

## **Histories of Insecurity in Glendale: Place, Race, Economy**

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### **Abstract**

In the paper I offer a potted history of the last forty years in Glendale, a “rural” sugar-producing area located in the present Ndwedwe municipality, KwaZulu-Natal. I broadly document the economic demise of area, associated with the closure of the Sugar Mill, and focus on two discussions during the 1970s: One about the “proper” place for Indians and the second about possibility of “regenerating” the African peasantry. Based on this, I reflected on the racially marked positions that shape perspectives on the histories I recount.

This paper is an attempt at a historical “prologue” to an analysis of the contemporary anxieties associated with making home in contemporary Glendale. In the broader analysis, I will attempt to show that we cannot explain people’s difficulties solely through a reference to economics, by exploring how people, in very similar economic circumstances and living in the same area, construct very different worlds around themselves, and displaying very different orientations and anxieties. I will also analyse the relationship between these people and the Post-Apartheid state that makes them into economic figures whose levels of development can be measured in order to design “appropriate interventions”.

“Hayi sihleli kabuhlungu lapha, nathi sidilikelwe izindlu!”

(Hey, we are not living okay here, our homes are collapsing!)

Man, 46, Traditional Housing, Glendale, Dec 2009

### **Introduction**

There were heavy rains during November and December 2009 in Glendale. Often. For those living in what is locally referred to as traditional housing, this meant facing the prospect of the collapse of their shelter. The house of the immediate neighbours of the man cited above lost more than a third of its wall and roof, and left several members of the small household sleeping in what was previously their kitchen while they slowly accumulated money. This money would eventually buy a tiny amount of concrete, and hire people to bring a truckload of branches, while the woman of the house reconstructed the house, with mud as her cement. For those in

traditional houses, these kinds of events are hardly unexpected in the rainy summer season, yet their regularity does not mean that people avoid living—sometimes for weeks—without a wall, a roof, or both.

But my informant was not only talking about the uncontrollable events of nature that distribute disaster unevenly, he was also talking about numerous social difficulties that confront people's attempts to build secure homes. That is, amid the periodic collapse of physical structures, he was referring to daily anxieties accompanying living in Glendale. To be sure, these anxieties include concerns with "material" things, such as the possibility of obtaining regular income, living in better houses, and so forth, but they also speak to the difficulties of forging durable solidarities with neighbours, to severed ties of kinship, and to the failure of government officials to pay consistent attention to people in the area. For some, these anxieties also include the young men of the area whom they fear could inflict violence on others without warning, dissatisfied ancestors, and even witches.

In this paper, I want to provide a kind of prologue to an analysis of the contemporary difficulty of making a secure home in Glendale. This prologue takes the form of short, potted, histories of insecurity in the area. This history is especially important in situating anxieties in the present, although they are inadequately to fully explain present anxieties. Like everybody, history is not transparent to people living in Glendale—indeed a great deal of what I will explore in future papers is the relationship between history and historicity and the legibility of certain histories in particular—because otherwise it would be impossible to refer to the past, as people in Glendale regularly do, as better than the present, and even as "secure".

### **A snapshot of present housing, amenities, and social divisions**

While anxieties are common across Glendale, the physical dwellings in the area are not homogeneous. Three main kinds of housing exist, each with its own historical form: the first is the already mentioned "traditional" housing, so-called because people have constructed these houses themselves, in a more or less elaborate manner, depending on available resources, following a pattern of building several houses around an enclosure for domesticated animals, with a circular hut marking the central structure of the home. Secondly, there are so-called "barracks", roughly constructed rectangular houses with several rooms within the structure and with indoor sanitation. Some of these may date as far back as the end of the nineteenth century, while others were certainly built in the 1960s and 1970s. The small sugar mill in Glendale built these structures for their employees, and most people currently living in these houses either worked for the mill, or have a blood relationship with someone that did. The third kind of houses are small, single-room houses with separate toilets and access to a communal tap. These are by the far the most common houses in Glendale and are referred to as "the location". They were built in 2002 by SBS

Companies on land formerly used to grow sugar cane which was bought by the government.

