

## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

**ProQuest Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600**

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**



A

**LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!**

**The State, The Traffickers, The Association and The Pink Mealy Bug Crisis**

**by**

**MARITZA WILLIAMS**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduated Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

**2001**

**UMI Number: 3024844**

**Copyright 2001 by  
Williams, Maritza Straughn**

**All rights reserved.**

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

---

**UMI Microform 3024844**

**Copyright 2001 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.**

**All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

---

**Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346**


© 2001

**MARITZA WILLIAMS**

**All Rights Reserved**

This manuscript has been and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Engineering in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

9/19/01  
Date

  
Chair of Examining Committee

9/19/01  
Date

  
Executive Officer

Michael Blim, Chair of Examining Committee

Louise Lennihan, Executive Officer

Ida Susser, Shirley Lindenbaum  
Supervisory Committee

**THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK****Abstract****LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!****The State, The Traffickers, The Association and The Pink Mealy Bug Crisis****by****MARITZA WILLIAMS****Advisor: Delmos Jones/Michael Blim**

**This study examines the behavior and decision-making of the traffickers, their Association and the Vincentian State during the pink mealy bug crisis. The analytical perspective is broad, ranging from case method/event analysis to an analysis of the decision-making process. The central argument of this study focuses on how people respond to crisis based on already established patterns of behavior that have been proven useful over time. The study also presents a detailed life history of five individual traffickers, including three females and two males from St. Vincent.**

**The findings of this research suggest that the female traffickers, like many poor women in the Caribbean, make decisions based on traditional practices and for the survival of their families. It also suggests that the women's lack of awareness prevent them from organizing collectively around specific gender-issues. Furthermore, it also points out how the lack of financial and human resources render many of these small organizations ineffective. The research finally suggests how the legacy of colonialism and political, social and economic structures often hinder the decisions made by Caribbean states.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are numerous people whose time and support have made this dissertation possible. I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support, love and faith in my ability to succeed. First, I thank my mother, Ethel Straughn for her continued faith, love and encouragement during this period in my life. Secondly, I thank my son Antonio and daughter Iesha who have contributed their time by running errands for me and making phone calls to ease my burden.

I would like to acknowledge the traffickers, the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association, officials, and friends in St. Vincent who made this work possible. Their warmth and friendliness helped me to carry out this research. I am also thankful to the Fulbright Fellowship Committee for providing the funding needed to complete this research.

I am especially grateful to Michael Blim, my supervisor and advisor for his insight and critical comments. His encouragement and patience were invaluable. I would also like to thank the following members of my committee: Ida Susser for her contribution, friendship and support; Shirley Lindenbaum and Norma J. Burgess for their comments; they were especially helpful.

There are also a number of friends that I would like to thank specifically. Lorisa Bates, my wonderful editor, proofreader, and commentator. The completion of this work is in large measure due to her contributions, time and patience. She is truly a remarkable friend and human being. For encouragement and insightful ideas, I am eternally grateful to Carl Ruddock who gave his time, willingly and unselfishly. Rhonda Johnson, Charles Price, Robert Saute and Lali Thomas contributed their friendship, intellectual and

emotional support. I am also grateful to Mervyn Oliver for taking the time to find information that contributed to my work and Clyde Dolgen, Sonia Saddler, Audrey McAllister for their constant emotional support.

To my friend, Belkis Neco, her help was invaluable throughout my research. She provided a home when I needed one and was a constant source of encouragement, intellectual stimulation, and amusement.

More importantly, I would like to thank my late husband Samuel Williams and late sister Irma Straughn for their love and support. I am deeply saddened that they did not have the opportunity to see this work completed. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the late Delmos Jones, my advisor and friend, whose spirit guided me through the completion of this dissertation. He will be sorely missed. Thank you Del.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **PART I: THEORY - CRISIS AND THE CARIBBEAN**

#### **CHAPTER ONE**

##### **OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION**

Crisis in the Caribbean.....1

##### **THEORIZING CRISIS**

Anthropologists and Culture Change.....3

Crisis Decision Making: A Case for the Caribbean.....12

Decisions Not Taken.....13

Decisions Not To Act On .....14

**OVERVIEW .....15**

#### **CHAPTER TWO**

##### **METHODOLOGY, FIELD RESEARCH, ORAL HISTORY AND AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AS A POLITICAL ACTOR**

**INTRODUCTION.....18**

**GENERAL STATEMENT OF ISSUES AND METHOD STUDY RATIONALE..21**

##### **FIELD RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY**

Semi-Structured Interviews.....21

Participant Observation.....23

Field Notes.....23

Sources of Archival Data.....24

**THE LIFE HISTORY APPROACH.....24**

Theory and Data.....26

**ANTHROPOLOGIST AS POLITICAL ACTOR.....27**

**SUMMARY.....30**

### **PART II: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MEALY BUG IN THE CARIBBEAN**

**CHAPTER THREE****DO WE OR DONT WE HAVE THE PINK MEALY BUG?**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>DESCRIPTION OF THE MEALY BUG.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>THE MEALY BUG IN CARIBBEAN</b>	
The Pink Mealy Bug in Grenada.....	34
The Pink Mealy Bug in St. Vincent.....	37
<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>53</b>

**CHAPTER FOUR****ST. VINCENT: THE STATE**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b>	
Early Historical Development: Plantation and Peasantry.....	56
Development of Organized Labor and Political Parties.....	61
Economic Changes During the 1950s.....	65
The Move For National Independence.....	66

<b>THE MITCHELL ADMINISTRATION: CONTEMPORARY VINCENTIAN SOCIETY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY 1984-PRESENT.....</b>	<b>68</b>
---	-----------

**PEOPLE**

The Elite Class.....	80
The Middle Class.....	83
The Poor Class.....	85

<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>90</b>
---------------------	-----------

**CHAPTER FIVE****THE TRAFFICKERS**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b>	
Historical Tradition.....	94
St. Vincentian Traffickers.....	100

<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b>	
<b>THE LIFE HISTORIES: PART I - FEMALE TRAFFICKERS</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>THE SHED.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>INFORMANTS</b>	
Madeline: “The Respected Elder”.....	117
Yvonne: “The New Breed”.....	133
Martha: “The Reluctant Informant”.....	145
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN</b>	
<b>THE LIFE HISTORIES: PART II - MALE TRAFFICKERS</b>	
Edric: “Dollars Rule”.....	165
JT: “I Call The Shots”.....	177
<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>PART III: EVOLUTION OF A CRISIS</b>	
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN</b>	
<b>THE PINK MEALY BUG: A CRISIS ON THE WINGS</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>THE BEGINNING.....</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS POLITICAL ACTOR.....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>THE MEETING: PLANNING STRATEGIES.....</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>THE AFTERMATH.....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS GRASSROOTS ORGANIZER</b>	
Planning Demonstration.....	235

<b>NO RESPONSE</b> .....	232
<b>WE MEET AGAIN</b> .....	235
<b>POSTSCRIPT</b> .....	245
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	247
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT</b>	
<b>TRAFFICKERS AND THE VICENTIAN STATE</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	249
<b>STATE BEHAVIOR: A VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM</b> .....	250
<b>THE BANANA INDUSTRY</b> .....	257
<b>DRUGS: THE NEW FORM OF EMPLOYMENT</b> .....	261
<b>THE TRAFFICKERS</b>	
The Trafficker's Response.....	271
Female Traffickers and the Political Domain.....	273
Gender Issues.....	276
Trafficking: A Strategy for Survival.....	279
Women as Small Scale Entrepreneurs.....	281
<b>JT, THE TRAFFICKERS AND THE ASSOCIATION</b> .....	282
<b>THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS POLITICAL ACTOR</b> .....	286
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	289
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	291

**LIST OF CHARTS**

<b>CHART</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1	ST. VINCENT – GNP – PER CAPITA	76
2	ST. VINCENT – GDP	77

## **PART I: THEORY, CRISIS AND THE CARIBBEAN**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

#### **OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION**

##### **Crisis in the Caribbean**

For this study, I chose to analyze regional integration with a primary focus on the petty commodity traders (traffickers) based in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a chain of small islands located in the eastern Caribbean. I wanted to learn if policies implemented by the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM)<sup>1</sup> had affected the traffickers in any way as they traveled to and sold produce to neighboring islands. Although there had been many studies on petty commodity trading (Clarendon 1986; Simmonds 1987; LeFranc 1988) none had focused on the activities of the women with regard to regional integration. Traffickers are important to the local and regional economies, a fact that is seldom acknowledged by Caribbean governments and CARICOM. They are major distributors of agricultural produce and employers to workers in the region. My objective was to conduct research on the activities of the traffickers as it related to CARICOM policies. However, my study was never fully completed because an unexpected event suddenly developed that not only threatened the livelihood of the traffickers, but the trade as well.

This project became a case study and event analysis of crisis. The focus of my study changed when the apparent presence of the pink mealy bug crisis was detected on the island. The presence of the pest was of great concern to the country because it

generally destroyed vegetables and ornamental plants, which were important sources of revenue for the majority of Vincentians. St. Vincent was dependent on the sale of its agricultural produce both regionally and internationally to earn a substantial portion of its revenues, therefore any threat to the agricultural sector would be viewed with considerable alarm. The Vincentian government refused to admit the presence of the pest and in so doing triggered a crisis that led to the ban on Vincentian agricultural produce by Barbados, one of its most important trading partners in the region. As a result, the traffickers and those they employed suffered tremendous financial losses with many being forced to seek alternative ways to survive.

As the situation developed, I spent the last five months of my fieldwork recording the responses of the actors who were to play a major part in the events as they occurred. Even though I was not aware of it at the time, my attention was to be diverted from my original study to an examination of events that later reached crisis proportions. It was only after returning from the field that I realized that I had become interested in the analysis of -crisis- - and wanted to seek answers for the following questions: What is a crisis? How is it defined? What factors trigger crisis? Finally, how do actors respond to and make decisions during critical times?

Webster defines crisis as a turning point for better or worse; the point or time when it is decided whether an affair or course of action shall proceed, be modified or terminated; and unstable or crucial time in a state of affairs; a decisive moment (Webster's Dictionary, 1976). Based on this definition, crisis appears to be an unusual or

---

<sup>1</sup> The Caribbean Community and Common Market was established in 1973 by the Treaty of Chaguaramas. It is a regional body for the economic promotion of economic

critical moment, which suddenly appears and requires immediate attention. It can also be viewed as a sometime and seldom occurrence, met occasionally along life's way (Kreyche, 1987). Based on this definition, the oil embargo of the 1970s, and incidents of mad cow and foot and mouth diseases and AIDS are some examples of episodic crisis that have threatened the economic well-being of nations.

My dilemma then was how to analyze the pink mealy bug crisis in terms of the organic definition. Was this just only an isolated event that demanded immediate attention or was this a cyclic continuum that was punctuated by a cataclysmic occurrence that could be put off for study or further analysis by a bureaucratic committee? However, I questioned the definition and its neatness in the context of Caribbean and Vincentian history. An examination of historical trends from colonialism to the present suggests that there have always been ongoing crisis such as poverty, unemployment and economic hardship that have been endemic to the region. As such crisis can be viewed as permanent/ongoing and episodic (Thomas, 1988). An episodic crisis may be defined as an incident or episode in a series of events that generally requires immediate attention. While permanent/ongoing crisis may be defined as never-ending or continuous series of events that are occasionally disrupted by an episodic event. The mealybug crisis could be considered an example of an episodic event.

## **THEORIZING CRISIS**

### **Anthropologists and Culture Change**

Although anthropologists do not use the term crisis in the context of permanent/ongoing and episodic, they have been concerned with change, specifically culture change.

---

integration.

They have asked questions regarding what generates cultural change and how societies respond to acute change. Beginning with Boas and his students, anthropologists have explored how traits diffuse across boundaries. They believed that the transmission of information, ideas and artifacts from one group to another is a powerful source of culture change (Brady and Isaac, 1975:2). In addition, Boas and his students suggested that the focal point of culture change can only be explained from a psychological perspective. In essence, change occurs in the areas of cognition, perception, information processing and symbolic transformation that produce innovation (Brady and Isaac, 1975). Hence, laws of sociocultural change, if they are to be found, are psychological in nature and effect the human response.

The Boasians were not interested in laws that explained change, but were much concerned with documenting the cultural histories of various societies. As such, they were preoccupied with gathering empirical-descriptive data than in developing a systematic body of data that could eventually lead to general laws. Essentially, Boas and his students as Harris suggests rejected the normal dialectic between fact and theory (Harris 1968:251 as cited in Brady and Isaac, 1975).

Regarding the Caribbean, Boasian student Melville Herskovitz<sup>2</sup> became primarily concerned with the investigation of rural life in small communities. More importantly, it was through the work of Herskovitz that anthropological research was drawn to the study of Afro-American tradition in the Caribbean, resulting in anthropologists focusing their attention on describing and reconstructing the historical origins of cultural traits exhibited

---

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion see Mintz "North American Anthropological Contribution to Caribbean Studies.

by the descendants of African slaves. Not surprisingly, the study of poor black Caribbean folk became the study of slavery and Africa (Greenfield, 1968). Since Herkovitz believed that cultural traits could diffuse over great distances, Africa came to be hypothesized as the source of specific observable traits in the region with the sum of these traits “constituting a distinctive configuration or whole” (Greenfield, 1968:19). Therefore, “the whole was seen as a series of quasi-dependent variables that undergo process of change in accordance with particular historical situation” (Herskovitz, 1968:19)

The 1940s and early 1950s produced a different response in anthropological research. The study of history, process and culture change gave way to the study of social systems. Henceforth, proponents of this perspective believed “the structural and organizational principles used by people in ordering their social behavior” should become the central point of any investigation (Greenfield, 1968:22). M.G. Smith, one of the leading supporters of this new model and a Caribbeanist, argued that the study of Africanisms was unscientific and that Caribbean studies should instead focus on an examination of society and function.

M.G. Smith was more concerned with the heterogeneous nature of the Caribbean than with concepts of culture change. He suggested that Caribbean societies were plural and were held together by “the monopoly of power by one cultural section for the maintenance of the total society in its current form” (Smith, 1965:183). So, no longer was Caribbean society viewed as whole, but were now treated as discrete segments to be studied independently as though they were holistic societies (Manyoni, 1982).

Unfortunately, this perspective ignores the fact that “Caribbean cultural practices are a conglomerate of elements contributed by the various immigrant groups who make up

present-day inhabitants in most territories” (Manyoni, 1982:169). Also not taken into account is the fact that tensions and crisis are generally produced when various disparate elements come together to produce a whole as exhibited when an attempt was made to federate the various islands.

On the contrary, R. T. Smith embraced Structural-Functionalism, but did not completely disavow the work of early Caribbean scholars. Instead, Smith viewed the community as part of the larger social structure and, in so doing was able to show that “the folk” was not a distinctive segment from other segments of society as M.G. Smith had suggested. Therefore, he proposed that “the Caribbean might better be conceptualized as a series of societies whose organization was to be investigated, within the context of the analysis of the interrelatedness and function of the society of each island and/or colony rather than the folk segment of all taken to be a unity” (Smith, 1968:24).

Kinship and the family were to be studied as parts of the total social system. Subsequently, Caribbean researchers not only focused on the domestic unit, but also on questions that pertained to the “history, origins and developmental processes of the organizational forms whose structure and function” were being described in these studies (Greenfield, 1968:25). Caribbean studies focused almost exclusively on “lower class blacks, women and social disorganization” (Greenfield, 1968:25). The social disorganization of the family, its female centerdness and displacement of the male were all aspects of an unvarying continuum. These studies discussed family structure and its origins, but were not overly concerned with distinguishing between permanent-ongoing and episodic crisis.

It was not until the late 1950s that Leslie White and his students Robert Carneiro, Marshall Sahlins, Elman Service<sup>3</sup> reevaluated the concept culture and culture change from a neoevolutionary perspective. According to White, culture change was not based on the individual nor psychological factors. Instead, he argued that “culture advances as the amount of energy harnessed per capita increases, or as the efficiency or economy of the means of controlling energy is increased, or both” (White, 1959:56). White and his followers suggest that culture change is predicated on technological innovation and they also believe that “the persistence, decline or transformation of cultural elements is predicated on adaptive forces that are expressed primarily through technology” (Brady and Isaac, 1975:xii). Service, for example, cites the Industrial Revolution as a good example of technology influencing not only Western Europe and eventually the entire world (Service, 1975).

The neo-evolutionist argues that change occurs as a result of technological innovation and not human intervention. White and his students believed that culture transcends the individual, and is not related to cognitive and psychological processes or shared ideas (Brady and Isaac, 1975). This perspective is deterministic and attributes culture change to a single causative factor. Culture change should not be explained only in terms of a single factor, but as a consequence of many other elements. As Geertz suggests, there is no single factor that is so important that it can determine the culture of any society (Geertz, 1963).

---

<sup>3</sup> This group was also referred to as the Michigan School.

Caribbean scholars were not influenced by the neoevolutionary model. Instead, in the 1960s, Price and Mintz, in repudiating Herskovitz's model, argued against the search for African traits within Caribbean societies. They believed that "African influence on Afro-American culture was best defined in terms of underlying values and grammatical orientations, and that the culture-history of the Afro-Americans should rest upon historical knowledge of the concrete conditions under which the slaves operated and interacted with Europeans" (Rolph-Trouillot, 1992: 31). For Mintz, history itself, becomes the focus and "provides the only context within which to make sense of human beings as subjects" (Rolph-Trouillot, 1992:3). Hence, the study of Jamaican art forms, for example, cannot be understood apart from Jamaican history and its meaning to the Jamaican people.

This historical model provided several ways to the study the Caribbean region-- the plantation system, the peasantry, accommodation and resistance, and relationship between the agrarian systems and cultural traditions-- are among some of the themes investigated by scholars. Although Mintz and Price opened the door to other ways of conceptualizing the region, they did not provide a framework to explicitly categorize crisis as ongoing and episodic. Nor did they consider the various behavioral responses that were possible when people were threatened.

Looking at the body of the work done in the 1970s, anthropologists continued to examine culture change and colonialism at work in Africa, Australia and Oceania. Fallers, in his study of modern African chieftanship in Uganda, examined the role of traditional leaders and the problems they experienced as they tried to negotiate between traditional and modern culture. He argued that traditional leaders who survive were able to straddle

both worlds and to enhance their status and economic position by practicing a “brand of sophisticated both world corruption” (Fallers, 1975:147). On the other hand, Sharp showed how the introduction of the steel axes to the Australian Aborigines by the colonialists altered the social relations and economic structure of Aboriginal society. As more steel axes circulated among the Aborigines, gender and age differences became blurred and economic relationships between trading partners were irrevocably changed (Sharpe, 1977). Afonja, in her study of the Yoruba, also demonstrated how the introduction of the capitalist mode of production changed the traditional patterns of economic cooperation in subsistence production as the Yoruba entered the nineteenth century (Afonja, 1986).

Anthropologists have been concerned with the study of cargo cults and/or millenarian movements. These have been of great interest to anthropologists because they point out how colonial contact produces disorientation among indigenous societies. For example, Worsley (1977) and Read (1975) examined how cargo cults in New Guinea believed that a new order would be established by eliminating the colonial control while still providing modern industrial wealth. Although these studies discuss changes in the cultures of these societies, they do not distinguish between episodic occurrences interrupting cycles of successive and ongoing problematic events.

Unlike the aforementioned, Susser in her study of a white working-class neighborhood demonstrated how a critical event, namely the 1975 fiscal crisis in New York City, could have tremendous political and economic ramifications for working-class people. She described “the struggles of a community confronting overwhelming incursions on its resources and economic stability” (Susser, 1982:vii). More importantly,

she pointed out how the de-industrialization of cities throughout the United States affected the working class. This approach best illustrates the concept of an acute event exacerbating ongoing problems.

To contrast, anthropological research in the Caribbean during the 1970s still continued to center on the household, kinship systems, issues of livelihood and social life outside the family. Added to this body of literature were the feminist and development/underdevelopment perspectives. Beckford (1972), Mandle (1973) and Best (1975) argue that the underdevelopment of the Caribbean can be traced back to the plantation economies established by Europeans in the sixteenth century. They suggested that the structural characteristics of the plantation were responsible for impeding the development of an integrated economic system that was capable of sustained growth (Dupuy, 1983). Their approach offers away to conceptualize the region in terms of permanent/ongoing and periodic crisis. However, because of primary focus on the structural characteristics of the region, their model did not create a dualistic model by which to approach the study of crisis.

Stimulated by the U.N. Decade for Women, Caribbean feminist scholars produced a plethora of research that addressed issues such as inequality, economic autonomy, petty commodity traders, and women in the informal urban sector. Safa in her work investigated the economic and political status of women in post-independent Caribbean societies. She concluded that economic autonomy could confer authority on women on the household level, but did not do so in the public domain (Safa, 1986). On the other hand, Sutton and Barrow argued that the Afro-Caribbean was absent of marked sexual inequalities because “the slave plantation produced few differences in the public

economic participation of women and men and that the social cleavage between free whites and enslaved blacks minimized the imposition of the dominant class ideology” (Sutton and Barrow, 1985: 495). Consequently, giving the slaves an opportunity to retain some autonomy and in the process developing different concepts about sex roles and their attributes.

Harrison in her examination of the urban informal sector in Jamaica posited that sexual inequality is a function of uneven development and the Caribbean position was a periphery in the world capitalist system. Harrison believes that the sexual oppression of women had to be understood within the context of local class relations and “international disparities which conditioned the specificity of women’s everyday lives (Nash and Safa as cited in Harrison 1988:). The foci of these studies shed light on the subordination of women in the region, in relation to the wider world.

More recent studies from Caribbean feminist researchers continue to follow in the legacy of R.T Smith. Mohammed and Perkins in their work among women in St. Lucia, Barbados and Dominica examined the decision-making process of women as it related to motherhood and other major life changing events in women’s lives. It also sought to deconstruct the stereotypes held about poor black women in relation to men and their role in the public domain (Mohammed and Perkins, 1999). Like many other studies, the focus of this investigation was limited to examining the role of women in certain functional relationships- -family, kinship, and household- -without extending it to the ongoing and episodic events happening in the region.

Interestingly, the term crisis has been analyzed most notably by sociologists, economists, historians, Marxists political and administrative scientists. Kreyche, a

professor of philosophy, in an editorial comment in *USA Today* suggested that it was time to rethink the concept because it had become such a common place occurrence since the early 1970s (*USA Today*, 1987). Crisis management, he stated was “a steady state of affairs in virtually” all areas of life. Kreyche cites the Social Security crisis, the ozone crisis and the overcrowding of the US prison system as examples to support his contention that “crisis is not unusual” (*USA Today* 1987:98).

Similarly, Robert Samuelson, a financial analyst, in examining crisis states that “the world works by crisis” and to think otherwise is to delude oneself (*Newsweek*, 1990: 51). Furthermore, he contends that the world does not work on the basis of “orderly action” but rather on the basis of crisis management. Samuelson also believes that it is time that we reevaluate our notions of crisis governance because it seems to be the only way of handling our present state of affairs (*Newsweek* 1990).

### **Crisis and Decision Making: A Case for the Caribbean**

My analysis of the pink mealy bug crisis is based on two theoretical perspectives that I have borrowed to create an expanded model. The first, developed by Clive Thomas, differentiates between “permanent or ongoing crisis and periodic crisis (Thomas, 1988:327). “Permanent or ongoing crisis is made up of elements of the socio-economic structure and their historical form and motion that were accentuated at certain historical conjectures. These periods were often cyclical and manifested themselves, for example, when there were periodic interruptions in the process of capital accumulation, when profits dropped, overseas markets contracted and when internal demand and confidence in the economy declined” (Thomas, 1988:327). It was precisely at these points of accentuation that periodic crises were produced (Thomas, 1988).

Hence, general crisis occurred in the region at several intervals: the end of slavery, the collapse of indenture, the labor crisis of the 1930s, the structural adjustment programs that were imposed by the IMF and the recent violence in Jamaica between the two warring political factions. The pink mealy bug problem crisis can be categorized as another example of periodic crisis that could be analyzed within the framework of permanent/ ongoing and punctuated crisis.

St. Vincent, like other nations in the region, has continuously dealt with ongoing systemic problems that are historical in nature, and has been forced to face added challenges that require immediate attention. The ongoing problems of poverty, high unemployment, scarce resources and a poorly integrated economic system are structural in nature and have been more difficult to address. The pink mealy bug crisis could have been remedied more quickly had all the actors involved in the drama worked together to find an equitable solution. The second objective of this study was to understand the response behavior of the state, the traffickers and the Association. To do so, I turned to Wolfstein (1967) and t'Hart et al model for crisis decision-making.

Crisis decision-making may be either positive or negative. Positive decisions are often made when the parties involved agree, devise a plan of action which is then implemented. However, as Wolfstein points out, non-decisions may be another alternative that may determine the course of events (Wolfstein, 1967). Non-decision making emerges as decisions that are not taken and decisions not to act (Wolfstein, 1967).

### **Decisions Not Taken**

“Decisions not taken” generally seem to revolve on how to manage outgoing information as critical events unfold. For example, strategies are not developed to contain

or to respond to queries made by the press and other interested parties. In the case of St. Vincent and the pink mealy bug infestation, the government never released any information to the press that could have prevented unnecessary speculations and accusations. Other cases that illustrate this point are the early reactions to the incidents of mad cow disease and foot-and-mouth disease that plagued England and some of the other European countries recently.

Failure to act may also result when the key actors misperceive the severity of the “threats posed by the events in their environment” (t’Hart, et al., 1993:5). The Vincentian government failed to recognize a developing crisis and in so doing, did not prepare for any problems that could have arisen. Initially, the traffickers like the government, also misread the severity of the situation and believed that Barbadian officials had overreacted to rumors that the pest was in St. Vincent. Even though the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association had been aware of the possibility that the pest was in St. Vincent, he, too, underestimated the problem and never discussed the matter with government officials.

### **Decisions Not To Act On**

The “decision not to act” may also be based on deliberate calculation by the actors that it may be too risky and costly to intervene or resolve the problem. As such the perceptions held by the actors as to the immediate threat, “the time pressures and the desirability of action versus non-action are outcomes of debate” (t’Hart, et al., 1993:10) that determine the response to the crisis. Even in the face of increasing pressure from the Vincentian press and the Barbadian trading ban, the Vincentian government did not actively seek to interact with officials from Barbados or the press.

Despite the aforementioned, it is important to note that decisions made during crisis vary cross-culturally based on the dominant structural patterns developed over time, and on cultural factors that shape how a people respond to problems. In the case of St. Vincent and the Caribbean, the historical legacy of colonialism and the overridden themes of survival and struggle (Sunshine, 1996:7) have shaped the ways in which the region has responded to permanent ongoing and episodic crisis.

In the following chapters, I examine the roles of the Vincentian government, the traffickers and the Traffickers and Small Business Association within this model in which I combine the perspectives of permanent/ongoing crisis and decision-making response.

## **OVERVIEW**

Chapter two provides a detailed description of how I collected information from the traffickers data to write five life histories on three female and two male traffickers. As the crisis evolved, I met with government officials in Barbados and St. Vincent and participated in the strategy meetings held by the Association. As an activist, I was not objective. I sided with the traffickers and diligently worked on their behalf to help resolve the crisis as soon as possible. My participation in these activities affected my understanding of how I perceived and interpreted the responses made by the various actors.

The third chapter introduces the pink mealy bug and its appearance in the Caribbean. The presence of the pest and its devastating impact did nothing to mobilize the region into action, resulting in the spread of the pest to neighboring St. Vincent. This chapter also describes how the press was responsible for alerting the Vincentian public

that the pest may have been in St. Vincent as well as how the Vincentian government and the traffickers responded to the news.

The historical, political and socio-economic forces that shaped St. Vincent are discussed in detail in chapter four. This chapter traces the development of St. Vincent from colonialism to the present and suggest that these forces may have converged to influence the response and decision made by the government when a crisis developed. In other words, the response may have been predicated by a structure that has been in place and may have determined the behavior of the government.

