

CENTRE FOR CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES (CCDS)

WORKING PAPER SERIES • (June 2017)



CCDS WORKING PAPER SERIES #2

LEGALIZE IT? The Contradictions of Cannabis and Capitalism in the Eastern Caribbean

Kevin Edmonds
Graduate Associate, CCDS
University of Toronto Scarborough



Legalize it? The Contradictions of Cannabis and Capitalism in the Eastern Caribbean

Kevin Edmonds
Graduate Associate, CCDS

In 1976, reggae legend Peter Tosh released the album and song *Legalize It*. The album and the song acted as an anthem of protest against the criminalization of ganja (marijuana)¹ in Jamaica and the rest of the world. Indeed, for many people, the Caribbean and ganja are synonymous. Thirty years later, Jamaica has been the first country in the Caribbean to take important, meaningful steps to decriminalize small quantities of ganja and has removed restrictions on ganja for medicinal, scientific, and cultural uses. Jamaica stands to see the largest economic benefit due to the strength of its brand and due the fact that it is one of the first country's to enter the market. However, unless Caribbean countries use ganja law reform as a platform for progressive social transformation from the bottom up, the industry will benefit the already rich and powerful. The shadows of multinational corporations and elite domination over the ganja industry have already begun to emerge, with the emergence of multimillion dollar megadeals from Canadian consortiums (Jones 2015). At the same time small cultivators have been clashing with the Jamaican Cannabis Licencing Authority, claiming that they are being squeezed out of the new industry (Jamaica Gleaner 2016).

While Caribbean governments have opened the door wider to discussions of medical ganja, they have not dealt with it in a way that will provide security for the current producers. This is primarily due to the fact that Jamaica and other Caribbean countries are still trapped by structural factors that inhibit them from capturing the benefits of engaging in trade within the global capitalist system. As it currently stands, there is nothing that will enable Caribbean states to regulate the production and trade of ganja – and once legalized it will become subject to the

same rules and norms that govern the trade of any other commodity. When viewed through the theory of the Plantation Economic Model (defined below), once ganja is legalized and opened up as a legitimate site of investment, the current power imbalances within the domestic and international economies will carry over, displacing those individuals who have been relying on the ganja trade as a source of income and employment for decades.

The new entrepreneurs of the Caribbean's legal ganja economy will not be the small farmer and cultivator in the hills – or the low level hustler on the street corner, but rather international investors and the domestic elite who are best positioned to capitalize on the new industry. Similar parallels can be seen in the agricultural, tourism and financial service industries – where the majority of opportunities for Caribbean people exist as cheap labour. During my time in both St. Vincent and St. Lucia, through numerous interviews with producers and traffickers, I have seen increasing concern and skepticism over who would truly benefit from the legalization of ganja in the Caribbean. Looking at the case of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, this paper will argue that due to the massive imbalances in power and wealth between small, dependent countries and multinational corporations, legalization should not be pursued in the absence of a clear, highly regulated platform to ensure that the poor and marginalized will not be displaced from their participation in what has largely been a communal social safety net (via the provision of income and employment), operating in the Crown Land forest reserves.

The unfortunate reality for the Caribbean is that it rarely gets chances to take the lead in new or emerging industries – and in a perfect world St. Vincent and St. Lucia should legalize ganja. Currently, the global capitalist system would view the legalization of ganja similar to any other commodity, and it would in turn be subject to the same rules that govern the trade regime that has historically decimated the region. The Plantation Economic Model, economies of scale

and the imbalance of power in the international capitalist system suggest that larger nations such as United States, Canada, and Israel would be able to produce ganja at a cheaper rate due to the greater availability of land, capital, and technology – and their use of market distorting agricultural subsidies.

With this in mind, the discussion of ganja reform as a platform for progressive social transformation needs to take center stage going forward. In the countries and states where ganja has been legalized, we have seen the benefits disproportionately accrue to socially dominant groups – particularly along the lines of race, class, and gender. Without a platform that takes this into consideration – and scales up the benefits to the average person, the Caribbean may find itself on the outside looking in, seeing further increases in poverty, unemployment, and foreign economic domination.

Historical Context & Background – The Caribbean and the Plantation Economic Theory

Given the many problems arising from the combination of factor endowments and the structural economic issues resulting from their particular historical experiences, St. Vincent and St. Lucia are important cases to test the impact of trade liberalization on weak countries existing at the very margins of the global economy. When history is analyzed through the Plantation Economic Model (PEM), it reveals a contextually grounded pattern whereby the respective decisions made by the interests of the global capitalist class (and their proponents of free trade in national governments and later international institutions) have wreaked havoc on the region's economic base – first with sugar, then with bananas, and now potentially with the legalization of ganja.

Due to their inherent weakness which stems from their uneven incorporation into the periphery of the international capitalist economy, the states of St. Lucia and St. Vincent have not

possessed the ability to effectively control developments within their own territories, despite having all of the trappings that come with formal political independence. The situation in St. Lucia and St. Vincent is one in which the respective nations may have international political recognition of their independence, but lack the ability to make any domestic political decisions which override the social and economic interests of the hegemonic powers of the time. This ultimately comes down to a question of power – as Caribbean countries have lacked the meaningful independence to determine their own priorities and reorient their economies in ways that put the needs of their people first. The unforgiving attacks on countries that have tried to make these changes (ie. Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, Guyana and Grenada) stand as traumatic examples of how far powerful countries and groups will go in order to maintain the status quo.

While trade liberalization is the trigger that accelerated the shift into ganja cultivation, we cannot understand this phenomenon without looking to the historical role that the plantation economic model has had on undermining self-sufficiency at the community, state and regional levels. In addition, we must also recognize the lasting legacies of alternative economic development as a form of resistance that goes back centuries. Neoliberalism intensified this already existing antagonism in the islands – as after independence the economies maintained their orientation towards servicing the needs of the colonial power. During periods of independence, there was no massive attempt to engage in land reform, diversify the economies, or reduce the levels of foreign ownership.