In addition, Glendale has a primary school, which is at least sixty years old and was reserved for Indian children until the early 1990s, a church, a tiny petrol station, and general grocery store, although the latter closed, seemingly permanently in early 2009, presumably in part because of the competition from several spaza shops in the area. The more elaborate spaza shops exist in the barracks, while smaller shops, selling the most basic of necessities (bread, mealie meal, beer, and soap) can be found in the location. At other buildings in the location you can buy alcohol and cigarettes. Only one of the “traditional” houses sells beer, although there are a few more where you might be able to purchase advice and remedies to help with particular ailments. A mobile clinic visits the area once a month, although during the past the clinic was open every day. There is also a small sugar mill in the Glendale area, although this was closed by Illovo Sugar shortly after its takeover from Lonrho in 1997. Next to the disused mill, a distillery built in 1988 still operates, making ethanol from sugar (*South African Sugar Journal*, Aug 1988, 258).

This contemporary landscape is thus a mix of things, some fragments or even ruins of the past, and others new. It is hard to avoid the sense that most people experience themselves as being caught “between things” here, waiting for possibilities to arise elsewhere and growing ever more anxious. It is certainly possible to compare this area to a disused mining town or to the places in declining rust belt in the United States. But how people think of the history of this lack of opportunity, or this uncomfortable in-betweenness that they feel, has a lot to do with where they come from, where they came to be placed socially. It has a lot to do specifically with race in South Africa.

### **The demise of Glendale’s sugar mill**

For some residents in Glendale, present anxieties are a product of the closure of the mill. The mill offered jobs and housing to people, and its closure, informants regularly emphasize to me, “destroyed Glendale”. While the ethanol plant does employ some people, the number of people permanently employed by the plant is less than twenty, compared to the more than three hundred permanents the mill employed. For those formerly employed, there seems to be a much cause for anxiety: Illovo closed the mill suddenly, and many people left Glendale. The ones who remained were those who felt that they could make ends meet from their pensions, small retrenchment packages, and the barrack houses Illovo gave to them as additional compensation for loss of work, or those who had nowhere else to go. It is thus unsurprising that the age-spread among people in the barracks tends to be skewed towards the elderly.

However dramatically people experienced Illovo’s takeover and closure of Glendale’s mill in 1997, the prospect of the mill closing could not have be entirely unexpected, especially for those who knew anything about sugar in Natal or had been around long enough. The mill was

small and its closure had seemed imminent in the early 1960s and again in 1969-70, during times when the price for sugar was low (Kandasamy 1985, McGregor 2008). At these moments, Illovo (CG Smith) had made a concerted effort to buy the mill, which operated autonomously from them and from Tongaat Hullett, Natal's two large sugar corporations. Glendale's mill competed for the supply of sugar with Illovo-run mills close by, first at Doornkop, and subsequently with the large mill at Gledhow.

While Glendale's mill was erected in 1880, from the 1920s until 1969 it was in the hands of the Paruk family, and was the only Indian owned mill in Natal during these years. Thomas and Lewis Reynolds had begun farming in 1874 in Glendale, opening the mill six years later, on what Osborn called, and Kandasamy echoed, "one of the most inaccessible yet one of the most productive spots in Natal" (Osborn 1926: 192, Kandasamy 1985:4). Following their takeover, the Paruks not only employed people at the mill, but housed Indian families in the barracks as tenants in a miller-cum-grower enterprise. Views over the time that the Paruks were in charge of Glendale vary quite considerably, with Kandasamy claiming that the eldest E.M. Paruk revolutionised production at the mill over the first twenty years and, in lieu of their solidarity with the Indian community, kept the mill instead of selling in 1962, and eventually sold it to only the bidder, the London Rhodesia Company (Lonrho), who would protect jobs in Glendale (Kandasamy 1985: 8-10). The account of the man who worked as manager for both the Paruks and for Lonrho, Robin McGregor, suggests that he travelled around the world to broker the deal with Lonrho during 1969-70 to ensure the continued existence of the mill, but also claims that when he started working at Glendale in 1964, it was "in very bad poor, with inadequate direction, and antiquated machinery" (McGregor 2008: 96-97). For his part, a retired informant who was born and spent most of his life working in Glendale, only leaving the area for Stanger when the mill closed in 1997, recalls that the Paruks had little interest in Glendale, and used whatever profits generated there for investment in the city. (Interview, Informant M.X, Dec 20, 2009). Nothing that together with the Lockhats, the Paruks built the Indian suburb of Parlock in Durban, he intimated that this was with money they had acquired from Glendale. He argued that it was only during the subsequent period, after 1970, when Lonrho ran the mill, that the area received any "modern things". People felt especially happy and secure after Lonrho "rebuilt the area" following a massive flood in the early 1980s.