Chapter five, six, and seven are devoted to the traffickers and their Association. Chapter five provides an overview of trafficking and its importance in the region and examines how past traditions may have influenced the behavior and shaped the response and decisions of the traffickers as the crisis evolved. Chapters six and seven are devoted to analyzing life histories of three female and two male traffickers in terms of establishing a basis by which to assess how decisions were made, why they were made and how they were justified (Van Velsen 1967). Moreover, this chapter also shows how the President of the Association became synonymous with the organization and as a result no longer had the mandate to lead, a point that was clearly illustrated during the crisis.

How people respond to crisis varies. Chapter eight looks at the way in which the actors responded to the unfolding events. Attention was given to the lack of collective action by the traffickers and underlying tensions that were exacerbated between the President of the Association and the traffickers. Additionally, the government's apparent unwillingness to respond to and resolve the crisis was examined. I also paid special

**attention to the role of the anthropologist and in so doing questioned her neutrality. The chapter also offers some tentative conclusions on crisis and decision making.**

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY, FIELD RESEARCH, ORAL HISTORY AND AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AS A POLITICAL ACTOR**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

When I first began my fieldwork, I was interested in studying how the Caribbean Community's trading policies would affect the livelihood of the petty commodity traders of the region. I decided to work in St. Vincent based upon a preliminary visit that I had made in June 1995. At the time, I had spoken to the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association about my course of study, and he expressed interest because the study might provide the Association with valuable information about the trade. When I returned in 1996, the President of the Association had handpicked one of the most highly respected traders to serve as a primary informant. She proved to be extremely helpful and was instrumental in introducing me to other members of the trafficking community.

Initially, I wanted to interview all sixty-seven members of the Association, but soon discovered that it would not be an easy task since most spent seven days a week working. As a result, I changed my approach and began selling cartons and other supplies in the traffickers shed, which allowed me the opportunity to meet the majority of the traffickers as they bought boxes from the Association on a weekly basis. In addition, I spent a great deal of time perusing the dock to meet the traders, boat-captains and customs officials who seldom came to the shed. At the time, I was interested in learning more about the difficulties that the traffickers had as they traveled back and forth in the region. I wanted to investigate the impact, if any, that CARICOM policies had on the

volume of trade. I had hypothesized that the volume of trade for the majority of traffickers/higglers/huckster had decreased because of policies that favored large businesses. Moreover, I also wanted to ascertain how the traders perceived The Caribbean Community and if their needs were factored into the Community's policies.

However, the emphasis of my study changed abruptly in late September when rumors about a pest infestation began to circulate among the traffickers traveling to Barbados. They reported that the Barbadian government was concerned about the possibility that St. Vincent had become infested with the pink mealy bug. My interest in this matter grew as I read several newspaper articles that suggested that the mealy bug was present on the island. The articles went even further by suggesting that the government was once more covering up a problem that could seriously affect the country. Hence, my attention became focused on the pink mealy bug especially after the Barbadian government banned trade with St. Vincent on October 4, 1996. It was then that I became interested in exploring how people responded to crisis.

The oral history narratives were collected from April 1996 to February 1997 in the city of Kingstown, Mesopotamia, where many of the traffickers lived and also Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The five individuals chosen for the study - - three females who sold produce to Trinidad & Tobago and Martinique. The male traffickers sold to Barbados and to the international marketplace. I selected the traffickers based on a number of factors: age, gender, number of years trafficking, where they sold produce, reputation as a trader and their willingness to work with me. The information gathered provided a profile of traffickers based on gender. Each of these individuals brought a unique perspective on the trade.

In addition to the oral histories, I conducted semi-structured interviews with traffickers, boat captains, customs officials, phytosanitary officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and merchants. I also spent four days in Guyana interviewing CARICOM officials about the importance of trafficking to the region. I attended meetings of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and CARICOM held in St. Vincent. During the time of the pink mealy bug crisis, I spent a great deal of time meeting and interviewing officials in the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture, the head of the Vincentian Chamber of Commerce and the National Farmers Union. Moreover, I interviewed the Assistant Minister of Agriculture and officials at the Foreign Office in Barbados in mid-January regarding the resumption of trade between Barbados and St. Vincent. I also collected data through participant observation, video, tape recording, archival data: newspaper articles and government statistical information. I watched and taped television programs and listened and taped radio programs that were relevant to my study.

The data I collected was twofold. Initially, I interviewed traffickers to elicit information about trafficking as an occupation. I asked questions about when and how they got started, the history of the trade, the importance of the trade to the St. Vincent and to the Caribbean and what they think would be the future of the trade. However, when the crisis developed, I limited my questions to eliciting information: on the impact to the individual traffickers, trafficking in general and on their reasons for not participating in the activities of the Association. I conducted interviews with government officials to learn why the Administrations adopted a policy of non-response.

## **GENERAL STATEMENT OF ISSUES AND METHOD STUDY RATIONALE**

The pink mealy bug crisis gave me an opportunity to study crisis in progress. Thomas suggests that in order to gain a broader understanding of crisis response in the Caribbean, it is important to situate it within a wider socio-political framework and historical forms (Thomas, 1988: 326-327). Therefore, I hypothesized that in order to gain an understanding of events, it is important to situate them within the Vincentian historical and socio-political framework.

Another related issue focused on crisis decisions. Who are the decisions makers and what factors influence decision-making? t'Hart, et al, argue that decision making can be limited to the number of people or small group, a local or regional agency or a strong leader (Hart et. al, 1993). In the case of St. Vincent, the decision-making appeared to be limited to a small number of officials at the Ministry of Agriculture and the Prime Minister. On the other hand, decisions making for the traffickers was made by a single individual, the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association.

This study finally examines the behavior of the traffickers independently of the crisis. Initially, this study began by documenting the activities of the traffickers to learn about their daily lives and the problems they encountered as they sold produce in CARICOM countries. This information provided a basis by which I could analyze their behavior during the crisis.

## **FIELD RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

As part of my methodology, I decided to conduct interviews to complement my observations in the field. I conducted both semi-structured and open-ended interviews,

thereby giving me control over the process. I conducted interviews in private or in groups while probing for more specific answers, repeating questions when necessary, observing nonverbal behaviors and assessing the validity of the responses of the individuals (Bailey, 1978:178).

At the beginning of my field research, I interviewed traffickers individually in the shed and on the docks in Kingstown. I gathered information on age, marital status, the number of children in the family, education and income even though it was difficult to elicit direct information on earnings. Instead, I had to ask questions about the ownership of private property land, home and vehicles etc. in order to establish criteria to determine the financial success of each trafficker. Additionally, I collected data on when and how they got started, number years trading, problems encountered (licenses, customs, taxes etc.) and the history and future of trafficking. This information helped me to develop a profile of the Vincentian trafficker.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect information on the life of five traffickers- -three women and two men. I asked questions about childhood, family, marital relations and their involvement in the trade. This information gave me data to write the life histories on five individuals traffickers and compare their experiences. In addition, it provided information on the differences between male and female traffickers.

During the crisis, the emphasis of my study shifted to an examination on how the ban on Vincentian produce affected the traffickers and the state. I also questioned the behavior of the government as the crisis evolved and why the government was so reluctant to admit the presence of the pest. In order to gather information on the behaviors of the actors at the time of the crisis, I conducted both open-ended and semi-structured

interviews. I spoke to traffickers, boat captains, officials at the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture, the heads of the Vincentian Chamber of Commerce and the Vincentian National Farmers Union and officials at the Ministry of Trade and Foreign Affairs in Barbados. My questions focused on the impact of the trading ban on the livelihood of the traffickers, their reluctance to participate in collective action and the government's decision not to respond. In all, I surveyed forty traffickers, three boat captains, ten government officials in St. Vincent and four officials in Barbados during the crisis.

### **Participant Observation**

Through participant observation of the actors and their activities, I was able to substantiate the information given by the traffickers and officials. I traveled with individuals as they bought produce from the farmers, helped prepare the goods for the market, interacted with customs and phytosanitary officials in both the home and host country, made travel arrangements and sold in the markets in St. Vincent and Trinidad. I participated in a training project conducted by International Farming and Agricultural Division (IFAD) to help the traffickers better prepare their produce for market. During the crisis, I organized meetings with the traffickers, met with government officials in St. Vincent and Barbados, assisted in the planned demonstration, helped the President of the Association write a letter to the Prime Minister and prepare for a thirty minute television program on the mealy bug crisis.

### **Field Notes**

My field notes were written daily after I returned from the field. I wrote about my daily activities with the trafficker in my notebook and I wrote my personal reactions to the day's events in a personal dairy. The fieldnotes and the taped-recorded interviews

complemented each other well. The videotaped interviews with the traffickers were also of great value because they provided a visual record of their activities.

### **Sources of Archival Data**

Much of my archival information came primarily from Vincentian newspapers and was supplemented by newspaper stories from Barbados, *Carib News* and *The New York Times* and magazine articles from *Newsweek Magazine*. The articles from Vincentian newspapers gave me a great deal of insight into the behavior of the government and how the public responded to and perceived its activities. I found these articles extremely useful in analyzing the relationship between the press, the public and the government. They also provided a lens through which I could understand the behavior of the government during the crisis. Articles from the international and regional press helped me to glean information about how the Vincentian government was perceived by outsiders. These articles corroborated several stories published by the local newspapers.

### **THE LIFE HISTORY APPROACH**

Shostak in her research on the !Kung points out the difficulties of gathering life histories and the concerns on how best to handle the material, how to represent it fairly and how to find forms suitable for publication. Shostak explains that her narrative was a compromise, at best, idiosyncratic constructions bound by the material and by individual experience. Furthermore, she states that her goal was to collect life histories as a vehicle through which people's experiences, thoughts and feelings might be expressed (Shostak 1998:403).

The life history approach is a wonderful tool that allows the researcher to describe the life experiences of ordinary people in their own voice. As a result, they can express

their feelings, thoughts and hopes, thus allowing the reader to recognize the similarities inherent in the human condition. It is important to note however, that these narratives do not represent the individuals' entire life histories but are events strung together to represent certain aspects of their lives. The stories provide the reader with information on how and why people make certain decisions.

My desire to collect life histories on the traffickers came from reading several stories including *Worker in the Cane*, *Nisa*, and *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* that gave the reader an insider's view and a better understanding of the culture of "the other." By allowing the traffickers to recount their stories, I, too, felt that the reader would gain a better understanding of the world of petty commodity trading. I wanted the traffickers to tell the reader about their work and its significance in shaping their life experiences. Moreover, I wanted the reader to understand how gender differences influenced the behavior of the traffickers before and during the mealy bug crisis.

In shaping the narratives, I tried not to edit or censure much of the stories. Shostak points out that she allowed Nisa's narrative style to influence how she presented the material (Shostak, 1998). I, too, allowed the narrative style of the five traffickers to dictate how I would present the material. With very few editorial changes, the trafficker's stories were written as they had been expressed on the tape recorder and video. As their biographer, I felt that it was important to accurately represent and remain as faithful to their narrative as possible. I interjected only when I thought that it would add or clarify a specific point. I remained in the background and in so doing, gave full expression to their voices.

I learned a great deal from their stories and realized how difficult it was for poor people to survive, especially poor women with few skills or education. Their efforts should be commended and applauded because traffickers work very hard to ensure that their families' survival. I developed a great deal of respect and admiration for them as a result of these narratives.

### **Theory and Data**

There were two types of data that were collected during the research. The first type of information was gathered centered on the lifestyle and the problems faced by the traffickers in the home and regional markets. The second type of data focused on the mealy bug crisis and the response of the actors to the unfolding events. Interestingly, as the crisis evolved, I did not examine the events from a specific theoretical perspective because I hoped that once the process of analysis began, the data would lead me to discover specific themes and patterns. In other words, I allowed the descriptive material to shape and frame the theoretical perspectives used in the dissertation.

The theoretical perspective that emerges is eclectic in the sense that I draw upon several theories to explain the data prior to and during the crisis. To explain the behavior and ideologies of the traffickers I drew upon gender studies, but more specifically from gender studies of Caribbean women. Molyneux (1985) and Alvarez (1990) argue that there are two ways to examine women's participation in social movements or participation in organizations: strategic gender interest and practical gender interest. While Ellis in her study of Caribbean women points out that although women's organizations have become more active, few have taken radical measures to transform themselves into activist organizations (Ellis, 1986: 12). Still, yet, Clarke in her discussion

on political power states within the Caribbean suggest that the evidence available indicates the low status of women in the region (Clarke, 1982).

Although I am aware of the criticism this perspective (see Byrdon and Chant 1993; Lind, 1992; Foster, 1992), the data collected supports the theoretical perspective that practical gendered interests must be considered when explaining the behavior of the traffickers before and during the crisis.

In addition to a gender perspective, I incorporated the theoretical framework used by Victor Turner in his study of social drama. Turner suggests that the social drama sometimes provides a way “to look beneath the surface of social regularities into hidden contradictions and conflicts in the social system. The kinds of redressive mechanism deployed to handle conflict, the pattern of factional struggle and the sources of initiative to end crisis are all clearly manifested in the social drama” (Turner 1968: xvii). Before one can study critical events, one must be aware of regularity (Turner 1968).

I approached this study in two ways. First, I developed a profile of the traffickers, their Association and the Vincentian government to establish a basis for comparison. Secondly, I analyzed the evolution of the pink mealy bug crisis or the social drama. In the first instance, I examined regularities in the behavior of the actors prior to the critical event; in the second, I discuss their responses to the social drama (Turner 1968).

### **ANTHROPOLOGIST AS ACTIVIST/POLITICAL ACTOR**

I believe that it is important to include a section that examines the anthropologist as activist/political actor. During the crisis, I worked diligently with the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association on behalf of the traffickers. In so doing, my role was transformed from neutral observer to activist/political actor. In my new role, I

planned and organized meetings, wrote letters and met with government officials in the hope that we would find a speedy resolution to the trading ban. The truth of the matter is that I behaved like an imperialist. I wanted to convert the Association from a weak organization into a strong lobby that would effectively pressure the Vincentian government in order to create and implement policies to meet the needs of the petty commodity traders.

At the time, I did not fully consider the implications of my actions for my research. Instead, I focused entirely on helping the traders since many of them had requested my help. Many had also become my friends, and I felt a sense of obligation. I became their advocate. Moreover, I wanted to give something back because so many of them had contributed willingly to my study without expecting anything in return. By the time I left St. Vincent, I had many questions about the role the anthropologist: Should we become advocates/political actors on behalf of those with whom we work? Are we responsible for giving something back to the native informant?

Sharon Bohn Gmelch addressed these questions in her work on Irish Travellers. She discussed the personal adaptation required of the anthropologist when studying another culture and also the dilemma faced by many in deciding whether to remain neutral observers or become needed advocates for the people they live among (Bohn Gmelch 1988: 137). Like, Bohn Gmelch, Alicida Ramos points out that Brazilian anthropologists have acquired a taste for activism (Ramos 2000:173). She traces the history of activism in the work of anthropologist who fought for the rights of various indigenous groups including the Yanomami in Brazil. Ramos argues that to do anthropology is a political act (Ramos, 2000:172).

Activism is not a new phenomenon to anthropology or to the social sciences. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists have been concerned with the rights of individuals whose voices are generally not heard. Boas and his students were instrumental in conducted studies against the “destructive policies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, ethnic and racial stereotypes. “DuBois conducted a neighborhood ethnography among African Americans in Philadelphia and Warner addressed issues of class and ethnicity during the Great Depression” (Susser 2001: 7). Ramos in her discussion points to a North American tradition that began with judicial testimony in 1946 on indigenous rights and on the work of Fred Myers who tried to change the way that local descent group was being applied to Aborigines since Radcliffe-Brown times (Ramos 2000).

This pattern continued in the 1960s when political turmoil rocked the United States. The Vietnam War, the civil right’s and women’s movements and Native American reparation “led the way for research concerning power, culture, and social movements” (Susser 2001: 7). Many researchers became advocates for the oppressed and in so doing, became aware of the contradictory role of anthropologists. The discipline had been strongly identified with imperialism since its beginning and forced many to realize that it was important for the discipline to illuminate global inequality. Anthropological approaches have taken this into account and have developed new ways of examining the impact of global inequality (Susser 2001).

Since the 1980s anthropologists have worked on the problems faced by those suffering form AIDS, homelessness, malnutrition, poverty and alcoholism (Singer 1994, 1993, 1991; Susser 1993, 1992; Farmer 1992). These studies shed light on the problems

faced by the poor and “exposes the nature and consequences of social and global inequalities” (Baer, Singer and Susser, 1997: 159).

### **SUMMARY**

In this section, I have discussed the methodology and my role as an activist/political actor. My role raise several questions regarding the neutrality of the anthropologists in the field especially when faced with critical events that may require intervention and participation. As Bohn Gmelch states, to be truly dispassionate when working with people, particularly poor people like the traffickers, is in some way inhuman. Moreover, anthropologists are in a far better position than most to speak for the people that they have lived among (Bohn Gmelch, 1988:147). In part II, I present the actors in the pink mealy bug drama.

## **PART II: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MEALY BUG IN THE CARIBBEAN**

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **DO WE OR DON'T WE HAVE THE PINK MEALY BUG?**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter serves as an introduction to the pink mealybug crisis. The crisis sets the tone for the actions and reactions of the many actors: the Vincentian government, the Barbadian government, the traffickers and The Traffickers and Small Business Association. Their interaction and oftentimes lack of response produced a situation that spiraled out of control. The Vincentian government's failure to respond appropriately, but more importantly, its refusal to admit the presence of the pink mealybug, created a crisis that could have been contained had it acted quickly.

On the other hand the Barbadian government acted unilaterally when it banned trade without informing the Vincentian government. No diplomatic communiqué was issued directly to the Vincentian Government. Instead, the Barbadians informed the traffickers in Barbados of the impending ban, urging them to put pressure on the Vincentian government to not only admit the presence of the bug but to put into place a plan of action that would contain the bug.

Barbados, a tourist enclave, was extremely concerned about its ornamental plants. An attack on these plants by the pest would have had a detrimental impact on the landscaping and beauty of the island which is so important to attracting tourist from all over the world. Additionally, the agricultural sector would also have been severely affected. Barbados has been investing in its agricultural sector and has seen tremendous

increase in its productive levels. The cost of containing and destroying the bug would reach in the millions.

The pest has been a serious problem in the region since 1994 and has now spread to several islands in the Caribbean and to Guyana in South America. The region and the agricultural division of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) were reticent in developing a comprehensive plan to contain the bug. The CARICOM countries could be faulted for not being proactive, particularly since the agriculture sector of Grenada. In view of its nature, it would have been only a matter of time before all the nations in the region would be severely infested. The case of St. Vincent is particularly disturbing since the government conspired to withhold information from others in the region as well as from its citizens. The Vincentian government was aware, according to my discussion with two government sources, of the presence of the bug as early as 1995. However, very little action was taken, and the government preferred to pretend that the bug was not present. Whatever palliative measures were taken did nothing to prevent the spread of the bug to the farming areas.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE MEALY BUG**

The pink mealy bug (*Maconellicoccus hirsutus*) is generally confined to tropical areas such as Southeast Asia, China, Egypt, Africa, Australia and India. With the exception of Egypt and India, the pest has not presented a problem in these areas because natural predators have prevented the bug from devastating the environment. In India, it is a major pest of grapes, reducing grape yields 50 to 100 percent. Yield losses on other crops such as sorrel, jute, mesta and roselle range up to 75 percent. In Egypt, the mealybug has caused serious damage to shade tress, such as mulberry, pigeon peas and

guava. Cotton, an important crop, is particularly susceptible if planted near infested trees (Curlett, 1996).

The pink mealybug is also known as the hibiscus mealybug, the grape mealybug and the grapevine mealy bug. The male and female adult mealybugs are about 1-3 mm inches in length or about one-eighth inches long. Female bodies are pink in color (hence the classification) with a white waxy covering. They are wingless and oval in shape, covered by a white mealy wax. Males have a pair of wings and two long tails and are capable of flight ([1mark@aphis.usda.gov](mailto:1mark@aphis.usda.gov)).

They have a life cycle of 24-30 days depending on the prevailing environmental conditions. Reproduction, according to some observers, may occur by means of parthenogenesis in the absence of the male. The eggs and the young are a pale orange color but turn pink at maturity. They are not easily seen by the naked eye and are easily dispersed by the wind (Curlett, 1996, *St. Vincent National Radio Show* 10/23/96).

In the second or crawling stage, the pest is very mobile and crawls all over the plant, especially toward tender growing parts. They also can be carried away by the wind, and they have also been known to travel short distances over the ground to get to other host plants in adjoining fields. Agricultural commerce is also responsible for the pest's spread. The pest has some ability to adapt to cool weather as shown by the nymphal movement to sheltered locations and the female's choice of protected places for eggsacks (Curlett, 1996: 734).

As the mealy bug grows and feeds on the host plant, it injects toxic saliva, which causes characteristic pleating and curling of the leaves. As infestation increases, the deformed leaves "rosette" often throughout the whole plant stunting the plant's growth

and leading to a “bunchy top” appearance. Stems are short, and buds may fail to flower, and stems may twist. The pink mealybug also exudes a syrupy sap called “honeydew”. The honeydew is a very good medium for the growth of fungus referred to as “black light.” Black light inhibits photosynthesis in the plant, putting it under further stress. Heavy infestation may result in fruits entirely covered with the white wax coating, which may cause the fruits to drop off or remain on the plant dry and shriveled. In peanuts, potatoes and some grasses, the pest has been reported to attack the root system (Curlett, 1996:734, St. Vincent National Radio Station, 10/23/96).

The pink mealybug attacks a wide range of unrelated plant hosts, including over 215 plant species, and according to the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA), the list is growing as the pests spreads into new geographical areas. Vegetables such as tannia, dasheen, eddo (are tropical tubers), pumpkin, tree crops such as avocado, breadfruit, citrus, cocoa, golden apple, mango and sorrel which are important source of revenue for many of the less developed Caribbean countries, have been destroyed by the pest (St. Vincent National Radio Station 10/23/96, USDA, 1997). It is very difficult to control the spread of the pest. Insecticides, biological control and education are some of the ways to reduce the spread of the mealybug.

## **THE PINK MEALY BUG IN CARIBBEAN**

### **The Pink Mealy Bug in Grenada**

The pink mealybug first appeared in the Caribbean on the island of Grenada, in September 1994 and then spread quickly to other islands in the region. By September-October 1995, it had reached the islands of Trinidad & Tobago and St. Kitts. However, Grenada set the stage for what was to come. The island was so severely affected that it

lost approximately 18 million (\$3,750,000 US) to 50 million (\$18,730,000 US) Eastern Caribbean Dollars in a year from damage. By October 1995, forests were denuded, vegetable crops were destroyed, and ornamentals were very badly damaged. Formerly an exporter of crops, Grenada now found itself importing produce (sugar apples, sorrel, okra, and sour sop) for home consumption. Its leading revenue exporting crop coco was banned by other Caribbean Nations (St. Vincent National Radio News Program (10/23/96).

Approximately 11,700 farm families and all those they employed were severely affected by this crisis. Many lost substantial income and their farms. The middlewomen or higglers were reduced to exporting spices and a limited number of produce to Trinidad. Mary, one of the Grenadian higglers/traffickers I met while traveling in Trinidad, explained the difficulties they were having since the mealybug invaded the island. She said that in spite of the good strides that Grenada had made to contain the mealybug, Trinidad still had not lifted the ban on their produce and their business had suffered enormously as a result. She and her counterparts have been trying to organize themselves to develop new trading partners outside the region, but with little success, partly due to the lack of cohesion among the women and government support.

According to the Caribbean Research Development Institute (CARDI), total eradication of the bug is unlikely, particularly since in most of the Caribbean nations the bug does not have natural enemies. Many have tried importing predators, including the Chinese parasitic wasp (*Anagyrus kamali*) and the Australian ladybird beetle, which feed on the mealybug. But the mealybug has continued to spread. Pesticides do not destroy the mealybug and can be damaging to the plants if not administered properly. Hence, CARDI

recommended that multiple strategies be applied, including biological and chemical control and dissemination of educational information throughout the region.

Unfortunately, most governments in the area and the Caribbean Community did not mobilize quickly enough to develop strategies to contain the spread of the pest and have handled the problem inadequately. The initial perception among Caribbean countries in the Community was that the problem was not serious enough to take regional measures to contain the mealybug. Even after Grenada had experienced severe economic hardship, there was still little collective action, and by the time the countries realized the seriousness of the situation, substantial damage had already been done.

The presence of the mealybug questions the willingness and ability of the region to act in concert on addressing issues facing the area. Because the nations in the Caribbean are newly independent and have few resources to combat crisis alone, one goal of the Community has been to make a collective response to emergencies. But the mealybug crisis shows that this model has not worked.

One problem is that the member nations are unwilling to relinquish authority to a supra-national body. Unlike the European community, which has moved ahead with a political agenda, Caribbean nations are clinging tightly to their individual identities. The concept of Caribbeanness has only become a reality in the West Indian diaspora and has little application in the region itself other through sports.

The mealybug crisis also points to the institutional weakness of Community. The General Secretariat has no power to implement decisions and, as Lloyd Best, a leading economist in the region points out, CARICOM has no communication networks. As a result, decisions made at meetings of the heads of government are often ineffective

because there are no mechanisms for implementing them. In this context, it was not surprising that the Community failed to develop a comprehensive policy for containing the mealybug despite its impact on regional trade. Each nation was left to develop strategies to control the pest, as I discovered in my discussions with the Secretariat in Georgetown, Guyana. No discussions were held among the various Ministries of Trade, Agriculture, Health and Environment and the Agricultural Division of CARICOM to create a plan to prevent the spread of the pest to the other countries. It was left to CARDI and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to devise a program to prevent the problem from getting worse.

Grenada, Trinidad & Tobago and St. Kitts have been very proactive in their fight against the pest. The FAO has also joined in the fight to help these governments contain the mealybug in hope that the agricultural sector would not be too severely damaged. Unlike many of the countries in the region, Trinidad took early steps to protect its borders from the pest. As a result of these actions, the country has been able to contain the spread of the mealybug. Moreover, Trinidad's economy, unlike the smaller countries in the eastern Caribbean, does not depend on agriculture exports to partly sustain its economy.

#### **The Pink Mealy Bug in St. Vincent**

In early September 1996, rumors circulated in Kingstown regarding the presence of the pink mealybug. On September 6, the weekly newspaper, *The News* carried a small article with the headline "The Pink Mealybug Is Here," informing the public that the pest was already in the New Mount Rose section of Kingstown. Apparently, an official from the Ministry of Agriculture visited a resident's home to determine whether or not the mealybug was there, but did not inform the resident of his findings. The article went on to

state that leaves taken from a plant in the Victoria Park vicinity in Kingstown were taken to the Ministry of Agriculture for study. No information has been provided from that study to confirm whether the pest was on St. Vincent. Nevertheless, a radio jingle produced by the Communication Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture urged Vincentians to be wary and not to import plants from other countries even though the Ministry official denied that the pest was on the island.

The article caused a great deal of discussion in the Traffickers shed. Both male and female traffickers were concerned that it would mean a disruption in trading activity. President of the Traffickers Association, James Thomas (JT), told me privately on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September that the bug had been sighted in the downtown Kingstown area, but so far had not reached the farming belt. He was very concerned with the government's attitude and feared that before long the traffickers would be out of business. Yet JT had not tried to bring the matter to the attention of the Ministry of Agriculture. We continued our discussions privately, and on more than one occasion, we conferred with Mark, the head of the International Farming and Agricultural Division (IFAD) project in St. Vincent regarding the matter. Both were sure that the pest was on the island because of evidence that had been presented to them, but neither took any action.