It is within this space where the PEM puts forward a nuanced and highly contextual account of Caribbean development in keeping with the central tenets of Dependency Theory's key insight that the patterns of underdevelopment and the correspondingly limited prospects for meaningful economic growth resulted from a historical process in which peripheral/hinterland

countries of the Global South were exploited by colonial/metropolitan economies at the centre (Best and Levitt 1968, 283). Lloyd Best and Kari Polanyi Levitt (1968) argued that there were three main types of colonial economies – hinterlands of conquest (that is, Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in South and Central America), settlement (settler colonies such as Canada and New Zealand) and exploitation (that is, the Caribbean). Hinterlands of exploitation were colonies that were organized to exclusively produce commodities for trade (such as, sugar, cotton and coffee) with the metropolitan centre and not for domestic needs.

PEM emerged in response to Arthur Lewis' theory of "Industrialization by Invitation," based on the experience of Puerto Rico (Girvan 2005, 200). PEM argues that without any structural change to reorient Caribbean economies towards fulfilling domestic economic needs, foreign investment would be a hollow, and ultimately harmful gesture. The central thesis of the PEM is "*that the plantation legacy represents an endowment of mechanisms of economic adjustment which deprive the region of an internal dynamic. More specifically, it involves patterns of income distribution and disposal which discriminate against economic transformation*" (Best and Levitt 1968, 321). On a larger level, the PEM argued that production in the Caribbean is tied to a boom and bust cycle (foundation, maturity, decline, eventual liquidation and collapse) whereby once production shifts to new terrains, the existing, older plantation economies will experience diminishing economic returns, falling profitability, and deteriorating terms of trade (Levitt 2005).

Due to the failure of Caribbean governments to reorient their economies away from this colonial pattern of trade, there remains a preference for export production to be given priority over domestic production. In turn, labour power continues to mirror the racial and class hierarchy of the plantation, with the descendants of formerly enslaved peoples overrepresented in terms of

labour and marginalized in terms of access to capital. We can see how all of these assumptions have held their power in the age of tourism and financial services. Both industries exist as enclaves, and are largely disconnected from establishing backward and forward linkages with the domestic economy. Thus, while the legalization of the ganja trade may appear on the surface to be progressive, without the structural changes to support a highly regulated framework to ensure that the benefits are equitably distributed amongst the poor, the reform will reproduce past inequalities. Not surprisingly, at the heart of the PEM theory is the plantation, which has been the dominant mode of economic production in the Caribbean. As Paul Sutton argues:

Development remains impeded by plantation legacies, which prioritize and promote dependency and limit and distort possibilities for economic self-reliance, which is the only way in which any structural transformation can really take place. These insights are historical and radical and provide a critique of the neo-Keynesian approaches to development in the Caribbean that preceded them and the neo-liberal approaches to development that followed them. They are holistic and emphasize the importance of the political and social dimensions of development, without which any policy for economic change will fail (Sutton 2011, 116).

Trade Liberalization and the Growth of the Ganja Trade

“What if ten percent of your population dies? Who cares if you find your comparative advantage – what if it doesn’t come?”

-Renwick Rose (Interview 2014)

It is important to note that the increase in both drug cultivation and trafficking in the region did not come out of the blue. This paper does not argue that the drug trade emerged solely due to trade reforms, but rather was intensified by it. Starting in the mid-1990s the Caribbean underwent a process of trade liberalization, which dismantled the former protections vital to the region’s banana industry, as mandated by the World Trade Organization. From 1995 to 2012,

this gradual elimination of protected trade with the United Kingdom unleashed a transformation that fundamentally contradicted the assumptions of neoliberal economic theory that market liberalization would produce growth and prosperity. Instead, it produced numerous widespread negative impacts on rural communities – such as increases in unemployment, poverty, crime and a dramatic cutback in government programs and services (Myers 2004; Green 2007; Girvan 2012; Fridell 2013). As Vincentian farmer Ras Jacob laments, “the IMF/WTO put them in poverty, they mash down all the EC [Eastern Caribbean] livelihood”.

Despite these warnings, trade liberalization went ahead with disastrous results. In 1990 St Vincent and St. Lucia produced 82,725 and 160,000 tonnes of bananas respectively. By 2010, St Vincent produced 56,000 tonnes of bananas, with St. Lucia managing 21,702 tonnes – or a drop of nearly 34 and 85 percent in 20 years (FAO STAT 2013). As a result of this economic transformation, in St. Lucia, the unemployment rate stands at over 20% with the youth unemployment rate reaching a staggering 40% (IMF 2017). International Financial Institutions have openly stated that St. Vincent’s unemployment rate is difficult to discern, but agree that it annually fluctuates between 25 and 30 percent (IMF 2011). At the time of the WTO dispute over the banana trade, U.S. Atlantic Command, General John Sheehan publically expressed his fear of “regional destabilization and increased drug flows if US policy on bananas did not change” (Myers 2004, 107).

In 1996, an International Narcotics Control Strategy Report by the U.S. State Department warned that “the terrain in the Windward Islands (St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Dominica and Grenada) was most attractive to South American transshipping of cocaine and that struggling farmers had been turning to ganja as a cash crop to replace lost earnings” (Ibid). This point is vividly demonstrated by a 2003 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report which revealed that

illicit drug exports constituted 3.4 per cent of legal GDP of Caribbean countries, making it the highest in the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2007). In one of the most detailed analyses concerning the impact of trade liberalization on the rise of ganja planting in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Axel Klein remarked that

In the face of state decline, the inadequacies of the private sector and a hostile external environment, a growing number of economically active people resorted to the informal sector. This in itself is not a surprising development, but in the region, the “informalization” of labour presented a challenge to the political order... Budget cuts and the reduction of services were not mere inconveniences but an existential threat to many citizens, and subsequently to the government and even the state itself... In the Caribbean the illicit drug economy is therefore of both political and economic significance. For rural cannabis growers, transporters, packers and urban distributors it provides a livelihood; for larger players and traffickers it is even a means for the accumulation of capital. Illicit and clandestine, the drug economy carved out a sphere that is not only outside the regulation of the state, but actually challenged the assertion of the state as the principle generator of economic development (Klein and Harriot 2004, 45).

