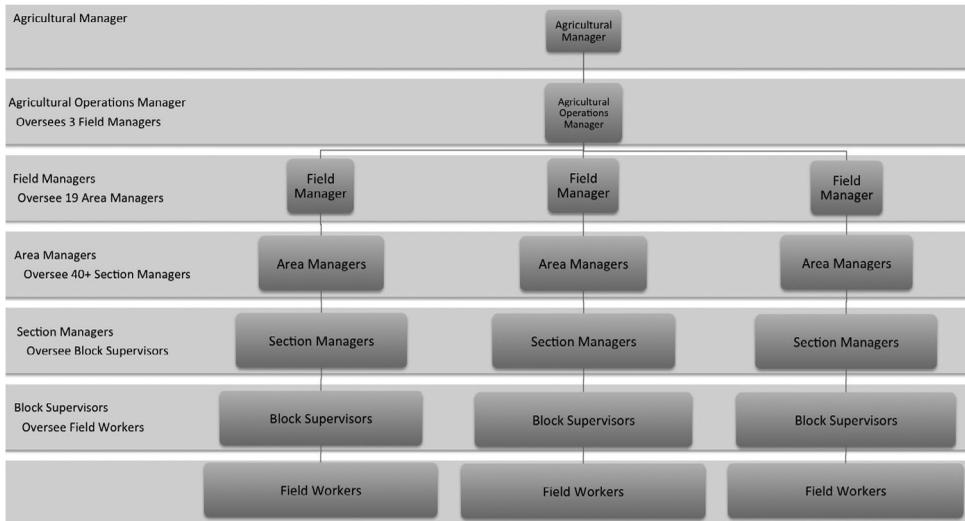


Figure 1. Field hierarchy structure (not to scale). *Source of data:* Author interviews, 2014.

Emblematic of the ‘modernisation’ of cane growing is digitisation of management through South African sugar management software CanePro, to which Mozambican managers referred with pride. CanePro was ‘imported’ to Xinavane to ‘power’, for example, the salary system, modernising the older one ‘done with folders’.³⁷ With the CanePro program, herbicide and fertiliser application, soil salinisation, water data and labour inputs alike allow engineers to calculate and analyse operational needs at the level of individual fields and across the vast scale of the estate. The resulting digitised and electronic management of labour and biological processes, assessed through progress indicators such as field TCH, suggests a production system increasingly quantified and decontextualised for ‘distanced’ agrarian engineers and managers.³⁸

In practice, labour management is based on daily goals and supervised through a hierarchical structure (Figure 1), monitored through mobile phone calls and field visits, with each day’s progress tallied up for report. This layered supervision creates constant pressure for managers, who in turn push workers to meet daily goals. Delays are met with stress or frustration around lost production, and, for one upper-level manager, a reminder that interruptions are a fundamental way of ‘how Mozambique works’.³⁹ One mid-level Mozambican agricultural manager described his and other managers’ visible hurry, their need to be on the move and repeated reminders for workers to meet daily tasks as a ‘push for the impossible’.⁴⁰ For senior management, however, the technology-led approach of the Improvement Strategy ‘corrects’ and differentiates contemporary production from the previously wasteful, small-scale and unproductive Mozambican system, producing more cane at lower cost, greater scale and higher profit.

The second key aspect of the Improvement Strategy is the role of expatriate staff, brought in to ‘transfer’ technical skills to Mozambican workers. ‘Key’ to ‘this agenda’ is that since

37 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on labour management and company transformations (Interview and translation by author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 27 February 2014).

38 Much like the distancing of ‘experts’ through measurement instruments, discussed in T. Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002).

39 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on mill and factory operations (Interview by author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 3 December 2013).

40 Participant observation with Xinavane management representative, field operations (Observation and translation by author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 11 December 2013).

2007, foreign workers have been brought to ‘fill in the skills gap ... a comprehensive training and skills development program was set up to transfer skills from the expatriates’ to create a ‘management structure and team ... well geared for the challenging environment’,⁴¹ and to mentor ‘locals by the expatriate team on site’.⁴² While ‘[o]nly locals are employed in the [lowest] A and B band categories’,⁴³ regionally experienced, often English-speaking mid- and upper-level staff disseminate South African growing skills to Mozambicans.

When I inquired regarding the Açucareira’s most important changes in the preceding years, a middle-level Mozambican manager immediately identified foreign staff and training:

We still need managers, or ‘experts’ – foreign – to still bring their ‘know-how’ ... For a long time we have worked very well. ... The South Africans understand the Mozambicans, but also the foreigners are here ... to teach the Mozambicans technologies ... to work here by our side for a time and after, go. But they have to train someone who has to learn the work that he will do. When ... everything was still a project, there were *many* foreigners. Because of this, communication was more difficult. But now it is diminishing. Because [now] many Mozambicans are already capable of doing [their] work.⁴⁴

In this manager’s narrative, foreign ‘experts’ impart technical ‘know-how’ in order for Mozambicans to be ‘capable of doing their work’ although many of the latter have been producing sugar for 20 to 30 years. This one-directional training by managers from South Africa, or other English-speaking sugar cane contexts such as Swaziland or Zimbabwe, to Mozambican managers, refers not only to scientific and technical knowledge, but also to an understanding of industrial production at an intangible or innate level. This was described to me as a natural or ingrained ‘habit’ of South African-ness: of efficiency, clarity and directness exemplified in language and business-oriented modes of social exchange.⁴⁵ The task of Mozambican management is then to integrate such South African cultural ‘habits’ and ‘know-how’ in their own approach and ways of being, to emulate world-class efficiency and business standards within a Mozambican context.