While Lonrho were involved in sugar production in Swaziland, Malawi, Mauritius, and elsewhere in Africa, Glendale was the only mill they owned in South Africa. Recounting Lonrho's involvement in South Africa recently, Gosnell (2005) notes that the company "came in for a lot of opposition" from the South African Sugar industry. Lonrho began the distillery at Glendale in 1989, and by 1996 produced 16000 litres per day. Lonrho also initiated organic sugar production in 1993, apparently being one of the biggest producers in the world just before the mill was sold to, and then closed by, Illovo (Gosnell 2005: 103-4).

The community in Glendale that depended on the mill's existence lived precariously since at least the 1960s. Perhaps before that time it was possible for the Glendale mill to gain access to cane in fields for kilometers surrounding the mill. As roads improved, together with the capacity and efficiency of mills in the hands of big sugar companies, it became increasingly difficult for the small mill to compete with the incentives the barons offered to cane farmers. It was obvious for some time before Lonrho sold Glendale that the mill would have to expand its capacity to handle cane significantly if it was to compete with the other mills. (according to informant MX). Such an expansion, as the Paruks must have realized in the 1960s, was incredibly risky, because it would have amounted to a price war with Illovo and Hullelt. At the time, small mills were being bought out and closed down, and the number of sugar companies was shrinking dramatically, being relentless swallowed by these two corporations (Lincoln nd: 41-42). The problem was better roads and increased transport capacity meant that these companies could offer sweeter and sweeter deals to the sugar farmers close to Glendale. Lonrho's purchase of Glendale did rescue the mill for a couple of decades, fighting off Illovo and leading to them closing one of their mills at Doornkop, but perhaps this only stalled what the inevitable, at least from big capital's perspective.

### **Placement and Displacement in Glendale**

People who stay in "traditional houses" in Glendale have often not been in the same houses for long, although many do come from the broader geographical area, encompassing mThandeni and Maphumulo. While their houses bear some resemblance to what might be considered historical Zulu structures (see Kuper 1993) more important is that they claim allegiance to chiefs or izinduna, rather than to municipal councilors. This is despite the fact that the Glendale area is zoned within the Ndwedwe municipal ward system, and represented by a councilor. One municipal official neatly described this allegiance, saying that people's sense of borders between areas under municipal jurisdiction and those under traditional authorities as much more likely to be marked by a physical landmark such as a road or a tree than by the agreed-upon border.

Ambiguities and tensions surrounding boundaries in Glendale are not new. By far the majority of people living near, and working for, the Mill for most of the twentieth century were Indian. Africans seldom found permanent jobs, whether cutting cane in the fields outside or working in the mill. Nonetheless, the majority of cane growers who worked in Glendale were African. Early in his career working as a manager at Glendale, during 1964 while the Paruks still owned the mill, Robin McGregor appealed to government to allow Africans to live in the area because, he stated on record, there was not enough labour to work the fields who lived in Glendale, and those (Africans) recruited from outside had to travel eight miles from the reserve to work in the fields. This meant that people sometimes did not show up for work, compromising

production at Mill.<sup>1</sup> While the Bantu Affairs Department granted this request, the question of who could live legitimately in Glendale, and how they should live, was hardly resolved. Indeed both McGregor and Kandasamy suggest that the government had political interest in ensuring that Glendale remained an area owned by, and employing, Indians, to the extent that the government bailed out the Paruks when the latter threatened to sell Glendale during the economic difficulties in 1962 (Kandasamy 1985: 8, McGregor 2008: 97).<sup>2</sup>