In light of the hollowing out of the St. Lucian and St. Vincentian economies by trade liberalization, there are now very few formal avenues for employment and income generation for a significant portion of the populations. Understandably, the literature on the drug trade focuses on the many negative consequences of the trade. However, the growth of ganja in St. Lucia and St. Vincent represents a positive development as it provides the poor with a source of income and economic survival. Drug production on these islands expanded because of the absence of safety nets for those who were displaced through the process of trade liberalization. This process is similar to the better-known cases of Bolivia, Jamaica, and Mexico. As in the Caribbean, the advice concerning the harmful socio-economic impact of trade liberalization was ignored.

**Table 1 – Value of Banana Exports vs. Ganja Cultivation
St. Vincent**

Year	Banana Exports	Value (EC\$Mill)	Value \$USD	Active Farmers	Value of Ganja \$USD

	(Mt)				
1992	76,095	99.28	\$36,770,370.37	7,855	\$ 33,333.33
1993	58,383	63.6	\$23,555,555.56	7,543	\$ 17,050,277.78
1994	30,933	40.84	\$15,125,925.93	6,139	\$ 5,977,777.78
1995	50,013	59.09	\$21,885,185.19	5,991	\$ 19,000,000.00
1996	44,802	53.12	\$19,674,074.07	5,665	\$ 40,333,333.33
1997	31,273	39.74	\$14,718,518.52	4,670	\$ 13,633,333.33
1998	38,944	55.55	\$20,574,074.07	4,152	\$ 5,855,555.56
1999	37,438	52	\$19,259,259.26	3,696	\$ 15,094,444.44
2000	42,074	48.31	\$17,892,592.59	3,623	\$ 81,100,000.00
2001	31,918	34.86	\$12,911,111.11	3,360	\$ 26,870,833.33
2002	34,369	41.08	\$15,214,814.81	2,673	\$ 21,800,000.00
2003	23,932	30.27	\$11,211,111.11	2,309	\$ 112,432,777.78
2004	24,242	32.48	\$12,029,629.63	2,099	\$ 18,888,888.89
2005	19,385	26.85	\$ 9,944,444.44	1,737	\$ 162,548,611.11
2006	17,944	25.29	\$ 9,366,666.67	1,551	\$ 21,035,555.56
2007	17,584	24.47	\$ 9,062,962.96	1,407	\$ 18,268,333.33
2008	11,753	11.51	\$ 4,262,962.96	1,222	\$ 187,923,055.56
2009	11,490	16.44	\$ 6,088,888.89	1,001	\$ 815,976,388.89
2010	5456	8.42	\$ 3,118,518.52	972	\$ 199,011,111.11
2011	825	0.96	\$ 355,555.56	796	\$ 2,749,315,000.00
2012			\$ -	475	\$ 586,261,388.89

*** Banana statistics courtesy of the St. Vincent Banana Growers Association

*** Ganja statistics courtesy of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports (Calculation of value appears in appendix A)

Table 1 is an effort to establish a rough baseline of the economic value of ganja in St. Vincent. While there are a number of problems related to determining the accuracy of drug seizure statistics in general, the table above demonstrates there is a clear connection between the decline of banana exports and corresponding employment (active farmers) and the growth of ganja cultivation in St. Vincent. The value of ganja is the combination of both dried ganja that has been seized by police forces and ganja plants that have been cut down during eradication exercises (Appendix A outlines how the value was arrived at in detail). Based on the above information, on an average year, the economic contribution of the ganja economy to St. Vincent would be \$243,733,809.52 USD, or \$2,256 USD per capita. When put into context, this is

significant, as the per capita GDP of St. Vincent in 2015 according to the World Bank, was \$11,000 USD. Hence, ganja production is close to 1/5 of the island's GDP.

Crown Lands and Ganja as an Accessible Public Good

It has been argued that globalization has undermined the ability of states to deliver goods and services via patronage networks due to declining resources (Ryan 1994), but in the case of St. Vincent in particular, a unique solution was adopted. In such small, weak states, continued political support is dependent on the direct provision of favours to supporters – often coming in the form of jobs, community investment or access to otherwise vacant privately owned or designated Crown Land. Squatting and illegal land use represents one of the most common methods historically used by the poor to address matters of poverty and unequal access to land. A 2010 report by Charisse Griffith Charles argues that trade liberalization has led to increased occurrences in the Caribbean whereby individuals sell their land due to economic hardship – creating an incentive for the settlement and/or cultivation of Crown Lands (Griffith-Charles 2010).

In *Land Law and Agricultural Production in the Eastern Caribbean*, Christine Toppin-Allahar (2013: VI), writes that “There are also several problems that affect the ability of the agencies responsible for Crown/State lands administration to discharge their mandate. Chief among these are inadequate land information, limited institutional capacity and a policy environment in which Crown/State land is a tool for political patronage.” Jimmy Tindigarukayo (2002) and Clive Thomas (1996) have also argued respectively that informal squatter settlements in the Caribbean context have been important bases of support for rival political parties. In many instances across the region, Thomas saw this policy of allowing access to Crown Land as self-

serving, as it was seen by political opponents of the ruling party as a means of passing out patronage to particular constituencies of voters (Thomas 1996).