This narrative also reflects race, class and political inflections: ‘Experts’ and ‘know-how’ are repeated in English throughout the Portuguese-language interview, and the foreignness of *many* foreign ‘experts’ emphasises a group separate from Mozambicans. Communication was difficult, the manager states, because of the gaps between foreign sugar ‘experts’ and Mozambicans in language, technical knowledge and ‘habit’. These gaps have lessened as Mozambicans have learned this innate technical knowledge, to be ‘capable of doing their work’ within the larger transformation of Xinavane. This relationship is reproduced in interviewees’ historical narratives that distinguish previous sugar production as ‘during the time of the English’ or ‘when the company was Portuguese’,⁴⁶ associating Xinavane’s early success with Britishness and South African-ness. Similarly, the company’s contemporary revival is credited to ‘Tongaat’ or ‘the South Africans’, who have strong business and production knowledge.⁴⁷ The same manager as above said when interviewed that

This company is Mozambican ... but it has a foreign management. The company came a long time ago, with Portuguese management. ... But the Portuguese went, Mozambicans tried to manage, and didn’t succeed because they didn’t have ‘know-how’, ... either resources or materials. They didn’t have the means to make the factory work like it works today. So, the government decided to get investors ... the investors [today] have foreign managers as well as local managers.⁴⁸

41 Tongaat Hulett Xinavane, ‘Agricultural Operations Overview’, p. 17.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

44 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on labour management and company transformations. Original emphasis. Inverted commas indicate use of English-language words by the interviewee.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Interview with Xinavane resident, on colonial Xinavane life and labour.

47 *Ibid.*

48 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on labour management and company transformations.

While here referencing past Portuguese management, at other times this manager explained that what has made the new estate ‘work’ is its reversion in new ways to its *British* roots: the company ‘had a structure same as the type [now], from South Africa’,⁴⁹ referring to the Incomati Estates’ British founders and owners. When sugar ‘worked’ in the past, it was due to the ‘means’, resources and materials of South African-associated British. In this narrative, the Portuguese SAI inherited the original British structure with their 1950s purchase, but, despite expanding the business, the company ‘degenerated’ due to Portuguese colonial deficiency in technology, education and industry.⁵⁰ The idea that Portuguese rule was inferior to other colonial systems – particularly vis-à-vis British – is also general: one Xinavane resident blamed the area’s and the country’s current poverty and lack of trained technicians on this economically and technically weak colonial heritage. This perception also links to how the enterprise ‘failed’ after newly independent Mozambique inherited the estate from the Portuguese. Rather than discussing Mozambican sugar’s failure in the 1980s due to the South African-backed conflict in the country, some Açucareira managers suggested that this was a particularly Portuguese as well as later Mozambican weakness and failure. Today’s dual correction of inferior Portuguese and Mozambican production is ‘similar to the past’, in which the Açucareira’s revitalisation is a reversion in new ways to Xinavane’s superior South African-British, Incomati Estates past. It is only now with South African investors, with strong capital and technical ‘know-how’, that Xinavane sugar has enjoyed such contemporary success.

The association of today’s sugar industry savvy with British or South African investors and company ownership echoes the colonial narratives accompanying the establishment of Incomati Estates. In a 1911 letter in the British National Archives, one businessperson commends Incomati Estates and its British directors. With ties to Natal sugar in South Africa, the Estates are described as a ‘project ... in the hands of people of repute, who will take great care that the Company’s business will be carried on in every aspect as if their property was situated within the British Empire’.⁵¹ The letter assures that despite its Portuguese location, associated with an inept and weak colonialism, the Estates’ British directors will ensure the venture’s success. Decades later a Portuguese district evaluator echoes the view that capitalist production must correct wasteful African livelihood activities, reporting that the Incomati Agricultural Society (SAI) was the southern region’s outstanding contributor to industrious production. Citing SAI output and indigenous employment, he was ‘convinced that native agriculture will achieve success if it were to be oriented by competent services. It is heart-breaking to see that, with rare exception, [agriculture] continues to be done according to primitive methods’.⁵²

The Açucareira’s ‘new’ narrative is that it has again regularised and expanded production despite its less efficient Mozambican location. This narrative suggests that it is South African investment and expertise that makes sugar ‘work’ in Mozambique. Its framing as correcting ineffectiveness, however, parallels the colonial narrative in which Xinavane’s sugar landscape was to be made more efficient through British- and economically oriented industrial galvanisation. However, such a view ignores Mozambicans’ own knowledges and experiences in sugar growing. Further, it raises questions about British industrial ‘success’ based on forced removal, dispossession and decades of coercion and violence, and the linkages of contemporary production to this colonial past. Thus, rather than a straightforward implementation of clear, technically informed, industrial standards, the Açucareira Agricultural Improvement Strategy must be interrogated in this wider landscape of histories and meanings emerging from Xinavane’s South African, Mozambican and British

49 *Ibid.*

50 Interview with Xinavane resident, on colonial Xinavane life and labour.

51 BNA FO 367/235, H.C. Haldane of Neish, Howell, and Haldane, London, 31 January 1911.

52 Mozambique Historical Archive (hereafter MHA) Inspeção Dos Serviços Administrativos (e Negócios Indígenas) (hereafter ISANI) Box 11, A.M. Serra, AI (Administrative Inspector), Report of the Regular Inspection of the District of Manhiça and its Administrative Posts of: Xinavane and Calanga, 1954–1965, 1966, p. 58.

colonial past. In doing so, I engage the deeply historical nature of this ‘technical’ approach and its implications for Xinavane sugar workers today.