Although the traffickers discussed the article, they made no effort to have an open dialogue with the Ministries of Agriculture and Trade. The traffickers were content to grumble among themselves and to go about business as usual. As long as there was no immediate threat to trade, the feeling was why bother because eventually in their minds, the matter would be taken care of. It was my observation that the women were very single-minded and are primarily concerned with moving their produce into the market. Unless

they were pushed into a corner, they would not act or confront any institutional body. Hence, no attempts were ever made to develop strategies to handle the problem had the mealybug spread to the farming areas.

On September 13, *The News* printed an article by the highly respected Historian Adrian Frazer. Frazer warned the Vincentian government that it should be careful in its handling of the mealybug situation lest it incur “the wrath of the Vincentian people.” He acknowledged the rumors circulating throughout the country regarding the presence of the mealybug and accused the government of covering up the problem. He strongly suggested that the government “not indulge in any kind of cover up since it could destroy any credibility that the Ministry of Agriculture has” (*The News*, 9/13/1996).

Once more, the reaction among the traffickers was predictable. The matter became a conversation piece as they prepared their goods for the market. Janet, an old time trafficker who ships to Barbados was highly disturbed by the article and stated that everyone in the country should be worried because she believed that the Barbadians would respond quickly to protect their borders from infestation. Within the past ten (September 3-13) days, Barbados had demanded that the traffickers fill out a special form to ship goods into the country, and she believed this was related to the pink mealybug. Janet expected Barbados to prevent Vincentian (Vincy) goods from entering the country and urged me to travel to Barbados to get some sense of what was going on. Janet also feared that the traffickers were not prepared for the changes that might be imposed by the Barbadians in the upcoming weeks and that many would be hard-pressed to find other markets that would accept Vincentian agricultural produce. “Things are bad enough as it

is,” she exclaimed, “without having to fight each other for market space. We never work together, and this will be our downfall.”

I was surprised by the lack of concern by both the traffickers and the Traffickers and Small Business Association. Although the women acknowledge that there might be a problem, they hoped that it was not true. Consequently, no pressure was brought on the Association to meet with the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture to ascertain the veracity of the stories in the press. I sensed that they hoped that the problem would go away although the women were well aware of the consequences of the pest because of Grenada. Yet, they took a shortsighted approach to the issue because as long as they continued trading, everything was fine. More importantly, the present was more important than the future. Additionally, the women had gained in the market, as a result of the crisis in Grenada. So far they were on top of their game.

The President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association did not make a formal request for a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, but he did bring the issue of the mealybug to a round table discussion of the Exporters Association. The Minister of Agriculture Allan Cruickshank informed the group that the pest was not present in the country and felt that JT’s question was inappropriate and should have been discussed privately. JT disagreed and felt that the problem should be discussed publicly. JT disagreed and felt that the problem needed to be discussed because the crisis would affect all those who shipped produce and ornamentals to other Caribbean nations and outside the region. The tension between the Minister and JT was not new. JT did not respect Cruickshank. He felt that the man had very little understanding of agriculture and the problems faced by the nation’s farmers. Cruickshank’s knowledge of farming and related

issues was limited; his background was in education. Moreover, he seemed unwilling to learn and was perceived as being more concerned with building his power base within the Mitchell government than with helping the farmers survive in a changing market place. As a result, JT, several members of the farming community and even some government officials felt that the Minister was ineffectual. According to JT, farming problems had increased since he had become the Minister of Agriculture, and the personal animosity between these two men was evident in the heated exchange that took place at the meeting.

The media continued its campaign to bring the mealybug question to light. On September 20, an editorial in *Searchlight*, another weekly newspaper, pointed out that the government was sending mix messages to the public by sponsoring public announcements calling for vigilance against the bug, while at the same time vehemently denying that it was on the island. The press was suspicious of the government and refused to give it credit for being proactive in disseminating information to the public. They also urged Vincentians to call upon the Ministry of Agriculture should they come upon the pest. Mitchell's government was notorious for covering up scandals and as far as the media was concerned this was one more attempt to suppress public information.

The government responded through the *West Indian Crusader*, a weekly publication partly sponsored by the government that the Mitchell government used to confront dissent and to criticize the opposition party. *The Crusader* accused the media of behaving "irresponsibly and unprofessionally" and more specifically *The Searchlight* of trying to increase circulation by running a story that was misleading and inaccurate. After all, the Chief Technical Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture had repeatedly denied that the pest was present in St. Vincent. *The Crusader* further reprimanded the newspaper and

*NBC radio* for raising such a sensitive issue publicly because the debate could affect the national interest. The government was also concerned that the publication of these stories might create an atmosphere of distrust in the region that would damage Vincentian agricultural export.

Caribbean governments had reacted swiftly to ban agricultural produce from Grenada and the other islands that had been infested by the mealybug. A ban on Vincy goods would mean a significant loss in revenues and foreign exchange. The Mitchell government took the position that trade had to be protected at all costs, even if it meant stifling the press. The government was indirectly asking the newspaper to censor itself, but *The Searchlight* made it clear in an editorial that the government had no right to “muzzle the press or stifle the expression of public concern” because it was a violation of the Constitution (*The Searchlight* 9/27/96).

Underlying the public debate between the government and the media was an overwhelming feeling of discontent that permeated the country. The public was dissatisfied with the manner in which Mitchell and his cabinet had been handling the country’s affairs in general. Unemployment was up significantly, the educational system was in crisis, and the country had been plagued by one scandal after another. For example, during The Ottley Hall scandal, in which millions of taxpayers dollars was wasted on a project that was never completed, the public was not informed until the story broke in the newspaper. With the mealy bug issue, the media felt responsible for exposing a problem that could have severe repercussions for the nation’s economy and suspected that the Mitchell government could not be trusted to handle the crisis effectively.

However, as Janet predicted, on September 27, 1996 Barbados reacted to these stories by putting into place more stringent restrictions on the shipment of produce into the country. The Barbadian Chief Plant Quarantine Officer stated publicly that the permits were not intended to stop imports, but to give Barbados more control over produce coming into the country. In effect, they would allow for a closer inspection of all produce. However, it was my understanding from discussions with the Trade officer in The Caribbean Community that no license or permits could be placed on goods moving through the region, in which case Barbados' policy was contrary to Community rules. The Community did allow each nation to develop rules to protect its borders from pest infestation. Therefore, the Barbadian government felt no need to consult with CARICOM before implementing its new policy.

Barbados made a unilateral decision to protect its own interest to the detriment of fellow Community members. The Vincentian government's failure to respond appropriately or even to admit the presence of the pink mealy bug created a crisis that could have been contained had it acted quickly. The Vincentian government locked itself into an awkward position, but at the same time the Barbadians acted in a hostile manner by unilaterally banning trade without informing the Vincentian government. No diplomatic communiqué was issued to the Vincentian government. Instead, the Barbadians informed the traffickers of the impending ban and initiated a plan to contain it.

As the stories continued to unfold in the newspapers and on radio broadcasts, the female traffickers saw the Barbados policy as intrusive. Tina, one of the more experienced higglers, complained that the traffickers were being unfairly penalized by the

Barbadian government. Admittedly, some of the women had not been careful about how they handled their produce, but Tina felt that the majority had been conscientious in washing and cleaning the produce. But the male traffickers, including JT, the head of the Association, welcomed the policy. At last, they concluded, the new program would force the women to alter their behavior and become more adept at handling agricultural goods. JT, the other male traffickers and officers in the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture felt that only the market could force the women to behave professionally. No the produce would have to be handled and packaged carefully, a change that was welcomed by the men. However, as I pointed out to JT, this was not an example of market forces at work, but the result of the Barbadian government's suspicion that St. Vincent was infested with the mealy bug.

It was no surprise to anyone when the women ignored the new rules. They continued to select produce that was not of highest quality, pack it in broken-down boxes and present it haphazardly in the marketplace. Although they were more concerned than before about their livelihood, little had changed. This unwillingness to change is also common among their counterparts, the Dominican and Grenadian higglers (Le Franc, 1988 ). It was also this attitude that explains the lack of sympathy among their male colleagues, who felt that the women had brought the wrath of the Barbadian government on themselves and if they had followed sound business practices their present difficulties could have been avoided. The men took this opportunity to berate the women for what they considered to be their poor sense of organization, improper handling of the agricultural goods, greediness, selfishness, and poor business acumen.

Lost in this discussion was the cause of the trouble- - the mealybug. The male traffickers had conveniently forgotten that the new rules imposed by the Barbadians were the result of media reports that the bug was in St. Vincent. Barbados had not always been happy with the way in which goods were packaged, and many traffickers had lost their shipment when the Barbadian Phytosanitary Division ordered fruits and vegetables that were unclean to be dumped. JT and some of the government officials in the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture thought that the mealy bug problem might have given the Barbadians a good excuse to impose stringent regulations on how produce should be shipped into the country.

It is also important to note that traffickers are independent traders who are not accountable to any “official body” on how they handles their business. As a result, any government attempt to control their activities would be met with resistance, as the phytosanitary officers in St. Vincent learned very quickly. These officers responded to the new rules imposed by the Barbadians by demanding that the women clean their produce thoroughly. No official stamp would be given to anyone who broke the rules. The women objected vehemently and arguments broke out between the officers and the women. Interestingly, the male traffickers were not involved in the heated and often acrimonious disputes. The women saw the officials’ conduct as a form of betrayal. After all, they were fellow Vincentians, and the women expected them to take their side. The women felt that they were also being harassed unnecessarily by the Vincentian authorities and to some extent they were right. They had been single-out as part of the problem.

The officers in turn told me that the women’s failure to comply was a reflection on how well they conducted their jobs. The business-as-usual attitude by the women

suggested to the Barbadians that the Phytosanitary Division in St. Vincent was weak and ineffective. Peters, one of the principal officers in the division, had very strong feelings about the women and how they conducted their business. He explained that he had been working with the women for more than ten years and the majority of the traders had never followed the rules. Peters viewed the women as aggressive, ill mannered and extremely rude. "I am tired telling them to clean the soil from the root crops and vegetables," he said. "We repeat ourselves almost every week... you have no idea how difficult our job is." I did know because I had watched and had participated in the inspection process.

Peters and his colleagues argued with the women almost every week. In spite of Peter's threat not to give them a stamp of approval, many of the women insisted on presenting their produce unscrubbed. I was also frustrated by this and asked the women why they didn't wash their goods. They never answered the question directly, but instead complained that they were under tremendous pressure from both the Vincentian and Barbadian governments. "No one cares about us. All they want to do is to make our lives difficult," explained Marcy and Theresa. However, two of the older traffickers, Janet and Madelyn Thompson, were of a different opinion. They believed that many of the traders were irresponsible and did not care about the business. "These women are selfish and will destroy our trade. Vincentians ain't easy. They are giving the rest of us a bad name."

Part of the traders' difficulty stemmed from the lack of facilities for cleaning the produce. Many of the goods came directly from the farm on the day of shipment, making it somewhat impossible for all the vegetables and fruits to be washed properly. The Traffickers Shed did not provide water or containers to wash the produce. Many women remained on Front Street where there were a few faucets available to wash their goods,

but this was still not enough. Although the Phytosanitary officers realized that the women had to confront these challenges, they were primarily concerned with getting the job done correctly. The traders' failure to comply with the new regulations was a direct reflection on them and they were not going to allow the women to further jeopardize an already tenuous reputation. St. Vincent's Phytosanitary suffered negative press in the region because of the women, and as far as Peters and his colleagues were concerned, the buck stopped with them. I was informed by the team that traders would not be issued a phytosanitary stamp if their goods were not properly cleaned and packaged. It was important to them that all produce leaving St. Vincent be pest-free. Naturally, this increased tensions between traffickers and the officials, both groups believing that they were under siege.

The attitude of the officials was understandable. Their jobs were on the line. Like the majority of the middleclass, these men and women depended on the government for work. If they lost their jobs, it would be hard to find another one. The number of jobs available in St. Vincent is limited, particularly in the agricultural sector, and no Vincentian could afford to be blacklisted by the government. For this reason Peters and his colleagues were very careful not to antagonize the Barbadian phytosanitary officials. Any added complaints from the Barbadians would certainly incur the wrath of the Vincentian government. Peters made it very clear that neither he nor any other members of the team would tolerate being disgraced by the traffickers.

Peters also explained that under normal circumstances it was hard for him to work with the women, and the mealybug situation had made working relations even more difficult. He confided that he and the other two field officers were working in the dark

because their superiors in the Ministry of Agriculture had not discussed the issue with them. Silence was the order of the day. Sadly, none of the agents felt comfortable enough to discuss the rumors with their superiors. They were suspicious of recent government action and believed that there was a cover-up taking place. "Trade is vital to the country," they said, and, "it was understandable that the government is not happy that the media continues to print these stories." Nevertheless, the agents were concerned that the government had not been proactive, and they feared that the pink mealy bug would eventually spread to Mesopotamia, the rich fertile growing region in St. Vincent.

"Pink Mealy Bug Stops Traffic" was the headline for a short piece in *The News* on September 27. The article informed the nation that the Barbadians, unlike the Vincentians, were "making efforts to keep the pink mealybug out of their country." The article also suggested that the Vincentian government was dragging its feet on the problem. Once more, the media accused the government of not being forthright. *The News* had "obtained a soursop fruit which had symptoms indicative of the presence of the bug. Parts of the fruit were covered with a whit thick mass, and when it was parted, a pink colour appeared." (The News, 9/27/96). The newspaper gave the sample to the Plant Protection Unit of the Agriculture Department for testing on September 24 but had not yet received a response. *The News* called the unit to ascertain the name of the pest, but staff members from the unit were not able to provide any information. Chief Technical officer Mr. Duncanson was at a meeting and was unavailable for comment. Clearly, the newspaper wanted to embarrass the government. It deliberately took a sample from the pest-infested area and was now demanding that the government acknowledge the presence of the mealybug publicly.

The Agricultural Ministry tried to maintain a veil of silence, but at times was forced to respond to the allegations made by the print media. It was precisely this attitude that provoked the strong response by the press. In the past, Mitchell's government had denied other serious allegations that it was not protecting national interest, and the press wanted to force a showdown.

It was impossible for Mitchell and his government to ignore the constant barrage by the media. Mr. Cruickshank, the Agricultural Minister, and his staff responded by denying that the mealy bug was on St. Vincent. But the media would not accept the denials, and the Prime Minister's credibility came into question. The press was suggesting that the Prime Minister was not to be trusted because of his mishandling of other crises.

Since newspapers had printed the reports, the traffickers were informed weekly by the Barbadians that they needed to speak with their government about the mealybug problem. Janet and the woman who received their shipment in Barbados were concerned that it would just be a matter of time before the Barbadians banned all produce leaving St. Vincent. The traffickers who shipped to Barbados became increasingly alarmed by the events taking place. Many called JT, the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association to ask if he had any information about the allegations made by the newspaper that declared that the pink mealy bug was present on St. Vincent. JT was cautious in his response. He told the women that he too was working in the dark because Mr. Cruickshank had not returned his calls. But he suggested to the women that they clean all produce well before shipping: "You must remove all soil from the vegetables and root

crops before you ship to Barbados. Don't give them any excuse to stop shipment" was his advice.

On the fourth of October, Barbados banned all produce leaving St. Vincent. *The Searchlight* carried the headline: "Vincy Produce Banned." The ban caused tremendous anger and fear. The traffickers and the Ministry of Agriculture blamed the newspapers and radio broadcast personality Glen Jackson for the ban. Mr. Duncanson, the Chief Agricultural Officer, accused *Searchlight* of being directly responsible for the problems facing the country... "You done make your trouble already, quote me on that." He and Mr. Cruickshank refused to discuss the matter any further with the reporters. The government had warned the media that these stories would bring great harm to the nation. Barbados was one of St. Vincent's largest trading partners, receiving approximately 40 tons of produce weekly. *Searchlight* reported that St. Vincent was the largest supplier of supplier of imported fruits and ground provisions to Barbados.

The ban on Vincentian produce to Barbados had vindicated the Vincentian government in the eyes of the public. The nation would lose substantial revenue as a consequence of the foolhardiness of the media. The farmers, the traffickers and all those involved in the trade were now severely affected. The traffickers provided a means through which farmers could increase their revenue base. Selling bananas to Windward Island Banana Development and Export Company (WIBDECO)<sup>4</sup> did not give the farmers sufficient income to maintain their families and any disruption in regional trade would have a devastating affect on the farmers in the country. Naturally, the farmers were

---

<sup>4</sup> WIBDECO was created in 1994 as a regional entity. It is involved in the commercial operations of bananas.

outraged and agreed with the government that the media had gone too far by implying that the mealybug was in St. Vincent.

The farmers were not the only ones angry with the media. Both male and female traffickers believed that the media's publications and Jackson's broadcast precipitated the actions taken by the Barbadian government. Like the farmers, the traffickers demanded that the media be punished for creating the problem facing the nation. Many called for Glen Jackson's dismissal from the National Broadcast Company. Jackson was sanctioned by the government and was not permitted to express his opinions freely.

Jackson, members of the media and many Vincentians were concerned by the government's attempt at censorship. The media believed that it had been right to publicize the issue and the censorship was a violation of the freedom of the press. Jackson continued to address the matter publicly, despite the fact that he worked directly for the government's broadcast network. He refused to allow Mitchell to dictate the terms under which he could perform his task as a talk show host. Jackson was known as a rebel and was generally liked by the public for his honesty. Nevertheless, there were many, particularly those who were directly affected by the ban, who saw him as troublemaker and rabble-rouser. But Jackson made it very clear in his broadcast that he was exposing the government's dishonesty. His talk show drew a large audience, and he had always been popular because of his controversy. Up to this point, the government had been fairly relaxed about his presentations but they were no longer willing to tolerate his criticisms. According to JT, The National Broadcast Board of Directors (NBC) warned Jackson that he was to toe the line if he wanted to remain on the radio station.

During the following weeks, the dispute between the nation and the media intensified. The mealybug story had become a national issue that raised the question about national security versus the freedom of the press. Many were divided on the issue. JT did not agree with the traffickers. He told me that Jackson was being used as a scapegoat, and as far as he was concerned, the media and Jackson, in particular, had done the right thing by bringing the problem out into the open. Now the government would be forced to admit that the bug was present in St. Vincent and perhaps the Ministry of Agriculture would now begin to put in place a program to prevent the bug from spreading to the Mesopotamia Valley.

We soon discovered how wrong we were to assume that Mitchell's government would admit to the presence of the mealybug. In a conversation with a staff member of the Ministry of Agriculture, JT was informed that action would not be taken by the government because Barbados had not directly informed St. Vincent that there was an official ban on Vincy produce. The government maintained its official position that the mealybug was not present on the island while the newspapers continued to print stories that the pest was present on the island.

*The News*, in the October 11 edition, printed a letter by J Bacchus, a community activist that supported the position of the media in its campaign to bring the mealybug issue to the public's attention by condemning the government's attack on the newspaper. "Why curse the press if they report on the evidence by the public?" Bacchus wrote that he was dismayed to hear that the Minister of Agriculture was still "seeking official confirmation on the reported temporary ban on Vincentian produce to Barbados" when in reality the Ministry had been informed by the traffickers that no produce could be sent to

Barbados. He also chided the Minister of Agriculture for not bringing the matter to the attention of the CARICOM Ministers of Agriculture since it was a regional problem that needed a regional approach.

Bacchus also took the opportunity to express his dissatisfaction with the way in which Mitchell was presently running the government. He advised the Prime Minister to get rid of most of his Ministers and appoint a body of three to run the country. Bacchus echoed the sentiments of many Vincentians who felt unhappy with the direction in which the country was moving. The mealybug problem presented an opportunity for Vincentians to voice their broader dissatisfaction.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter describes the mealybug and the difficulties Caribbean countries face in containing the pest. Despite of the fact that Grenada had lost millions in foreign exchange by 1995, the region was slow to respond to the mealybug infestation. The failure to respond immediately to the problem by the Community and its member nations illustrated how difficult it was for this group to work in concert to resolve important issues. As a consequence, the mealybug continued to spread throughout the Caribbean. Recently, the coordinated efforts of the Caribbean Research and Development Institute, the FAO and the United States Department of Agriculture have been instrumental in helping governments contain the pest. Nevertheless, according to the USDA, they had cited the bug in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Mexico (The Barbadian Saturday Advocate, 1/25/1997).

This chapter also points out the reluctance of the Vincentian government to publicly disclose the presence of the pest. It also highlights the tension between the

**Vincentian press and the State. In the next chapter, I will examine more fully the relationship between the state and the press. I also will discuss the historical background and the evolution of the Vincentian State. In so doing, I hope to explain the behavior of the state in the handling of the pink mealy bug crisis.**

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ST. VINCENT: THE STATE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), one of the least developed members of CARICOM triggered a regional crisis in 1996 when at first, it refused to disclose to its trading partners the presence of the pink mealybug on its soil. This led to the decision by Barbados, a more developed member of the Community, to ban trade with the island nation, thereby creating a small scale trading war that eventually included other member countries of CARICOM.

St. Vincent's decision not to reveal the presence of the pink mealybug to its citizens and to the Community raises several questions, particularly since this decision has had an adverse impact on trading activities within the region. Why did the government withhold this information, and what, if anything, did it stand to gain by not divulging the presence of the pest to the nation to its trading partners and to the Community as a whole? The answers to these questions lie in the historical, political and socio-economic forces that have shaped the development of modern day St. Vincent.

Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to demonstrate how these forces converge and influence the response of the actors when political and economic events occur. In other words, the response of the actors is predicated by a structure that has already been in place and to a greater extent, determines the end result. More importantly, when considering this background, it becomes clearer to understand how and why the Vincentian government and the traffickers handled the mealybug crisis the way they did.

The first part of this chapter will trace the incorporation of St. Vincent into the world political economic system and the subsequent development of the plantation economy that helped fuel the growth of capitalism. This confluence shaped the socio-cultural aspects of the island, while simultaneously creating a political-economic system that is a mixture of Westminster type parliamentarianism superimposed on a plantation system that segments the population into a peculiar class structure. The problems engendered by this system are discussed in detail including the use of slave labor and the accompanying development of the present class structure, the formation of the peasantry, the issue of land redistribution, and finally, the social and political struggles of the people prior to independence.

Part two of this chapter will examine the contemporary political, social and economic problems facing the nation. Issues such as authoritarianism and corruption will also be explored because they may explain how the present government formulates both domestic and foreign policy. Additionally, the pressure for economic and agricultural diversification as a strategy for development could have been a factor to explain the handling of the mealybug crisis.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Early Historical Development: Plantation and Peasantry**

In 1498, Columbus claimed St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the king of Spain. However, little effort was made to exert full control of the territories since Spain had little interest in developing the islands because of their limited resources. The French and the British, the other two powers in the region, were too busy extracting wealth from their

own colonies to be concerned with taking over the small islands. Thus, the Caribs,<sup>5</sup> the original inhabitants of the islands, retained some degree of autonomy more than two centuries after Columbus “discovered” the Americas. Between 1750 and 1783, the islands changed hands constantly between the British and French as they fought for hegemony in the Caribbean. Eventually, the British were formally awarded control of the islands under the treaty of 1783.

In 1795, resentful of British encroachment on their lands, the Caribs, with aid from the French, revolted and re-took control of their lands in 1795. However, by 1796, the main island and most of the Grenadines were recaptured by the British, and a year later, most of the Caribs were deported to Honduras. For several years, the French continued to control some portions of the Grenadines which today still exhibit a strong cultural, architectural, and linguistic influence of the French (Cosover, 1989).

Once the British finally took control of the islands from the French, sugar production increased significantly and the number of slaves imported to work on sugar estates rose dramatically, making sugar cane the most important crop on the island. Sugar production was initially based on slave labor and later on the labor of the peasantry. Sugar was king and through the mid-twentieth century dominated the economic structure of the island. Because St. Vincent’s economy was devoted exclusively to the production of a single export crop, a pattern of limited economic development was established early on, subsequently, placing its economy forever at the mercy of agricultural production, natural disasters and global forces.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Caribs were Amerindians who originated somewhere in South America, although it is not exactly known where on the mainland.

With the abolition of slavery in 1834, the planter class found itself in a very peculiar predicament. The former slaves refused to work on the plantations; instead, many became tenant farmers thereby creating a labor shortage. To alleviate the shortage, the planter class was forced to import workers. From 1846-1851, more than three thousand Africans, Portuguese and East Indians were introduced into the labor force as indentured servants to revitalize the agricultural sector (Marshall, 1965). However, at the end of their contracts, the immigrants, like the former slaves, became peasant farmers, destroying any hope for a sustained economic recovery.

By the end of 1851, the peasantry was made up of new immigrants and former slaves who bought and/or rented land to become small farmers. They often supplemented their income by working on the sugar estates as laborers, but plantation work did not provide enough money for subsistence, and since they were not tied to sugar production like the planter class, they were instrumental in introducing other crops, which led to the development of the arrowroot industry. Arrowroot was particularly suited to peasant agriculture because it could be grown in a wide range of environmental conditions and thrived on the sloping land characteristic of peasant holdings (Grossman 1998). When market prices increased for arrowroot in the international markets, it was then that the planter class took over production, transforming arrowroot from a secondary cash crop to a primary crop. The crop diversification instituted by the peasantry created a strong domestic and export market for ground provisions, fruits, vegetables and meats. By the 1930s, the character of the Vincentian economy had become transformed with the peasantry now being its backbone (Brizan 1984).

Despite their contributions, the peasants were still limited to cultivating crops on their small plots of land that they owned or rented, mostly on the mountain slopes. Unfortunately, the vast majority remained landless because the planter class used its influence to get legislation passed to protect its privilege control over land (Thomas 1988). Because the availability land was so limited, the peasants lived in a state of poverty, and responded by agitating against the plantocracy and the British government. To counteract unrest among landless peasants, during the 1800s, the British government developed peasant land schemes in an effort to redistribute some of the land. However, most of the fertile lands still remained in the hands of the planter class, which did little to alleviate the poor economic conditions of the peasantry.

As with other land redistribution schemes, the allotment of land did not provide for better subsistence because the British Crown lands and bankrupt plantations sold to some of the peasantry were not particularly fertile. As a result, unrest continued to increase during this time period. Furthermore, the redistribution was more structural than substantive and the concentration of land wealth increased among the merchant plantocracy class (Brizan 1984). Hence, the land schemes failed because the planter class feared losing control over a servile labor force and over the government (Gomes 1985).

By the 1930s, on average, peasants owned less than 2 ½ acres of land, and by 1972, the government statistics showed that 85% of farms owned by the Vincentian peasantry were still less than five acres. More importantly, 50% of them owned less than an acre. On the other hand, the planter class retained control of 59% of the best lands, and most of these farms exceeded more than one hundred acres (HeyerYoung 1993). Herein lies the problem: St. Vincent is mainly mountainous with only a few acres of arable land

that can support peasant land redistribution and maintain large estates that would lead to economies of scale.

The Minister of Agriculture in his Parliamentary address on December 11, 1996, discussed the issue of land reform. He stated that land reform is a priority of the Vincentian government and that the bulk of agricultural land will eventually be in the hands of the poor people. For example, he discussed the accomplishment of The Orange Hills Estate land redistribution scheme. The 1,400-acre Orange Hills Estate, nationalized by government in 1985, provided land for 435 families giving each of them two-to-seven acres. In addition, he mentioned that the Richmond and Wallibou Estates were also divided into farms, benefiting approximately 445 families. Because these estates went bankrupt, or were bought out by the government, the land distribution program was carried out without antagonizing the plantocracy. Nonetheless, it did not change the land distribution significantly because the best lands still remain in the hands of the old planter class.

Land distribution was not the only problem facing St. Vincent during the first four decades of the twentieth century. The peasantry was ignored as a class by the colonial government, and their poor social conditions were not addressed. Housing was substandard, forcing families to live in small huts sometimes measuring approximately 12 feet by 8 feet. There was also a lack of potable water, electricity and proper sanitation facilities and inadequate health and educational services. All of these factors contributed to rampant malnutrition and increased social discord, as the neglected peasantry was left to fend for themselves by both the colonial and metropolitan governments (Duncan 1963).