Because St. Lucia and St. Vincent lacked significant pools of public revenue to distribute, access to land became an increasingly important resource. Crown Lands for the construction of houses or agricultural use have been traditionally used within the Caribbean as a tool of political patronage to bolster the support of key constituencies (Thomas 1996; Toppin-Allahar 2013). In contrast to access to productive land, the promised jobs are often short term – contracts for road paving, grass cutting and the construction of drains are common examples.

What is unique in this case – and what is rarely mentioned publically, is that the access to land is no longer about securing shelter, but rather to access economic opportunity in the form of marijuana cultivation. In the cases of St. Lucia and St. Vincent, the government has, to varying degrees, largely accepted that marijuana plantations in the rugged and largely “inaccessible” mountainous interior of the islands are now a fact of life. These spaces have become a necessary informal, accessible (albeit, illicit), and communally held social safety net. These are sites in which individuals from economically marginalized communities have access to income generating opportunities through the cultivation and distribution of marijuana. The experience of St. Lucia and St. Vincent provides an important rural, decentralized contrast to the urban form of political patronage that has manifested itself in the notorious garrison communities of Kingston, Jamaica (Stone 1986).

Given the present economic climate where the state is unable to put forward programs to meaningfully impact the lives of its citizens to reduce poverty or provide employment, the illegal use of land is permitted as a form of compensation to the poor – and is subject to the same elements of manipulation and politicization as other public goods. However, Trevor Munroe

(1996) argues that clientelism in the Caribbean is a tool that rewards all classes of “clients” in society, as the spending of government funds can create general labour jobs that provide temporary relief to the poor – but also the awarding of government contracts that can be very lucrative to wealthy supporters.

The Ganja Economy as a Social Safety Net

“Boy, you see me here? I is doing nothing more than turning dirt into money. I sending my children to school, helping my mother with her operation. I ain’t troublesome for nobody.”

- “Alfi”, Ganja farmer

“People grow ganja because there are no jobs, no help, so we must help weself. I have two choices, get a gun and rob a man. I don’t want to shoot or kill nobody, that not for me. So we must do we business and go plant.”

- “Gully”, Ganja farmer

Historically, “illegal” social safety nets have long sustained the peoples of the Caribbean during difficult times. Central to the survival of the communities, which would eventually form in the forested highlands (called maroons), were the provision of grounds – plots on poor quality, stony or the mountainous land, which were tended to by the enslaved peoples or runaways. The provision grounds acted as the primary form of self-sufficiency and survival outside of the total institution of the plantation – but they were also a direct challenge to it. In addition to a source of food, the provision grounds would also act as a source of income, as surplus produce was often sold or traded to access goods such as tools or clothing.

Fast forward to today, with the decline of the banana trade, the forested highlands across the Caribbean have provided excellent, concealed spaces for the production of marijuana –

providing parallels to the provision grounds during the sugar plantation era. The mountainous and inaccessible geography of both islands prevented the widespread establishment of plantations. Historically, this terrain also facilitated the armed resistance and freedom of the indigenous and enslaved populations while providing economic opportunities for many marginalized rural communities. Ganja cultivation has long been done by the Rastafarian community, who, marginalized from mainstream society, chose to live in or close to the forested highlands away from state interference. Now, however, the poor see it as a source of income and a commodity rather than as a cultural and spiritual item.

Given that the promises of new markets and job opportunities in the tourism or financial services industries never materialized in any significant manner, many farmers and agricultural labourers turned to ganja production and trafficking as a means of economic survival. It was the only real way to avoid starvation for themselves and their families. The cultivation of ganja has become so commonplace in St. Vincent that it became an open secret in the mid-1990s when a Ganja Growers Association was established on the island. Here more than 12,000 acres of land were devoted to ganja cultivation, an industry that employed more than 8,000 people directly (Gibbings, 1999). Much of this can be traced to the high levels of unemployment, underemployment and poverty in the region, as Paul B. Stares argued in his influential book *Global Habit* “For most people involved in cultivating drugs, the motivational derives less from the promise of economic gain and more from the pressure of economic necessity” (Stares 1996, 50).

It is important to highlight, that while criminalized, the ganja economy has in many ways brought about significant bottom up, regional economic development that has been out of reach when operating within traditional political and economic channels. In several important ways,

the ganja trade has laid the foundation of bottom up inter-regional trade, as innovative producers, distributors and consumers have been able to develop markets, trade routes, employment opportunities, and income generation in a manner that has not been attempted by respective governments. As Table 1 shows, the ganja economy brings hundreds of millions of dollars into the economy of St. Vincent – and importantly, to peripheral rural communities that have been shut out of foreign or public investment.

In many ways, the cultivation of ganja has become the only way for farmers and rural youth to survive. Just as bananas had once been the way for the poor to achieve some degree of social mobility, the underground ganja economy is now largely responsible for providing employment, putting food on the tables, constructing houses, sending children to school and providing incomes, which circulate in the wider domestic economy. As Ivelaw Griffith highlights, “Over and above all this, as is done in Latin America and elsewhere, Caribbean drug operations often engage in a form of social investment – Robin Hoodism – by doing what governments are sometimes unable to do: they fulfill social welfare needs, either on an individual or a communal basis” (Griffith 2000, 20) – or as one young interviewee *Bongo* put it,

Alluh’we need fi separate ganja from di drug trade... It is unfairly attacked because a wha has been colonially cultured in di mind. Ganja ‘as helped so many people, sent thousands a children a school and bought plane tickets for people to go a foreign [overseas] and better ‘demselves. We goh lose a golden opportunity, if we doh move on this we nah av’ anything. It gunna be turmoil (Interview 2014).

