Neoliberalism, States, and Bananas in the Windward Islands

by
Michaeline A. Crichlow

> We were too lazy at first in allowing the free trade ideologues to hijack the process with hardly a murmur of real opposition. The WTO, which so quickly became a mechanism for enforcing the wishes of multinational corporations, was not intended originally to serve that purpose. In the Final Act embodying the results of the Uruguay round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, out of which the WTO emerged, it is clearly stated that one long-term objective is "to establish a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system." Why is emphasis not placed on fair as much as it is placed on market-oriented?
>
> —Ian McDonald

The formation of the European Union and the emergence of a single European market were the first harbingers of change for banana-producing countries, in particular the Caribbean islands trading under preferential agreements with Europe. The common market sought to preserve all such agreements under a central protocol, the New Banana Regime, which according to a system of tariff quotas and licenses facilitated European importation from former colonial countries. Under this system, "dollar bananas" from Latin America, so-called for their low cost of production, were assessed a 20 percent tariff,[1] whereas all other imports faced a tariff of approximately 170 percent. This system allowed Europe's former colonies to unload bananas in Europe tariff-free, granting producers commercial viability (Welch, 1996).

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When the New Banana Regime collapsed, the African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries found themselves unable to compete on a global scale.

In 1996 the United States objected to the New Banana Regime as a violation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (since replaced by the World Trade Organization [WTO]). U.S. companies such as Dole, Del Monte, and Chiquita, which produce and ship "dollar bananas" from Mexico, Honduras, Ecuador, and Guatemala, were successful in getting their case argued before the WTO, and it ruled in 1997 and again in 1999 that the New Banana Regime violated the rules of world trade in giving the African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries an unfair advantage over other banana-producing countries. This ruling resulted in a major restructuring of the banana industries of the Caribbean, redefining relations between banana farmers and regional microstates.

In the Windward Islands, agriculture is synonymous with the banana industry, which is responsible for between 78 and 90 percent of exports. In St. Vincent alone the industry accounts for 70 percent of employment. In Dominica, it employs close to 33 percent of the labor force, and in St. Lucia roughly 60,000 people, or about 46 percent of the population, depend on the industry for income and employment (Nurse and Sandiford, 1995: 3). Because the Windward Islands lack private sectors capable of implementing development projects, the state has traditionally performed this task, in the 1980s attempting to supplant transnational capital by establishing a short-lived leased-farm project. In the 1990s, however, coincident with the entrenchment of the neoliberal agenda, the Windward Islands' constituencies reacted against the state, accusing it of restricting producers' earning power. The state, in turn, relinquished many key controls over the banana industry, making producers' only recourse a fluctuating market and a U.S.-led world policy touting that market's ability to equalize merchant and manager, producer and capital.

Several studies have already highlighted the catastrophic effects of economic neoliberalization on Caribbean constituencies, many of which, it has been suggested, may find the production and sale of drugs a profitable alternative, depending on the appetites of its global neighbor.[2] Fewer studies have dealt with the way in which WTO policies, implemented on the heels of structural adjustment programs, affect relations between states and nonstate actors and how these in turn affect the global arena in which they are compelled to meet. Such an investigation requires examination of the relationship between states and their constituents prior to neoliberalism.

MODEL FARMS IN THE SERVICE OF CAPITAL, STATE, AND WORKERS

The establishment of model farms in the Windward Islands during the early 1980s coincided with the reorganization of transnational capital. While other transnationals were tightening their grip over food and agricultural commodities, Geest West Indies Limited in the Windwards and Tate and Lyle and the United Fruit Company in Jamaica, all three involved in production since the 1960s, severed their connections with producers in the wake of financial losses and repeated instances of worker unrest.[3] In Jamaica the West Indies Sugar Corporation (WISCO), a subsidiary of Tate and Lyle, had reputedly lost approximately US$4.4 million (J$5.5 million) on its operations at Frome and Monymusk between 1967 and 1970 (Feuer, 1983: 228–229). Geest's diversification of its operations made banana production in the Windwards, estimated at less than 20 percent of its total earnings, dispensable, reinstituting, according to the new policy's spin doctors, "banana production as far as possible in the hands of local growers." The vice president of another transnational withdrawing from banana production elsewhere commented with surprising candor, "[We] let them do it. It's cheaper" (quoted by Trouillot, 1988: 163).