## **Development of Organized Labor and Political Parties**

By the late 1930s, there was great labor unrest and uprising in the region against the colonial state and the local ruling classes. Between May 1934 and February 1939, widespread revolt on sugar estates extended to Trinidad, St. Kitts, Jamaica, Barbados and Guyana. Rural and urban workers demanded higher wages and better social and working conditions (Green 1990; Thomas 1988). It was from this general unrest that the trade labor movement and the affiliation of many general unions with political parties emerged (Green 1990).

In 1935, rioting broke out in St. Vincent when the governor tried to impose a tax on the luxuries of the poor--beer, tobacco, cigarettes, and matches-- while exempting the automobile, which was the luxury of the wealthy (Heyer Young 1993). For the first time in its history, the small Vincentian middle class community -tradespeople, teachers and other professionals, joined the peasant farmers/laborers- in protesting the new tax and even physically attacked government officials. The middle class, from that point on, assumed a political dominance and to a larger extent, became the voice of the uneducated peasant/laborer class.

In response to the riot of 1935, the following year, St. Vincent's first political party, The Workingmen's Cooperative, emerged under the leadership of George MacIntosh, a pharmacist and member of the middle class. MacIntosh, who subscribed to Garvism, believed that unions were not the solution to the farmer's plight. In fact, a political party could be more effective by pressing for economic, political and social change. In 1937, The Workingmen's Cooperative succeeded in forcing the local government to institute political reform. The number of elected representatives to the

legislative council was increased from three to five members, and property qualifications for holding office was also changed. Additionally, more of the poor were granted voting rights. As a result, MacIntosh and his party won four out of the five elected seats because of a growing nationalistic, pro-independence sentiment among the local population and the growth of working-class consciousness (Thomas 1988).

The riots and political agitation by the working class forced the British government to establish the West India Royal Commission in order to investigate the social and economic crisis of various colonial governments. A preliminary report, issued in 1940, condemned the conditions of the peasantry throughout the Caribbean and recommended among other things, that a minimum wage be implemented throughout the area to improve their standard of living (Brizan 1984). However, WWII disrupted the implementation of further improvement as the colonial state was now preoccupied with conditions on the home front.

The peasants continued to experience tremendous hardships, in spite of the wage increase because it did not have a significant impact on changing their standard of living. The poor felt the need to support unions that would help them increase their standard of living. This may explain the development of the first trade union in St. Vincent during the mid-1940s as workers demanded better wages (Duncan 1963). Membership was opened to the working and middle classes since both suffered from the inequities of the class structure. The middle class, consisting of shopkeepers, tradespeople, peasant planters, teachers, nurses and office workers, joined the day laborers, cooks and domestics as union members. However, this alliance did not last as the class structure became more differentiated over the ensuing years.

In order to improve conditions, the Vincentian government introduced a ten-year development scheme. Funds were allocated for slum clearance, village relocation, building of new schools, training of teachers and nurses as well as for health reform. Ebenezer Duncan (1963), a Vincentian historian, implies that these measures were adopted by the local government out of a sense of duty and obligation to the Vincentian population. Consequently, these disturbances shook the very foundations of Britain's colonial power forcing them to redress these issues in the hope of defusing agitation for independence (Thomas 1988).

By 1951, labor unrest continued as workers pushed for further improvements. The political environment changed when MacIntosh, after being a representative for the poor, converted to the politics of the elite. To fill the power vacuum, Ebenezer Joshua, a teacher, emerged as the champion of the poor. Joshua, a former oil field worker in Trinidad and a product of the working class, had been influenced by Grenadian Uriah Butler, the leader of the oil field workers in Trinidad. Upon his return to St. Vincent in 1949, Joshua, using tactics that he had learned from Butler, mobilized the agricultural workers. By 1950, he had formed the Agricultural and General Workers Union to represent the interest of both the agricultural workers and general workers of St. Vincent. For the first time in the country's history, there was continuous action by workers against both the planter and merchant class.

Eventually, Joshua used his position as head of the trade union movement to establish the People's Political Party (PPP) in 1951. The party addressed issues that were essential to the well being of the poor such as inadequate pay, poor working conditions

and the lack of child labor laws. Consequently, Joshua received the overwhelming support of the Vincentian underclass.

Although the Party represented the poor, the Party's platform was still influenced by issues of color and religious affiliation. To be socially acceptable, Brizan argues that one had to be either fair-skinned, straight-haired, "good-looking" or reasonably wealthy (Brizan 1984). However, Joshua was none of the above. In fact, he was quite the opposite; he was poor, dark-skinned and a "Shaker."<sup>6</sup> However, Joshua was accepted because he understood their plight better than most and became a symbol of hope, an answer to their prayers and their "Moses" leading them out of bondage.

From 1957 through 1966, The PPP led the fight for workers' rights and colonial independence while politically the party controlled the majority of parliamentary seats. The party was challenged throughout this period, and in 1955, the St. Vincent Labour Party (SVLP) emerged to represent the interests of the elite, better educated blacks and professional class. The party's leader conservative lawyer Milton Cato was interested in maintaining status quo. He was clearly pro-business, pro-middle class and pro-dominant class. Interestingly, one could argue that Cato was "the Savior" to the middle and upper class as Joshua was "the Moses" to the poor.

According to Vincentian political scientist Kenneth John, the division between the parties was superficial. He states that none of the parties had a clear ideology and practically stood for the same thing. The parties preached the same story and shared the same political platform: advocating for reform, better living conditions and independence

---

<sup>6</sup> A Shaker refers to a fundamentalist religious sect.

from Britain. John also argues that in terms of educational qualification, shade gradation, or economic indices, the country was about eighty percent lower class. And since both parties shared the country evenly, it was obvious that both were supported by a substantial portion of the working class (Flambeau 1966).

### **Economic Changes during the 1950s**

During this period of political upheaval, the country also experienced significant economic changes as a result of the decline in sugar prices internationally. In 1953, the government introduced bananas as a new export crop as a way to revive the economy. Bananas were believed to be more suitable for peasant cultivation than sugar cane because they did not require any large amount of land. Therefore, peasants were encouraged to produce bananas for the export market (Gonsalves 1994).

Workers' wages increased because of labor agitation, and according to Duncan this resulted in the eventual collapse of the sugar industry (Duncan 1963). However, the collapse of the sugar industry was not solely based on worker demands. Low prices offered on the world market and the failure of the planter class to fully modernize the production system were also partially responsible for its demise (Mandle 1973). Consequently, when various sugar estates became insolvent, many small farmers were able to purchase land cheaply.

Despite these economic changes, the relationship between the working class and the dominant class remained fundamentally the same. The working class continued to be doubly exploited by the domestic and international forces of production because the surplus value of their labor was appropriated first by the local banana associations and then by the multinational corporations. As in the past, banana production brought small

farmers in direct contact with monopoly capital through the Vincentian Marketing Board, the only legal exporter, which was under exclusive contract to the British conglomerate, Geest Industries Ltd.

Nevertheless, social conditions on the island continued to improve for many peasant farmers. The Central Housing and Planning Authority implemented programs to clear slums. New housing and commercial properties were developed in the towns, and roads were paved in the countryside in order to allow easier transport of agricultural goods to the major port town. Sanitation improved, and the number of schools increased to accommodate the growing population. Overall, Vincentians' standard of living had improved markedly since the beginning of the labor movement and the political activities of the working class (Duncan [1941] 1970).

### **The Move for National Independence**

Between 1957-1983, the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) moved from a member in the short lived Federation of Caribbean States to associate status and finally to independence. The Federation was a compromise between the British who wanted administrative efficiency and centralization, and the West Indians who wanted independence. This federation of islands lasted from 1957 until 1961 when the already independent Jamaica left the group because of political differences with Trinidad (Knight & Palmer 1989). As a consequence, most of the larger islands, namely Trinidad, Barbados and Guyana received their independence by 1966. The smaller islands, such as St. Vincent, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, etc., which were considered too small to survive on their own, were given associate status by the British government. Eventually, with some exceptions, most of the islands in the British Caribbean became independent by 1983.

Throughout this period of political upheaval in the region, the PPP and the SVLP fought for control of the Parliament, although the local governor and appointed council members could veto many of their programs. The PPP retained the majority of parliamentary seats until 1966 when the party was defeated by the SVLP. As a result of political patronage and the general disenchantment of Vincentians, Joshua, who had once been an activist for the poor, was now conservative, business-oriented and corrupt. Over the years, he had consolidated his power base and had demobilized the trade union movement paying only lip service to the masses (Heyer Young 1993; Thomas 1988). Following the defeat of the PPP, Cato dominated the political scene and guided the country into independence in 1979. He became St. Vincent's first Prime Minister.

Cato was strongly challenged in 1975 by James Mitchell, the founder of the National Democratic Party (NDP) and in 1979 by Ralph Gonsalves, the leader of the United People's Movement (UPM). Nevertheless, Cato remained in power until 1984 when the SVLP was resoundingly defeated by one of the largest voter turnout in Vincentian history. More than 80% of the population supported the NDP, which resulted in a victory of nine of the thirteen parliamentary seats (Cosover 1989). Although, Joshua and Cato's platform differed initially, by the end of their political careers, both were accused of corruption and gross mismanagement. They left a legacy and a political structure that was guided not only by corruption but also authoritarianism, patronage and favoritism.

## **THE MITCHELL ADMINISTRATION: CONTEMPORARY VINCENTIAN SOCIETY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY: 1984-PRESENT**

The political system in St. Vincent has been one of the most stable in the Caribbean. The struggle for power and control of the political machinery often leads members of the various parties to defect and establish new parties. Mitchell, for example, an agronomist, began his career in 1966 as a member of the St. Vincent Labor Party (SVLP), and then became an independent candidate for Parliament in 1972 following a disagreement with the Cato government. Subsequently, Mitchell and the PPP formed a coalition government until it fell apart in 1974.

Mitchell remained independent until 1975, and thereafter, formed the pro-Western National Democratic Party (NDP). His slogan “it is time for a change” signaled the end of corruption and mismanagement in government and the NDP gained the overwhelming support of the middle and working class. In his 1984 campaign, Mitchell pledged to revise the tax code, encourage savings and investments, broaden the manufacturing base and reduce the government’s participation in production. His platform also included infrastructural and human development, agricultural diversification, land reform and the development of a stronger tourist sector. Mitchell, who had been called the “favorite son,” won the election by a landslide and became Prime Minister in 1984.

Soon after the election, Mitchell assumed the position of Minister of Finance, Planning and Development so that he could have direct control over the economy. In so doing, he managed to reduce the country’s deficit, tighten domestic spending, increase agricultural exports, divest the government of state run enterprises and institute land

reform without antagonizing landed Vincentians. His success was due to his ability to sell farmland from estates that were bankrupted or sold to the government (Cosover 1989).

The success of Mitchell's domestic programs during his first term ensured the consolidation of the NDP's power base for fifteen years without any opposition. Solely male dominated, the NDP controlled twelve of the fifteen seats, giving Mitchell a four-to-one majority in Parliament until the United Labor Party (ULP) won seven Parliamentary seats in 1998. Between 1984-1998, according to R. Gonsalves, a ranking member of the opposition, Prime Minister Mitchell has centralized and personalized power to the point where he served almost as absolute ruler. Gonsalves contends that Mitchell's firm grip on the central institutions and the justice system created an environment that may have led the Prime Minister and his Ministers to abuse their power (Gonsalves 1993).

The United States' Department of State in its 1996 report on the Caribbean also suggests that corruption may exist in the Vincentian government. The report states that over the past year that both domestic and foreign funds earned from drug trafficking and other crimes are laundered in St. Vincent. There have also been allegations of illegal payments and loans to officials, and offshore activity has been conducted without any effective regulations. The report further states that local officials administer the offshore industry, not the Eastern Caribbean Central Banks (Unity Press March 29, 1996).

Recent events in St. Vincent may also support allegations of wrongdoing and mismanagement. For example, The Ottley Hall Marina Scandal in 1995 focused attention on the government's solicitation of foreign investment. Mitchell had managed to persuade the country that an Italian construction firm had agreed to invest in the construction of a small boat basin. This new marina would allow moorings, supplies and

repair services to be available to the international yachting community while at the same time would provide jobs and business opportunities for the country. Mitchell, without the approval of Parliament, guaranteed a thirty million-dollar loan needed by the Italian firm to complete the project. However, the marina project was never completed, and St. Vincent must now repay loans to British banks even though the Italians defaulted on their agreement. Sadly, the country has been saddled with a thirty-year repayment schedule, and further pressure has been added to an already stressed economy.

As more stories of impropriety surfaced, Vincentians began to question the ethics and morality of the Mitchell Administration. The Parnell Campbell scandal of 1995 further supported rumors of corruption. Former Attorney General Campbell was accused of accepting large personal loans from an offshore bank but was never sanctioned or penalized by the government (The Political Handbook of the World 1995). James Thomas, the head of the Traffickers and Small Business Association, Anselmo Spencer, a former member of the NDP and Patsy Johnson, Secretary for the Farmer's Union, all claimed that that Mitchell responded to the scandal by commenting that "boys will be boys." It reduced the Attorney General's action to the level of a prank that was an expected and acceptable behavior among men. They believed that the PM's reluctance to investigate the matter believed added credence to the popular contention that he too was clearly dishonest.<sup>7</sup>

Adding fuel to the fire, in 1996, the United Labor Party accused the Attorney General and Minister of Justice Carlyle Dougan of authorizing clearance of a fraudulent

---

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, Spencer and Johnson and I had several discussions in which they voiced their belief that the Prime Minister and his Ministers were corrupt.

check for \$400,000 deposited on a state run National Commercial Bank to the account of Bienvenido Bensocome, a citizen of the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, it was brought to light that Dougan had also accepted \$30,000 in local payments from Mr. Bensocome as part of a land purchase agreement. Mitchell again promised Vincentians a full investigation, but as of this writing, has failed to live up to his words. Dougan, like his predecessor, was never penalized and presently, still continues to practice law in St. Vincent (The Europa World Year Book, 1996).

The aforementioned are not the only reasons why Vincentians are suspicious of Mitchell. They believe that he has become wealthier since becoming Prime Minister, and cite as evidence the number of properties that he has acquired, including the Frangipani Hotel on the Grenadine Island of Bequia. Vincentians also believe that there is a direct connection between the construction of the Bequia Airport and Mitchell's desire to increase the tourist trade on the island. As far as they are concerned, tourism guarantees that Mitchell will continue to reap financial benefits long after he leaves office. Although there is only circumstantial evidence to corroborate these suspicions, Vincentians strongly believe in Mitchell's corruption.

Notwithstanding his problems at home, Mitchell is highly respected regionally. He has developed strong relations with his neighbors in the Eastern Caribbean in order to build strong alliances. He has been a strong supporter of regionalism and has pushed for regional political integration (The Political Handbook of the World, 1996). As a member of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)<sup>8</sup> since 1981, Mitchell has been

---

<sup>8</sup> The OECS a collective union was created in 1981 to support the smaller states. This organization established its own Central Bank which regulates the EC dollar.

one of the principal advocates for Eastern Caribbean unity claiming that only a unitary state could develop a strong indigenous economy for the small countries of the region (The Europa World Year Book 1996). He believes that the OECS model could later be adopted by CARICOM in order to create a larger unitary state or supranational body that would articulate the interest of the region.

As a result of his strong ties to the region, Mitchell supports the policies of OECS, as long as he is able to get support for St. Vincent. For example, the Prime Minister recently endorsed the decision by the OECS to increase the head tax on visitors of cruise ships in order for him to facilitate a loan from the World Bank for environmental purposes (Anthony 1997). Mitchell also supports the OECS in hopes of creating a positive image for himself in the spirit of mutual cooperation. He recently backed the bid by Barbados to become a member of the OECS, in spite of the fact that the Barbadian government suspended trade with St. Vincent in 1996, as a consequence of the mealybug crisis. The Barbadian government also accused officials in Mitchell's Administration of aiding and abetting Barbadian drug dealers with the ganja trade between the two islands (*Sunday Sun*, Jan., 1999).

Mitchell also has tried to create a better relationship with the United States after the American government stated that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) were second to Jamaica in marijuana production (*The Vincentian* 1996; *Newsweek* 1997). The United States government suggested that he is not doing enough to rid his Administration of corruption. The United States has not accused the Prime Minister directly of being responsible, but these accusations may have prompted Mitchell to ask for assistance from the US in the war against drugs. They may have also prompted his endorsement of the

**ShipRiders Agreement, which allows the US to monitor and send patrol boats into the Caribbean waters to fight drug trafficking.**

**Nevertheless, Vincentian relations with the United States had been friendly until 1996 when the Clinton Administration stepped up its campaign against the European Union's (EU) trading policies with its former colonies. A trading crisis has now been triggered because of the United States' demands for the EU to discontinue giving favorable status to bananas coming from their former colonies. This dispute has escalated to the point where Mitchell and other CARICOM leaders have openly expressed their anger and resentment towards the US. Some Caribbean leaders believe that banana producers, mostly the peasantry, will be hurt most by this on-going crisis, encouraging many of them to turn to marijuana production or to trafficking in Colombian cocaine in order to make money (*Newsweek* April 28, 1997).**

**More importantly, officials of the Mitchell Administration have voiced their concerns regarding the increase in marijuana production on the island and fear that it will worsen in ensuing years (*Sunday Sun* January, 1999). Therefore, Prime Minister Mitchell is heading one of the delegations to Europe in order to secure the future of the banana industry. As of this writing, the EU's trade official Pascal Lamy is still attempting to find a resolution to the problem (*Searchlight* May 26, 2000).**

**St. Vincent, like other resource-poor Caribbean countries, now finds itself under further economic pressure as a result of the banana war. The Vincentian economy is still highly dependent on agricultural exports; therefore, any threat to this sector will have major repercussions on the socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants. Although tourism and manufacturing have been growing steadily over the past fifteen years, these**

other sectors of the economy cannot offset the loss of impending revenues created by the banana crisis. Efforts by the government to diversify the economy have had minimal success, due in part to poor infrastructure and the changing nature of international capital.

Mitchell has been enthusiastic about increasing direct foreign investment, in accordance with the requisites of international capitalism and being consistent with the policies of the Caribbean Community (Gonsalves 1994). Using the Puerto Rican model, which instituted "Industrialization by Invitation,"<sup>9</sup> Mitchell solicited foreign capital to build The Industrial Park, a tax free zone built in Kingstown during the mid-1980s. However, although the state offered cheap non-unionized labor, little government regulation and tax breaks, most companies still left after their ten year contracts expired in search of still cheaper labor and bigger tax breaks. Today, the Industrial Park sits idle with only a few local companies using the facilities. Despite the setback, Mitchell continues to search for foreign investors and has facilitated the growth of offshore banking. Mitchell's foreign dealings lend further credence to speculation that the nation has been involved in the international money laundering trade.

The Prime Minister is still encouraging multinational conglomerates to bring their electronic billing industry to St. Vincent. However, unlike Barbados, St. Vincent does not have the infrastructure and highly skilled work force necessary to provide these services. Nevertheless, Mitchell is continuously attempting alliances in the international community in hopes of bringing jobs to the country.

---

<sup>9</sup> Also known as Operation Bootstrap was launched in 1947 to attract industry from the US that would employ large number of workers. It also provided a ten year tax relief.

The Prime Minister's effort to create jobs is understandable. Seventy percent of the Vincentian population was under 30; as a result, the nation's employment capacity is unduly burdened by young, unskilled and poorly educated youth. Presently, 43,531 persons are employed, 35.9% of whom are women<sup>10</sup> (St. Vincent Statistical Office, CGCED 1996). The unemployment rate is one of the highest in the region: 19.8% consisting mostly of women and young adults between the ages of 15-24 (CGCED 1996). The vast majority of the unemployed is unskilled, and they are forced to depend on seasonal agricultural work and/or the informal sector to make a living.

Female workers who are most often restricted to employment in the informal sectors are subjected to low wages, with minimal or no benefits. Even when they are employed in the formal sector, women still tend to suffer from wage discrimination. Women who make up 13.9% of agricultural workers are paid on average \$3.00 per day, while male agricultural workers receive \$3.85 for the same day's work. Unfortunately, women have not fared much better in the industrial sector, earning only \$3.85 daily compared to men earning \$5.00 daily. These figures are particularly disturbing since approximately 40% of all Vincentians households are headed by females. Consequently, women have been forced to develop survival strategies including strong family support networks, petty commodity trading or trafficking to maintain the family structure (French 1994; Cosover 1989).

Women's groups and labor unions have made efforts to correct wage disparities, however, they have had little success in changing the wage imbalances due to women's

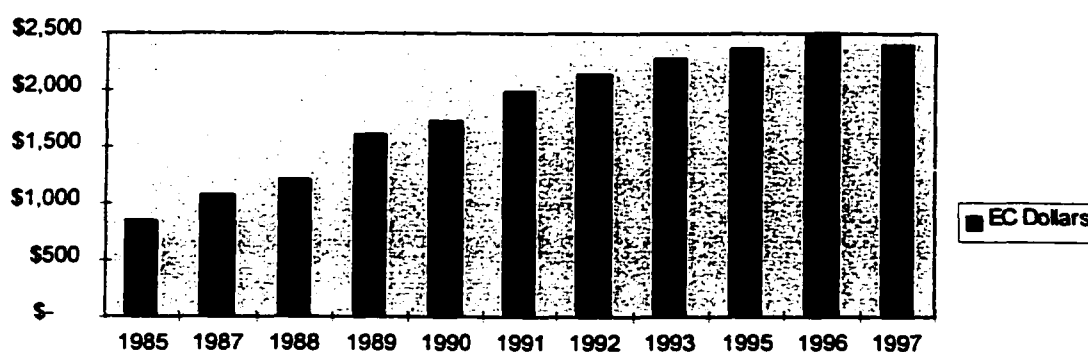
---

<sup>10</sup> 50% of the women work in the informal economy.

inferior status in Caribbean society (French, 1994). Women are commonly relegated to the bottom rung and are generally counted among the poorest segments of the population.

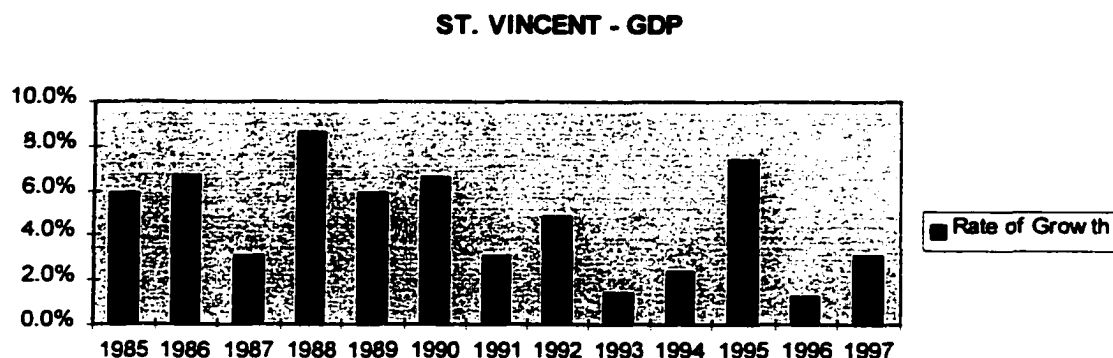
Notwithstanding, the Mitchell Administration has still been credited with moving the economy in a positive direction. The state, under his tutelage, has directed and managed the economy fairly successfully, despite a small domestic market, lack of natural resources, poor infrastructure and an elite class that does not invest in the country. Between 1985 and 1989, and 1990 and 1997, the World Bank estimated that the gross national product (GNP) increased by an average rate of 4.8% and 1.8% per year respectively. Per capita income increased from \$850EC to \$2,400EC between 1985 and 1997. Regarding the gross domestic product (GDP), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated an increase of an average of 4.5% per year between 1985-96 (see below).

**St. Vincent - GNP - Per Capita**



GDP figures for 1997 suggest that the economy continues to grow at an annual rate of 3.13% (St. Vincent Statistical Office 1999, The Europa Year Book 1984-2001, The Political Handbook of the World 1988-1999). With the World Bank and IMF moving St.

Vincent into a middle-tiered economy, the country is now ineligible for grants and must rely on loans for development.



The nation has made significant advances economically since the late 1980s. However, economic development remains a major concern for St. Vincent due to the island's foreign exchange, which is contingent on agricultural exports, a very small manufacturing base and a burgeoning tourist industry. Tourism has been growing steadily during the 1990s, contributing 2.5% of the GDP and employing 4% of the population. The manufacturing sector contributed only 8% of GDP and employed 8.5% of the labor force, mostly in the garment industry and the assembly of electronic parts, while the agricultural sector contributed 12.7% of the GDP and employed 25.1% of all workers. The principal cash crop, bananas, contributed 42.2% of the value of domestic merchandise exports. According to the IMF, agricultural GDP increased in real terms by 37.75% in 1995 (The Europa Year Book 1996).

Because agriculture remains the predominant sector of the economy, the Mitchell Administration introduced other crops in hopes that they would reduce the island's dependence on banana production. In 1996, The European Union via the STABEX Fund

gave the country financial and technical assistance to diversify the economy. This is because the preferential quota system allowing bananas from the Caribbean to enter European Markets under special concessions would expire. The quota system has been effectively challenged by the US; therefore, bananas may no longer have preferential access to the European nations. In anticipation of the loss of banana revenue, Mitchell has been focusing his attention on the tourism as a means of enhancing and revitalizing the economy.

Tourism is touted by the Mitchell government as the new savior of the economy. In his address at the St. Vincent Community College, the Prime Minister stated that St. Vincent and the Grenadines have been blessed with gems of islands, beautiful climate and good weather to profit from tourism. He also noted that tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world and that the multi-island nation of SVG is strategically located to reap the maximum benefits from it (*The Vincentian*, February 14, 1997). As a result, Mitchell has been courting the international community to build and develop the tourist industry, particularly on the main island St. Vincent. The Mitchell Administration believes that if tourism expands, then the economy will shift gears and be less dependent on bananas.

The tourist industry has been more successful in the Grenadines, legendary for its beauty than on the main island St. Vincent. These islands serve as a niche market, primarily attracting the yatching world and the very wealthy. In spite of the tourist market, the tourist trade has not provided much revenue for St. Vincent since most of the businesses are foreign owned and most of the profits being siphoned off to the home country. Tourism does nothing to develop the local infrastructure because of the high

costs of creating roads and providing other services. Hence, the efficacy of the tourist trade contributing to the development of the country is still questionable.

The role of tourism is perilous as it depends on a stable world economy. Recent world recessions have left Caribbean countries in a worse condition since many have relied on the tourist trade to maintain a viable and sound economy. Any future global economic downturns would lead fickle Caribbean economies already dependent on the vagaries of world financial markets into possible economic disaster.

Despite these problems, Mitchell continues to push forward with his plan to increase tourism by building a new ship berth, hoping to encourage tourist cruise lines to include St. Vincent on their stopover in the region. He has also supported the construction of new luxury hotels on the main island, St. Vincent, in anticipation of a growing tourist sector. However, due to the lack of an international airport and a poorly developed infrastructure, he has not been successful in attracting tourists other than those who are already involved in the specialized market of the Grenadines.

From 1996 - 1998, the country's tourist industry suffered severe setbacks as a result of several murders on the Grenadine islands of Bequia and Mustique; and the highly publicized murder on the main island St. Vincent of a South African woman on her yacht. The government was blamed for the poor handling of these murders by family members of the victims and the international community. The US States Department issued a travel advisory to its citizens in 1997, accusing the Vincentian justice system of not being able to handle crimes effectively. With his plan for economic development highly dependent on tourism, Mitchell cannot afford negative publicity. He has been

working diligently to create a positive image of the island by stepping up his advertisement tourism campaign in travel magazines.