This point was stressed by nearly every cultivator and trafficker that I interviewed, with one young man Akil bluntly stating that “If the government is providing the conditions for me to make a living then I should be expected to obey the law – but when they don’t... you must expect people to break rules to feed their children”. When it came to the risks involved and the potential for violence from the trade, I was quickly corrected that it was poverty that is the real

danger, with one farmer Kalonji saying “Nah boss, you have it wrong. It is not the drug trade that is killing the people or causing violence, it is the poverty. People use drugs like mad in the rich areas, but the shootings stay to the ghetto. Movie stars doing coke all the time in Beverly Hills but they nah shot up.”

However, just like the licit economy, the profits made from the ganja trade are not spread evenly and it is important not to romanticize all ganja farmers as independent operators. The class dynamics and inequalities which are present in the formal economy also trickle over into the ganja economy. During a number of interviews, it became clear that the ganja economy was increasingly being used as a vehicle for capital accumulation by the middle and upper class individuals, where they would act in a sense like a venture capitalist providing the seed money. Very often the share of the proceeds go 70-30 or 60-40 in favour of the investor, as one grower, Capo stated,

“The big man, they pay you to chop lawn [clear the land], they bring foodstuff, tools, digging, manure – it a serious investment... For a team of we, you need at least \$2000 ECD, til harvest we not getting paid, you need to wait at least 4 months, 6 months the longest to get the money... A nice crop can get you more than 1,000 pounds, and we split the cash come harvest – but they the one who belly full and hands clean”

Fear of the Free Market - The Legalization vs. Decriminalization Debate

As can be expected, there is a clear divide on the ground in St. Lucia and St. Vincent as to how to move forward with ganja reform. The main split is between those who are in favour of total legalization and those who have pushed towards decriminalization. Political ideology plays a key role in this debate, as the legalization camp have advocated ganja reform as being a key opportunity to bring about economic development and foreign investment, while on the decriminalization side several key figures in St. Vincent’s Black Power Movement in the 1960s

and 1970s have based their advocacy on a sharp understanding of the unequal power relations that govern global capitalism.

Legalization broadly means that consumers and producers face no penalties at all. The most common examples of this can be seen in Uruguay and some US states like Colorado. This distinction means that the cultivation of ganja becomes a legitimate, taxable occupation. While it is still early on in regards to the shift away from ganja prohibition, legalizing ganja and treating it as any other agricultural commodity also comes with related trade consequences. As a freely traded, legal commodity, countries would not be able to discriminate against the national origin of the product – and we could very well see a repetition of the sugar and banana trades as small, domestic producers get squeezed out with global agribusiness.

In place of legalization, many of the farmers thought that the decriminalization of ganja consumption would be a better route to undergo as decriminalization does not mean that people can use drugs without consequence. Rather, it would mean that possessing small amounts of ganja would no longer land individuals with a criminal record or prison sentence. One of the most recent examples of decriminalization is occurring in Jamaica, where under newly implemented reforms, people can possess up to two ounces (57 grams) of cannabis – but only face a fine instead of being arrested and imprisoned. The decriminalization route has also been undertaken in Portugal, as drug users can be forced into mandatory drug education classes as a way to bring about individual reform.

The decriminalization of ganja will have very important benefits in regards to reducing incarceration and judiciary costs in addition to removing the criminal penalties of ganja possession which have given so many people a record. Getting rid of these penalties will allow for greater life opportunities for people who would otherwise remain marginalized and

unemployable due to their criminal record. Due to its value on the black market, it is still likely that due to their geographic position and specialization, St. Vincent will still continue to supply neighbouring countries into the near future.

One of the most prolific and visible advocates for ganja legalization in the Caribbean has been St. Lucia's Andre De Caries—the former leader of the St Lucia Cannabis Movement and Green Party respectively. De Caries, the author of the comprehensive and thoughtful *Ganja Document* (2013, Unpublished), discusses the multiplier effect that the ganja economy has on St. Lucia, stating that it:

contributes significantly to the alleviation of poverty among many of the poor people of this nation. This is not a “trickle down” economic model like tourism, but a “filter up” economic model like any agricultural based model. Money generated from the ganja industry, is money that stays in the country as opposed to tourism dollars where a large percentage of it ends up overseas. Reality is that there are just not enough legitimate jobs out there to employ everyone, and if there is indeed an industry that contributes so significantly, then why try to destroy it?

De Caries sees legal ganja as being a dynamic industry that can increase government tax revenues, reduce government expenditure related to policing and incarceration, and create new spinoff industries related to ganja tourism such as regulated “coffeeshops” similar to those found in Amsterdam.

Similarly, Conley “Chivango” Rose, the Director of the National Ganja Industry Association (NMIA) of St. Vincent and the Grenadines states that

“Medicinal and Recreational Ganja Sales in St. Vincent and the Grenadines could generate extra revenues and taxes for the government in licenses, fees, sales taxes, VAT, excise taxes and so on, government and the people would benefit tremendously from this lucrative industry... According to Vincentian economists, financial analysts, tax collectors, bankers and professional accountants, ganja, if regulated and taxed in the same fashion as alcohol, can bring in over \$500 million dollars for the St. Vincent and the Grenadines economy between 2014-2016 ! Much needed revenue to assist

in stimulating growth, creating wealth and helping to transform the economic landscape of the island (interview 2014).

Marcus Day, the Director of the Caribbean Drug and Alcohol Research Institute, argued that

There is no discussion of marijuana outside of the context of criminality. There is no discussion of how it is a bottom up income generator for marginalized communities. The World Bank spends millions of dollars on studies of how to create pro-poor development projects, but totally ignores ganja. It does not make any sense. It is clearly acting as a vital source of employment and income for these people. Criminalizing it only makes matters worse (Interview 2014).