In response to the transnationals' withdrawal, Windward Island states provided loans to wage workers on banana estates so that they might lease land as property owners and undertake commercial family-farm ventures, so-called model farms. In this way they shifted the burden and risk of production from wage labor to the family at no extra cost, a general point consistently made by feminist researchers (see, e.g., Smith et al., 1984). The St. Lucia Model Farm Company (SLMF) served as a model for those later established in St. Vincent and Grenada as well as for such land settlement projects as the Mabouya Valley Project in St. Lucia. Established in 1983, the SLMF was financed by the state, the National Development Corporation (a statutory body), the Commonwealth Development Corporation (a British-based mortgage finance company), and Geest Industries. Despite local professionals' management of the SLMF, Geest's presence prevailed, as it retained strict control of international marketing, where the industry's lure lay. The St. Vincent and Grenada model farms, in contrast, arose from earlier land redistribution schemes, thus avoiding the global influences that Geest represented. In Grenada, model farms emerged from the defeat and implosion of the Peoples' Revolutionary Government (PRG), which had expropriated several private farms and reorganized them as state farms.[4] As in the Jamaica of the 1970s, Grenada's "socialism" obscured both the state's shrunken role in a global economy and local political and economic tensions. The government was compelled to consider ways of making agriculture more commercially viable and internationally competitive even as it framed the project in terms of land reform, appropriating farms of roughly 3,600 acres to become model farms in 1986.[5] In St. Vincent as in St. Lucia, where banana production dominated the agricultural sector, the discourse of land reform likewise predominated, with little mention of commercialization. In a joint venture with both private capital and that of donor organizations and spearheaded by the state, the model-farm companies emerged as alternatives to large estate agriculture. By establishing family farms, states and international capital maintained continuous banana production and staved off a regional crisis. Though farmers controlled the labor processes on the farms, marketing, distribution, pricing, and insurance remained under Geest's control. Thus, except in Dominica, a new class structure emerged.

FROM PROLETARIANS TO SMALL FARMERS

Though wage laborers, these people were typically not without property, often living in substandard Geest houses in order to make use of fallow Geest lands to grow crops. On the Geest estates, where production was a mere 9 to 12 tons per acre, workers were employed in all manner of tasks associated with banana production. Women weeded, sleeved, fertilized, and field-packed, all tasks considered "delicate." Men, the main wage workers, performed such "robust" tasks as clearing land, digging, ploughing, replanting ratoons or new plants, and spraying (Crichlow, 1979). In St. Lucia these workers had little difficulty with the transition to model farming. As one farmer put it, "We were already accustomed to producing bananas, even though they were not ours."

Family farmers developed new ways of harnessing and employing labor; operating small, resource-poor 5-acre or smaller farms, they had to incorporate as many family members as possible into banana production. Production involved engaging in a "peasant labor process, that is, using specific instruments of work, regularly deployed on a particular object, in a particular unit of production, with a particular organization of the labor force, toward the production of particular products," where farmers cultivated full-time with the aid of family members (Trouillot, 1988: 4). It involved, as Trouillot observes of the Dominican situation, "an institutionalized process, through which a household does agricultural labor on a unit over which it exerts a form of control that excludes similar groups, with instruments of work which it also controls in an exclusive manner and which generally represent less of an input than the labor itself" (Trouillot, 1988: 4).[6]

While one hesitates to classify smallholders engaged in export agriculture as peasants, in this instance the concept of "peasant labor process" may be applied heuristically to the analysis of the work processes performed on model farms. Clearly, the preference for farmers whose families might assist in banana cultivation reflected management's wish to institute a "peasant labor process." In Grenada, following the lead of the PRG, the state-established Grenada Farm Corporation made it clear that only the minister of agriculture had the authority to implement measures affecting production and marketing on state farms (see Government of Grenada, 1980: 24). Insofar as the decisions made about these farms' management sprang from companies' managers and the state, conceptualizing them as family farms is misleading if not problematic. After all, management companies such as the SLMF often mandated paying workers at week's end and only after deducting such maintenance from the farms' returns. In place of a true "peasant labor process" there was a formal subsumption of labor to capital, or contract farming (Grossman, 1997), which is not to say that control over the means of production (in this case land) translated into control over either the terms of production, the commodity produced, or the prices received for the product. In fact, small farmers had no input into decisions concerning the timing of their harvest; many did not even have much say over the transportation of their fruit (Trouillot, 1988; Grossman, 1997). One farmer recounted that on one banana-cutting day he lost over US$932 (EC$2,500) because the driver whom he had contracted arrived too late for his bananas to be accepted at the docks. He had therefore "sacrificed" to purchase a pickup truck in order to ensure that, in the future, his fruit would not be left behind.

Many analysts consider small farmers' control over banana production illusory. All they have control over, at best, is the "peasant labor process." At least until 1994, Geest set the shipping rates or the prices paid to banana growers' associations, the parastatal bodies mediating between Geest, the market, and the growers/producers.[7] These associations purchased all export-quality bananas from individual growers, boxed, delivered, and sold them to Geest, controlled banana diseases primarily by spraying, and provided extension services and technical advice to farmers (Nurse and Sandiford, 1995). Established by Geest to promote research and to negotiate contracts with farmers, the Windward Islands Banana Growers Association (WINBAN) until 1994 arranged marketing and shipping contracts for bananas, monitored such contracts, initiated research, assisted growers technically, purchased inputs needed by producers, and represented producers on the U.K. Banana Trade Advisory Committee in London (Nurse and Sandiford, 1995: 45–47). Trouillot (1988: 152) describes some of Geest's operations as follows:

> The bananas are boxed, shipped, or discarded on Geest's orders. The [growers' associations] can reject fruits from peasants only under the assumption that their quality would be unacceptable to Geest. There is no transfer of cash or acknowledgment of a quantified debt by Geest as the Geest boats take away the product. There are no prices, but rather the possibility of a remainder after Geest deducts its expenses. . . . The exchange value of the commodity is ascertained in England and nowhere else. The first real sale occurs there.