Lonrho's purchase of Glendale in 1969-70 for R2 675 000 caused considerable consternation among government officials tasked with implementing and maintaining the Group Areas Act. Whether this white-owned firm would be allowed to buy a mill in designated Indian area was discussed at length, and eventually the Department of Planning conceded, noting that while an Indian consortium had attempted to buy Glendale, they simply did not have enough money, and that if Illovo or Hullett bought Glendale they would close it down. Lonrho was thus given a license to buy Glendale, under several provisions, one of which was that that any future sale of the mill had to be Indians.<sup>3</sup>

Only a couple of years later, the declaration of KwaZulu as an independent homeland prompted further questions about where Glendale belonged, and more specifically, who belonged in Glendale. It seemed that geographically that it Glendale would be located in KwaZulu, since all the areas surrounding it would certainly be incorporated into the homeland. At the end of 1973 and in early 1974 Lonrho sent several letters to Chief Buthelezi suggesting that they aid the homeland develop a sugar mill in the Melmoth area, and that they facilitate the transfer of ownership of

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<sup>1</sup> See McGregor letter to Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 28 Oct 1964, in SAB BAO 9694, REF C29/3/486, Part 1.

<sup>2</sup> In 1962, Kandasamy reports that the Indian Affairs department was involved in long negotiations with Paruks about their threat to sell, apparently for the sake of the 1000 of more Indians in Glendale (the workers and their families). The Department of Indian Affairs evidently felt strongly about Indian ownership of the mill, and told the white sugar barons that they had to take action to encourage similar Indian ownership, because of the need to "repay the moral debt to Indians for what they have done for the sugar industry in Natal. (Kandasamy 1985: 7-8)

<sup>3</sup> Departement van Beplanning. "Aansoek vir 'n Permit/Aanwysing ingevolge die Wet of Grondgebeide, 1966" (November 1969). SAB GMO Vol 2/483 REF 12/26, part 1.

Glendale to the KwaZulu government.<sup>4</sup> This was a source of irritation for the Director of Agriculture and Forestry in Natal, who wrote to the secretary of Bantu Affairs and Development, noting that Lonrho seemed directly committed to establishing a sugar industry in KwaZulu that would be totally independent of South Africa!

The proposed incorporation of Glendale into KwaZulu was vigorously protested by the Natal Indian Canegrowers associated, who noted in a long memorandum to Owen Horwood that the absorption of Glendale into KwaZulu would mean the expropriation of Indian-owned lands, which would have dire consequences not only for farmers, but for all of the 995 Indian people living in Glendale. This land, the memorandum notes, had been cultivated for decades by Indian people, the fruits of whose labour benefited everybody in the country. In fact, any uprooting of Indian people from Glendale would be not only ruinous for them, who would not be able to cope with “being thrown upon the city”, but also affect the agricultural output of South Africa. Furthermore, the memorandum appeals in “cultural terms” to the role of Indians in South Africa, and to their obedience to the Apartheid government:

... the culture of the Indian people of Natal with its love of the land, close kinship ties and deep attachment to the family, and also the deep religious feeling, all of which have contributed to community and societal stability which has helped to contribute to the Indian community’s well deserved reputation for being a law-abiding section of the population. (Memorandum, pg. 6).

This put the Department of Bantu Affairs and Development (BAD) in a difficult position. In response they suggested in a February 1974 that they had considered the matter thoroughly, noting that the boundaries of KwaZulu had already been accepted by parliament, and deciding that the boundaries of KwaZulu should remain unchanged. This meant that Glendale would be zoned in KwaZulu. Yet the Durban-Pietermaritzburg Regional Planning Commission met at the same time to discuss the zoning of Glendale into KwaZulu. Noting that the intention of the Department of Bantu Affairs was to resettle people from Groutville in Glendale, the commission made it clear that it was difficult to find agricultural land to give as compensation to Indian farmers in Glendale that would be of anywhere near equivalent value. After a detailed exploration of the possible sites to which Indian farmers from Glendale could be moved, the committee recommended that it was best