While the legalization of ganja would bring immediate economic benefits, it would also have widespread social consequences. St. Vincent farmer Ras Andre believes that the legalization of ganja will lead to a greater, positive transformation in the class structure of St. Vincent and the wider Caribbean, stating that

It will be a class change, you have poor citizens getting into a multi-billion industry, who is poor is now becoming rich, while people which have become comfortable in their wealthy lifestyles will get shifted... This is important for people like Rasta, who are marginalized – but with this change they will be able to handle their affairs, to many it is frightening (2014).

Another farmer, “Power”, highlighted that it is the criminalized status and classification of ganja as a dangerous drug which leads to crime, arguing that

In the heights we always exposed to the thief man, our investment is at risk. Very often there are rip-offs where people saying the crop bust when they made a shot [got intercepted by the police during smuggling abroad], when they really keeping it themselves. This is what gets people killed. If it was legal we could have real sales and not have to worry and hide”. Additionally, he argues that it is the hustle and profit of ganja which has led to the “baldheads going up in the hills, brining guns, cocaine, crime and robbery (2014).

The issue concerning the fear of a free market was cited as a primary issue facing cultivators, as many of the leading figures involved in the Ganja Growers Association have recently reorganized to form the St Vincent and the Grenadines Cannabis Revival Committee.

While the legalization of ganja would temporarily see a decline in the level of criminal violence and corruption, the Caribbean will still face important structural limitations in regards to achieving long term, equitable growth. Given their small size, inability to achieve economies of scale and a limited resource base, it is very likely that even with the eventual legalization of ganja cultivation, the problem of lacking a foreign exchange generating export activity will still hinder the economic and social development of St. Lucia and St. Vincent. As Senator Jomo Thomas remarked concerning the lingering issue regarding economies of scale, “There are ganja fields in Kentucky larger than the entire island of St. Vincent” (Interview 2014). Despite the importance of the ganja economy, with the legalization of cannabis in many American states and Jamaica legalizing ganja for medicinal (not recreational) use there is the possibility that the Windward islands may become net importers of ganja if they do not play their cards right. Similarly, ganja activist Junior “Spirit” Cottle argues that the discussion of ganja legalization cannot be isolated from the history of popular political struggle in the Caribbean. The former leader of the St. Vincent Ganja Growers Association states that the ganja issue is one that deeply cuts along the lines of race and class. In an interview, Cottle told me:

It cannot be done as individual countries, it must be a regional solution which makes social transformation central to any talk about legalization. It is the poorest people who grow ganja... Without a proper system in place to ensure that their livelihoods are maintained... I am against the current trend to enact legalization and deal with the consequences after. Ganja reform must be part of a wider political program to bring meaningful social change... Ganja is tied up with the historical black struggle in the region... It is only when the rich can find a way to control it is considered legitimate (interview 2014).

Conclusion: The Necessity of a Platform for Progressive Ganja Reform as a Vehicle for Social Transformation

In the face of the growing informalization of employment and trade in the Eastern Caribbean, the respective states of St. Lucia and St. Vincent have taken selective, unconventional responses to mitigate the socio-economic crisis. Stripped of much of its sources of traditional revenue and resulting services, the state has to play a complex balancing act between international and domestic pressures – which involves, on the one hand, at least giving the impression that they are upholding their international responsibilities to engage in free trade and fight drug trafficking under international treaties. On the other hand, their domestic political survival depends on ensuring that the population has the opportunity to have a source of income and employment to provide for their basic needs. In the cases of St. Vincent in particular, ganja is a product which plays a variety of often contradictory roles – as a source of employment, income, and even campaign funding – but cultivation and sale of the product also imparts a social stigma linked to criminality and occasionally becomes a trigger for international intervention.

In an unconventional way, predominantly in St. Vincent, the state has provided a form of protection to the growers by keeping ganja illegal. While this may not be intuitive at first, the reality is that St. Vincent and St. Lucia only have a comparative advantage in growing *illegal* ganja and cannot compete with the mega plantations emerging in the United States that adopt advanced technology and economies of scale to produce a cheaper product. In order to avoid being decertified and accused of being soft on crime by the United States, the government of St. Vincent will occasionally conduct raids on the ganja plantations that can be seen dotting the hills and mountains of the country in plain sight. In this process it is unavoidable that a small percentage of farmers are arrested and bear the brunt of the fight against drugs, giving evidence

to uphold the illusion that the government is doing all it can to fight crime – knowing full well that it is the primary source of income in many communities.

Thus, in many ways, what currently prevails in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a system that can be considered *de facto legalization* – meaning that in practice ganja is openly grown and sold, but remains illegal on paper for the most part, protecting the government from drug enforcement sanctions. This situation allows for the state, with its diminished capacity to balance both its domestic and international pressures. While it could never be openly stated in the current prohibitionist climate, by stalling on ganja reform, these states are trying to protect one of the last, consistent sources of income and employment left. *De facto legalization* allows for a relative social peace to occur in a society which would otherwise be thrown into even more dangerous forms of drug trafficking such as the cocaine trade if ganja cultivation were to be eradicated entirely.²

If the decriminalization or legalization of ganja takes place without sufficient regional and domestic regulation, the Caribbean may end up losing out on one of its most lucrative, albeit illicit, exports – and if Caribbean governments are not careful, they will soon be importing the very same ganja that they were demonized and punished for producing for so many years. No doubt this has not been lost on the small ganja producers of the Caribbean. The people who are displaced from selling five bags on the block will not find employment after legalization, and without the ability to compete with larger producers, may fall prey to cocaine trafficking, which is a more lucrative, but also considerably more violently administered alternative than grassroots, community based ganja cultivation and trade.