## **PEOPLE**

### **The Elite Class**

The legacy of slavery and colonialism informs the social relations on the island. Class, color, pedigree and wealth continue to determine the position of the 110, 000 members of the Vincentian Community. True wealth remains concentrated in the hands of 2% (2,200) of the population. This group is known as the ruling elite, comprised of the old plantocracy (the Creole whites), a small group of blacks, coloreds, immigrants and members of the international community. Although their power and influence cross the entire social structure, each group has a particular sphere of influence and control. The professional class dominates the legal, medical, government and educational bureaucracy, and the Creole whites or the members of the old plantocracy class maintain their dominance in land holding, real estate, as well as the retail, wholesale and import/export sectors.

The members of the old white plantocracy, many of whom do not have professional training, owe their wealth, prestige and power to their antecedents. They continue to exert power and control over many of the island's resources. A small number of these families use their extensive agricultural holdings to grow bananas and have diversified their production to include the cultivation of exotic flowers for the international market. As in the past, this group remains heavily dependent on the land to earn revenues, subsequently, making itself vulnerable to the vagaries of the marketplace as well as to natural disasters including the mealybug infestation.

Although the estates have been modernized, farm work is still labor intensive as I witnessed on my visit to the Hadley Estate.<sup>11</sup> The labor force comprises mostly women who do the difficult job of weeding while the men work with machinery or work in supervisory roles. Similar to female workers in other parts of the world, Vincentian women are perceived as docile, more flexible, less demanding and more willing to work long hours for less pay (Osirim 1995).

Creole whites have retained their social distance from the majority of the black population, mingling occasionally or only when absolutely necessary. The members of the plantocracy marry within their home territory, but will sometimes marry whites from Europe, The US and Canada, thereby ensuring that their social position developed during slavery remains intact (Douglass 1995; M.G. Smith 1988). Children are aware of their lineage and are expected to conform to the standards imposed by their class status even though they attend school and play with children from the other social classes.

The professional and bureaucratic groups, unlike the plantocracy, are black or have mixed heritage. Many are educated at the University of the West Indies or in the United States, Canada or England, where they are prepared to assume positions of power and authority within the political, banking, and bureaucratic structures on the island. Their power comes directly from control over government resources, and together with the plantocracy class, wield authority and exercise influence on all aspects of Vincentian life.

---

<sup>11</sup> I visited the Estate in June 1996 and had a conversation with Mr. Hadley. The estate employs mostly women to plant and take care of flowers for export.

Marriage for this segment of the elite class is also based on family, color and pedigree. Although many would deny that color influences their choice of mates, those of a darker hue tend to marry light-complexioned blacks. These “dark-light” marriages enable the elite to escape the stigma associated with blackness while, at the same time secures the social standing of any offspring. Their children are sent to the best private schools on the island and in so doing, preserve the existing class structure concomitant with the desired levels of association, education and income (Douglass 1995). M.G. Smith in his study of Grenada points out that the members of the middle tier group are distinguished by their emphasis on observance of “white” cultural norms. He also states that the dominant conditions and correlates of social status are kinship, descent, marriage, color, association, behavior, organizational role, education and income in that order (Smith, 1988).

Politically, the upper class is conservative. They have generally supported the Mitchell Administration until very recently when some of them broke with the National Democratic Party and joined forces with the opposition, the United Labor Party. For example, Ken Boyer, owner of several companies and formerly an ardent supporter of Mitchell, became so disenchanted by his policies that he joined the opposition party. Interestingly, several informants, including members of the opposition party, claimed that the break with Mitchell happened because he refused to grant Boyer any further financial concessions. Moreover, my informants claimed that the growing number of scandals, the present state of the economy, the general discontent among Vincentians and the recent mealybug crisis compelled this group to rethink its position vis-à-vis the present government. Many from the elite group who broke rank with the party, openly criticized

the Prime Minister for mismanagement and corruption and urged Vincentians to vote for the opposition.

The upper class lives in distinct sections on the island. The professional and bureaucrats live in suburban areas such as Cane Garden or Villa surrounding the capital city of Kingstown. The members of the plantocracy, on the other hand, still reside on estates located in the rural sector of the island, while many diplomats and foreign nationals stay on the Grenadine Islands of Bequia, Mustique and Union, where they maintain palatial homes. In recent years, the homes of the elite on the main island St. Vincent have become much more elaborate and ostentatious, reflecting a growing inequality of wealth that mirrors worldwide trends. Furnishings are often bought from abroad with families sporting the latest cars and clothing, either imported or purchased on their frequent vacations. In essence, members of this class, like their counterparts in England, Canada and the United States, are set apart from others within their respective societies by their standard of living, attitudes, and behaviors ([c.f. Philpott 1973:46] Rubenstein, 1987; Heyer Young, 1993).

### **The Middle Class**

The middle class is much larger than the elite, but is still only 8-10% (8,000 - 10,000) of the Vincentian population. This group is slightly more racially diverse than the upper class and includes blacks, brown Indians and some whites of Barbadian descent. A middle class status can be achieved through education, employment and inheritance. Nevertheless, pedigree is very important, and although there is social mobility, people from poor families who gain middle class status are constantly reminded of their humble origins. Traffickers, for example, who have achieved financial success, are not accepted

as members of this class because they lack the family background and respectability necessary for them to be recognized by this class (Clarke, 1957; Katzin, 1960; Durant-Gonzalez 1985). Many traffickers during my investigation have repeatedly informed me that they would not be invited to the better homes in St. Vincent. Additionally, members of the middle and upper class commended me for working with the women, but told me that I needed to be rescued from that element.

Middle class lifestyle is tempered by an ideology that is rooted in notions of what is proper and acceptable conduct. Marriage rather than consensual unions is preferred; proper speech and dress are essential. Children are socialized to observe the proprieties of their class with the appropriate pedigree, including proper speech, proper dress and the right schools. Generally, behavior is guarded; loudness and boisterousness are frowned upon because these are social characteristics inherent to the poor. Moreover, parents spend a significant portion of family income on education and in so doing, ensure the social position for their offspring.

Within the group, social cliques are based not only on family and educational background but also on color gradations. However, issues of race do not take on the same ominous tone as in the United States. Color and gradations of color are still significant because it partially determines people's social standing within Vincentian society. It is easier for light-skinned blacks to find suitable marriage partners as well as employment. This is not to say that dark-skinned blacks are excluded from all significant positions in St. Vincent. On the contrary, the bureaucracy and the professional arenas are replete with people of a darker hue.

Most of the middle class work in government (the largest employer) as civil servants, clerical workers, nurses, middle managers, teachers and technicians. The family income on average is low, and most family members work to make ends-meet because the cost of living is high. Rents and mortgages are costly for modest sized housing located near Kingstown or in the rural areas. Phone services and other utilities absorb a significant portion of their income, as does their preference for imported foods and clothing, which are considered essential for maintaining a middle class lifestyle. Economically, they live a precarious existence because most depend on government employment to survive.

This group has always been politically active and has been strong supporters of the NDP until the 1998 elections, when the members also backed the ULP in its bid to take over the majority of seats in Parliament. Educational spending, a lack of support for the workers of the English base Cable and Wireless Company during the fight for workers' rights, and the government's poor handling of the mealybug incident which affected both small and larger farmers alike were some of the issues that propelled the group to back another party. Unless Mitchell addresses the needs of this class, he may no longer be able to count on them to keep the NDP in power.

### **The Lower Class**

The lower class consists of the poor, comprising at least 88% (96,800) of the population. The majority is dark in complexion, although the group includes Caribs, Portuguese and whites of Barbadian descent. Many live in rural areas of the country and

work the land. The Vincentian poor<sup>12</sup> are the second poorest group in the Caribbean with an average per capita income of only \$2,280 a year (CGCED, 1996).

Although much more expressive in their speech and behavior, the poor nonetheless subscribe to elite/middle class values. Marriage is the ideal; however, many women in this class enter into common-law relationships or have a “visiting friendship” that does not have the stability or respectability of legal marriages (Toney, 1997). Because many of these young women are undereducated and jobless, they continue to live at home with parents, single mothers, grandmothers or with a member of the extended family. Unmarried women are often forced to raise children without the assistance of males, since many are “absentee fathers” who generally have dalliances in more than one household at the same time. As a result, at least 39 % of Vincentian households have become matrifocal forcing Vincentian women to develop strategies for survival. For example, some women will have children with more than one man hoping that one of them will be responsible enough to help them maintain the family while others rely on the informal economy to provide income for the family. The traffickers, the majority of whom are poor single mothers, travel weekly to sell agricultural products to neighboring islands to ensure that their families are taken care of.

Family members, particularly children, suffer the most under these conditions. Limited resources make it difficult for mothers to feed, clothe and send their children to school. Even though mothers understand the importance of education and encourage their young to study and work hard, they are at a disadvantage because they lack the money to

---

<sup>12</sup> Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

purchase books and hire tutors to prepare their children for the competitive common entrance exams.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, many children must work in the fields during the banana harvest and older daughters are expected to lend a hand in raising younger siblings at the expense of their own education. On average, most poor children leave school after the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, making it even more difficult for them to find work in an already unfavorable job environment (CGCED, 1996). As a result, the existing class structure is not only supported and reinforced by the educational system, but also by the economic conditions of these families as well.

Economically, members of the lower class work as farm laborers, dock workers, domestic workers, traffickers and dressmakers. However, many still rely on peasant farming to make ends meet. Small farmers cultivate bananas, root crops and citrus fruits on small plots of land behind or near their homestead which are then sold to WIBEDCO, the British conglomerate, and to the traffickers. They also sell surplus or rejected bananas to the traffickers whom then sell these in the regional markets. Production levels are limited by the acreage they own, farming techniques and the topography of the land; thus, farmers make very little money. In addition, WIBEDCO pays the farmers approximately US \$.05 cents a pound since the traffickers cannot always be trusted to pay the farmers.

Migration is viewed as another option open to families to supplement their income. Women migrate (United States, Canada, England and other Caribbean islands) more frequently than men, leaving behind children in the care of fathers or extended family members. Unfortunately, many of these women as Toney argues send very little if

---

<sup>13</sup> Common entrance exams

any remittances home either because they are unable or are unwilling to do so. She further suggests that the results are devastating psychologically and economically for the children of the émigrés, who must cope with feelings of being unwanted by their mothers and guardians alike (Toney 1997).

The lower class has been extremely loyal to Mitchell and his party during the last fifteen years. Since 1994, there has been tremendous discontent with the government's overall performance, and demonstrations initiated by the postal workers, the teachers union, the Traffickers Small Business Association and the farmers' union have encouraged the poor to make their voices heard (*Starlight, The Star* 1996). Despite the efforts made by the poor to influence political change, the NDP still won the 1998 election on a platform based on the old political system, including patronage, job development programs that specifically hire the poor, the distribution of money, food and building materials needed to repair or build housing.<sup>14</sup>

Under the Mitchell Administration's structural adjustment programs, the number of poor families living in one room and two room houses has increased significantly since the beginning of the 1990s (Toney, 1997). The houses are generally located in the rural sectors of the island and the majority is made of wood. Those more fortunate have been able to construct small houses of concrete blocks or add to the existing structure as money becomes available. Many houses are in a state of disrepair. They lack indoor plumbing and electricity or are just empty shells. Unfortunately, repairs and additions to these houses are slow because of the unavailability of money.

---

<sup>14</sup> Two years later Mitchell was forced to resign when Vincentians held a general strike and demanded his resignation. He still selected the next PM.

Those who live in or near the capital city Kingstown have not fared much better. Generally, families live in small and crowded wooden shacks that accommodate at least five people. Children are often seen fetching water for cooking or drinking, and they are also seen bathing publicly because of no indoor plumbing. Furnishings consist of small tables, chairs, mattresses and kitchen utensils. Unfortunately, the urban poor is in a worse condition than the rural poor because this class has no land to cultivate and must depend on the generosity of family members in the country to send vegetables, fruits and root crops. But now, according to Toney, family support and the mutual exchange of goods and services that have been part of family life, have been jeopardized because of structural adjustment programs<sup>15</sup> (Toney, 1997).

The poor who continuously struggle for survival are very pleased when their children are born light in complexion. Light skin is associated with better economic opportunity in lower class thinking and differentiates family members in the same way that it differentiates economic strata. Children with light complexion are prized within the family and much is expected of them because it is assumed that their complexion will bring access to better jobs (Heyer Young 1993). Although complexion is important, I would argue that family background and pedigree still play a key role in determining social class. The stigma of lower-class origins is hard to lose even for those who have become successful.

Limited social mobility is possible within the Vincentian society, but issues of color, family background and pedigree temper it. Hence, ownership of the means of

---

<sup>15</sup> This program instituted by the IMF required that Caribbean govts. cut back on all services, thereby having a deleterious effect on the region.

production in the classical Marxist sense cannot be used as the only criteria to analyze the Vincentian class structure since wealth in and of itself is not sufficient in determining class position. Color is still very important in Caribbean societies and plays a role in determining one's class. Any discussion of the development of class formation within Vincentian society must take into account the Weberian notion of social identity and life-style which is transmitted from generation to generation. Moreover, a structuralist perspective alone cannot fully explain the relationship or interplay between class and color within the Vincentian context. I agree with Beneria and Roldan that social perception, values, beliefs and forms of consciousness must be taken into consideration in any analysis of class formation (Beneria and Roldan 1987).

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter examined the historical and contemporary development of St. Vincent. Overall, significant changes occurred in the lives of the working class throughout the Caribbean with most of these changes taking place during the tumultuous period between 1930 and 1960. Working class consciousness effectively challenged the total control of the ruling class over the economic life of the workers. In 1940, wages increased substantially, from US \$0.34 cents and US \$0.28 cents a day, respectively, for men and women to \$5 and \$3.85<sup>16</sup> for men and women in 1986 (St. Vincent Government Statistical Office 1990). To this extent, one could argue that there was significant improvement in the economic conditions of the workers because there was improvement in their purchasing power. For example, Brizan points out that Grenadian banana farmers

---

<sup>16</sup> the figures are quoted in US dollars.

received on average US 5.6 cents per lb. for their labor during 1953-1959, while sellers received 15.4 US cents per kg (Brizan 1984). Nevertheless, the wages did not reflect the value of the work.

The establishment of the first political party was followed by the development of workers' unions that set the trend for political, social and economic changes. Socially, affordable and better housing became available to the poor. Health and education improved, and the general population was now able to vote. Nonetheless, the majority of the population still remained poor and powerless (Thomas 1988). It is also important to note that although the political parties differed ideologically at first, they laid the groundwork for a "Tweedledum-Tweedeledee two party-system. Since then, each party has been dominated by a "big man" whose influence has been overwhelming, thus setting the tone for the political structure that presently exist (Sunshine 1996).

Although the Mitchell Administration has been enmeshed in several scandals, it can be credited for the overall improvement in the economic and social conditions of the islands. Both the GDP and GNP have risen substantially from 1985-1997, resulting in an overall increase in wages as well as in the standard of living. Nevertheless, Vincentians struggle daily, but have learned to be creative and resourceful in making ends-meet. Women, especially, have learned to make do and have been noted for turning a dollar into food to provide for their families (Senior 1984). Sadly, the majority of Vincentians have remained poor because political and economic power still has remained in the hands of local elites and foreign nationals (Sunshine 1996).

The poor have devised survival tactics to help them cope with difficult economic conditions. Trafficking became a means for some, especially women to mitigate and

become a conduit to a better life. Traffickers assumed an importance even during slavery, as slaves were allowed to cultivate small plots and sell surplus, which has carried over to the present. The next chapter examines the historical and contemporary conditions of higglering/huckstering or trafficking in the Caribbean and more specifically in St. Vincent.

To understand the actions of the Vincentian government during the crisis, it was important to examine the historical background and the present social, political and economic factors that might have contributed to the decision-making process. To omit the historical development of the country hinders our understanding of how the legacy of colonialism shaped the behavior of the state.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE TRAFFICKERS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, higglering or trafficking has been the mainstay for poor rural women throughout the Caribbean. By selling agricultural produce regionally, these women have been given opportunities to participate in economic activities while at the same time they achieve personal satisfaction and self-fulfillment. Higglering has also been important to the economies of Caribbean states. Traders who distribute agricultural goods across the region provide much needed revenues as well as a source of employment for truckers, ship owners and unskilled workers. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the development of trafficking in the Caribbean; to introduce five actors engaged in the trade; and to underscore the importance of the trade to the economic well being of the region. It is important to show why disruptions in trade can have devastating impacts on both the welfare of the petty commodity traders and the states.

The first part of this chapter begins with a brief historical discussion on trafficking, and/or how it has become important to the economic development of Caribbean states. This section provides the context within which to understand how past traditions influence the behaviors of the various actors and shape their response to crisis.

The second part of the chapter is devoted to the individual stories of five Vincentian traffickers: three women and two men whose voices provide a detailed personal account of their lives as traffickers and how trafficking has informed their position within the Vincentian class structure. These narratives contribute to an understanding on how gender determines the ways in which one's business is organized

and conducted. Moreover, I will explore how gender limits the success of the female traffickers and the ability to make their voices heard.

The final section focuses on The Traffickers Small Business Association, which is the organization created to represent the interest of the traffickers and to influence government policies, which have a direct bearing on petty commodity trading. The Association's position within the Vincentian power structure can be viewed as weak because of its inability to represent the economic and political interests of poor black women. This weakness, I would argue, impairs the organization's ability to affect change and to influence positive outcomes on behalf of its members.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Historical Tradition**

Traffickers, also known as higglers or hucksters, are informal, small-scale traders with a long history in the Caribbean, dating back to the earliest days of plantation economy when slaves were expected to produce their own food on back or mountain lands (Durant-Gonzalez 1983). The small surplus produced by the slaves led to the development of weekly markets dominated by women, eventually giving rise to the growth of strong internal market systems in many parts of the region by the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Simmonds 1987). This system appears to have firmly established the gender division of labor with men as the principal cultivators and women as the marketers.

Although there is no clear evidence that women dominated the markets, both Mintz (1955) and Simmonds (1987) suggest that the African origins of these communities make it likely that they did. Vagale's study of the Yoruba confirms that West African women controlled the markets:

Some of the striking and distinctive characteristics of markets not only in Nigeria but also in the entire West African region are to be found in the social structure of the trading community. Yoruba women play a very important role in trading operations. In fact, the females constitute the majority among the traders; and in certain sectors of trade, the market-women hold a monopoly. (Vagale as cited in Simmonds 1983).

Since the vast majority of slaves came from West Africa where markets were highly developed and since women were predominantly the marketers, it follows that this tradition of females dominating the market place could have been adopted by Caribbean traders with variations appropriate to the demands of the new territory.

Nonetheless, higglering became an important economic activity in slave societies. Female slaves marketed surplus provisions and handicrafts to the market place on behalf of their masters who benefited financially and were relieved from responsibility for the upkeep of their charges. Despite the constant exposure to danger, the women traveled on foot or by canoe to urban areas and to estates in the countryside to sell their wares (Simmonds 1987). They also dealt in contraband or/and in stolen goods to maximize profits. In the process, women gained unexpected benefits: had some measure of independence, earned incomes, became skilled negotiators and enhanced their self-esteem. Thus, a pattern of employment was established throughout the Caribbean, which benefited poor unskilled women, marginal cultivators and the economy at large.

The emancipation of Caribbean slaves in the 1800s made female traders even more important because the number of small scale peasant farmers grew substantially during this period, thereby giving full impetus to the flowering of the internal market

system (Durant-Gonsalves 1983). The peasantry depended a great deal on the higglers to distribute agricultural goods not consumed locally or in regional markets. In so doing, farmers were able to earn a small income, which provided for some of the basic necessities needed for survival. Together, the higglers and peasant farmers modified the economic system in the region by creating strong local markets and expanding trade into the regional market. In the process, they have developed a symbiotic relationship, which is still an important part of their daily activities, which has lasted until today (Brizan 1984).

Despite the social, political and economic changes that have taken place in the region, higgling/trafficking has remained a viable occupation throughout the Twentieth Century. Women are still the major distributors of agricultural produce, though some have become more innovative as a response to changing economic conditions and have evolved into a new breed of higglers (Macfarlan 1984).

More numerous in Jamaica and Guyana, the new breed of higglers burst on to the international scene in the mid-1970s as a reaction to the financial crises in their respective countries. Taking advantage of business opportunities created by structural adjustment programs to galvanize the economy, they sold produce, spices and fruits in Panama, Honduras, Miami and New York. Simultaneously, they purchased such items as clothes, shoes, cornflakes and other necessities lacking at home. These women also learned to negotiate the complexities of international trade and in so doing, transformed the occupation of inter-island traders into one that has become formally recognized by the establishment. In Jamaica, the traders became so successful that they were targeted by

the government and were required to be licensed and pay income tax (MacFarlane, 1984).

The art of higglering was brought to new heights.

In contrast, traffickers in the eastern Caribbean, Dominica, Grenada and St. Vincent have remained the chief exporters of agricultural produce in the regional market, in part because of government policies instituted during the 1960s that promoted the growth of inter-island trade (St. Vincent Report 1994). Regional integration schemes, such as Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA), which subsequently evolved into the Caribbean Community, made trafficking more profitable and accessible to many poor women. Petty commodity trading expanded significantly until the 1970s, when several governments faced financial crises causing a decline in trading activities that continued into the 1980s when Trinidad lost a substantial portion of its oil revenues and no longer served as a mecca for traders.

Presently, women higglers continue to trade regionally because they know the market well, are comfortable in their surroundings and make a decent living. Consequently, many are reluctant to engage in the international markets, claiming that they are unprepared to negotiate its complexities. Although this may be partially true, I would contend that the women have not engaged in extra-regional trade because they are unwilling to implement the measures required to trade in the overseas market or to exercise quality control in the selection and packaging of agricultural produce. Moreover, The Trafficker's and Small Business Association is unable to lend financial and technical support to help the women expand the trade, and the local government and Caribbean Community policies have been directed towards the needs of established exporters and large producers who are predominantly male.

Notwithstanding, their unwillingness to venture into overseas markets, petty commodity traders often face problems at home that affect their ability to do well in the regional market. Since the late 1980s, there has been a significant decline in agrarian production due to higher wages in the industrial and tourist sectors as well as inefficient farming techniques and a general disdain for agricultural work. Little financial remuneration for agricultural goods has also served as a disincentive, encouraging farmers to seek other means, such as growing marijuana, to secure a living. For example, a young farmer explained during a conversation that I had with him, that “what would you have me grow, tomatoes like everyone else? How would I eat? There is no money in tomatoes, that’s why I grow ganja”<sup>17</sup> In addition, policies instituted by Caribbean governments that aim at diversifying their economies, do so at the expense of the agricultural sector resulting in a decline in farm production. More recently, the mealybug crisis in St. Vincent, Grenada and St. Lucia has exacerbated the situation even further by preventing many in the trade from working in their respective markets. These factors have contributed to a decrease in the number of petty commodity traders from an estimated high of 1,264 in 1988 to an approximate low of 468 in 1996 (Vincentian 1994, Draft Report, Dominican Hucksters Association and St. Vincent Traffickers and Small Business Association 1991-1996 membership list).

Despite these pressures, traffickers/higglers in the eastern Caribbean continue to market agricultural produce in their selected markets. Dominican traders sell primarily agricultural produce to the French departments of Guadeloupe and St. Martin and in the

---

<sup>17</sup> Ganja is the local term for marijuana.

CARICOM countries of Antigua and St. Kitts, while the Grenadians vend their produce in Trinidad & Tobago. On the other hand, Vincentians market agricultural goods in Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, Tortola, and in the French department of Martinique and occasionally in St. Martin. Interestingly, the markets tend to overlap and are not as clearly divided as I have indicated. The women often trade in each other's territories, particularly if the opportunity presents itself, as in the recent case of the mealybug crisis. Dominica hucksters, for example, quickly filled in the gap for their counterparts when Barbados imposed a ban on all Vincentian and St. Lucian produce. Essentially, St. Vincent's loss was Dominica's gain.

Traffickers throughout the Caribbean have made very little efforts to modify their behaviors in order to meet these new challenges. They are very independent, highly competitive but conservative in their business practices. These characteristics have served them well in the past though they may be detrimental to their future. The local, regional and global markets presently require that traffickers adhere to standard business practices, which they have been reluctant to do. Higglers have made a decent living over the years without deviating from traditional behavior patterns. For example, three higglers, Tina, Sylvia and Jackie, voiced their sentiments during some of our conversations. In essence their philosophy may be summed by the following "If it is not broken, why fix it?" Nonetheless, higglers often voice their concern about the market place. For example, Tina believed that if the traffickers did not change their behavior, they would not have any markets to trade their goods. "In the 70s and 80s, business was good, but today everything is slow; the market is more difficult. They want us to use standardized cartons; our produce must be of standard size. If we do not comply, where will we go?"

In spite of their protests, traffickers continue to do business as usual. Higglers are wedded to a particular way of life, as Le Franc suggests in her study of the Jamaican higglers. Few are rarely interested in improving their commodity mix, searching for cheaper supplies or influencing the farmer's production habits to increase their rate of profit. After all, trafficking may be viewed as a source of employment in economies that cannot provide work for the poor unskilled women. Higgling allows these women to feed, clothe and provide shelter for their family; consequently, most are unwilling to run the risk of changing what has worked well for them in the past (Le Franc, 1988).

### **St. Vincent Traffickers: A Portrait**

Most of the women are dark-complexioned with what can be described as strong African characteristics. Although their ages may vary from 21 years to about 62 years, with 38.3 years being the average age for females, and 36.1 years for males. The average age for female traffickers in St. Vincent is 41 and for male traffickers 35.5 (1992 Regional Report, 1996 Study on Vincentian Traffickers). The traffickers tend to look older than their chronological age due to the constant exposure to the elements, particularly the sun, which give their skin a leathery and dry appearance. This is understandable when you think about the fact that traders work seven days a week, approximately 335 days of the year and seldom protect themselves from the sun.

The work, which is demanding, requires that the higgler invest most of her time running her business since she is the sole proprietor. She negotiates with farmers and boat owners, hires truckers and packers as well as maneuvers through cumbersome government bureaucratic systems in order to get the produce to market. In doing her job, she has learned to be tough, assertive, demanding, and unyielding or dour, exhibiting

behavior that would not be accepted by “a proper Caribbean woman.” However, higglers are not the average Caribbean women. They are independent businesswomen, who, since slavery, have been given a certain amount of leeway by Caribbean societies to assume “male characteristics” in the operation of their enterprise. Like the men in their society, they move about the island freely and unencumbered, not bounded by the parameters imposed upon other women. As a result, female traders break the rules of prescribed gender roles without the fear of being sanctioned or ostracized by their community or members of her household. I often observed Martha, one of my closest informants, arguing, and /or threatening her male helpers. She did not consider her behavior unladylike, but rather part of her regular business dealings.

Female traders are still responsible for the household and are shown deference by all members of the family, including male partners. According to figures published by Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC 1988), 45.3 percent of all the hucksters in the eastern Caribbean were single heads of household, and 54.7 percent were either married or in a common-law/visiting arrangement. Vincentian traffickers, both male and female, were 66.7 percent more likely than their counterparts to be in some form of partnership arrangement. In general, 42.1 percent of male traffickers were more likely to be in some partnership arrangement. (Among the registered Vincentian traffickers in my sample, 8 of the 10 or 80 percent of males were married in comparison to 38 of the 56 or 68 percent of the females surveyed in 1996).

Regardless of their marital status, the majority of traders have children, on average seven per household. Interestingly, the male Vincentian traffickers in my sample tended to have less children than the females, and took every opportunity to bring that

fact to my attention by calling the women “breeders,” who did not know when to stop. However, children are important to female traders because they provide cheap labor. Youngsters are brought into the trade at a very early age. They are kept out of school to help pick, select and package produce for the market place.

By the time the children become young adults, mothers rely on them to purchase goods without supervision and to help sell in the marketplace. Teenage girls can also be of tremendous benefit to mothers, as I discovered while working with the traffickers in St. Vincent. Young attractive daughters were frequently used to distract the customs guards when traffickers returned to the homeport. The girls would “chat up” the young male guards in hopes that they would not carefully search their mother’s merchandise. Many of these women tried to maximize their profits by bringing contraband into the country or by not declaring certain goods.