In the next section I explore parallels between contemporary and past labour relations.

Divisions of Labour

While the Açucareira de Xinavane characterises labour and its management as a straightforward technical issue in their new approach, two contradictions are evident between this discourse and the company’s agricultural labour management. First, through the differentiation of labour via gendered and migrant worker ideologies and labour precarisation, the company reinforces the poor conditions of Mozambican rural life and labour. Second, agricultural worker management has drawn on and re-established a recruitment strategy drawing heavily upon colonial labour recruitment, contrary to the purported neutrality of its technical improvement plan.

Gendered Divisions and Agricultural Employment: Local Female Workers

The Açucareira de Xinavane is a vast operation, with enormous resources and over 6,400 agricultural workers at peak harvest time. Due to the time-sensitive nature of sugar cane processing, the company has shifting labour needs and requires a large and easily accessible labour pool. Virtually all economic activities in the area are associated with sugar, and, as this is the primary source of waged work in the area, competition for company jobs is high despite low wages. Getting a job often requires personal connections with field supervisors and managers, and – at times – bribes.⁵³ In addition, seasonal agricultural work is limited to two-, four- and six-month contracts with no guarantee of continued or subsequent employment.⁵⁴

At the same time, while lessening in recent years, historical out-migration to South Africa is still high, particularly for young men. In 2007, 40–60 per cent of households in the area were female headed.⁵⁵ While Xinavane is known for its employment of female agricultural workers, positions are highly seasonal and lowly remunerated. As seen in Figure 2, women comprised 40 per cent of the agricultural workforce in February 2014, decreasing to 30 per cent in August. While cane-cutting⁵⁶ increased overall agricultural employment from 5,344 to 6,425, the number of workers employed (excluding cane-cutting) decreased between growing and harvest seasons. Women are disproportionately affected by seasonal staff reductions, with 264 female positions lost compared to 117 male worker positions (excluding cane-cutting).

Women also occupy among the lowest-paid positions in the agricultural employment grade scale (Table 1). In addition, men are employed in a wider variety of jobs than women (Figure 3). While direct field labour, such as irrigation, general field work and fertiliser application represent lower pay grades and employ more women, higher-graded positions, such as management, are predominantly represented by male workers. While more men work in Xinavane than women, this does not account for women’s greater concentration in the most unskilled and lowest-paid positions. Rather, gendered labour ideologies play a large part in how agricultural work is divided and valued. From a company manager’s perspective, local women are good workers: they are seen as less troublesome than local men, considered more docile and accommodating to changing daily tasks and less likely to strike, but also dependable and ‘more determined toward their objective. When they go into work, they go only to do the work,

53 For example, those who are family, close friends, or partnered with supervisors have better access to jobs.

54 Interviews with Xinavane agricultural workers, on sugar and domestic agricultural work (Interviews and translation by author with assistance from Changaan to Portuguese by Laurinda Mazive, Xinavane, Mozambique, October 2013–May 2014).

55 B. O’Laughlin and Y. Ibraimo, ‘The Expansion of Sugar Production and the Well-Being of Agricultural Workers and Rural Communities in Xinavane and Magude’, *Cadernos IESE*, 12E (April 2013).

56 As cane-cutters are employed and managed separately by the company, I treat cane-cutting as a different category to other agricultural work.

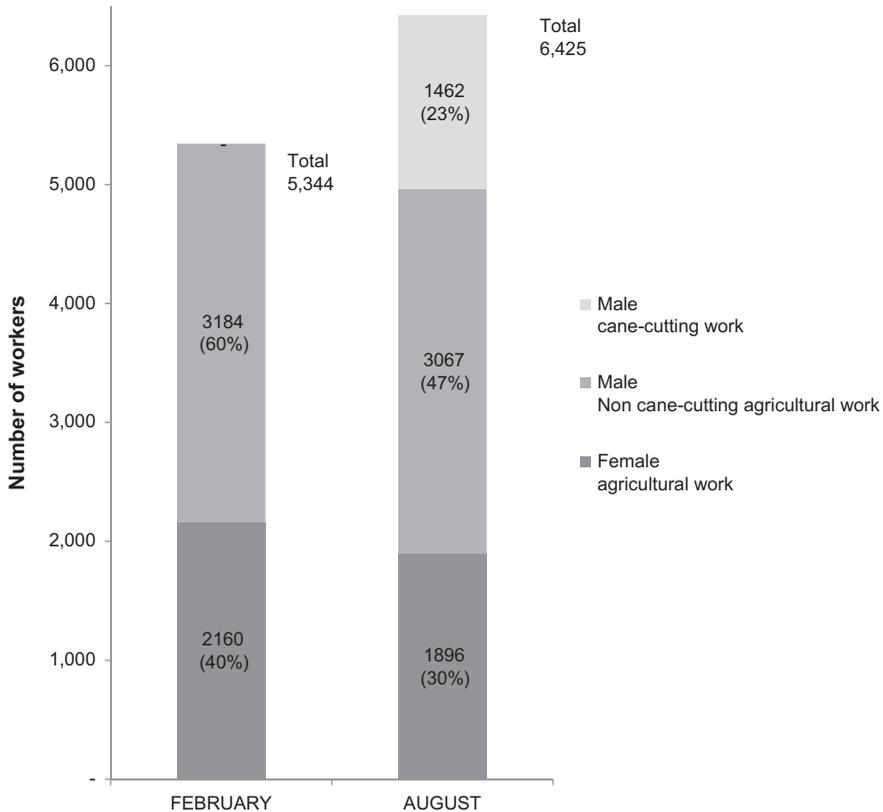


Figure 2. Change in employment by season and gender, 2014. *Source of data:* Açucareira de Xinavane, 2014.

then it's finished'.⁵⁷ Managers attribute this dependability to women's child-raising and other household responsibilities, assuming they would finish field tasks quickly in order to return to their families. This is expressed in terms of women seeking 'light' work which mimics domestic tasks – weeding cane, cleaning and janitorial positions in the mill and residential areas – so as to conserve energy for domestic and *machamba* work that are undertaken after returning from working for the company.