We only need to look to the aftermath of legalization in Colorado and Washington to see how corporations and the wealthy can quickly dominate an illicit industry that was previously

dependent on demonizing, criminalizing, and repeatedly incarcerating black and brown bodies in order to make a profit. As Michelle Alexander (2010), author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* argues, “Here are white men poised to run big ganja businesses, dreaming of cashing in big—big money, big businesses selling weed—after 40 years of impoverished black kids getting prison time for selling weed, and their families and futures destroyed. Now, white men are planning to get rich doing precisely the same thing?” The outcomes of Washington and Colorado suggest a similar future: tens of thousands of black and brown men and women remain in prison for an activity that was hypocritically headlined on Yahoo Finance as “the single best investment idea of the next decade.”

It is for this reason that the farmers, traffickers, civil society figures, activists, progressive government figures and academics call for ganja reform. They want ganja reform to become a vehicle of progressive economic transformation in order to break the stranglehold that the PEM has had across the region. Taking the steps to ensure that ganja reform can make meaningful change and have a long lasting, equitable economic impact – the issue means that it must be tied to land reform and combating the pervasive influence that large multinational corporations will have on this process (primarily in the fields of agribusiness, pharmaceuticals and chemicals).

The unfortunate reality is that the region is caught between a rock and a hard place, as St. Lucia and St. Vincent only have a comparative advantage in the illicit cultivation of ganja, and if legalized, the price and income generation opportunities will decline significantly. Thus, outside of blatant defiance of existing drug laws, creativity in policy maneuvering will be the only tool the region has to try to continue to capture the positives of income generation and employment that come out of the ganja trade. Tight controls on foreign investment and the prioritization of grassroots, community economic development must guide this process so that the people of St.

Lucia and St. Vincent do not simply end up as cheap labour in what is already a multibillion dollar industry. At the very least, through these actions, the domestic and regional market can be protected in an unconventional way from the influence of foreign investment and corporations.

A clear framework concerning the production of medicinal marijuana for domestic and international use must be implemented in a democratic partnership with civil society and farming associations. Any foreign investment in these industries must be done in a partnership that sees locals holding the balance of power in order to avoid the dominance of foreign capital and the relegation of local workers to the role of cheap labour. Furthermore, an open, affordable licencing system for domestic producers and production cap will also ensure that wealthier individuals in the Windward Islands do not dominate the new industry at the expense of those who have traditionally cultivated ganja and bore the accompanying physical hardship and legal risks.

In regards to recreational supply, the Netherlands has been a pioneer in regards to creatively navigating international narcotics laws without penalty. In 1976, the country made a sharp distinction between hard and soft drugs, implementing a policy of de-facto legalization in regards to the recreational use of cannabis. While remaining a signatory to all major drug control conventions, the country has continually faced pressure from the international community to shut down the ‘coffeeshop’ scene in Amsterdam, where ganja is openly sold and consumed—but the government has resisted shutting these businesses down. Despite the cultivation of ganja being illegal in the Netherlands, these shops have never had the problem of running out, and can have a maximum of 500 grams on site at any given time. While the power dynamics are undoubtedly different in the Caribbean, one must be hopeful that a similar ‘grey area’ of de facto legalization

can work—as there are many spliff bars (small establishments where ganja can be openly purchased and smoked) in St Vincent that operate in the open without sanction.

Aside from the economic impact, we must also consider the social and human consequences that have come about due to the criminalization of ganja. To Empress Modupe Olufenmi Jacob, a member of St Vincent and the Grenadines Cannabis Revival Committee, decriminalization must also involve the “creation of provisions to compensate those who have been charged and jailed before it was legal” and “ensure that the farmers who have sacrificed for so long are the immediate beneficiaries of a regulated system to plant legal ganja.” An amnesty for all ganja related offences should be part of any discussion, as holding these charges limits the possibility that an individual will be able to find employment in an already incredibly difficult economy and limit their freedom of movement.

The Caribbean has a significant task in front of itself, as it has the opportunity to attempt the design of an unconventional industrial model that blends the licit and illicit sectors in a way that can truly benefit those who have been left behind by globalization. A progressive ganja platform would take into account the use of the ganja economy as a social safety net for many of the regions poorest and most vulnerable, and must be tied to a wider process of significant land reform and regional economic cooperation. The ganja economy provides an indispensable source of employment and income – but also leads to growing problems of environmental destruction, exploitation and the ever present potential of violence. That said, determining what the flesh and bones of this industrial model for ganja looks like and developing the political will to institute it is no doubt a very difficult task. With this in mind, governments in the Eastern Caribbean must step up to the plate and put forward a vision of a nuanced approach to ganja which does not replicate the negatives of the plantation model on a new cash crop. The international capitalist

system has always operated in ways not beneficial to the Caribbean. We should learn from history that laws are not always just or enforced equally – and we in turn should learn how to creatively exploit opportunities to our advantage (however unconventional) when they arise.

Appendix A

Data for years 2003, 2006, 2008, 2009, and 2010 provided by International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports. Data for all other years come from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime database.

Seizure statistics contain information on the levels of dried ganja by kilogram and the plants destroyed during eradication exercises. In order to provide a baseline for future research, I have attempted to make my estimates on the conservative side of the spectrum.

For Dried Ganja

- Given that there is no way to tell the distribution of wholesale vs. individual sales, two separate calculations were made.
- The wholesale value of the dried ganja was determined by multiplying the number of kilograms seized by \$750 ECD (which was regularly given by police and traffickers as a typical price). The wholesale price was used as a conservative measure of ganja's economic value.
- The street value of the dried ganja was determined by multiplying the number of grams seized (1000 per kilogram) by \$3 ECD (which was a common price per gram). The street price was used as a more liberal measure of ganja's economic value.

For Ganja Plants

- Given that there is no way to tell the level of maturity of the plants destroyed by eradication efforts, two very conservative measures were given – that plants destroyed on average had 50 grams per plant, and a second estimate of 100 grams per plant. It was stated that mature plants can yield over 400 grams per plant, but there is no way to estimate the value in any real way.