On the other hand, the Vincentian male traffickers in my sample seldom enlisted the services of their children. In part, this may be explained by the fact that four (40%) of the men in the sample were childless. Another four (40%) had small children under the age of ten who were sent to school, and the other two (20%) had older sons who participated in the business, but in a supervisory capacity. More importantly, the men did not have to struggle to sell their merchandise weekly since eighty percent had established contractual agreements with male customers, both in the domestic and foreign markets. As a result, they were guaranteed weekly incomes, which allowed them to run their business more efficiently. They were able to hire paid labor and provide quality merchandise that met market demands. Thus, the majority of the male traffickers in St. Vincent are fairly successful businessmen.

Unlike their male counterparts, most of the female traffickers do not have the same kind of opportunities to establish similar contractual arrangements with their clients and must depend on family members to get their produce to market. The business environment in the region is not structured to encourage, support or benefit women. Few develop long term agreements with customers in the same way that men do. Instead, females travel to the markets where they rely on their wits and relationships with particular clients to dispose of all their merchandise.

Caribbean societies are generally male-oriented or patriarchal and ignore the needs of women. For example, a Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) agronomist working with the traffickers informed me that “a wo-man is to know her place in society at all times. Men control and make decisions while women follow. Besides, her domain is the household.” These comments were made during a training session for the traffickers in which I participated.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in keeping with this widely held philosophy, women are not thought to be smart or capable of running a successful business, not even in the female dominated occupation of higglering. In essence, female traffickers are expected to remain small-scale traders in keeping with their role as women.

The success of petty commodity traders is further limited by a lack of education. A 1992 report revealed that most higglers had a basic education with 85.7 percent claiming to have attended primary school and 14.2 percent claiming to have secondary training. Once more, male traders outstripped their female counterparts: 30.6 percent had

---

<sup>18</sup> I was asked to participate in an IFAD project that was developed to train the traffickers to use proper cleaning and packaging techniques.

some secondary training while only 10.2 percent of the females moved beyond the primary level. Of the Vincentian traffickers surveyed in this investigation, 11.9 percent had a secondary education, a pattern that I found to be consistent when I worked with the group in 1996 (Regional Report 1992). Seventy percent of the men attended secondary school compared to 15 percent of the women.

The difference in education between the genders is significant, especially in terms of the type of record keeping system. I found that female traders had a more loosely structured system in contrast to the men, which may partly explain their limited financial success when compared to the men. When I asked some of the female informants if they kept financial records, many said: "I keep all that information in my head; or I keep a little book where I write everything down; I know how much I spend for tannia, coconuts, banana; how much I pay the boy to help me pack; what I give the boat captain and what I get pay for my goods." Although none of the female informants allowed me to see their bookkeeping system, I seldom observed them documenting any of their daily transactions. However, this did not mean that they never recorded information in a journal. As a matter of fact, Miriam, another informant, explained that she recorded her daily transactions so that at the end of the day, she knew exactly what profit was made, if any.

In contrast, the male traffickers proudly, openly and willingly discussed their accounting practices. By so doing, they appeared to want me to note the differences between them and their female colleagues. Many took the opportunity to point out that female higglers were disorganized and did not systematically document their activities.

As one male trafficker commented: “No wonder they can’t keep track of their money; they don’t know what they are doing.”

The men saw themselves as sophisticated business people who understood the relationship between a good bookkeeping system and their rate of success. More importantly, they shared a camaraderie which was absent among the women. This was understandable since the men did not have to compete directly with each other for market share because they had developed relationships with large wholesale buyers who purchased large quantities of goods on a weekly basis. In addition, the number of male traffickers was comparatively smaller, making it easier for them to work together. Men could afford to be magnanimous as long as there was no direct threat to their business.

Another significant difference between the men and women, at least in St. Vincent, is the manner in which they contract to buy their goods. Male traffickers generally arranged to pay for their produce on “a cash and carry basis,” because they had more access to capital as a result of their relationship to their business partners. Overall, male traffickers had established good relations with the farmers throughout the island. For example, I observed “Dollars,” one of the male traffickers, who had consented to work with me, pay the farmers immediately for the produce that he had purchased. On the other hand, female traffickers more often than not would buy goods on consignment and frequently would renege on their verbal contractual agreements, thus creating an atmosphere of mistrust with the farming community. Female traders do not have much cash at their disposal because their business is operated on a day-to-day basis, whereas male traffickers can anticipate a weekly regular income by virtue of the business arrangements they have made with their business partners.

Many female traffickers appear to behave “like crabs in a barrel,” pulling and clawing at each other, a behavior which was not limited to the traders in St. Vincent, but was also prevalent among the hucksters of Dominica and Grenada. They seemed mistrustful, uncooperative, competitive and do not readily listen to advice that may improve their business practice. According to JT, this maybe why many do not fare well and to compensate flood the market weekly with agricultural goods, stuffing the cartons with more goods than they can hold, selecting poor quality merchandise and underbidding each other when buying and selling produce. Their actions had a negative effect on pricing. Goods purchased became more costly, while goods sold commanded less than the going rate.

Although female higglers claim to understand as well as verbalize the need for change, “ I know that we are killing the trade; we need to stop competing against each other; or we must band together if we’re to make it,” they rarely take any action to improve their circumstances. Even when the higglers came together as a group in St. Vincent during 1994, according to Mr. R., a customs supervisor, the spirit of cooperation did not last long. The women were divided into groups and were instructed on the amount of merchandise to be sold in the market: the first group that was assigned week number one did extremely well. The following week, when group two was scheduled to sell, group one would not allow them to do so. When confronted, the women replied that there was no one who could prevent them from going to the market; consequently, the program folded. Mr. R claims that it is this kind of behavior that prevents the women from moving ahead.

It is also important to examine the behavior and attitudes of the traders and the reasons for their development. Selling is competitive, and each trafficker is a business entity- - one could consider them an indigenous capitalist class- - whose purpose, to use a purely capitalistic rationale is to maximize profit. They are in business to make money even when it means that others in the trade lose out. Women constantly bid against each other when buying farm goods and often buy more goods than needed. In so doing, they create unstable farm prices and make it more difficult for competitors to obtain supplies. For example, one of my informants, Martha, ships more than 125 boxes of yams per week to Martinique, even though she cannot sell most of them. This is a good example of competition at work, though with unfortunate results.

Another interpretation frequently offered for their behavior is that female traffickers are selfish, greedy and said to deliberately undermine each other, regardless of the consequences of their actions. As one female informant remarked, "The women are backstabbing, non-cooperative and think only of themselves. They buy too many fruits and ground provisions and always flood the market and then complain when they can't make a profit: "No wonder we can never make any money." To a great extent, this statement reflects the reality of the trade; the women constantly over supply the markets with goods and openly refuse to change their pattern. This behavior may also be partially explained by a mind-set prevalent in the region: "every man for himself" and "your loss is my gain." It can also be explained by the fact that women as sole supporters of the family must do whatever they can to earn a living.

Though smaller in numbers, many male traffickers have established relationships with wholesalers who pay them directly on delivery. As a result, they can pay the farmers

on a cash basis, and it was my observation that they were less dependent on direct sales at the market. In my travels with Edric, or “Dollars,” he paid immediately for all produce purchased on sight. In contrast, the head of the farmers union complained that the women frequently informed farmers that they were unable to sell their goods at the market, thereby making it difficult for them to pay the farmers all that they owe.

Finally, higglers are also steeped in tradition. As far as most of the women are concerned, they believe that there is no need to improve the commodity mix, its quality, and its presentation in the local market, especially when clients continue to purchase goods on a weekly basis without too many complaints. Consequently, the change is deferred. During my stay in St. Vincent, even when faced with the challenge of the mealybug crisis, it was business as usual. In essence, the market place has accepted their “modus operandi,” resulting in what may appear to the outsider as a stubborn adherence to old business practices and tradition.

The women also live in the *here and the now*, and although they are not oblivious to the changes taking place, that is, the interconnection between markets or markets which are more demanding, the majority continue to function as though very little has changed. Because the traffickers live in a very narrow world and are immersed with their day to day activity, it is difficult for most to accept that the old established way of operating their business may no longer be effective in a market place or that it requires a certain level of sophistication that most female traffickers have been too busy to embrace. For example, Thelma, one of the more successful female traffickers often criticizes her colleagues for their unwillingness to change and refers to their business as a “Nickel and Dime” operation.

Recently, Caribbean markets, like other markets, are beginning to reflect world trends and have also become concerned with establishing standards and quality control measures. As a result, petty commodity traders may eventually have to tow the line or lose out to their competitors from Central America (Dole and Chiquita), who have been eagerly “waiting in the wings,” so to speak to increase their market shares.

Since traders receive very little financial assistance from local governments, financial institutions, CARICOM or their associations, it is natural for them to be cautious about how they conduct their business. The majority depends on family and friends for financial assistance to get started. Therefore, most are reluctant to take big risks and instead prefer to stick with “the tried and proven methods” established by other higglers over the past years. As 33 year old, Ms M., a novice from St. Vincent explained, “I can’t afford to lose my money. Where will I go and what would I do?” Like many, Ms. M.’s concerns as well as her story are not unusual. With very little education or skills, she became a trafficker to better herself and make a decent living. Ms. M. had very little income; so, she approached a family member for help and has now become indebted to her sister with whom she had cosigned a bank loan. Understandably, the young trafficker voices concern about how she handles her money and has been afraid to take chances that might ruin her business. Instead, she prefers to remain conservative in her business dealings.

At least half of the petty commodity traders in the region had not been gainfully employed before entering the trade, according to a survey done by ECLAC in 1988, a fact that may also account for their resistance to change. For the first time in their lives, many traffickers/higglers depend on a steady income, no matter how small, to maintain their

families. And since 65.1 percent of the traffickers surveyed in this study had been in business for less than ten years, perhaps one could conclude that many would be apprehensive about changing a system that has been reliable and income producing for so many over the years. The remaining 50 percent, who had previously worked in low paying jobs as domestics, farmers, laborers, seamstresses, clerks or hotel workers, were also assured of earning more than \$200 per week, much more than many of them had earned previously in other occupations. It is not surprising that the traffickers' behaviors and attitudes have been conditioned to some extent by past experiences that make them appear to be shortsighted and rigid in the eyes of the observer.

In spite of the aforementioned shortcomings, traders have been extremely resourceful and innovative. An examination of the lives of five Vincentian traffickers in the next section bears that out. The female traffickers supply fruits and ground provisions to Barbados, Trinidad, Martinique, the United States and to a lesser extent to Tortola and St. Martin while importing manufactured goods and other food items from Barbados and Trinidad which are not available in their own country. Although seldom acknowledged by governmental officials, this trade is important not only to the traders, but also to the Vincentian and regional economy.

Vincentian traffickers have contributed substantially to the economy over the years. It is unfortunate that there is so little documentation on the local and regional levels to substantiate this claim. The figures that I am presenting were obtained from the Vincentian Statistical Office but are incomplete, as they do not include data on all the traffickers, some of whom, I know, were in business during that period. Moreover, the 1996 figures reflect only the first ten months of business. The following government data

represent the trading activities of only twenty-five traffickers, compared to sixty-five listed on the Traffickers and Small Business Association Registry: 1995--EC \$1,537,738 (US \$575,931) and January-October 1996 EC \$910,341 (US\$340,951). Prime Minister Mitchell, in his 1996 Parliamentary address, substantiated this information and credited the contributions of the traffickers. He also noted that they had earned revenues totaling \$10,000,000 EC (US \$ 3,745,318) between January-October 1996.

Furthermore, the mealybug crisis, which began in October 1996, pushed the Traffickers and Small Business Association to collect data on the Barbados trade from January through September 1996. The Freight on Board Value (FOB) \$5,765,760 EC, based on shipping documentation, showed the role played by the traffickers in the movement of goods regionally and provided a basis to calculate the economic loss when trade between Barbados and St. Vincent was banned as a result of the mealybug crisis.

The government directly benefits from the trade when it earns revenues from import/export license fees, phytosanitary fees, bottle deposit fees and import taxes. In addition, traffickers provide employment to dock workers, truckers, boat owners and income for the farmers. One must also remember that the money earned by traffickers goes into the purchase of local goods and services, a fact that is only tacitly recognized by the government and local business people.

## **SUMMARY**

Overall petty commodity trading has benefited women since slavery because it allowed them to earn a living. Simultaneously, trading has given them a sense of dignity and independence. Vincentian traders, like their counterparts in the Caribbean, were responsible for the development of the internal market structure and for the expansion of

the market into the regional marketplace. In addition, a number of traders have become suitcase entrepreneurs buying and selling in the international marketplace and to some extent, have revolutionized the trade.

Although the market place is changing and the traders confront new challenges, their resourcefulness and creativity have allowed them to maintain their business even in the face of uncertainty. Nonetheless, their individualism may prove to be more costly in the final analysis because it will prevent them from uniting locally and regionally to save the trade. As it presently stands, Vincentian traders, like other traders in the region, cannot depend on their local government or CARICOM to provide assistance and protection against the changing marketplace or a crisis that may suddenly develop. The pink mealy bug crisis illustrates this case clearly because it did not protect their interest in the regional market. As a result, most remained vulnerable and sought to protect their individual interest.

The following chapter—the life histories of five traders-- will illustrate the individualism, resilience, hopes and vulnerabilities of the Vincentian traders. It will also point out how gender differences affect how the traders conduct their businesses and make decisions.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE LIFE HISTORIES: PART I – FEMALE TRAFFICKERS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is divided into two sections and features the stories of five traders who worked with me during my ten-month stay in St. Vincent. Their stories are narrated in their voices, and I have maintained the integrity of the narration as much as possible by making only minor changes when necessary. Part I is devoted to describing the life histories of three female traffickers, ranging in age from 21-65 who had been trading for more than three years. Part II, examines the lives of two male traders, ages 36 and 38 who had spent the last seven years selling produce to Barbados and the international market.

The purpose of these narratives is to give the reader a first hand account of the life of a trafficker. It is important for the reader to become personally familiar with these stories, and in so doing, will learn about the difficulties inherent in being a petty commodity trader. Traders work very hard seven days a week for most of the year taking only a few weeks off to rest. They work in order to earn enough money to maintain their families. In addition, I will to show how skillful, independent, resourceful and self-reliant the traffickers are in negotiating and circumventing the cumbersome bureaucracies in the home and host countries. Moreover, I wanted to highlight how gender differences affect the way in which the traders conduct their business.

#### **THE SHED**

Early every Monday, Upper Bay Street, in the capital city Kingstown, becomes the hub of activity for the traffickers. Women in colorful dresses, some with scarves tied around their heads talking and laughing loudly, invade the area with their trucks and vans

filled with fruits and ground provisions- - yams, eddoes, tannia, coconuts, dasheen, plantains, green bananas, as well as ginger, mangos and oranges. Many spread their goods all along the sidewalk on Upper Bay Street. By late morning, the street is so crowded that it becomes virtually impossible for pedestrians and cars to get through. The women, however, are oblivious to their surroundings as they scurry back and forth to customs, the shipping office and the docks in preparation for the afternoon shipment.

Others take their produce into the traffickers shed, a large warehouse located directly at the end of Upper Bay Street. The shed is filled with pallets that are stored along the walls. It also contains a large container belonging to one of the female traffickers, hundreds of cartons and heaps of garbage. A small office for the President and staff is located at the top of the stairs near the entrance. The back of the shed leads to the bay, but there is no properly constructed dock to receive boats; therefore, the facility is only used to temporarily store and prepare goods for shipment.

The shed is a sprawling fixture generally filled with hundreds of packed boxes. On the floor are hands of green plantains and bananas along with other produce brought earlier which are warehoused to protect them from the sun. Picturesquely seated on wooden boxes in the midst of it all are the ladies cleaning and wiping the dirt from the ground provisions prior to packing them in old corrugated boxes. New cartons cost \$4.15EC (approximately \$1.50 US) each which is very expensive. Women (more so than the men) recycle the used boxes in order to minimize their expenses. The traders complain bitterly to JT, the head of the Traffickers and Small Business Association, Miriam, the Association's secretary or to me that boxes are too costly and accuse the Association President of overcharging them for the cartons.

At this point, I must interject that I expressed to JT my desire to partake more fully in the lives and daily activities of the traffickers. To understand and not be seen as a rank outsider, I took it upon myself to ask JT what the best course of action was to facilitate my entry into the community. We decided that I would take a job as a way to observe and engage the women without interfering in their routine. This provided me with a good vantage point from which I could observe the flow and the interaction among the traffickers, of which I often was a part. The job that I took was to build cartons on Friday, which I would sell on Monday when the traffickers needed to pack their goods. It gave me a much-needed opportunity to meet them on an individual basis and to learn about their individual quirks. I became familiar with those who would pay readily and those who would try to get away without paying. I was instructed by Miriam not to extend credit. This often created tension amongst the traffickers (who knew the rules but still tried to outwit me because I was the newcomer), Miriam, the Association and myself.

By mid-morning, the volume in the shed increases as more people enter and leave the area. Young men in torn clothing with their pushcarts, many of whom have no other source of income or employment, tie and load boxes on their rickety wooden carts as they argue with the women over money or over the manner in which they are spoken to. Interestingly, the female traders generally win most arguments because the men back down, not so much in fear of losing work, but out of fear of bodily harm.

The shed is also the place where the Agricultural Ministry sets up shop every Monday morning. Traffickers are expected to have all the produce inspected by the agricultural department prior to shipment. Unfortunately, this procedure does not always run smoothly, particularly since both parties, the traffickers and the inspectors, do not

trust each other. The inspectors often complain that the women do not clean the goods properly and are always trying to deceive them. As far as I observed, this was not a fair assessment: the majority did try to comply by washing and cleaning the produce. At times, the ground provisions (tannia, dasheen and eddoes) appeared not as clean as they might have been, but the facilities available both at the shed and Upper Bay Street were not adequate to ensure that all goods were properly cleaned.

The Monday morning rush to get the phytosanitary stamp, pits the state inspectors against the traffickers, resulting in an antagonistic relationship between the inspector and the women who frequently behave disrespectfully and belligerently. The agricultural inspection for produce slated for export is quite bureaucratic. The process involves more than one procedure: one inspector issues the \$5.00EC stamp, while a field worker travels up and down Upper Bay Street and the dock randomly inspecting boxes of produce to ensure that they meet proper specifications. Their job is made difficult because there are so few inspectors. The traders compete actively against one another to get their goods inspected first by the field officer. As a result, they often pull the field worker in so many directions at the same time, as she goes up and down the street where arguments and disagreements often occur. This problem is not limited to the street, and also occurs in the office where JD, the other agricultural inspector issues the \$5.00EC stamp necessary to export agricultural products. Although the Ministry of Agriculture is aware of the problem, no solution is expected because the government claims it lacks the funds to hire additional inspectors. Until the problem is resolved, the women will continue to struggle, and the inspectors are unable to adequately inspect goods leaving the country. Despite

the problem, the traffickers, with very few exceptions, eventually receive the stamp to ship their produce.

## **INFORMANTS**

### **Madelyn: “Mother: The Respected Elder”**

I was first introduced to *mother*, as she is affectionately called by many of the traffickers on one of these very busy Mondays. Madelyn Thompson (MT), a handsome woman in her early 60s, was handpicked by JT as my principal informant. She presented herself as a very warm, soft-spoken and genteel lady. Neatly dressed with her straw hat and beads, she quickly moved through the maze of activities from the shed to the customs house and to the docks without ever losing her dignity or decorum. Unlike so many of her female colleagues, MT seldom raised her voice during the many transactions necessary to prepare the goods for shipment, and in so doing maintained a veneer of middle class respectability.

Madelyn was acutely aware of the position held by traffickers in Vincentian Society and therefore tried very hard to uphold middle class standards. Although trafficking rewarded many with financial success and permitted them to enjoy the material benefits of middle class life, it simultaneously denied them the rights, privileges and prestige accorded to members of that class. MT knew that no matter how successful or admired she may be as a business woman, or how much people liked her, she would be excluded from “true” middle class circles because in the eyes of most Vincentians. A trafficker could not change her spots: “once a trafficker always a trafficker.” Traffickers were relegated to an intermediary position within the social structure above the lower

class but below the middle class. Consequently, most sought ways to enhance their social standing in the community by exhibiting a middle class demeanor.

Because MT subscribed to middle class notions of propriety, she refused to end her 36 years of marriage to a man she called a ‘drunk’ out of fear that he may ruin her well-established reputation. As she explained, “I can’t let that man wander through town without a place to live. How would it look: MT’s husband a beggar? I will not allow that to happen.” Her image and standing among the traffickers and within the community was so important that she was willing to remain in a difficult marriage. Madelyn told explained why she remained.

“I had no intention of marrying Mr. Thompson (Mr. T),” Madelyn says, “but he claimed to have become a Christian, and so I decided to marry him. I am a very religious person with strong convictions and was pleased to marry a man who could offer my six children respectability, stability and a good Christian home. I gave him a job taking care of the store because he was a day laborer only earning two dollars a day when we first married. I took him out of all that and made the store his responsibility. We did very well at the beginning selling food and other items that I brought back from Trinidad. It is a pity that it did not last very long. At first, he was warm, giving, and eager to please. My children loved him and got along well with him, but then the drinking began and ever since then, everything has gone downhill. He wrecked my little side business and also destroyed two of the vehicles that I used in my business. Now thanks to that man, I must rely on the kindness of JT to get my goods to the shed every Monday. Can you imagine the difficulties I am experiencing because he drinks so music?”

“Let me tell you a story! I was in Trinidad selling when one of the women came over to me and said that they were not sure whether they should inform me or not about what Mr. T had done. I told her that whatever it was I could handle it. The woman informed me that Mr. T had broken into my safe and took all the money. He stole over \$10,000EC (\$3,749 US). To everyone’s surprise, I took it very well, but promptly left Trinidad to go home. One of my daughters was able to recover \$2,000 EC (\$750 US): that was all that he left. It was at this point that I decided that I had enough and consulted a lawyer. I gave the lawyer a deposit of \$500 EC (or \$187 US) to start the divorce, but when I consulted with the children, my oldest son asked me not to do it and called a family conference. He was very concerned that Mr. T. might stalk and abuse me.”

“At the meeting, the man remained quiet while four of the children spoke. After that, he promised he would stop drinking and behave. Of course, his promise did not hold long because he liked to have money and behaved like a ‘big man.’ All that money was spent in providing drinks for friends in the rum shop. Eventually, I lost my business because he drank out all the profits, so I refused to stock the shelves with any goods. He likes to play ‘big man,’ but not with my money, he won’t.”

‘I cannot afford to lose money because today’s business is not like it used to be in the 80s when Trinidad was sweet. The money, US dollars were flowing, and we traffickers had thousands of dollars in our hands all the time. I bought 12 acres of land with the profits. I gave my son, who worked for me, part of the land because he was always so helpful driving, picking up goods and traveling with me to Trinidad. I was also able to build a house without the help of my husband. All he did was to stay home and drink. He would not even work the land that is how lazy he was. He would not hire day

laborers to plant and harvest. I depended on one of my sons to help until he moved to Tortola to live with my two daughters. Poor me, when the boy left, I could not depend on Mr. Thompson to manage the land or to drive the truck because he was always too drunk. I was afraid that he would wreck the truck, which he did by the way, leaving me as you can see to rely on others to get my goods to town.”

“When I study Mr. T., I see what the man means. He is dark, his nose broad and ugly. I don’t understand myself why I married him. When I tell you I have no luck with men, I mean it. I had my first child when I was sixteen. My mother wanted me to marry the boy, but I refused and am glad because the man turned out to be a heavy gambler and a total mess. You see I was very hot for a young girl and have had a total of twelve children, ten of whom are still alive. Imagine that by the time that I was twenty-two, I had three children and was dating a young eighteen year old Carib boy whom I loved dearly. We had a child together, and he offered to marry me; but I ran away because it was too much of a burden for an eighteen-year-old with only a teacher’s salary to take care of all of us. He found me in town and took care of the children, but later migrated to Canada. He was truly a gentleman and took good care of his daughter, and it was his money that often went into taking care of all the children. That’s how we survived for years. By the way, he is the only one of the children’s fathers that Mr. T. allows in the house- - that is how much of a gentleman he is.”

“Thank God his daughter and my other daughter are married to respectable, caring and supporting men. One owns a taxi company with her husband, and the other has her own shop and is doing quite well. One of my boys moved to England to study law after spending years teaching school at the local high school. He and his wife have invited me

to come and stay with them for a while, something that I am planning to do when I get out of this business. I am quite proud of his achievements. The youngest boy who moved with the girls is not doing badly. I visit them whenever I get a chance. They look after me and love to send me beautiful things. I do not think that they want to see their mother looking old. Do you know not one of the children, except for the son who worked with me, wanted to become traders because they saw how hard I had to work to make a living. So, I make sure that they all had a good education. Trafficking is a hard life and don't let anybody tell you different."

"Every week, I travel to Trinidad to sell, but the market is no longer good- too much competition and too little profit. I don't know how long I can stay in this business for it is not like it used to be. You see how hard it is to get the goods processed in St. Vincent, and then you go to Trinidad where the Indians<sup>19</sup> give you a hard time in customs. They see you every week and still don't want to clear the goods. Can you understand that? It just don't make sense."

I understand her sentiments, having shared some of her experiences on our journeys to Trinidad. The customs officers were often demanding and rude even though they dealt with the traders on a weekly basis. Consequently, the interaction between both groups was fraught with tension, which may be due in part to a widely held perception that many of the women were involved in the illegal drug trade and were also manipulating the Indians by smuggling goods to avoid paying import/export taxes. In the view of the Trinidadian Customs Officials, customs officials kept a watchful eye on the

---

<sup>19</sup> Basdeo Pandy established his government in 1995 . Since then many feel that the Indians

traffickers to prevent them from breaking the law and manipulating the system to their own advantage.

Traffickers generally traveled either on Monday nights to Trinidad on the “Windward,” the largest cargo and passenger vessel in the area, or on Tuesday mornings by LIAT, the regional airline. When traveling by air, the traffickers shipped their goods, the night before on small vessels with no refrigeration, which left them open to damage, and spoilage. Although the traffickers were aware that the ships’ captains could not guarantee that their goods would arrive safely in port, they had no other alternative and made do with what was available because the region did not have a shipping industry.

On my first trip to Trinidad with MT, I had difficulty getting on the flight because it was booked. The manager of the Leeward Islands Air Transport (LIAT) office in St. Vincent explained that the airline automatically reserved an early Tuesday flight and a late Friday afternoon flight for the ladies because they were weekly customers. MT and I explained that I was working with the traffickers, and it was through her intervention that I was able to join the women that Tuesday morning. The women and men were well dressed and in good spirits when we left for Trinidad. Interestingly, the flight was a place where the traders could exchange information. They could also buy and sell EC dollars without fear of being observed by the authorities or by young men lurking around the market hoping to get an opportunity to rob the women of their hard earned money.

When we arrived in Trinidad, the airport officials asked the women the nature of their business and their length of stay. The women were given permission only to remain in the country for a few days. They must renew their visas on a weekly basis, in spite of

---

have taken over and behave badly towards non-Indians.

the fact they were trading within the Caribbean Community. Nevertheless, the women seemed to have established good relations with some of the phytosanitary officers at the airport. MT warmly greeted one of Indian plant quarantine officers with a hug and informed him that she had brought him a bottle of rum from St. Vincent and would have Mr. Young, her friend and driver, drop it off later.

Aubrey Young, a short dark-skinned man, routinely escorted MT around during her stay and was among one of the many Vincentians living in Trinidad who participated in the trading network. This small community of ex-patriots worked very closely with the traders by providing transportation, housing and emotional support for many during their stay in Trinidad. In addition, many received produce from friends or family members at home to sell in the market place.