For the most part, small farmers were simply "working for capital,"[8] and their alienation from management comes as no surprise.

Though leaseholder farmers owned the properties, the model farms' management created a sense of powerlessness akin to that of a landless worker. In Grenada, for example, the corporation retained the right to "enter into and upon the holding and view and examine its state and condition" at any time (Government of Grenada, n.d.) In St. Vincent and St. Lucia similar conditions became prerequisites for farm ownership. The St. Lucia company reserved the right to dismiss farmers not abiding by the lease's rules and regularly complained of low productivity, the illegal employment of hired labor, and the prevalence of part-time producers.

In St. Vincent the absence of a centralized management able to offer educational programs, among other services, exacerbated the farmers'/workers' dependence on management. In turn, they criticized management for its lack of understanding of their problems and complained of excessive weekly deductions from their income (Government of St. Vincent, 1987). According to several St. Lucian farmers, at the end of the week they were presented with vouchers showing "zero, zero, zero [and] according to their [management's] calculations, they owed us nothing, and we owed them nothing either." Many farmers claimed that these deductions were not included in the lease agreement and were made by capricious managers who felt that farmers were taking home too much money. Management, too, had complaints, among them that workers had not abandoned their wage-worker mentality. Though workers moved fairly easily into the position of family farmers, several key members of the SLMF had difficulty accepting this class transformation.[9] Roughly ten years ago, St. Lucian model farmers sued management over "unfair deductions" from their income. Because the lease agreement allowed the deduction of whatever management deemed fit, the farmers lost, but the company's dissolution soon followed.

GENDER IN THE SERVICE OF PRODUCTION

The transition from proletarians to small farmers in the Windward Islands occasioned an increase in the number of family workers employed on the farm and, as a result, changes in the gendered division of labor, which resembled patriarchy, however beleaguered. Many women, including those who had worked on Geest-managed estates, placed themselves under their male partners' leadership in order to sustain family farms and relinquished their independent earning potential. Though the tasks whereby women tended to earn money were distributed according to gender, many women had found a measure of independence in earning a wage by producing and selling domestic crops. The new farms' needs reinstated male dominance and widespread acceptance of unpaid female labor. With Geest's withdrawal from production, more than 97 percent of male wage workers became model farmers and were required to mobilize and channel the labor of spouses, relatives, and children.

Analysts have theorized about the extent to which patriarchal organizations have changed in response to the early modern and current emphasis on an ethos of individuality—individual effort, individual worth, and individual achievement. These analyses often highlight clashes between the needs of the collective and the needs of the individual. In his discussion of modernity and informality, Mingione (1991) observes that industrialization has not substituted one form of sociality for another but merely scrambled the mix of such sociality. He argues that patriarchy, an outcome of and a response to an ethos based on a preindustrial (read precapitalist) collectivism, was fundamentally opposed to the individualist tendencies to which, with the shifting ground of industrialization, it was forced to accommodate (1991: 52).

The gender imbalances and tensions underscored in the Windward Islands were not, of course, the same as those that surface in the wake of a society's transition from preindustrialism to industrialism, but reconstituted forms of patriarchy emerged on model farms according to the demands of an influential neoliberal world market. While state reinforcement of the agrarian monocrop patterns necessary to restore banana economies within the model farms was new, the reinstatement of male-oriented relations was not. New forms of production reinvigorated old forms of gender sociality in the service of both capital and the state. The preponderance of males performing the final tasks of production, transportation, and producer representation reinforced the symbolic position of men even on farms where owners or chief operators were women.

Women involved in banana production are reported to be more heavily engaged in the marketing of the produce: "The inter-island, or intra-regional trade in agricultural produce is largely controlled by women." So-called hucksters or higglers controlled "80 to 90 percent of the inter-island trade in agricultural produce in the early 1980s" and formed what has been called an "informal economy" (Nurse and Sandiford, 1995: 75). A study of 195 rural women in St. Lucia found that the majority spent most of their time small-scale farming for household consumption or for sale in domestic or regional markets. Women were "generally responsible for the production of vegetables and pulses and the tending of tree crops to a lesser extent. On farms with both animal and crop enterprises, women were often responsible for small stock such as goats, sheep, domestic chickens, rabbits and others" (Jean, 1986: 15). Though a small number of women farmed bananas for export, they relied on their spouses to engage the public domain.