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<sup>4</sup> SAB BAO 12/687 REF 218/17, Part 2.

that Glendale remain in the hands of Indian farmers.<sup>5</sup>

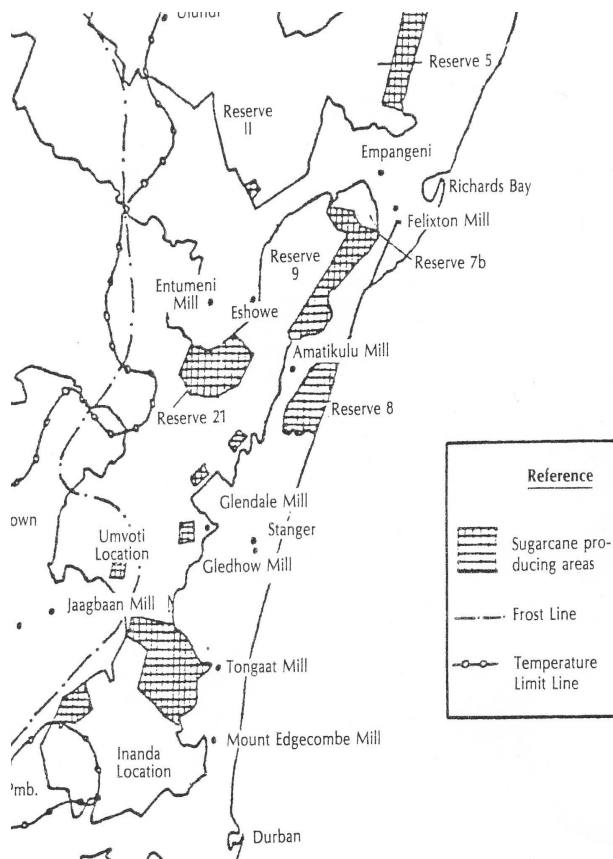
However much members of the BAD protested in writing, whatever the boundaries of KwaZulu might have been in law, *de facto*, Glendale remained populated by one thousand Indian people. I have seen no evidence yet about the attempt to remove African people from Groutville to Glendale (cf. Kiernan 1981), but it seems that the public pressure, presence of Lonrho, the duration of Indian's people presence and, especially, their success at farming in Glendale meant that no forced removals actually occurred. Suffice to say that a 1991 report of a commission (reporting to FW de Klerk) investigating problematic borders of KwaZulu for the Department of Cooperation and Development acknowledged that while Glendale was supposed to have been bought in 1973 by KwaZulu for the resettlement of Groutville's residents, this had never happened.<sup>6</sup> The commission attributed this to the high cost of the land and the efficient production of sugar, recommending, after eighteen years, that Glendale should not become part KwaZulu after all. The two maps show how Glendale's location vis-à-vis KwaZulu changed:

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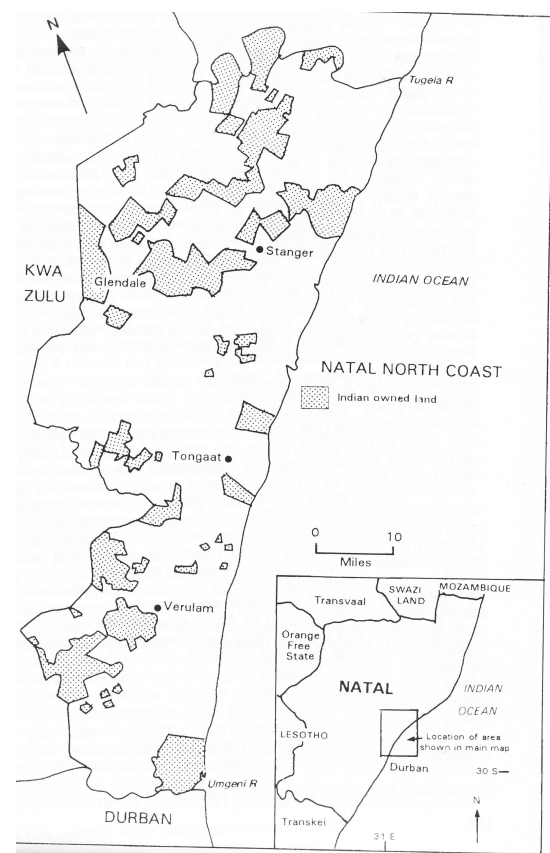
<sup>5</sup> This correspondence is all contained in SAB GMO 1/207 Glendale 4/3