Madelyn listened halfheartedly to the gossip as Aubrey drove us through Port-of-Spain, but was much more preoccupied with getting to the wharf to check on the arrival of her goods. In contrast to St. Vincent, the Trinidad wharf area was larger and divided into two sections: one for cruise ships and the other for the smaller regional boats. The cruise ship berth was centrally located while the customs house with its unimpressive wooden buildings was located at the other end of the wharf. We entered the first building to speak with the shipping agent because MT wanted to get her papers and license before the ship arrived in port. She wanted to transfer the goods to the market compound by mid-afternoon. Since there was no information available regarding the arrival of the Hounddog, the vessel that had left St. Vincent the night before with her goods, we drove to the small apartment that MT rented in San Juan Hills, a working class community, to

drop off our bags. Shouts of hellos greeted us from the yards filled with barking dogs, cats and children, as we climbed the more than thirty steps leading to the apartment.

The three-room apartment was small and modestly furnished. The sitting area was decorated with a red sofa, two chairs and a small coffee table, while the kitchen, directly behind it, was furnished with a small table, three chairs, refrigerator and a small stove. To the right of the sitting room was the bedroom with a single bed directly under the window facing the door, a double bed at the far end of the room and a dresser in between the two beds. Although the room was dusty, it reflected Madelyn's personality: handkerchiefs, jewelry and toiletries were carefully arranged on the dresser, while on the floor next to her bed, lay a basket filled with several handbags neatly piled on top of each other.

The occupants in the next apartment on the ground floor shared the bathroom located in the yard. MT warned me not to use it because the tenants next door did not keep the place clean. As a consequence, I was informed that we would bathe in the open courtyard after 9 p.m. when the other tenants were in for the night and would use a potty, which she kept under her bed. She explained that the water for our baths was stored in a drum near the front door, which would be replenished every time it rained. MT had been living here for ten years and was quite comfortable with her home away from home. It served as a safe haven and a place where she could enjoy some peace and tranquillity far away from Mr. T. Moreover, she has had a close relationship with the owner, a seventy-year-old Vincentian woman living in Trinidad, for more than twenty- five years.

We returned to the docks to learn that the Hounddog had still not arrived. The other women already congregated in the open shed waiting for the Persia II, the other vessel that had left St. Vincent a few hours after the Hounddog. With the passing of each

hour, the women became visibly agitated and anxious because it meant that they would be unable to get their produce to market before the end of the day. By 2:30 p.m., MT was furious with the captain of the boat because he had promised to have the vessel in port no later than 2 p.m. She accused him of taking the boat to Grenada before traveling to T&T. "The crew is Grenadian. It is the only explanation for the delay," she said.

To make matters worse, the Persia II arrived on time, but was clearing immigration when the ladies were informed by the phytosanitary officers that they would not clear any goods if the boats did not arrive by 4 p.m. Although the Persia II arrived at its berth by 3:30 p.m., the goods were not cleared. The customs officers, not inclined to start processing, informed the ladies that they would have to return the next day. The traders were furious because it meant the loss of a day in the market. When we left the dock after 5:50 p.m., the Hounddog still had not arrived. Madelyn was angry and exclaimed, "I am going to have a word with that captain tomorrow."

The following day, MT, dressed in a floral skirt and blouse complemented by a broad straw hat, arrived at the pier by 7:30 a.m. The Hounddog, which had arrived the night before, was still loaded with cargo because the Trinidadian officials had not begun work. Madelyn spoke to the captain tersely, who only laughed as she informed him, "I will not use your ship again, but will wait for the Windward. I know that I can depend on the captain. He leaves St. Vincent on time and arrives in Trinidad on time. It never has problems unloading because the port knows that the Windward has to be on its way to Margarita by 4 p.m. Tuesday." The captain unconcerned turned and walked away from her. The women and the ship's captains had a less than friendly relationship, although they were both dependent on the other. This antagonism and mutual distrust were born

out of their business dealings. Generally, the traders tried to pay less than the value of their goods while the captains were often careless with the cargo (stacking the boxes of perishables goods too closely together, thereby damaging the produce), or are arrived late in port.

By the time customs opened at 8 a.m., there were six boats waiting to be cleared: two from Grenada and St. Vincent and two others from neighboring Caribbean islands. The phytosanitary officers were ready to clear the produce, but the customs people were having difficulty getting their staff together. At 9:30 a.m., pandemonium broke out, as the women, their helpers, and the captains were up in arms since nothing was being done.

Esther, a Vincentian trafficker living in Trinidad, expressed the feelings of many of the traders when she spoke about CARICOM: "Our governments are supposed to be working together, so why do we have so many problems each time our goods arrive in Trinidad? Our representatives should be meeting to iron out the problems that the traffickers faced with the customs department and market place. The representatives should sit down and work out their differences." Others agreed and added, "CARICOM is a joke." CARICOM was perceived by the traffickers and their helpers as useless and ineffective because they were unable to move their agricultural goods freely and unencumbered. Trading between member countries remained problematic and difficult as far as they were concerned.

MT asked me to speak with the customs officer, in the hope that I would be able to resolve the problems quickly. The young customs officer explained that there was no staff to clear the boats and added that everyone present the day before was absent today. The most senior officer, Mr. M., was willing to lend support and help to the officer in

charge. As I waited to speak to Mr. M., the traffickers kept walking back and forth, expressing their anger with the inactivity in the office. They were concerned that by the time the goods, long exposed to a fierce sun were cleared, much of it would have spoiled, resulting in a substantial decrease in profits.

When I got back to the shed, everyone was complaining about the customs office. The women were arguing loudly, but would not approach the officers directly. One of the quarantine officers with whom I had spoken earlier suggested that the traffickers speak with the comptroller. I presented the idea to the group who agreed to take some action. A delegation made up of MT, Esther and myself would take their complaints to the comptroller. However, prior to leaving the area, we went back to the office to speak with the supervisor in the hope that the matter could be resolved amicably. Because the Windward was in dry dock for three weeks, he informed us that no efforts had been made to accommodate the additional volume of traffic. Interestingly, the women did not respond in anger, but instead decided to give Mr. M an opportunity to clear up the matter and opted not to take the issue to the comptroller.

The Officer in Charge (OC) had one man on duty by 10:15 a.m., and appeared in the eyes of the women to be in no hurry to solve the problem. As the cargo sat, the traffickers became angrier and complained to one another, but made no further attempts to meet with the comptroller even though the officers ignored their grumbling. Taking advantage of my outsider's position, MT asked me to intercede on their behalf. As I pressed for information, Mr. M. interrupted his lengthy conversation with the other men in the office to finally address me, stating that "they had made every attempt to find staff, but had been unsuccessful." He promptly returned to his discussion with the other men.

At that point, I asked who was in charge of the division and was referred to KP, the head of customs. It was only then that the OC began taking care of the papers personally.

The OC believed that if the traffickers had followed the proper guidelines, there would be little confusion when the goods arrived in port. He stated that “the women believe that by giving a customs guard a gift, a bribe so to speak, facilitates the entry of their goods. Some of my men accept a bottle of booze and other goods, making it easier for them to operate. However this flaunts the laws. There are good laws on the books that people should follow, particularly the traffickers. If they did, then life would not be as complicated as it presently is.” When I asked about the staffing problem, he confessed that his staff had been on a work stoppage for the last two days because they disagreed with the way in which he handled the office. He also added “the women blame me for what is essentially not my fault.” The OC is Indian while the majority of his staff and the women are of African descent.

According to both Esther and MT, the common perception among the traffickers is that their problems in Trinidad have increased since the East Indians had come to power. MT and Esther stated in separate conversations, “since they took over (meaning the East Indian government of Prime Minister Basdeo Pandy in 1995) things have gotten much worse. The Indians do not like the blacks and mistreat us. For example, the OC makes it very difficult for us to get through customs on a timely basis. We lose hours waiting here for his officers to clear our goods, time that could be well spent in the market. He is not a very nice man.” According to MT, Esther, Pammy and Betty, a Grenadian speculator waiting to clear her goods, tensions have increased considerably

since “they” took over.” Blacks are not happy with the way they were being treated. “Indians are all for themselves. They don’t care about anybody,” the women stated.

At 3:30, the traffickers were still clearing goods and had lost a full day at the market much to their dismay. MT’s goods were still on the docks waiting to be picked up and taken to the market. The OC, noting the hour was extremely solicitous, made special arrangements for her produce to be taken to the market immediately. MT concluded that he was being helpful because he did not want me to write a negative report about the day’s events. When we arrived at the market at 4 p.m., we were greeted by the others, who complained bitterly about the possible loss of revenue. They had one day and a half left to sell and buy goods to take back on the 6:50 flight on Friday to St. Vincent.

Though MT was able to get rid of three bags of eddoes that evening, she worried that the remaining 14 bags of eddoes and coconuts as well as the 5 boxes of avocados would not be so easily sold. The next morning, we arrived at the market by 6:30 a.m. only to learn that one of the traffickers had been robbed on her way to the market. The women were upset and complained bitterly that they were not given much protection by Trinidadian authorities despite common knowledge that they were easy prey for young men hanging around the market place. Although they petitioned the Trinidadian government for more protection, the women claimed that the government never fully addressed their concerns. Instead, a small police unit was assigned to patrol the market, leaving the issue of safety unresolved since the unit was not responsible for securing the surrounding areas leading to the market. Therefore, the traders remained at great risk of assault from those waiting outside the market.

The market place, a sprawling facility located next to a major highway in downtown Port-of-Spain, houses an array of vendors from Grenada, St. Vincent, Guyana as well as Trinidad. The market is divided in such a way that each group has its particular location, though the local merchants are given preference and the best spaces. Foreign vendors are spread around without what appears to be any consideration for their comfort or accessibility to clients. This spatial arrangement favors the local vendor and has negative implications for foreigners since it affects the commercial success of each vendor (Clarke, 1994). For example, the Grenadians and Vincentians, along with their goods, are exposed to the elements, and many are allocated space at the back end of the market out of the main traffic. Generally, the two groups compete, but since the mealybug infestation in Grenada, the Grenadian higglers have been reduced to selling only avocados and spices because of the ban imposed by the Trinidadian government.

MT continued to negotiate with an East Indian merchant who offered her \$50.00 a bag for the eddoes. When she refused, the man informed her that it was the best offer that she would get because the market was flooded with eddoes from both St. Vincent and Trinidad. MT stood her ground and remarked: "It is so typical of him and his kind, (meaning East Indians) always trying to swindle me out of money. Let him go on his way." The man returned a few minutes later and bought two bags of eddoes at \$60.00 a piece. Nonetheless, MT lost \$20.00 on the deal because she paid a Vincentian farmer \$70 per bag. She then tried to persuade a Trinidad vendor, named Rasta (short for Rastafarian) to buy the remaining two bags, but he was only willing to give her \$50.00 per bag. Despite his protest that he had been unable to sell the three bags from the

previous week, MT left the bags on consignment hopes that Rasta would be more successful in the upcoming week in order to recover some of her losses.

As we continued walking through the market, MT shared some of her observations and criticisms of the others with me. Naturally, she did not see herself as part of the problem because she believed that she understood the principles of supply and demand well and thus seldom bought more than the market could absorb. “Do you see the problems that I am having? I don’t understand the women. Why do they insist on bringing so much goods to the market every week, when they know that we will have a hard time selling? Look around, you see them struggling, but they refuse to work together and limit the goods coming into the market. The Trinidad harvest also means that we have to compete against them, too, and the Indians ain’t easy. You see how they try to swindle you out of your money. I don’t know how long we can continue this way. No matter what you tell the women, they never listen. I don’t see the traffickers lasting very long if we continue outbidding and backstabbing each other. Look at them: when will they sell what they have? I tell you, Vincentians ain’t easy.”

“To make matters worse,” she continued, “the Trinidad dollar is worth nothing, and we always have to find ways of getting rid of it. I don’t buy goods like the others to take back to St. Vincent. That’s too much trouble, I prefer to have the money in my hands. I hope that I can get rid of it in the market; otherwise, I will have to go to the bank. The Grenadians usually buy from me, but I don’t know what happened today. Everybody is holding on to their EC dollars. The bank exchange is not usually in my favor and that is why I like to change my money here.” Unfortunately, MT was forced to

exchange the money at the bank and was upset that she had lost some of her profits in the exchange.

On our return to St. Vincent, Madelyn had nothing to declare, since she did not import sodas, juices and other food items to sell in the Vincentian market or in the countryside. Unlike so many of her colleagues, who were struggling with school age children, she no longer had to hustle to make ends meet. MT was seriously considering spending less time in the business and more time with her children in Tortola and England. "I am tired and work too hard for my money. My children want me to stop so that I can spend time with them. Besides, they will give me money if I need it."

The onset of the mealybug crisis in early October provided Madelyn with the opportunity to rethink her retirement date. Initially, she planned to work through June of 97, but with the recent ban imposed by the Barbadian Government against Vincentian produce, MT planned to stop trading even sooner: "The market is going to get very rough. How can we make any money with all of us trading in Trinidad? How are we to survive? I don't know how much more I can stand," she complained.

The mealybug crisis further sharpened the divisions among the three groups that traded in Trinidad, Martinique and Barbados. Both the Trinidadian and Martinique contingent made it clear that their respective markets were saturated and could not absorb additional traders. MT echoed these sentiments, but also expressed dismay at the possibility that the Trinidadian government would join the boycott against St. Vincent, an idea she quickly dismissed as groundless: "How could they stop us from trading? Everyone knows that Trinidad has the mealybug," she retorted. Feeling reassured, MT continued her weekly routine without lending much support either to the Association or

to her colleagues who traded in Barbados. She did not participate in many of the meetings held to discuss strategies, nor did she join the demonstrations that had been organized by the Traffickers Association and the National Farmers Union against the Mitchell government.

When I discussed the matter with her, MT had no explanation and gave no excuse for her behavior. She was too preoccupied with the incursion of the other traders into the market and its impact on her personally to worry about her colleagues. Although the trade was in danger of collapsing, her primary focus, like so many others in this group, was to get their produce to market quickly. The trade continued uninterrupted to Trinidad and Martinique, eventually leading to those who traded in these markets to see the crisis as peculiar to the traffickers who sold produce to Barbados. No longer was it necessary for them to get involved in the activities of the Association to resolve the problem. As far as the ladies were concerned, it was business as usual. It remained unclear why they should get involved in someone else's problems particularly when it did not directly interfere with the trade.

**Yvonne: "The New Breed"**

Before meeting Yvonne, I felt that I knew her because she had been described so often by JT. He had expressed his belief that she and others like her were the future of the trade. Young, bright, energetic and better educated than most of the older traffickers, they were expected to revive the trade by leaving tradition behind and embracing more modern business practices. "Yvonne and the other young traffickers," JT boldly declared during one of our many conversations, "were the bridge between two worlds: the old and the new," or a synthesis between tradition and modernity that would infuse the trade with

vitality. This new group, he believed, would establish trafficking as a dynamic force within the region, a sentiment also shared by Cecil Joseph, the head of the Dominican Huckster's Association. He stated that "the future of the trade lies with the younger and better educated trader." Both were convinced that the younger women would revitalize the trade. Moreover, they were confident that with proper training in the art of selling, merchandising and client development, the younger petty commodity trader would help reverse the downward trend in trafficking. "Training is the key," JT insisted, as we spoke one afternoon. "It will help the younger ones, like Yvonne, develop a clientele as well as good business relationships with institutions and other business people so that they will not have to sell every week in the market like the older women. Believe me, it will make all the difference."

I agreed with both men that the younger traffickers may revive the trade. However, it was my experience that even though they articulated an openness to modern business practices, they continued to employ the old method. They learned the trade and business techniques by observing and working closely with the older, more experienced traffickers. It was no surprise that the young traders conformed to the standards and practices developed over the years by the women who established trafficking as a viable occupation. Yvonne, for instance, repeatedly still oversupplied the market, a behavior pattern that I witnessed to be quite a common practice among the older traders, despite its detrimental effects. When queried, Yvonne informed me, "I have to compete with them if I am to make back my money. What am I supposed to do? I have to make ends meet. I need to send as much as I can to Trinidad in the hope that Tammy, my assistant, will be

able to sell all my goods. If she is successful, I will make back my money, and then I can go back to market the next week.”

Yvonne’s trading strategies, like her colleagues, had been shaped to some extent by tradition, but also in part by the individual trader’s desire to improve her overall economic and social position in less than ideal economic conditions. Consequently, there was a need to out-bid her competition. However, unlike so many of the older traffickers, Yvonne was willing to participate in the training program initiated and designed by the Traffickers Association to teach young traffickers the art of selling: “I want to become successful at what I do and am willing to work hard to learn new ways of doing business. This is my opportunity to learn how to become a more effective businesswoman and become more like JT who runs a successful operation. If I can expand my business by becoming an exporter, then I won’t have to worry so much about money, and then I won’t have to depend on trafficking alone. I could sell car parts which is something that I want to do.” As she articulated her hopes, Yvonne was acutely aware of the obstacles that faced her, such as a lack of financial resources, knowledge of the new product and the intricacies of the international market place. As our relationship developed during the latter part of my stay in St. Vincent, I had the opportunity to observe her progress and success in expanding her business beyond the sale of agricultural products.

I remember my first glimpse of the honey colored, five foot four, full bodied young woman who walked into the shed in a very bright colored, tight fitting top and short skirt early one Monday morning in late March 1996. She immediately stood out, because she was dressed less conservatively than the older women who tended to wear long skirts and the occasional head wrap. She moved about freely, talking and laughing

loudly with the traffickers and their assistants. Yet, despite the obvious differences, she seemed to belong as she yelled across the room... “Where are my boxes? What do you mean you don’t have them ready?” As I listened intently, she demanded to get the boxes immediately. More importantly, Yvonne wanted to purchase the boxes on credit. I had been warned repeatedly by the secretary not to give credit to anyone because many of the female traffickers did not pay their debt, and so I denied her request. As she walked away angrily, I pondered and wondered: Was she really the embodiment of this “new breed” of trader that was going to make a clean sweep and break with the past? At that point, I had grave reservations, though the answer to my question evolved slowly over the following months.

We began to develop our relationship slowly after our “not so pleasant” first encounter. Yvonne had not quite forgiven me for denying her the five cartons. Sensing her resentment, I went out of my way to develop our friendship by offering my assistance each time she came to the Trafficker’s shed. I often waited with her as she negotiated her way through customs when exporting and importing goods to and from Trinidad. As we worked closely over the following months, she became more at ease with me. Yvonne eventually confessed that she had believed that I was like all the other researchers, just a nosy outsider who had come to study the group, and like all the others before me, would leave without any real concern for their well being. It was at this point that she began to talk about herself more openly.

“ I started trading with very little when I was seventeen. At that time, it was the only thing that I was interested in doing. Actually, it was the only thing that I grew up knowing about because there were many traffickers who lived in my area. In every

community, there are traffickers, so you grow up watching and learning about trafficking. The entire nation knows about the traffickers and who they are...very independent women.”

“I considered myself very independent and looked at trafficking as something that I could do. I love business and grew up wanting to join the ranks of the speculators. Besides, there was not much else to do even though I started out working in the hotel industry right after leaving school. I was not going to make it by working in the hotel trade so I saved \$500EC (approximately \$135 US) and used that money to buy some produce with the help of a friend who had been trafficking in Barbados. We pooled our goods together, made one shipment and one bill. It was not so difficult back then to get started, at least not as difficult as it is right now. Remember, it was 1989, and you could still turn a dollar.” Yvonne was referring to the boom that existed in the 1980s when traffickers made substantial amounts of money from the trade because the Trinidadian oil industry was still providing substantial revenue to the country.

She went on to say: “I started out in Barbados because the friend who encouraged me had been working in Barbados and believed that I could earn a good living. When you have to support yourself, you have to find ways to make a dollar, and trafficking is a good way of gaining a source of income. It also helped me to support my family. I worked the Barbados market for several months, but had to switch because it was much more expensive to ship produce to Barbados than it was to Trinidad. Barbados was a bit difficult in that you had to have a National Insurance card and computer number. Trinidad, on the other hand, was a bit easier because you do not have to have these things; all you need to have is the necessary documents for shipping. When you get to

Trinidad, you make your invoice, clear your goods and then you go directly to the market. Besides, Trinidad was faster and easier to travel to, so I joined with someone else who was shipping to that market and had less cost.”

“Now, my major problem is not going to Trinidad myself. Traveling every week is very expensive so I have arranged with a young lady there that whenever I don’t go, she will pick up my goods and sell them for me. Although it is cheaper than in Barbados, it is still costly. For instance, if you are packaging bananas, you first and foremost have to get your cartons, order the bananas, purchase them, wash and treat them, then after all of that, you have to get people to package them. You still have to transport them to town, get a license for them, and you must also meet your shipping bill. There are expenses towards that. Then you have to pay about twenty-five cents or twenty-six cents for export duty in customs, ten dollars for a banana license and one dollar and fifty cents freight cost for each carton you ship. There is a bit more payment you have to make towards bananas.”

“When you get to Trinidad, it is different there. You have to have money to make up that entry and stuff like that, and you also have to declare goods. Then you get to the market place where you suffer most of the time. I must say ‘suffer’ because for these past months [March-June 1996] it has been terrible in terms of sales. Recently, half my goods were left back on the wharf [in St. Vincent] and the rest went to Trinidad. There were absolutely no sales; the market was terrible. I took 1,500 coconuts, golden apples, bananas and plantains. The market was flooded; it had too much, so I had to leave everything in Trinidad. I lost so much money that when I came back to St. Vincent, I had

to find money to pay the farmers for their goods. I had credited some of the goods because the finance wasn't there to purchase all at one time. It was a real disaster.”

“The market is a rough place, and it is mostly our fault that we suffer every week. We, as traffickers, are not united, and that is our major problem. It prevents us from having a better trade. As you know, lots of traffickers go to Trinidad, and by now, we should know for ourselves that we can only take a limited amount of produce. Yet, certain people continue to take more than their fair share so that when we get to Trinidad, the market is flooded with too much goods. Too much food means that not only do we have to leave most of it, but the prices for our goods also fall. If we could only get together, do things the right way, take a limited amount of produce, then we would be able to get a better sale and make more money. We would even be able to pay our farmers a better price for their produce. Trafficking could become even better if only we could unite.”

“Trafficking is in serious trouble and will only survive if somebody does something, and they have to do it fast. The person has to install proper regulations for traffickers and a full support system so that when there is a problem with the market or whatever the case may be, traffickers can still function. We also need a stronger Association where members are involved, not only the President, but also the full body of the traffickers. It is impossible for the Association to function properly when only one set of people is involved and others are not. When you put one good thing in place, only one group follows the new procedure while the others remain on their own. If the Association and trafficking are to work, everybody has to come together and then at least our

trafficking can stand up for a very, very long time. If only we can have something like that.”

“Sales are also poor because of the recent closure of the Barbados market. Barbados is complaining that we have the mealybug, and that they have found it in our produce, so they close their market. However, there is no news as to when it will be opened if at all, but until that decision is made, we are going to face a crisis in Trinidad.” Yvonne was referring to the October 4, 1996 closing of the Barbadian market to Vincentian agricultural goods because of the mealybug infestation which will be discussed in the next chapter.

“It is going to affect Trinidad in a way,” Yvonne exclaimed. “Where all those people who normally go to Barbados will now be going to Trinidad, instead. They just can’t sit back and do nothing; they have to make a dollar like everyone else. Now, the market is going to be even more overcrowded because one person isn’t going to take a limited amount. It is going to be even more of a mess. When the Trinidadian vendors see us, the traffickers, they are going to start complaining that we have too much goods. As it is, they do not want to pay us enough money to even cover our expenses. The Trinidadians are not going to buy from us because then they cannot sell all of these goods, so we end up being stuck with most of the produce. You cannot explain this to the speculators because everyone gets angry and believes that you are trying to corner the market. What am I to do? The mealybug problem isn’t going to go away anytime soon.”

“As it is, we are struggling to keep our heads above water. But I do not plan to give up because it is my only source of income, and until I see something else, I will be out here everyday trying to do my bit. You know that I keep a little side business to keep

me going. My fiancée and I have a lunch shop that normally supplies children with lunch. We make and sell chicken sandwiches and juice. The little money that we make helps me continue speculating. It is a hustle, but a girl has to help herself. My man and I are trying to make it work because we want to get married soon. You need money to make a marriage work, and that is why we are working so hard to earn a bit more.”

Yvonne was concerned and unsure of her future. She believed that trafficking had lost ground and would cease to be a viable occupation unless the women worked together. I understood and shared her fears because the marketplace had changed and most of the traders had not adjusted to the demands of the market. I reassured Yvonne by stating that the President of the Association was working hard to train the traffickers especially, the new traders. Yvonne agreed that JT had been working very hard and took the opportunity to discuss her relationship with him.

“JT has been a really good source of support to me, but there are times that he and I fight because he does not believe that I handle my business as well as I could. He wants me to have a tighter control of the business. Truly, I should travel every week to Trinidad with my produce, but I can’t afford to go every time, so I depend on Tammy to sell. It is not the best system, especially when you do not get a return on your investment. Take last week for instance, I received very little from her and so when I questioned her about the sale of my goods, she claimed that the market was bad, and she could not get rid of the produce. I guess that is why JT argues with me because I do not have a direct handle on my sales. Girl, if I were to follow JT on ever bit of advice, I would go crazy. He does not understand that my business is set up differently from his. Yes, it would be nice to be in Trinidad every week, but I don’t have the money to travel. Besides, JT has been doing

this much longer than me, and he comes from a family of traffickers. This is new for me and I am doing the best that I can.”

“You know how bad things got for me last week? So bad that I had to borrow a hundred dollars (approximately \$27US) from you to cover my expenses. If you had not extended a hand, I don’t know what I would have done. I plan to pay you back as soon as I can (the loan was never repaid) even though I owe JT for some boxes that I had to take on consignment last week. JT and I have worked out a system; he knows how hard it is for me, so I will pick up staples or some other items for the shed and in that way, he gets his money back. I remember the first time that I tried to get you to give me credit on the cartons, you flatly refused, but then you did not understand the relationship between me and JT.” Even though the general rule was not to extend credit to the traffickers, on occasions, JT would allow Yvonne to take cartons on consignment as part of his mentoring.

“We have been working together since 1989 when I first started trading, and during the past seven years, he has been trying to teach me how to handle my business. I know that he gets frustrated with me because at times he will give up on me and tell me that it is hopeless. He wants me to run my business the way that he runs his. He forgets that I do not have the money or the kind of contacts that he has to make my business run as smoothly. I have to struggle every week to make ends meet. I am not saying that JT has had it easy, but like many of the men who trade, he has had it easier than most of the women traders. He has also been in this business for a long time and has established himself so well that he exports goods outside the region and is a member of the exporters group.”

Yvonne is referring to an organization of men, some who are traffickers who send agricultural goods to Canada, England and the US. So far, none of the female petty commodity traders have joined the association because they tend to sell exclusively within the Caribbean region. Although many female traffickers had voiced an interest in expanding their trade beyond the domestic market, it was only recently that the Traffickers and Small Business Association and the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade showed any interest in teaching the ladies how to negotiate the complexities of foreign markets. The attitudes of both the Association and the government may be explained by a limited interest in what is seen as a predominantly female sector of employment, as well as by gender differences that continue to exclude women from full participation in the public domain (Freeman, 1988).