Productivity and the well-being of family-farm households depend on the farm operators' ability to mobilize unpaid labor, particularly when hiring is costly or impossible. In this respect, model farms proved more successful than similarly positioned farms depending on a "peasant labor process." Labor was mobilized not only from the immediate farm-family household but from other families, usually relatives, living in other households. The farm operator might also seek the help of friends, especially on cutting days, when more hands were needed to select, cut, wash, and box bananas to be taken to the central depot. In St. Lucia, where model farms were more advanced, owners produced more bananas per acre than all other farms including the 3,000-acre Geest-owned-and-operated estate. While the national average ranged from 5 to 10 tons per acre, in 1986 model farm yields were as much as 15 to 20 tons per acre, with several farmers producing as much as 25 to 27 tons (Crichlow, 1987; Nurse and Sandiford, 1995: 78). One commentator attributed this to the fact that "they are no longer working for 'massa' now, they are working for themselves" (former Prime Minister John Compton, interview, June 1998). Indeed, workers on Geest estates often sabotaged agricultural tasks, strewing fertilizers into crab holes or indiscriminately rather than carefully around the banana plant. As Trouillot observed, it was the availability of labor that most benefited Dominican farms, and a household's success in banana farming reflected its ability to mobilize labor.

"SEEING LIKE A STATE": THE PRODUCTIVE PROJECTS OF STATES

In critiques of the development industry's operation, poststructuralists sometimes argue against an exclusive focus on the failures of state projects (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994; Crush, 1995; Mitchell, 1995). They emphasize the importance of understanding the product apart from the intentions or objectives of developers and the relationship between knowledge and power that underlies development projects (Foucault, 1972; 1980). In the scenario under consideration, peripheral agrarian states sought to recover or reinforce their position as banana producers in the world economy by new means. Because of Geest's maneuvers, states, supported by international and national funding, attempted to regulate banana production under the management apparatus of model farms. These efforts were successful because they fully capitalized on a gender and class hierarchy that allowed for the use of the unpaid labor of women and children and underemployed or unemployed poor relatives. Although the state had some success in mobilizing farmers in the name of private industry, it failed to turn model farms into viable quasi-private enterprises that might resuscitate the banana industry. An unintended outcome of this mobilization was workers' politicization. While the state stressed land reform and rules, workers challenged both, airing their grievances in court.

Forced to act within the strictures of the marketplace, states implemented policies by bureaucratic edict. The collusion of market demand and the locals' hunger for land and steady household income legitimized such policies. States were not imposing structures on an unsuspecting populace; aspects of the state scheme satisfied the farmers' needs and were for a time nominally successful. The farm structures that the scheme erected were, after all, no different from what obtained nationally with or without direct state intervention. Nevertheless, the SLMF's authoritarian practices, secretive decision-making habits, and built-in class biases ultimately undermined its control over farmers. It constructed, in short, the syndrome that Scott (1998) calls "seeing like a state" not so much because of its impulse for regulation and insistence on efficiency as because of the measures it employed to realize these objectives. It excluded ways of imagining alternatives, sometimes violently, and belittled other forms of knowledge production.

No perspective beyond that projected by the state was considered valuable. According to many farmers, the prime objective of the SLMF's bureaucracy was to undercut their independence by deducting too much from their incomes, not to mention by imposing regulations. In the words of one St. Lucian farmer, the almost triumphant announcement of zero-zero income at the end of the day "was hard to take, because we worked so hard and nothing was coming in. I could not buy anything for my children. I could not give my wife anything. We had to do something about that." In 1992, amidst heightened worker discontent, the SLMF was liquidated, and farmers reached various loan arrangements with the development bank and commercial banks to secure ownership of their farms. Few farmers who could not attract credit because of their accumulated debts lost their property. And yet the revolt against the SLMF should be understood as a repudiation not of the market conditions or requirements but of ineffective bureaucratization, unfair company practice, and company officials' arrogance.

THE IMPACT OF DIRECT MARKET EXPOSURE

Model farms were designed to mediate between farmers and the market. When St. Lucia dissolved those farms and the other banana-producing Windwards reorganized theirs, a new, more direct relationship between the market and the farmer was forged under the tutelage of the neoliberal marketplace's proponent states, whose leaders espouse what they believe to be a self-adjusting market that produces order and stability in an era of globalized commodity standards (Arrighi, 1998: 69). Led by the United States and other hegemonic industrialized states, the WTO has advocated eliminating many preferential supports for agricultural commodities produced by small states such as the Windwards.

In a poignant account of the problems small states face in their trade negotiations with larger, more powerful ones, Haraksingh (1994–1995: 25) captures the "roller coaster of emotions" experienced by Caribbean states in this era of free trade. Although Haraksingh refers to sugar, the account might also apply to other commodities:

> Most of us knew that the international movement of sugar is dictated only to a minor extent by free market forces and that 80% of world sugar is traded under special arrangements. Students of sugar are more convinced than others, therefore, that there is no such thing as free trade, and more convinced too that there will never be. They know that what really exists are arrangements for the movement of goods, sometimes tight, sometimes flexible, but always arrangements. The real issue for sugar producers was to obtain the edge of advantage in settling those arrangements.