<sup>6</sup> SAB BAO 24/64 REF: R6/1/2/3 (Part 1) 1991





South African Sugar Journal (1979)



Freund (1991)

The Apartheid government's inability to remove Indian people from Glendale did ensure that for almost twenty-five years, a certainly community remained deeply entrenched in an agrarian livelihood. This was ran against the times: the "peasant option" was being exhausted for Indians generally in Natal (Freund 1991: 281-283). This is not to say that Indians were determined to stay in Glendale forever, and it is highly likely that many of the same generational tensions—the desire of many of the youth to leave sugar plantations rather than have their farmer organise a job for them—that Buijs described among Indians on sugar plantation in Southern Natal also featured in Glendale during the 1980s and 1990s (Buijs 1986: 246-7). Despite this, for many Indians the closure of the mill in 1997 meant an abrupt break in the trajectory of their lives. Indian people remaining in Glendale are deeply nostalgic for the time of mill, and it is they who maintain that Glendale is now "destroyed". Their nostalgia does not seem to be just for jobs and community, it also appears to be for a time in which they enjoyed relative, yet considerable, privilege over Africans. An embittered Indian teacher at the primary school in Glendale expressed this sentiment clearly in his claim that

Indians built Glendale out of the little whites gave them, while Africans were lazy, and have inherited it—and much of South Africa—without giving Indians their proper due.

### **Regenerating an African peasantry?**

As long ago as 1872, the Prime Minister of the Natal colony, John Robinson visited the Glendale area, describing the “countless kraals” which gave “a true air of African wildness to the locality” (cited in Kandasamy 1985: 1-2). From that perspective, it would be possible to think of Reynolds and the Paruks as building Glendale almost from “nature”. Such a perspective, of course, took a fair amount of political work to maintain, for it masked African forms of cultivation as well as Africans’ position as highly exploited labourers in any agricultural development in South Africa. It was not as if Africans were ignorant of sugar before the arrival of the British colonists (Richardson 1982: 517), though it is certainly true that many Zulu people refused to work for Europeans on farms, leading both to the massive importation of indentured workers from India and, later migrant workers from Pondoland (Beinart 1997). Neither was it true that Africans only worked on sugar farms as labourers, since as Khumalo’s (1998) study of the area now known as Melville shows, African farmers in the 1860s and 1870s managed to produce quality cane independently, only to encounter difficulties with access to the mill. While these farmers managed in the early 1880s to overcome this by gaining a lease to the mill, when this ran out their participation in the sugar industry came to an end.

Although independent black canegrowers were never entirely eliminated, similar patterns to the destruction of the African peasantry, for which Bundy is famous for describing in the Eastern Cape, happened with independent African cane growers in Natal and Zululand. By 1944, for instance, Simelane (1990:8) notes that Africans owned only one percent of the land on which sugar cane was produced, while Indians owned eleven percent and whites eighty-eight percent. There was surely also some independent production by Africans as tenant farmers, although between 1900 and 1970 this appears to have been quite marginal. Then, in the early 1970s, just as the Sugar Industry in Natal was centralising (Lincoln nd), the South African Sugar Association created a fund dedicated to the development of small, “independent” canegrowers. This fund, which began operating in the 1973, was known as the Small Growers Financial Aid Fund (FAF), and had as its business providing loans and general assistance, starting with an initial five million rand dedicated to loans. These loans were allocated to black farmers in the newly formed KwaZulu. The fund was promoted in glossy publications and its language was that of market-led development, as a 1973-4 report on FAF reveals: “small canegrowers must improve their lives by their own ability and the South African Sugar

Association's assistance should take the form of friendly and unobtrusive support".