This management assumption that female sugar labourers have access to their own *machambas* casts women as primarily subsistence rather than waged workers, and is used to justify low remuneration and seasonal work. While this re-emphasises women's historical 'responsibility for food production ... [falling] more and more heavily on women' in southern African male out-migration areas,⁵⁸ managers recognise that many female workers are single heads of household and need cash income for household maintenance. At 2,500–3,300 *meticaís* per month (US\$85–110), workers I interviewed overwhelmingly reported that field or irrigation salary '*não chega*' – was insufficient – to purchase all monthly household staple goods, let alone pay for children's school fees.⁵⁹ This places women's dual labours in domestic and unwaged agriculture as central to family sustenance and survival, and places high demands on women's time and energy. While men do work on family *machambas*, they also report more leisure hours,

57 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on labour management and company transformations.

58 C. Walker, 'Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System c.1850–1930'.

59 Interviews with Xinavane agricultural workers, on sugar and domestic agricultural work.

Table 1. Wages, employment type and seasonality for positions with highest employment, 2014

Common jobs	Grade	Wage		February*		August*	
		Mts/Mo	USD/Mo	% Workers	% Seasonal	% Workers	% Seasonal
Female:							
Irrigation	A2	3,317	110	46	32	47	25
Field worker	A1(A)	2,554	85	31	92	26	91
Fertiliser applier	A2	3,317	110	6	0	7	0
Gardener/grounds	A1(A)	2,554	85	5	9	6	11
Livestock guard	A1(A)	2,554	85	3	95	2	94
Total				91		87	
Male:							
Cane-cutter	1	6,150	204	0	0	32	100
Irrigation	A2	3,317	110	17	42	10	41
Field worker	A1(A)	2,554	85	15	99	7	99
Guard-general	A2	3,317	110	13	14	9	20
Pumps worker	A3	3,416	113	6	28	4	30
Total				51		63	

Sources of data: Açucareira de Xinavane, 2014; B. O’Laughlin and Y. Ibraimo, ‘The Expansion of Sugar Production’. Mts to USD conversion as of May 2015.

*Indicates percentage of workers by gender and, of those workers, percentage that are seasonal.

with women spending the majority of time outside waged labour on domestic and subsistence agriculture.⁶⁰ Most female agricultural workers struggle to attend to sugar work, their own *machambas* and children and family members. Accessing small, faraway plots carved out of unused land or within cane fields places further burden on women’s extremely labour-intensive days, which include manually pounding grain and grinding maize, cooking, cleaning and caring for children and elderly family members, on top of formal sugar work in distant fields.

Low field work wages and highly feminised domestic work demands also perpetuate broader structures of gender-based differences and low educational attainment. The need for women to bring in income, along with the demands of household maintenance and the association of these duties as ‘women’s work’, mean that young girls typically stay home to assist with domestic tasks, and youth in general seek waged work: this contributes to irregular schooling and the area’s low educational attainment. Low wages and the need for income places families in a precarious situation: despite nearly all able family members seeking paid work, many families experience seasonal food shortage, and illness is a serious strain on households.⁶¹ Despite the sugar industry’s claim to provide employment, most of this work is not permanent, is low paid and increases social reproduction burdens on female workers and youth. Unable to depend on sugar work for the entire year, workers experience an unstable employment environment, which scholars of South African agribusiness have also recently explored.⁶²

While women could be employed in more highly paid positions, managers cite low educational attainment for why women are not employed in more technical and supervisory positions. However, men’s education levels are also low and have little to do with the training opportunities associated with better pay grades. Rather, managers’ gender norms associate

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Ibid.*

62 See among others, H. Bernstein, ‘Commercial Agriculture in South Africa since 1994: “Natural, Simply Capitalism”’, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 13, 1 (January 2013), pp. 23–46; A. du Toit and F. Ally, ‘The Externalisation and Casualisation of Farm Labour in Western Cape Horticulture’, *Centre for Rural Legal Studies Research Report*, 16 (December 2003); J. Murray and C. van Walbeek, ‘Impact of the Sectoral Determination for Farm Workers on the South African Sugar Industry: Case Study of the KwaZulu-Natal North and South Coasts’, *Agrekon: Agricultural Economics Research, Policy and Practice in Southern Africa* (January 2007), pp. 94–112.