The agricultural industry responsible for providing, among other commodities, sugar, coffee, cacao, rum, and rice, some of which are produced in the Windwards and Jamaica, benefits tremendously from trade agreements. In 1990, eight Caribbean countries[10] exported sugar to the United States under quota agreements that originated in the nineteenth century and to the European Community (EC) under the Sugar Protocol, together worth approximately US$90 million (World Bank, 1993: 25). Bananas from Jamaica and the Windwards enter the United Kingdom under trade agreements restricting imports from dollar countries, particularly those in Latin America. Sugar and bananas combined are "50 percent more important than all manufactured exports, and the EC offers an absolute preference guaranteeing importation of a certain volume of exports at high prices" (World Bank, 1988: 18). Thus, in contrast to the United States and European states, which rely heavily on the subsidization of their domestic agricultural production,[11] Caribbean states, Haraksingh (1994–1995) reminds us, must negotiate fiercely to ensure the continuation of the preferential agreements entered into with the former colonial powers.

Caribbean states must also negotiate for financial aid from core states (Grossman, 1994). Aid from Britain to the Windward Islands' banana industry since the 1950s has ensured continued production, as unpopular as subsidizing the operations of Geest Industries may have been. These supports were no doubt provided to encourage the Windwards to produce cost-effectively, in the future allowing the United Kingdom to liberalize imports from dollar countries. Though such production was never realized, the United Kingdom maintained its support.[12]

ASSOCIATIONS UNDER THE NEW BANANA REGIME

The demise of trade agreements has accelerated the deterioration of relations between farmers and the four Windward Island states. The dissolution of the state-controlled banana growers' associations, which mediated between Geest and growers, the emphasis on the market, and privatization have altered the links between growers and consumers in industrialized countries, consequently reconstituting relationships with their harried states. Amidst grower dissatisfaction with the association's management and low international fruit prices (the average green market price has declined since 1993 in the wake of the formation of the European common market [WIBDECO, 1997]), these associations have been forced to reorganize, creating new economic and political contexts for the former model farmer.

The EU's New Banana Regime was designed to "merge the three varying banana market structures in the European Community without creating conditions for breach of the preferences of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific banana producers protected by the Banana Protocol No. 5 of the Lomé IV agreement" (WIBDECO, n.d.: appendix A1). While it temporarily protected the substance of those preferential agreements, which provided the Windward Islands banana producers with a secure European market (primarily British), it also allowed more "dollar bananas" into the European market, thus eroding the earnings of Windward Island producers (Nurse and Sandiford, 1995). Since January 2002, the EU market has been open to Latin American producers.

Aware of the potential disaster threatening the economies of peripheral states that depended upon bananas, a commission set up to review the discontinuation of preferential treatment recommended that the industry "act now to make use of the short window of opportunity prior to the year 2002 to effect change" (Nurse and Sandiford, 1995: 3). One of the resultant changes was the formation in 1994 of the Windward Islands Banana Development and Exporting Company (WIBDECO), a private liability company. WIBDECO immediately established a presence in the United Kingdom "to take full advantage of the licensing system under Lomé." WIBDECO is jointly owned by the four banana growers' associations, and the governments of the Windward Islands have availed themselves of 50 percent of its share capital (SLBGA, 1994). In light of Geest's disposal of its U.K. banana business, to salvage its farm investment in Costa Rica WIBDECO, along with the U.K.-based transnational Fyffes, purchased five businesses from Geest, thereby replacing Geest as the sole purchaser of Windward Island bananas. WIBDECO's responsibilities are marketing/distribution of bananas, contract negotiation and monitoring, maintenance of uniform quality standards and legislation, investments and other commercial activity grower (producer) regional services, and shipping services (SLBGA, 1994). In contrast to WINBAN, which the governments monopolized, WIBDECO will seek to implement new requirements attested to by the Windward Island governments' relinquishing their original interest to share WIBDECO profits 50–50, thus paving the way for dividends to be paid directly to the four growers' associations (SLBGA, 1994: 37).

Just as WINBAN was supplanted by the substantive changes that led to the creation of WIBDECO, so the banana growers' associations have been forced to face constitutional restructuring with regard to their resources. Currently statutory bodies, they now favor privatization in a way that preserves the Windward Island governments' guiding hand. How this is to be accomplished is unclear, and some governments have chosen to avoid these arrangements altogether. Producers will control the new associations, owning their net assets through the purchase of shares. According to one recommendation, "directors and senior management [will] be replaced with experienced executives and professional line managers using technical assistance resources" with emphasis on "increasing productivity and quality and reducing costs of production" (WIBDECO, n.d.: 3).