In addition to providing loans, FAF also established or upgrade irrigation schemes, including the one built in 1952 at mThandeni, near Glendale. After the first fourteen years of the project, in 1988, the South African Sugar Association claimed that the scheme had meant 19000 small scale growers. Sokhela, a manager in the Sugar Industry, suggests in his 1999 Doctoral thesis that FAF managed to produce 50000 small scale growers from the 4500 in Natal/KwaZulu at the initiation of the project in 1973. It is difficult to ascertain the market share of sugar produced by small canegrowers, although 1979 report of the Financial Mail suggested that black (Indian and African combined) production was 8% of output in the Sugar industry. Obviously this also included black commercial ventures not in FAF, but it was certainly clear that a serious attempt had been made to regenerate the African commercial production of the land

From the inception of FAF, the KwaZulu government made it clear that small cane growers funded through this program would have to operate through "traditional structures"(Simelane 1990: 19). Simelane mentions that Chiefs in the mThandeni area tried their hand at growing cane, and suggests explicitly that FAF worked to fulfill the aims of both the government and capital. After all, any effort to foster a black peasantry in the 1970s in KwaZulu that kept people in the homeland served political ends. A small black peasantry, without big plots of land or real capital to buy machinery, would depend on loans and on mills nearby to crush the cane. They would not be a threat to large commercial farmers and millers. Such a initiative, if successful, the government may have plotted, could have prevented urbanization, which by even by the mid 1970s, was a struggle for the Apartheid government to control. For companies such as Illovo and Hullett, the closing down of rivals and their mills meant that small growers increasingly had to sell to them, and small canegrowers would simply bring in additional sugar cane rather than pose any threat whatsoever. It is unsurprising that, by the early 1990s, the mill at Glendale relied on small scale growers for forty percent of its output (Vaughan and McIntosh 1993: 447).

Anne Vaughan has argued that, during the 1980s, small household production persisted and grew in the sugar industry. Yet she also shows that this was not so much a fully-fledged regeneration of the peasantry as a supplement to household income in rural areas (Vaughan 1991a, 1992). While the sugar industry explicitly and regularly promoted small farmers as their (ostensibly non-ideological!) contribution to development, the resources available to canegrowers were simply too small to become financially independent, even if they had the skill and the luck to produce regularly good yields. What the sugar industry did not show, in their glossily publications showing their contribution to delveopment, was the regularity with which small canegrowers failed, and the extent

to which these growers were entirely dependent on FAF and on millers for their continued operation. This, for Vaughan (1991b: 339), rather than challenging Apartheid's spatial political economy, confirmed it.

## **Conclusion**

It did not even take Illovo five months after buying Lonrho's sugar interests in Africa to announce publicly that it was closing down the Glendale Mill.<sup>7</sup> They promised to "minimize job losses" and "not to prejudice the farmers supplying the mill", saying their future cane supplies could easily be diverted to Gledhow mill, near Stanger. Ironically enough, the previous year Lonrho had donated one of the canefields near the mill to the government. This was earmarked for a housing project, presumably because of its proximity to the mill and the hope to future jobs there. In 2002, some 330 low-income houses were completed, and people moved into one-room facilities with outside toilets and shared taps with their neighbours. Eager to provide "rural development", nobody noticed that the mill was closing, and that no jobs would be available. Are we seen the creation of Botshabelo again (Murray 1992), of a displaced urbanization only even further from the city and under the guise of development rather than explicitly organized by race? Perhaps not: people had houses where they did not have property before. Many have title deeds, including women. However we are to understand the housing project, it is clear that the recipients of the houses that have been close together are without jobs and relatively far from an urban area.

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<sup>7</sup>See "African sugar giant: sweet victory for Illovo after fierce competition" *Sunday Tribune*, 11 May 1997; "Illovo Mill a causality of merger" *The Star*, 10 Oct 1997.



are criminal, whereas “traditionalists” are viewed as having no possibility of a future. Wherever one has been placed in Glendale, prospects are bleak, but the boundaries of the past, if not the past itself, continue to shape practice in the present in deeply meaningful ways.

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