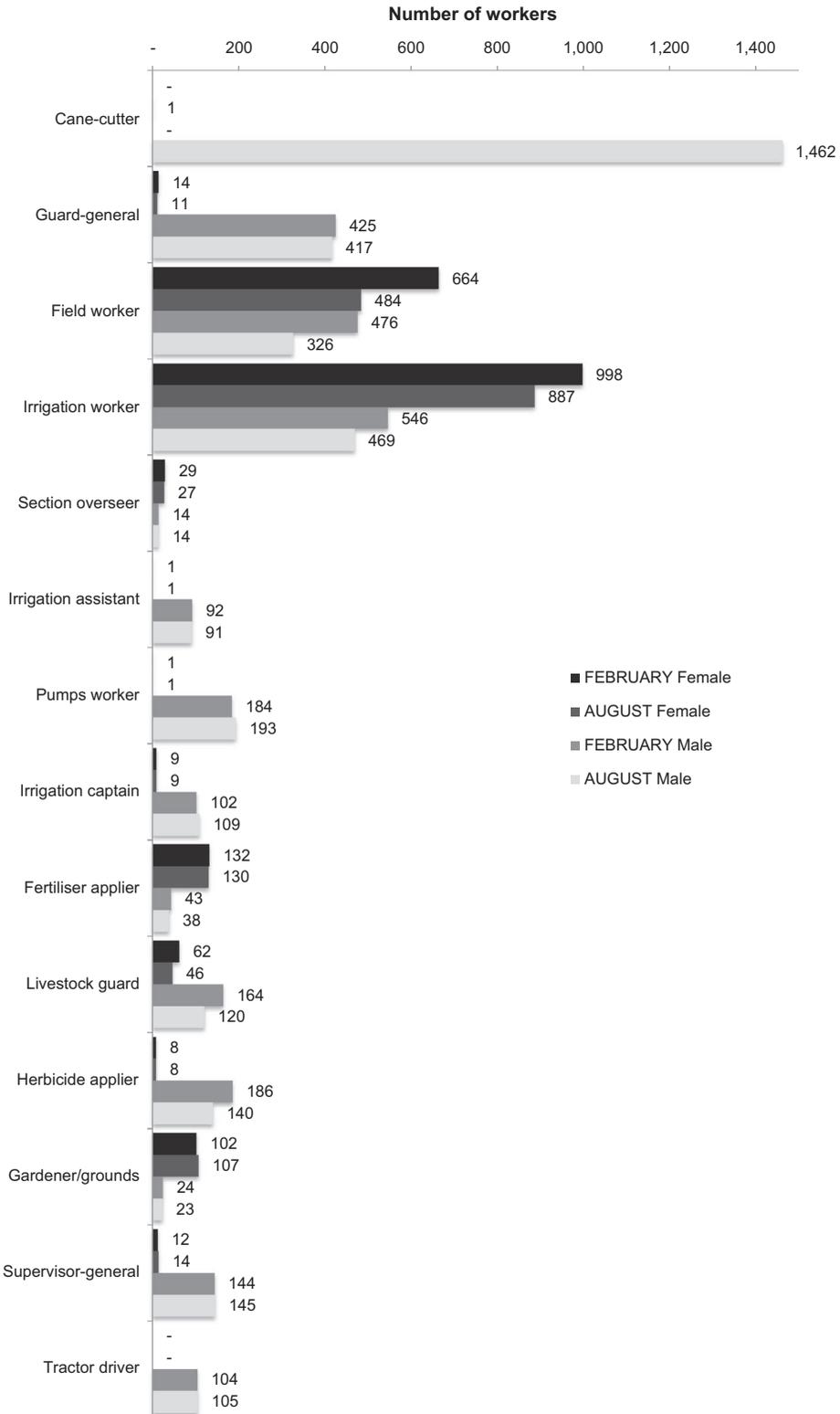


Figure 3. Employment distribution by gender and season, 2014. Source of data: Açucareira de Xinavane, 2014.

training, higher social status, permanent rather than seasonal work and better wages with masculinity and masculinised labour in an industry that has been and continues to be heavily male oriented.

The feminisation, low remuneration and high instability of Xinavane agricultural work reflects a generally low social valuation of Mozambican peasant labour. More particularly Mozambican women's agricultural work is less valued than local Mozambican men's agricultural labour, though both are paid less than cane-cutting work. Yet the industry's high and varying demand for labour makes these groups' ready and flexible inputs highly critical to Xinavane's ability to deliver cane production. Thus, these unevenly gendered and valued labour regimes, although not articulated explicitly in the Açucareira's new technical or science-based approach, provide its foundations and structure, as well as fundamentally structure workers' lives and labours.

Migrant Origins and Agricultural Employment: Migrant Male Workers

In Xinavane, cane-cutting labour is highly associated with migrant men who arrive for the harvest season and are managed and paid in a separate wage band from other agricultural labourers (Table 1). Of nearly 1,500 cane-cutters recorded in August 2014, about 1,000 are from outside Xinavane (Figure 3 and Table 2).

Açucareira managers describe migrant cane-cutters as hard-working, and – similarly to local women – there to 'do their job and return home'.⁶³ Managers associate migrant workers with discipline and a strong work ethic, efficiency, humility and workers who do not 'create problems'.⁶⁴ Cane-cutting provides a 'reasonably' well-paying job for someone 'without education' or specialised skills,⁶⁵ and cutters themselves stated that they do this work to support their far-off family as the male breadwinner. Keeping their 'objective' in mind – that they work so their family can eat – with 'courage' and 'determination' supports them through the work.⁶⁶ However, despite managers' association of cane-cutting with migrant male workers, a breakdown of cane-cutter origins (Figure 4) shows that local cutters make up more than a third of these labourers, and the largest cutter group by origin. This calls into question the company's claim that local workers do not want this work and that the company *must* source cane-cutters from elsewhere, because they would fill 'not even one-quarter'⁶⁷ of the company's cane-cutter need locally. On the contrary, one local resident in Xinavane, claiming he has actively sought work – including cane-cutting – with the company, stated that it is difficult for local men to get any of the better-paid jobs. Instead, as another older resident said, it is the non-*machangaan*, or non-locals, who are 'occupying the land', and getting the better jobs in the company.⁶⁸ Analysis of cane-cutters' areas of origin is further revealing. The second largest group is from Inhambane Province, which was the colonial recruitment area for Xinavane,⁶⁹ followed by Tete Province, supplying one-third of cane-cutters. Looking more closely at this last group, nearly all list a primary address as Mutarara, a medium-sized town across the Zambezi river from the historical Sena Sugar Estates.⁷⁰ Thus, colonial connections, directly with Inhambane and newly emerging with Mutarara, seem clear.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on labour management and company transformations.