In St. Lucia, where the pace of transformation has intensified and the future is clearer than in either St. Vincent or Dominica, a new company has emerged that challenges the monopoly of the growers' associations (Serieux, 1998)—the Tropical Quality Fruit Company (TQF), created by farmers, charging the St. Lucia Banana Growers Association (SLBGA) with corruption and stridently disagreeing with its privatization methods, which offered each registered grower the same vote regardless of level of production. At first the company attracted the bigger, presumably more efficient producers, but increasingly farmers were taking advantage of every opportunity the market presented. Its keynote speaker at the TQF's launching, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, urged the company to "open up membership and shareholding of your new company to investors other than farmers, so you can attract capital and expertise you will need to operate successfully" (*The Mirror*, July 10, 1998). The TQF offers shares to producers on the basis of their production levels. This differentiates the company from the transformed SLBGA, the St. Lucia Banana Company (SLBC), which offers shares to growers registered between 1993 and 1997 who produced a minimum of 2,000 lb. of bananas in any given year.[13]

The emergence of these private companies heralds the end of state monopoly and of the relationship Geest has enjoyed with the Windward Islands since the 1950s (Trouillot, 1988; Welch, 1996).[14] Nevertheless, Geest is still present in ways that suggest that when situations change they need to engage the past. It remains linked to the banana industry, albeit differently. For example, WIBDECO relies on the Geest name to sell Windward Island bananas, and Geest plans to purchase 78 percent of the bananas WIBDECO exports to the United Kingdom. The two parties will negotiate the weekly price of bananas.

THE NEW BUSINESS ERA: LOCALIZED EXPRESSIONS OF GLOBAL DISCOURSES OF PRIVATIZATION

As noted by the St. Lucia Chamber of Commerce, the launching of the TQF punctuated the end of SLBGA domination and monopoly over producers' sales. The chair of the TQF reported being "confident that the business approach planned for TQF will bring farmers out of an obsolete Association mode into business practices that are necessary for a profitable operation" (*The Mirror*, July 10, 1998). This discursive focus on business, the need for profitability, and recognition of international standards reveals not only advocacy of market liberalization but also a class struggle that seems to follow political party lines. Farmers more committed to SLBC (the reconstituted SLBGA) are for the most part supporters of the ruling St. Lucia Labor party, while there is a greater concentration of supporters of the opposition

United Workers' party in the TQF.[15] Because the SLBGA failed to reward farmers producing higher-quality fruit, the more successful farmers formed their own organization to demand a greater say in the operation of the industry. Such class-based struggles are bound to be ideological as well. Locally, farmers see themselves as adversaries of the banana growers' associations, which have traditionally been seen, along with Geest, as enemies skimming off profits. The TQF portrays the state as inefficient and incompetent, using language similar to that of WTO, World Bank, and U.S. trade officials, who advocate the supremacy of the market as policy determiner par excellence. For the TQF, the state has mishandled the banana industry and private enterprise is required to restore managerial credibility and profitability: "What is needed is effective production organization and coordination, driven by the private entrepreneur's stimulation of market demands which is to be found locally . . . regionally . . . and internationally" (Serieux, 1998: 4).

These developments point to the reorganization of the rural class structure, perhaps the first such reorganization in the Windward Islands since emancipation in 1838. The collapse of the SLMF led to the withdrawal of highly indebted farmers, and other farmers were permitted to consolidate their holdings. Members of the urban middle class, unconnected to agriculture, took over the loan portfolios of indebted farmers, and several of them now own 5-acre farms and are seeking to acquire further acreage.

THE DILEMMA OF LABOR IN A "STRICTLY BUSINESS" OPERATION

For former model farmers the demise of the SLBGA did not warrant regret. They adopted an approach that they termed "strictly business." Buoyed by the SLBGA's agreement with the major British supermarket, TESCO, to increase the volume of bananas from 5,000 to 15,000 40-lb. boxes per week, farmers were eager to do business with anyone who promised profits. Former model farmers in St. Lucia said they would do business with the TQF and the SLBC according to which company paid the most (*The Mirror*, May 8, 1998). Such competition involves increasing production and reducing production costs, which is difficult given the precipitous decline in banana production and production acreage. In 1997 the Windward Islands recorded the biggest decline to date in banana production; "total banana output fell from 191,407 tonnes in 1996 to 137,429 tonnes, a decline of approximately 28 percent" (WIBDECO, 1997: 1). St. Lucia experienced the greatest drop (32 percent) and Dominica the least (13 percent). Though prolonged drought was partly to blame, there was also a 5 percent decline in the number of active banana farmers, hence in production acreage.

Producing more and better bananas also depends on the availability of labor. Among farmers with whom I spoke, even on farms owned by women, the men were more outspoken on farm matters, dominating conversations, even when I indicated that I wanted to hear from the women. The wife of one of the most successful farmers I interviewed, though present, continued to perform her tasks silently, as did the children and relatives who were there on harvest day cutting, selecting, washing, and boxing the bananas. On farms where there were no male partners and sons and daughters dutifully assisted their mothers, mothers ceded authority to those who were more knowledgeable about the farms' operations. In several cases I conversed with daughters who had completed secondary education and kept informal records of farm operations. One could begin to talk about a more egalitarian division of labor on such farms. For example, on two farms sharing resources, one owned by a young woman, "Adlena," and the other by her widowed mother, Adlena's husband, though demonstrably in control of decision making on Adlena's farm, did not exercise control over her mother's farm. Adlena's mother consulted regularly with her daughter and her children, who helped operate the farm. Although much research is still necessary to assess the gender relations on farms, preliminary evidence suggests a reorganization of households according to gender hierarchies.