For Total Value

- The low figure was calculated by combining the wholesale value of dried ganja with the estimate that on average each plant destroyed during eradication would have produced 50 grams of ganja.
- The high figure was calculated by combining the street level value of dried ganja with the estimate that on average each plant destroyed during eradication would have produced 100 grams of ganja.
- The low and high values were then multiplied by 10, as the Regional Security Service has published that their interdiction rate for ganja is on average 10 percent. This is assuming

that local police forces are eradicating and seizing 10 percent of St. Vincent's ganja trade. These values are then called the Speculative Low / High values. The Speculative high values in \$ USD has been used for this paper (whereby \$1 USD = \$2.7 ECD)

Endnotes

¹ This paper will use the term ganja instead of marijuana due to the fact that this is the local term for cannabis – and likely preceded the word marijuana. Furthermore, the word marijuana is rooted in the anti-immigrant hysteria of the early 20th century (Serrano 2013; Campos 2014)

² During fieldwork, it was mentioned many times that if the ganja economy were to disappear the island(s) would turn into Trinidad. The comparison to Trinidad is an important one, as it is not a ganja producer of any significance, but has become a major transshipment point for cocaine – and has a correspondingly high rate of murder and kidnapping.

References

- Alexander, M. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press.
- Best, L. A. and Levitt, K. 1968. "Outlines of a Model of Pure Plantation Economy." *Social and Economic Studies* 17,3:283-326.
- Campos, I. 2014. *Home Grown: Marijuana and the Origins of Mexico's War on Drugs*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- De Caires, A. 2013. *The Ganja Document: Exploring Decriminalization in St. Lucia*. Unpublished. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/pdfy-F-9IY2md7frXZiuA>
- Duncan, N.T. and Woods, D. 2007. "What about us? The Anglo-Caribbean Democratic Experience." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 45,2: 202-218.
- FOA (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). 2013. *FAOSTAT statistics database*: Rome.
- Fridell, G. 2013. *Alternative Trade: Legacies for the Future*. Black Point: Fernwood Publishing.

Gibbins, W. 1999. "Marijuana Report Wins Applause." *IPS News*. March 24. Available at:

<http://www.ipsnews.net/1999/03/narcotics-caribbean-marijuana-report-wins-applause/>

Girvan, N. 2005. "WA Lewis, the Plantation School, and Dependency: An Interpretation." *Social and Economic Studies* 54,3: 198-221.

Green, C. 2007. "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Mercantilism and Free Trade." *Race & Class* 49,2: 41-56.

Griffith, I. 2000. *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean*. London: Palgrave Press.

Griffith-Charles, C. 2010. *Good Governance and Natural Resources in the Caribbean Sub-Region*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Land Tenure Working Paper 17. Available at: www.fao.org/3/a-al381e.pdf

IMF (International Monetary Fund). 2011. "St. Vincent and the Grenadines: 2017 Article IV Consultation." Press Release and Staff Report available at:

<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2011/cr11343.pdf>

_____ . 2017. "St. Lucia : 2017 Article IV Consultation." Press Release and Staff Report available at:

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2017/03/31/st-lucia-2017-article-iv-consultation-press-release-and-staff-report-44784>

Jamaica Gleaner. 2016. "Big Bucks to go into Ganja Business." June 20. Available at:

<http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20160620/big-bucks-go-ganja-business>

Jones, A. 2015. "Ernie Eves, former Ontario Premier, joins Board of Jamaican Medical Marijuana Business". *CBC News*. January 23. Available at:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ernie-eves-former-ontario-premier-joins-board-of-jamaican-medical-marijuana-business-1.2929648>

-
- Klein, A, Marcus Day and Anthony Harriot. 2004. *Caribbean Drugs: From Criminalization to Harm Reduction*. London: Zed.
- Levitt, K. 2005. *Reclaiming Development: Independent Thought and Caribbean Community*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Munroe, T. 1996. "Caribbean Democracy: Decay or Renewal?" *CARICOM Perspective*, No. 66.
- Myers, G. 2004. *Banana Wars: The Price of Free Trade*. New York: Zed.
- Ryan, S. 1994. "Problems and Prospects for the Survival of Liberal Democracy in the Anglophone Caribbean." In C. J. Edie, ed., *Democracy in the Caribbean: Myths and Realities*, London: Praeger.
- Serrano, A. 2013. "Weed all about it: The Origins of the Word Marijuana" *Al Jazeera America*. December 14. Available at: <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/12/14/weed-all-about-ittheoriginsofthewordamarijuanaaintheus.html>
- Stares, P. 1996. *Global Habit: The Drug Problem in a Borderless World*. Washington DC: Brookings Institute.
- Stone, K. 1986. *Class, State, and Democracy in Jamaica*. Kingston: Blackett Publishers.
- Sutton, P. 2011. "Essays on the Theory of the Plantation Economy: A Historical and Institutional Approach to Caribbean Economic Development." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 90: 115-116
- Thomas, C.Y. 1996. "Three Decades of Agriculture in the Commonwealth Caribbean." In Kari Levitt and Michael Witter, eds., *The Critical Tradition of Caribbean Political Economy: The Legacy of George Beckford*. Kingston: Ian Randle.
- Tindigarukayo, Jimmy. 2002. "The Squatter Problem in Jamaica." *Social and Economic Studies*, 51,4: 95–125.

Toppin-Allahar, C. 2013. "Law, Land, and Agricultural Production in the Eastern Caribbean."

Food & Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. Available at: www.fao.org/3/a-i3204e.pdf

UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). 2007. "Crime, Violence, and

Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean." Available at:

https://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Cr_and_Vio_Car_E.pdf