66 *Ibid.*

67 *Ibid.*

68 Interview with Xinavane resident, on colonial Xinavane life and labour. *Machangaan* refers to local ethnic identity.

69 This is supported by interviews with elder Xinavane residents and retired workers, as well as national land records indicating a permanent Inhambane recruitment centre during the colonial era.

70 The Sena Sugar Company is now based in Marromeu, 160 km downriver.

Table 2. Overview agricultural employment origins, 2014

Agricultural employment origins	February	% of workers	August	% of workers
Local*	4,953	93	5,034	79
Elsewhere	141	2	1,114	17
Unknown	250	5	277	4

Source of data: Açucareira de Xinavane, 2014.

*Includes Maputo Province and lower Gaza Province near the Xinavane estate. The majority of local workers are from Xinavane's and Magude's surrounding areas, and areas near the estate's holdings along the Incomati river. Few are from Maputo City or unrelated parts of the province.

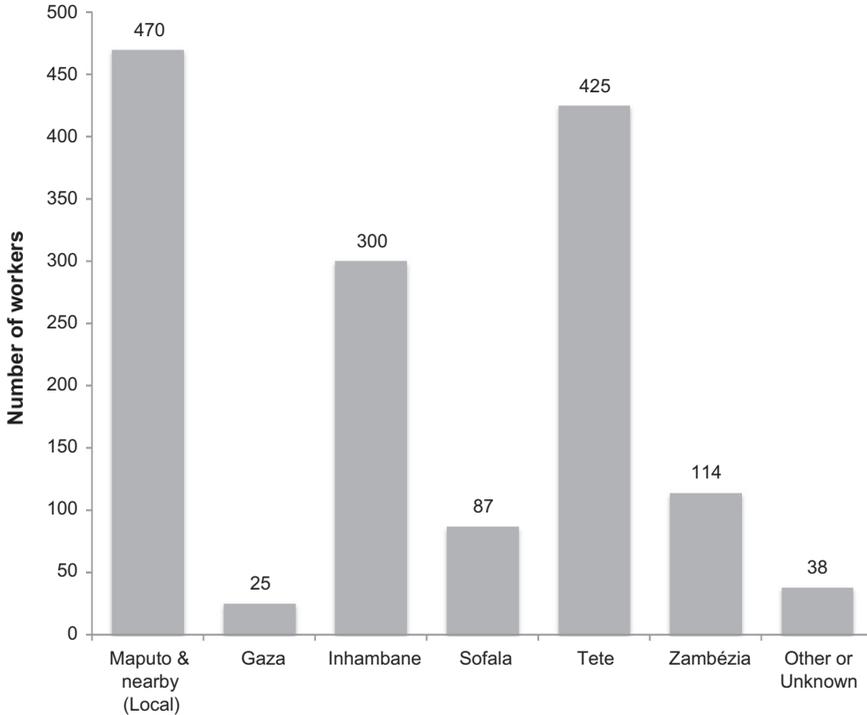


Figure 4. Origins of cane-cutters employed, 2014. Source of data: Açucareira de Xinavane, 2014.

The data on migrants' origins appear to contradict both the company's narrative that local men do not want sugar cane work and also the unlikely re-emergence of migration from Inhambane to Xinavane.⁷¹ And what of this new group of workers – never previously linked to Xinavane – from the Sena area, infamous for colonial-era forced-labour sugar cane production? My interviews with managers indicate that these labour migration patterns are not simply due to migrants' interest in work, or any comparative expertise in cane-cutting. Rather, the Açucareira has initiated a recruitment system which carefully pre-selects workers from different regions within and outside Xinavane. This strategy engages directly with the third category of field labourers I have identified: local men.

71 Since Inhambane migration to Xinavane was previously through *chibalo* conscription.

Agricultural Employment and Recruitment Strategy: Local Male Workers

The labour recruitment strategy in Xinavane emphasising women and migrant men as seasonal labourers is consistent with a wider regional trend that du Toit and Ally, in their analysis of South African horticulture, call the externalisation and casualisation of labour, whereby farmers have shifted from permanent to seasonal farm labour.⁷² This shift affects particular groups more strongly than others. Thus, similar to du Toit and Ally's observation that permanent jobs are predominantly taken by men, in Xinavane women occupy the more vulnerable jobs, with fewer benefits and lower pay. While cane-cutters make higher pay, their livelihoods are more precarious due to their migrant status. As I argue below, the detail of cane-cutter recruitment for Xinavane's operations provides further insights into the logic of the 'new' labour management. To more fully understand the implications of Xinavane's transforming labour dynamics, therefore, one must examine the category of local men and seasonal cutting recruitment.

In some sense, the Xinavane managers' narrative contradicts the fact that the majority of the Açucareira de Xinavane's agricultural workers are local men. Local male workers are cast as argumentative, complaining, lazy, unreliable and interested in negative kinds of 'objectives', to leave immediately for South Africa after receiving their salary. Xinavane men, according to my interviews with managers, prefer urban employment because they 'don't have the culture to work in the field. For them this activity is the activity of woman ... for a man to do the work of the *machamba* [would be like] he is doing light work that deserves to be done by women ... it would be an embarrassment for a man'.⁷³ While *machamba* here refers to work in the cane fields rather than in household subsistence fields, the two types of field work are associated together, and the statement suggests that, whether paid or not, performing agricultural work would be an affront to a Xinavane man's masculinity, such that local men prefer to emigrate.