In the Windward Islands, farmers have long believed that educated children should abandon farming for other employment. One family member I interviewed in St. Lucia told me that she was the butt of jokes (*mauvais langue*) among neighbors who believed that she was wasting her secondary school education by working on the farm. She contended that she felt obligated to help her mother, who owned the farm, and besides, she loved farming.[16] Because she kept the farm records, she knew the farm was operating at a deficit, however, and so was reluctantly looking for work elsewhere in the industry. On another farm, when I observed the owner's teenage son working on the farm, I was assured that this employment was temporary, that he had recently graduated from secondary school and, while providing help on the farm, was thinking about his future. The owner said that he would not encourage his children to farm because it was arduous and unprofitable. Both of these farmers were full-time, relatively successful former model farmers.

In addition to family aid, farmers call on friends to assist, particularly on cutting days, suggesting a revitalization of traditional forms of community solidarity, now serving not collective but individual needs. The reputation of each farm depends on the quality and steadiness of the banana supply. The farm as an individual household entity that draws upon family resources has replaced the state-leased farm on which farmers banded together to discuss common problems. Even the informal associations employed by model farmers to restructure the SLMF's terms no longer exist. Farmers now operate independently and exchange labor (by *coup-de-main*) to facilitate each other's production.

Further isolated by economically incapacitated states, farmers face a market whose smallest fluctuations call for new standards and practices. According to one researcher, "farmers were barely breaking even with the new production requirements. More of the responsibilities of post-harvest processing were being passed from the BGA [banana growers' associations] and falling on farmers. Moreover, the focus on the ills of the SLBGA popularized disenchantment with the organization, though that focus obscured the broader context of global transformation" (*The Mirror*, May 8, 1998).[17] In other words, even those farmers who advocate full, unimpeded market entry into banana production have probably not fully grasped the magnitude of the changes that this will bring to banana production. Created in response to European consumer concern, the fair-trade-bananas category is cause for optimism, as it favors bananas produced with a minimum of pesticides and fertilizers by farmers opposed to worker exploitation. Thus, Windward Island bananas fare better than those of Central America. "England's fifth largest supermarket chain has launched a nationwide promotion to boost sales of Windward Island bananas produced by small farmers using environmentally sound practices" (Raynolds, 1998: 35). And this supermarket chain has assisted farmers with soft loans for banana sheds and other basic infrastructure to ensure workers humane conditions. Although there are limits to these policies' ability to ameliorate social and economic abuses in production, they represent an alternative business model that is rare if not radical today (Raynolds, 1998: 37).

In a reconstituted "peasant labor process" now mobilized for and by the globalization project, the balance between consumption and production may be sacrificed as farmers and the companies that represent them pursue profits above all else. The TQF, for example, promises to pay the new business farmers, "who can deliver on a regular basis, higher prices, though its spokesmen warn that the company will 'not breast-feed them' " (*The Mirror*, June 6, 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

From the periphery, Caribbean states are attempting to reestablish their position within a world economy dominated by transnational capital and the overindustrialized countries. The region's indebtedness and structural adjustment policies have fostered new relationships between states and their constituents, and neither states nor constituents have had their way. Holding more power than their constituents, states have attempted to reshape agricultural sectors in ways that would allow them to maintain control over vital avenues of foreign exchange and key political actors.

Even so, "seeing like a state"—seeking to regulate labor and the social relations of production in ways that disable alternative forms of production and participation in the market—is no guarantee that states' plans will succeed. Indeed, these states have already been transformed. The amendment of the growers' associations' constitutions to allow for privatization has made it possible for private companies to compete for producers' bananas, altering the states' relationship to the most important of its economic sectors and the people who contribute most to the production of foreign exchange for the region's growing import requirements. Rather than emanating from identifiable state institutions, this major social change will come from private enterprises whose associations with state officials determine whether and how the state's power will reassert itself beyond the traditional state institutions. Nevertheless, neither private enterprise nor the Windward Island states have sufficient clout to affect the restructured processes of global accumulation.

Brought into existence by local and international states through funding agencies, with production maintained and protected by U.K.-generated preferential agreements, former model farmers find themselves embarking on independent existences. Encouraged to incorporate their families into production—indeed, forced to do so by the high cost of labor or, as in Dominica, the shortage of labor—farmers have rejuvenated both traditional modes of sociality such as cooperative work and family obligations for the benefit of capital and themselves. These processes involve not the elimination of entrenched systems of patriarchy but their reorganization. In the Windward Islands, where forms of patriarchy have already been fractured by the sort of independence that tends to come with education, male farmers' mobilization of cheaper labor supplies will clash with the educated people's need for a higher standard of living. The Western-based educational system that the region has inherited propagates such values, rendering the Caribbean's traditions of collective obligation suspect. Farm obligations will have to confront this reality. Global dynamics ensure that the banana industry will not be as it was. However eroded the influence of states, their central roles in development in the past presage their continued participation in the outfitting of local strata for the new globalized project. At the moment both traditional and emergent alternatives structure Caribbean farmers' responses. Farmers aim to combine the tools of the neoliberalized marketplace with those of older traditions of modernity, locally expressed, in building gendered places of comfort. The price of such "progress" will probably be high.