This narrative of local men's resistance to agricultural field work as a 'problem of culture' draws on Xinavane's history of gendered labour migration, in which masculinity was tied to wage-earning elsewhere, often in South Africa. This is evident in the 1966 administrative report referred to earlier, in which 'all those who do not emigrate for "Jone" [Johannesburg] ... are not considered men, and hence leaves his land'.⁷⁴ In Covane's analysis, colonial labour patterns of conscripted male in-migration and local male out-migration became integral to notions of masculinity in southern Mozambique: men who did not go to 'Djoni' (again, Johannesburg) were ridiculed for their unmanliness.⁷⁵ Analysis of labour migration elsewhere in southern Africa has drawn similar conclusions⁷⁶ that Walker links to the role that migrants' wages played in acquisition of goods and money to pay bride price:⁷⁷ by migrating, a young man could return home to take his place as a full adult male.

While this sense of Xinavane masculinity still appears centrally tied to migration, interviews with local men who work in the sugar cane fields provide a more nuanced view. One who held a post as 'agricultural supervisor' said that, like other men, he was at first uninterested in working in the fields, but that he is hard-working and wants to support his family. In his view,

72 A. du Toit and F. Ally, 'The Externalisation and Casualisation of Farm Labour in Western Cape Horticulture'.

73 Or shameful: '... *como se fosse uma vergonha*' (Interview with Xinavane management representative, on labour management and company transformations).

74 MHA ISANI Box 11, Serra, Report of the Regular Inspection of the District of Manhiça, pp. 69–70.

75 L.A. Covane, *O Trabalho Migratório e a Agricultura no Sul de Moçambique, 1920–1992* (Maputo, Promédia, 2001). See also P. Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c.1860–1910* (Portsmouth, NH, Johannesburg and London, Heinemann, Witwatersrand University Press and James Currey, 1994).

76 See particularly Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity*, and the classic works by M. Legassick, 'South Africa: Forced Labour, Industrialisation and Racial Differentiation', in R. Harris (ed.) *The Political Economy of Africa* (New York, John Riley, 1975), pp. 229–70 and H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy and Society* 1, 4 (December 1972), pp. 425–56; see also discussion in this paper's historical section.

77 C. Walker, 'Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour System c.1850–1930'.

a local man does not want to be told how to work ‘in his own home’ and on land which is not his own.⁷⁸ This idea that *local* agricultural work is a subordinated person’s realm is supported by a retired worker’s view that local men prefer to migrate because Xinavane employment means working within a labour hierarchy associated with dispossession.⁷⁹ Thus the historical association of migration with dignity and male adulthood is evident, but reflects ambivalence: the supervisor wants to support his family and is proud to work, but would also like to migrate to earn wages and autonomy. This ambivalence is tied to Xinavane sugar’s history of land takeover and dislocation, in which the colonial state itself admitted taking ‘too much land ... [with] the resultant area assigned ... insufficient for the normal life of its natives’.⁸⁰ These historical labour and land associations in Xinavane are papered over by managerial narratives in which workers are cast culturally as ‘hard-working’ or ‘efficient’ versus ‘lazy’ and ‘troublemaking’. This also directs attention away from management’s introduction of employment practices that echo historically gendered and forced migration systems, creating new forms of uneven gender, labour and migration regimes.

The cane-cutting recruitment system further demonstrates this. After a series of wildcat strikes which damaged production in 2011, the company introduced a system of cane-cutter pre-selection and recruitment. Since then, each year the Açucareira’s human resources staff and field managers make the seven-hour drive from Xinavane to a small town in Inhambane Province for a week-long screening and admissions process. Workers are selected, assembled under group supervisors for the season and then transported in buses to Xinavane. They then undergo a three-day intake process of registration, health inspections and assignment to one of several migrant worker accommodation areas (*acampamentos*), originally built during the colonial era for forced migrant labourers. At the end of harvest, and after supervisors have evaluated workers to determine who will be among the following year’s returnees, they are transported back to Inhambane. A company manager described this as a ‘controlled situation’ reducing labour ‘problems’ or risks of strikes, but it is a resource-, time- and staff-intensive procedure that takes place over several months.

In this new programme the company works with the government and leaders of communities in different parts of the country to recruit workers.⁸¹ For example, in Inhambane local administrators and police control the influx of migrants during recruitment season. Prior to this stage, however, migrant workers are recommended by *régulos* or traditional leaders who know ‘all of the people of the area ... all the families’. The company ‘communicate[s] to the leader’ the requirement of good behaviour, and leaders ‘work directly with the government’ to decide who to send, ensuring ‘dependable behaviour’. In the event of misbehaviour, the Xinavane mill ‘can return [troublesome cutters] directly to the leaders. ... It is a *multidisciplined* process’.⁸² In Xinavane itself, as it has ‘always been done’, local recruitment is coordinated directly with the government, through the Xinavane Administrative Post and District Administrator. This company-led recruitment, in tandem with national government supporters, district administrators, local leaders,⁸³ along with emphasis on behaviour through disciplinary social

78 Participant observation and interview with field supervisor, on field supervision and daily tasks (Observation, interview and translation by author, Xinavane, Mozambique, 18 December 2013).

79 Interview with Xinavane resident, on colonial Xinavane life and labour. This interviewee, originally from Inhambane, informed me of the local – and better known – name of ‘Gwevhane’ for Xinavane: ‘when returning home after being sent, people would proclaim, “I survived Gwevhane!” If one survived, it was by the grace of God’. Gwevhane was the Changaan name, referring to G.H. Risien, Incomati Estate’s general manager from 1914–1927. Another elder recounted that the name was taken from a Changaan verb, to refer to a thief who buys something at a low price to turn and sell it at a higher one.

80 MHA ISANI Box 11, Serra, Report of the Regular Inspection of the District of Manhiça, Annex.

81 Interview with Xinavane management representative, on labour management and company transformations.

82 *Ibid.* Original emphasis.

83 The interviewee did not discuss specific examples of coordination, i.e., which government offices or departments assisted in this large-scale effort.

ties, is a direct throwback to colonial labour recruitment practice.⁸⁴ Asked how this recruitment organisation began, it was described as

a decision which was agreed jointly between the company and the government, because the company wouldn't be able to decide alone to recruit people from Inhambane. ... There were consultants, everything else, to ensure that this process would run well. It is the decision of the management of the company that we must recruit outside. ... It is very important to have this coordination because whatever problem [there may be], we know who coordinated [which workers]. There are 1,500 [migrant workers] here. ... If they are not controlled there can be many problems.

This multilevel and spatially dispersed recruitment programme is thus jointly brokered between national and local government, regional industry and consultants and local government and community representatives. Despite the manager's emphasis on the programme being based on business consultations, this labour policy is not based on standardised 'best practices', but a 'multidisciplined' organisation that harks back to forced-labour policies of the colonial era. Further, this strategy builds on colonial histories that utilised local government and traditional authority to keep workers in order. Each of the three different worker groups balances against the others, maintaining local female and migrant male workers especially in a state of heightened employment precarity. Local female workers and 'outside' male workers are positioned against local male workers. Local female workers, for whom the company is often the only source of cash income for their households, and migrant male labourers, with few other employment options in their home regions, are characterised as good workers. These groups are used to temper access to employment for local men who are cast as disturbing the productivity of the company and community. Although these groups and their work are in fact highly intermixed, they are separated in the company narratives as desirable or difficult workers through their gender and migratory identities, which structure their disadvantageous employment conditions as well as dilute their potential for disruption.

This 'new' recruitment system is therefore part of a crafted labour regime whose narrative minimises social and spatial complexity. Its 'multidisciplined' organisation simultaneously draws upon the gendered and migrant labour regimes of Xinavane's colonial and forced labour past, as well as exploits new forms of employment insecurity through seasonal labour to minimise the capacity for disrupting the agro-factory. The re-emergence of colonial labour recruitment patterns contradicts a narrative claiming scientific practice or transcendence of the purported problems of the Mozambican context. Rather, it engages with practices that reflect past violence, dispossession and unequal social positioning to retain worker control necessary for sugar production and capital accumulation. That the Açucareira is willing to put in place such a highly time- and resource-intensive – as well as historically resonant – labour regime suggests that workers have the capability to unsettle and subvert foreign investment 'success' and agro-industrial 'rehabilitation'. This demonstrates the Açucareira de Xinavane's enormous vulnerability to labour's power to disrupt both operations and this capitalist narrative.

Conclusion

When examining Tongaat Hulett's actual 'technical' approach at the Açucareira de Xinavane, what becomes clear is not an organisation of labour and production based on its narrative of a purely rationalist efficiency or 'best practices'. Rather, its narrative, first, echoes colonial

84 On the importance of such relationships between local leaders and government during the colonial era see, e.g., B. O'Laughlin, 'Proletarianisation, Agency and Changing Rural Livelihoods'; for argument around its re-emergence in post-independence Niassa Province see A. Dinerman, 'From "Abaixo" to "Chiefs of Production": Agrarian Change in Nampula Province, Mozambique, 1975–87', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 28, 2 (January 2001), pp. 1–82. For discussion of the Mozambique Company's – and its Sena Sugar Estates subconcession – use of forced labour 'recruitment', see Allina, *Slavery by Any Other Name*.

British industrialisation imperatives within a 'weak' Portuguese territory. Second, the approach fortifies highly uneven gender- and migrant-based divisions of labour, social life and material conditions as part of a larger regional shift toward 'flexibilisation' of agricultural labour. Third, it forms a contextually specific labour management system rooted in colonial and regional imperial strategies of labour recruitment, while using a narrative of industry 'science'. The three historically resonant agricultural labour categories offset workers' collective disruptive power, which maintains a balance in the company's favour. This system's contribution to growing inequality and precarious livelihoods curtails contemporary access to dignified work and lives, which in Xinavane are intricately intertwined with historical processes and meanings from the colonial past.

While Xinavane sugar provides a further example of labour casualisation extending from South Africa to Mozambique, its particular historical context requires both an analysis of its political economy and linkages to colonial dynamics and practices. Interrogating material and discursive dynamics of 'technology' and 'progress' in practice, I call into question the claimed scientific rationality and universally positive impacts of the Açucareira de Xinavane's 'new' approach. In this paper I examine, ultimately, how interrogating the contradictions between supposedly straightforward 'advancement' narratives and strategies, and the historic and current socio-economic divisions it reproduces, enables an understanding which takes seriously the geographically and historically specific factors shaping industry and nation today. As in the colonial past, sugar is crucially linked to foreign capital and the production of the 'new' nation, even while the company's and workers' own narratives betray complexity that challenges its apparent newness. This article works to make visible the historically laden gender- and place-based labour dynamics at work in Mozambican sugar's purportedly 'technical' approach, and to emphasise the importance of place and history in the economic 'vitalisation' of an imagined African land and labour frontier.

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