P.S. On January 15, 2000, my St. Lucian journalist friend Earl Bousquet wrote, "Privatisation has meant chaos because the dependency syndrome cannot be broken overnight and the grass is being trampled upon while the elephants battle. Three (and possibly four) private companies have been formed to replace Geest and they are competing, not against Chiquita (which they can't, really) or any other common enemy, but against themselves. Each is chartering its own ships, each seeking its own markets. In the meantime, as many as 2,000 families are falling out of bananas because of the changed picture."

NOTES

1. Production of bananas in the Windward Islands is estimated at 6 metric tons per acre, compared with 14.2 and 17.7 for Costa Rica and Honduras, respectively (see Nurse and Sandiford, 1995: esp. 144).

2. This was an argument made by several heads of Caribbean states.

3. This followed in the wake of a reorganization according to post-Fordist industrial practices, subcontracting, flexibility of production practices, and the loss of control by core states over the operations of transnationals. On the latter point, consider the U.S.-based transnationals' flouting of the U.S. grain embargo against the Soviet Union in the 1970s.

4. The invasion of Grenada in 1983 led to reprivatization of at least ten estates following upon the PRG initiative. The new Grenada government signaled its intention to create smallholdings out of the remaining 25 3,600-acre farms. The idea was to (*a*) maintain, manage, and control all Grenada farms, (*b*) develop all Grenada farms commercially according to the agricultural policies and programs of the government, (*c*) stimulate and undertake agricultural development on Grenada farms and participate in agricultural development projects as approved by the minister, (*d*) stimulate development among small farmers in proximity to Grenada farms and be a source of inputs critical to small-farm development, and (*e*) perform any other function consistent with agricultural development that the minister, from time to time, might direct.

5. The model farms include St. Omer Estate, 104 acres; Perseverance, 260 acres; Bon Accord, 140 acres; Larva Estate, 98 acres; La Sagesse, 110 acres; Requin Estate, 102 acres; Belle Vue Estate, 226 acres; Springs Estate, 266 acres; Poyntzfield Estate, 43 acres; Mount Reuil Estate, 127 acres; Levera Estate, 120 acres; Samaritan Estate, 38 acres; Diamond Estate, 136 acres; Lorette Estate, 110 acres; Black Bay Estate, 130 acres; Carriere Estate, 71 acres; Paradise Estate, 198 acres (Government of Grenada, 1986).

6. The Dominican government refused to take up Geest's offer to buy the estates and set up a model-farm situation like those of the other Windwards. Instead, Geest was forced to sell small farms directly to those who wanted them. It is not clear whether former Geest workers were given preference in those sales.

7. The banana growers' associations function in all the Windward Islands. They service all the 27,000 farmers in the Windwards and link the four governments in an umbrella organization, the Windward Islands Banana Growers' Association (WINBAN), which represents the interests

of the associations in marketing and contractual issues and provides research and development support for farmers (Nurse and Sandiford, 1995: 46).

8. This is Trouillot's perspective, given his argument that "peasants" have the illusion of control.

9. A popular story is that of the farmer who purchased a used Mercedes and parked it every day alongside of the accountant's Japanese car. Farmers say that this created problems between the farmer and the accountant, the accountant claiming that the farmer did not know his place.

10. Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago.

11. The reduction in sugar prices in the 1980s was attributed in part to the effects of these subsidies (World Bank, 1988: 11).

12. Indeed, in a discussion in 1965 concerning possible renewal of the price adjustment scheme, a British official declared that the preferential market "was in contradiction of U.K. commitments under the GATT and a constant source of international embarrassment" (Grossman, 1994: 163).

13. See SLBC (n.d.).

14. See Trouillot's (1988) account of how Geest relied on the "peasant labor process" to finance its expansion and profitability. Also see Welch (1996), who offers a different interpretation of Geest's role in the banana industry of the Windwards.

15. In recent times, farmers looking for a better deal have invested in both enterprises.

16. This attitude toward assisting parents is also found in the work of other researchers. For example, Harmsen (1997) seeks to draw a correlation between people's household connections and their labor efforts. She cites the case of a young man named Felix who had returned from England to St. Lucia to help his grandmother, who had provided for him when his mother migrated to England.

17. Karla Slocum recalls, "In my survey [of 70 farmers in Mabouya], I found that if a farmer sold 51 boxes in one period, he or she made $EC300 (one $US1 = $EC2.68). And women made less money, on less land, with the same labor costs" (*The Mirror*, May 5, 1998).

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