As she continued her narrative, she asked me, “How many women traffickers have you met so far who sell overseas? None. The only woman trafficker in St. Vincent who has a fairly successful business is Thelma, and you know the rumors about her success. Everyone believes that she is doing something illegal. She has a big house in Kingstown, one in Trinidad, a jeep, truck and a Mercedes. How many women traders, do you know, that are doing that well? I don’t know if it is true or not, but when you look at what she has, you cannot help but believe that it is true.” Thelma is one of the few female traders who appear to be financially successful despite the fact that she buys and sells goods regionally. She continues in the same vein:

“Maybe I, too, can become successful. I am not going to spend the rest of my life trying to make ends meet. I have a lot of wild ideas. I do not know when I will get to them, but I am more hopeful that since JT has been working to develop a training

program for the traffickers, maybe things will improve. Perhaps I can get started soon in my new business. There is a tremendous business in St. Vincent for used vehicle parts. I am thinking of seeing if this same speculating, although it is rough, can get me into used vehicle parts. I would continue to take some produce down to Trinidad and use the cash to buy used parts to bring back to St. Vincent for sale. My boyfriend and I are working hard to make this happen soon. He helps me a lot by working with me on the weekend when I have to purchase my goods and during the week selling the lunches.”

Because Yvonne’s young man, like so many others in St. Vincent, is underemployed, he is able to spend a great deal of time helping with her business. Although I had many doubts and knew that it would be difficult for her to succeed in a less than ideal business environment, I saw a young woman slowly moving away from the old ways towards the new model envisioned by JT. Sadly, Yvonne’s efforts to expand her business were delayed as a consequence of the mealybug crisis, which began in early October of 1996. As the Barbados market was closed to traffickers, the number of traders selling in Trinidad increased as predicted, resulting in a drop in market prices as well as poor sales. Yvonne, like her colleagues, saw her margin of profit decrease substantially over the next five months. Even though the Vincentian government tried to negotiate a settlement with the other countries in the region, she still struggled because the crisis was not fully resolved. Nevertheless, Yvonne has not given up her dreams. Since the beginning of 2000, she has gotten married and has been working with NP selling imported chicken parts in the Vincentian countryside.

**Martha: “The Reluctant Informant”**

Unlike my relationship with the other informants, Martha and I never developed a very close bond; instead, we formed a working relationship that was based more on mutual respect than on a genuine friendship. Martha never fully trusted me, even though I worked very hard to convince her that I was not the enemy. Her feelings toward me had been shaped by previous experiences with other researchers that had studied the traffickers over the years. She ventures, “So many investigators come through here and not one of them think to leave behind any information that could be used to help us with our problems.” Martha was making it very clear that the traffickers had been exploited. Consequently, I should not have expected her full cooperation, especially since she had nothing to gain. “None of us have ever benefited from any of these studies.” As far as she was concerned, I was just another investigator who was there to misuse the women and then would leave at the end of the study without rendering any assistance. More importantly, I was the only one who would benefit from my study. After all, she once queried, “What will any of us gain?”

I tried very hard over the course of ten months to persuade Martha that I was genuinely interested not only in the problems facing the traffickers, but also in her personal problems. Despite my efforts, Martha was never quite convinced of my sincerity and maintained her distance to the end. Nonetheless, she became one of my favorite informants because of her outgoing and bombastic personality. She was outspoken and loved to laugh even when she experienced tremendous hardship. Martha was a trooper.

We began our relationship in late March as I was carrying out my duties of selling cartons to the traffickers. My attention was immediately drawn to a very handsome

mocha colored, full figured woman with a green beret who had waddled languidly into the shed yelling, "Miriam, where are you?" As Miriam peered out of the office, the two women began a heated verbal exchange that produced uproarious laughter from those present in the shed. Baffled, I listened intently as the women argued; though, I found it difficult to follow the discussion because I still did not understand at that time the local Creole dialect well. The banter continued for some time, concluding with both women laughing and Martha walking over in my direction. I introduced myself and tried to engage her in conversation by explaining the purpose of my visit. She smiled, paid for five cartons and then walked away.

Intrigued, I spent the remainder of the day, paying close attention to Martha's activities. As she cleaned the yams and eddoes, she repeatedly screamed orders to her workers. During the course of the day, an argument ensued between Martha and her lead worker John. He quarreled over money while she listened impassively without saying a word. Mrs. Johnston, another trafficker, joined the discussion, but she was more concerned with letting Martha know that she disapproved of the number of cartons that she was shipping to Martinique. "When are you going to sell all of these goods? You are sending too much," Johnston exclaimed. Martha looked at both, laughed and then walked away without uttering a word.

At the end of the day, I asked Miriam to tell me about the argument that had taken place earlier. "That was no argument," she stated. "Martha is always trying to get into my business. She wanted to know the name of my baby's father, but I would not give her any information. Martha will not get that information out of me." It was then that I

learned that Miriam was two months pregnant and that there had been great speculation regarding the paternity of the child. Martha implied that JT was the father of the child.

Over the next two months [April- May, 1996], I spent a great deal of time observing, following and speaking to Martha in hopes that she would be less distrustful of my motives. By working with her often, I learned about the problems facing the traffickers who shipped produce to Martinique. Martha and the others were seldom paid for the goods sold in Martinique because under the French system, they were expected to wait fifteen to thirty days before being paid. Most often, the women sold their goods to the French government and other business that paid contractors on a thirty-day basis. To make matters worse, Martha complained bitterly that the traffickers could not collect their money from the middlemen who sold their produce: “Every week there is a new story. No matter what we do, we can never collect all our money. Instead, we get a small amount every now and then to pay our bills. It is not enough to take care of our families. Despite our efforts, we don’t seem to be getting anywhere. We have no one to fight for us and the Association has not been able to help at all.”

Although the matter had been brought to JT’s attention, he expressed disgust. “Those women are impossible and will not listen to anything that I have to say. Do you know how many times I have told them to stop taking goods to Martinique? What is the point if you are not being paid? They are to be blamed for the situation that they are in. Marie, the middle-woman in Martinique, who sells for them, has repeatedly told them not to ship so many goods every week, because then she can’t get rid of it before the next shipment. Martha and that group never listen to what I have to say. Moreover, they have to realize that it is a different market. The French do not allow them to bring just any kind

of produce. They demand that they wash, clean and package their goods in proper cartons. The produce has to be of good quality; otherwise, it will not be accepted. Look at Martha; she has a hard time collecting her money, and yet she insists on taking the same amount every week. I have tried time and time again to get it across to that group that they can't expect to make any money if they continue to flood the market with produce. Do you see what they are taking this week? Martha alone can fill the market. It is no use trying to talk to them."

It was obvious to me that JT had given up on the women. Nonetheless, I made several attempts to help. In one of my discussions with KR, the head of the International Farming and Agricultural Development (IFAD) Project based in St. Vincent I expressed my concerns about the plight of the women and wondered if there was anything that he could do to help. We agreed that the project would pay for a translator to travel with the women and myself to help them negotiate better terms for their produce. I took this information back to Martha and the others for their approval. All were delighted and eager to get going.

Our first attempts to carry out the plan failed for several reasons. Initially, it was difficult to find a translator fluent in both French and the local patois dialect, the language of the Martinique market. But once we settled on the translator, we could not arrange a date because the women were not traveling due to the upcoming carnival festivities in late June. So, we postponed our travel plans until early July 1996. By then, the women had lost interest in the project and were not particularly keen on having us travel along with them. Perplexed, when I queried Martha about the change in their attitude. Her only

response was, "There really is no decent place for you to stay. Where we stay is just not appropriate for you." She offered no further comments.

JT and Miriam believed that the ladies may not be have been comfortable with the possibility that Mr. Peters, the translator, and I would have access to information that might disclose their income. More importantly, they probably thought that Mr. Peters, as a staff member of one of the government Ministries, would more than likely share this information with government officials. I tried to reassure Martha and the others that the terms of their agreement would remain confidential unless they wished to share the information with others. Failing to convince them, I suggested that we could travel without the services of the translator and that I would try to help with my limited French. The latter suggestion was received with lukewarm enthusiasm. As a result, the trip was postponed for a second time.

We continued to talk about our plans for months, but never came to an agreement that would allow me to make the trip before the onset of the mealybug crisis. I worked with Martha as often as I could believing that eventually she would agree to our initial plan. However, as months passed, Martha continued to find one excuse after another to prevent me from traveling with the group, despite their worsening economic situation. To add to her burden, she learned that her blood pressure was high. She was advised by the doctor to slow down and to lose weight. It was during this period that she began to open up and our conversations became more intimate. Martha began to narrate bits and pieces of her life.

"Life has been very difficult for me. I had sixteen children, ten of whom are alive. I was a very foolish and ignorant young woman. I saw my friends getting pregnant, and I

wanted a baby, too. The first time that I got pregnant, I did not know, but my boyfriend did. It was he who told me. I was getting bigger but did not make the connection to pregnancy. This is how simple I was. From then on, I was pregnant every year. My last child is now thirteen. Frankly, I do not wish my children to have the kind of life that I had. It still is a very hard life. Struggling to maintain my household is difficult. Presently, I am having a great deal of problems with Martinique. As you know, I have been complaining that I have not been able to collect my money. My blood pressure is high to the point where the doctor told me to lose weight. As you can see, I have had no success.” I remained extremely sympathetic during our conversation and made some dietary suggestions such as avoiding fatty foods, sugars and snacking between meals. Martha remarked “I have tried over the years, but it has been a losing battle because with each pregnancy, I got bigger.”

As she discussed her life, I saw a very vulnerable woman. She was not the bombastic and confident woman that I had grown to know. Instead, I saw a woman who was very worried not only about her health, but also about her financial difficulties. A sadness lingered on her face as she collected her thoughts. Afraid that she might have revealed too much about herself, she smiled and quickly said her good-byes.

I was very touched as well as concerned about her physical well being, so I discussed Martha’s problems with Miriam. I said, “It is hard to understand why Martha and the others continue to ship to Martinique when they are not paid. They send over two hundred pounds of yam each week. How can the wholesaler dispose of that quantity in such a short period of time? Why do they insist on taking so much? Why can’t they send

less and diversify the goods? If they did, it would give them a better opportunity to sell their produce.”

I had become accustomed to hearing these comments repeatedly when I began working with the traders. For example, Tiny, an outspoken critic and seasoned veteran, who shipped produce to Trinidad weekly, informed me in one of our early conversations that “traffickers have to limit the quantity of goods shipped abroad. If we send less, we would make more.” Although the women, including Martha, subscribe to an “ideal” standard for conducting business, that is, limiting goods and working together, they seldom follow this prescription. This disjuncture between the “ideal and “actual” behavior of the traffickers may be explained by an emphasis on entrepreneurship, which is supported by an individualistic ethos found throughout the Caribbean (Yevilton, 1998).

It is important to note that the speculators were able to purchase more produce than the market demands because farmers needed to dispose of surplus goods that the local market cannot absorb. Moreover, farmers welcomed the additional income that their relationship with the women provided, despite the difficulties that they often faced in collecting payment.

Miriam continued with our discussion by saying, “The women who ship to Martinique are hardheaded and petty. Sonia, one of the members of that group, who ships smaller quantities of yam to the wholesaler, gets paid, so Mrs. Roberts, a very vocal member of the Martinique group, conspired with the others not to allow her goods on the boat. Can you imagine? They told the woman to charter a boat herself. These women are being vindictive and are punishing this woman because she is getting paid. Perhaps, if the

others took less, they too would get paid. Martha and the group have no one to blame but themselves.”

As far as Miriam was concerned, this story supported her argument: “the less the traffickers send to the market, the more likely they were to get paid.” She naturally concluded that the problems facing the traders was of their own making and would only get better once they changed their irrational business practices. To some extent, she may be right; the women were partly responsible. The small size of the market limits the amount of produce bought weekly by the wholesalers and the public. Because Sonia took a limited amount of produce to Martinique weekly, the middleman who represented her interest in the marketplace is able to dispose of the goods more quickly. In general, customers would only buy what they needed, and thus anything over the prescribed limit would go unsold. As a result, the Martinique middlemen would not pay the women for the unbought produce. The Vincentians, who believed that they were being robbed, however, contested this.

To make matters worse, petty commodity traders faced many other obstacles such as inadequate transportation, negligible financial support from local institutions, too little training, competition from the global marketplace as well as the more recent mealybug infestation. These factors tended to prevent many from operating successful businesses. Moreover, since neither the local governments nor CARICOM had fully recognized the contributions of the traders to both the national and regional economies, they appeared to have developed a “laissez-faire” attitude in formulating policies that would facilitate trading for this group.

The situation remained the same through early September 1996. Martha was still struggling. Sensing her despair, I took the opportunity to offer my help once more. Reluctantly, she agreed to return to our initial plans, albeit with a proviso, that the translator was not to be included in our travels. I made my travel arrangements only to learn that Martha would not be traveling that week. She claimed that her financial situation had become worse and as consequence, she would be unable to make the flight. Had she deliberately sabotaged her plans to prevent me from going? In retrospect, it appeared so because for several months, Martha had continued to travel despite her pressing financial problems. Subsequently, our trip was postponed until the following Tuesday. At this point, I must confess that I harbored very little hope that the plan would be carried out. Though disappointed, I still sat with her, and while wiping yams, took the opportunity to ask about her first experiences as a trafficker. She related the following:

“Although I wanted to take up the trade, initially, I got involved in trafficking by selling eddoes, plantains and other produce to traffickers. One day, I said to myself, instead of planting to sell, let me take up the trade of my mother. She used to sell fish throughout the countryside, and it was through her work that I learned a little about buying and selling. I had no money at the beginning, and it was my sister who loaned me some money to buy produce to take to the market.”

“It was not easy then, and it is not easy now. When I first began, I shipped goods to Trinidad and many times lost most, if not all of it, as a result of bad weather. The boat would arrive in Trinidad without my goods, including the animals that I shipped. At that time, you could still ship animals. Can you imagine how I felt when I arrived in Trinidad to collect my goods only to be told that all my animals and other goods had been washed

away at sea? Naturally, I became upset and worried because I did not have the money to pay people for the goods that I had credited. I had to struggle to find money to pay these people, and it was not easy. Business had always been up and down. One week, I would get some money, the next I would get licks [badly hurt in the market]. It has been difficult from the start, not only for me, but also for many of the traffickers who had lost their goods during that time. You see, many of the captains overloaded their boat, forcing the crew to throw our goods overboard just to save their neck and the boat. It has been up and down since the start.” I sat listening attentively as she continued.

“My pregnancies did not help, either. As I told you before, I made sixteen children, buried six. When I made a baby, I traveled with it until the ninth month. Once they had to take me off the plane with baby in hand because the other one was coming. Can you image that?” she said laughing. “Thank God for my sister who lives in Trinidad. She always took care of the new baby while I went to the market. The older children went to school, with my first child acting like the mother while I was gone from Tuesday until Friday. The father was there, also, but sometimes he was not around, so she had most of the responsibility.”

“Because my children were young, I had to do a lot of the work myself. I washed and packaged my goods to take to the market. Eventually, some of the boys living in my area helped me prepare and package the produce.” Suddenly, Edric, one of the leading male traffickers, interrupted our conversation. He, along with others like NP, had become quite successful at trafficking and had now bought his own boat, which he used to ply between the islands (Edric will be discussed in the next section). Edric informed Martha that she had to have her shipment ready because his boat would be leaving for Martinique

by 4 p.m. that afternoon. I was surprised by this new relationship, because both individuals had very little respect one for one another. Like most of the traffickers, Martha considered Edric to be greedy and implied that his motto “dollars rule,” aptly described the man. Edric, on the other hand, also painted an unflattering picture of the women as “uncooperative and not likely to pay their debts.”

Miriam explained this unholy alliance: “The Martinique group is constantly changing boats because they do not pay the captains all the money. Every week, they have to find a new captain to transport the cargo.” Even though I knew from talking to several boat captains that the women had often tried to circumvent payment, I was still sympathetic. Miriam, however, was unmoved. “Even if they had been paid,” she stated, “they would still owe the boat captains.” Her opinion about the women had been shaped by a prevailing belief held among many Vincentians that female traffickers seldom paid their bills. Furthermore, this sentiment was reinforced by daily observation as well as by interaction of the traders with the boat captains. Edric, she remarked, “will do anything for money.” Since neither party involved in the transaction offered any information about the terms of their agreement, I could only speculate that Martha’s group was forced to ask Edric for assistance and was probably paying a little bit more per carton than the prevailing rate.

Martha and I resumed our conversation while wiping yams. “It was tough going for me over the years. Fortunately, by working with me, the children learned very early how to pick, buy, wash and package the produce. Eventually, I relied on the older ones to buy from the farmers, which allowed me to buy goods from farmers in other areas. You could say that I trained all my children to be traffickers, but only three of the boys work

at it sometimes. Right now, none of the boys are successful. If I don't buy and send produce for the one in Barbados, then he does not sell in the market. So I guess you could say that to some extent, he is still in trafficking. The rest of the children are trying to make it by working for the government and other businesses. I still have a few young ones at home who are going to school. I hope that they will have a better life than I have."

As we continued to work on the shipment, I turned to Martha and asked why she chose the Martinique market. She responded pensively: "I had not been doing anything for a year, at least not on a steady basis. Occasionally, I shipped three, four or five boxes of produce to Trinidad, and the money earned was used to buy mattresses for sale here in St. Vincent. It was the only way that I could get my money's worth. The Trinidadian dollar had been devalued, and that is why I stopped shipping every week. It made no sense. What could that little money do? It did not stop the others, but it stopped me. I tell you, it made no sense, so in 1995, I joined the Martinique group."

"That market opened up when a group of traffickers, including JT, traveled to Martinique in search of markets. They came back with such high hopes for the traders that Mrs. Roberts, one of the group members, convinced me to return to trafficking. Since I was not doing anything, she suggested that I take some goods on credit to ship to Martinique. That's how I got started again about a year ago. But frankly, I don't know how in God's name they don't kill us," Martha exclaimed, as she pounded her fist in her palm. "It has been hard knocks; suffocation really come to meet us," she added.

I wondered how much her inability to speak Martiniquan Creole and the lack of direct access to the market place contributed to this feeling of suffocation. Martha had no power and had to rely on the integrity of others to sell her produce: "I don't speak Creole,

as a matter of fact, neither do any of the others. Sometimes when they speak, I can understand them, but not enough to carry on business. I am forced to work with Audrey, a Dominican woman from Roseau, who speaks Creole and interprets for me. It is hard trying to get the best price for your goods when you have to go through someone else, especially when they are also selling their own goods. Nevertheless, Audrey negotiates with Marie, the Martinique woman who sells for me and a few of the others, because we can't sell in the market. They say that it is not right for us to come and sell there, so Marie takes my goods on consignment directly from the boat and sells them in the market. I rely on her and must wait until she sells most, if not all my produce, before I can get my money. I like to keep an eye on what is going on, and that is why I have taken the boat many times when there are no flights available. This week, I don't have the money necessary to travel and hope that Marie will send me something, so that I can get up there next Tuesday."

Once the shipment was completed that afternoon, Martha and I said our good-byes with the understanding that I would travel with her on the following Tuesday. Unfortunately, my plans had to be canceled since all flights to Martinique were booked for the next two weeks. By now (mid-September, 1996), I was extremely discouraged and feared that I would not get the opportunity to learn first hand about the problems facing Martha and the others in the Martinique market. NP tried to reassure me, but I was not very hopeful. As a result of my past experiences with the group, I knew that my invitation could be rescinded at any time, thereby heightening my concern. "Keep trying, maybe you can get a flight by the mid-October," was his only remark.

For the next week, Martha and the group continued to travel and were still not receiving enough money from the sale of their produce. She expressed her concerns: “We have a lot of problems. It is more than not getting our money; we are not getting the right price for our goods. When we buy from the farmers at a certain price, we expect to make a profit from the sale, instead, we are losing our shirts. In addition, our expenses are so high that we can barely make any money. There is the expense of the boat, the boxes, the labeling and of the boys who work for me and have to be paid and given lunch. Then, the price of goods varies depending on where you buy them. Where is the profit? When I put all of these figures in my book, they add up to a loss. Besides, sometimes when you go to Martinique, they pay you only part of what they owe you, but when you come home, you can’t give people part of their money; you have to give them all of it. Then, I still have to turn around to find money to buy more goods. Tell me, how can we survive?”

“To make matters worse, we are not getting enough support. If the Traffickers and Small Business Association had money, we could borrow some during times of stress. As it is right now, the Association has no money to lend, and you certainly can’t get any from the bank. Even if the Association could lend us money to buy goods, where would we sell them? Where are the markets? We need good markets to sell our produce, and so far no one is helping us to find markets for our goods.”

“Another problem that we have to deal with all the time is customs.” The women accuse the customs of exorbitant duties, high fees, over-zealous searching and arrogant behavior. “We speculators are holding up the customs department. If the traffickers did not go in there to check our goods, how many of them would have jobs? We have to get a license for this and for that, pay a phytosanitary fee, shipping fee, and when you come

back, you have to pay import taxes. Then, the customs officers give you a hard time as well as complain that the speculators cheat. They overdo it, and take advantage of us. Tell me, who is there to fight for us? I am tired and am prepared to turn the business over to the young ones like my daughter. Maybe they can come up with new ways of doing business and finding other markets.”

The speculators did not have an “easy time,” as Martha often remarked. In part my observations supported her argument that the women had relatively little financial support other than those offered by their family and extended kin networks. It was also true that the Vincentian government benefited substantially from revenues collected by customs officials, as a result of the trade, caused hardship for the traffickers. Martha was also correct when she decried the state of the regional markets. Moreover, the Traffickers and Small Business Association did not provide the assistance and support to its members.

Even though the aforementioned statements were true, Martha excluded the behavior of the women as being a contributing factor. As I have mentioned several times, the speculators regularly oversupplied the market despite repeated warnings from JT and others regarding the principles of supply and demand that too much produce resulted in lower prices. Many have also been reluctant to adjust their business practices to accommodate the changing demands of the market place and would still send poorly packaged produce to the market.

Equally as important, the women did not support the Association. Seldom did they attend meetings. During my twelve-month stay, the only meetings that were convened were related to the mealybug crisis, and even then, the majority did not attend

the meetings. Additionally, most did not pay their dues, or move to convene with their board to discuss policy issues or to elect new officials. No new elections for officers had been held since 1990, leaving the decision making to the same individual. This lack of interest had rendered the Association powerless and ineffective in negotiating on behalf of the traffickers. Perhaps, as Yvonne noted, the Association would be more influential “if you can get everybody involved and together, then we can have a bigger Trafficker’s Association. The President alone can’t do it. Everyone has to get involved.”

As usual, Martha and I ended our dialogue pleasantly and reconfirmed our travel plans for Martinique in mid-October 1996. Sadly, our plans as well as any further development in our relationship were deferred for the remainder of my stay in St. Vincent. My attention became diverted to the problems posed by the mealybug infestation. Consequently, from October 1996 through January 1997, I devoted much of my time to strategizing with JT on resolving these issues. In so doing, we tried to persuade, cajole and motivate the speculators to band together but had very little success despite all of our efforts. Most of the traders, especially those not directly affected, continued their routine unabated.

Martha and the Martinique group were no exception. When asked to participate in meetings held by the Association, Martha, though visibly concerned, informed me that she could not attend the meetings because “they are always held when I am getting my goods ready for shipment.” Since the meetings conflicted with the traders’ schedules, I suggested that we rearrange them to coincide with their mid-day lunch hour. Even then, many traffickers, including Martha and the Martinique group, did not attend the meetings

nor did they participate in any of the protest activities organized by the Association to bring their plight to the attention of the Vincentian government.

Despite the turmoil created by the pest infestation, I was fortunate to meet Martha's twenty-one year old daughter, during this time. Linda, a petite, dark-haired, chocolate brown-skinned woman, often visited the shed to check on her mother as well as on the progress the Association was making with regard to the crisis. Martha introduced me to her daughter with great pride. Linda had successfully completed her O levels and was presently working as a receptionist at the airport. Martha looked at her daughter and remarked that she was tired and would love to hand over the business: "I am ready to turn over the business to my daughter if she is interested." Seizing the opportunity, I asked Linda if she had ever thought of becoming a trafficker. She was very pensive before replying, "yes." Linda came the shed to meet with me because her mother had informed her that she and I had been discussing trafficking and her domestic life.

Linda continued. "St. Vincent is a nice place to live, but as you can see, it is not an easy place to make a living. Agriculture is our major form of activity, and traffickers rely on it to make a living. Perhaps you could assist the traffickers to find markets since you come from America. Believe me, it would be a great help. The women need to know that when they are buying their produce, there is a market where they can sell their goods so that they may earn a steady income. These women have families that rely on them for survival, and many also have a side business that depends on this income to stay afloat. Since there is no strong regional market, the traffickers must go beyond the Caribbean if they are to remain in business."

**“Moreover, they need to have someone represent them in the market place.**

**Ideally, this person should work for the government as well as with the traffickers. I believe that the individual would be responsible for finding new markets, learning the restrictions present in those markets, checking on the types of licenses, and most importantly, negotiating the right fees. With this system in place, the women could ship their produce to these markets and secure a good income. Presently, traffickers are not attached to the government and are self-employed, doing their own stuff, so to speak. As a result, it would be impossible for them or the Traffickers Association to negotiate any trading agreements with these countries.”**

**Linda, a very articulate young woman, added dispassionately: “If the government assisted my mother and the others in Martinique, they would not have such a difficult time. Our government could negotiate an agreement whereby the ladies could get together to pay for the boat and the freight before the produce was taken to the market. In so doing, the lady who sells for them would be prevented from taking these fees out of their profit. Right now, they are not making much because she takes the money from the sales to pay for the freight, the boat, and also her commission, thereby leaving them with little or nothing. In addition, the ladies must pay for their flight and must pay the farmers when they return home. So as you can see, it is not easy, therefore, I understand my mother’s frustration and desire to get out of the trade.”**

**“Overall, speculators stay in the business not just for survival, but to remain independent, and not to having to stretch their hand to nobody. My only wish is that they work together, especially since they are all ladies. This business is run primarily by women, and as far as I am concerned, women are supposed to be together as one.**

Frankly, I don't know why, nor do I understand why they behave as they do. For instance, if the majority of the ladies purchase yams at \$2.00 (\$.74US) a pound, one of them will surely come along to buy the same type of yams for \$2.50 (\$.93US), knowing fully well that the others have only paid the farmers \$2.00 a pound. Does this make sense, especially when that woman knows that she is not going to get any more for these yams in the market? She will have to sell the yams at the same price as the others. How can we correct this problem? I believe that the women need to decide beforehand on the prices at which they are willing to buy and sell their goods. In so doing, they can command better prices and make a decent profit."

"Perhaps that is one of the major reasons why I have not left my job as a receptionist to become a trafficker. Until the women learn to cooperate and come to some agreement on a pricing system, it simply does not make sense to get involved in the trade at the moment. However, I don't want to give you the wrong impression; I like business and plan to go into trafficking one of these days. You see, my mother taught me the importance of having your own business as well as the need for women to always have something of their own, even after they are married. Women should be independent and have something for themselves. Trafficking is one of the ways in which people like me can establish themselves. Nonetheless, the system has to change, things have to be done differently. If not, the ladies are going to create a lot of problems for us, the young ones. Maybe one day soon, I will start; then I will help to change the old system."

Martha joined us as our conversation was ending and beamed when I complimented her on raising a daughter who is not only independent but also champion's women's issues. Martha exclaimed proudly, "She should be independent. I left her and

the others on their own for long periods at a time while I worked, so she had to learn from very early on how to be strong and self-sufficient. I know that my daughter can become a very good speculator because she has a good head for business and has learned the trade by watching and working for me over the years. She will do well, trust me.” Linda laughed and added, “I have also learned what not to do as a result of listening to your complaints and problems for the last twenty something years. So as you can see, trafficking is certainly not new to me.”

## CHAPTER VII

### LIFE HISTORIES: PART II - MALE TRAFFICKERS

#### **Edric: “Dollars Rules”**

Like the other men who traffic in St. Vincent, Edric, exhibited an air of confidence and self-assuredness. He always strutted about the island with an air of self-importance. This six-foot, dirty-blond blue-eyed male Bequian<sup>20</sup> has been trafficking for the last ten years, and has developed a very successful business, thereby acquiring a certain status and prestige within the trafficking community. “Dollars,” as Edric was nicknamed, also symbolically represented the man. His often-repeated refrain, “dollars rule” was well known among the traders who clearly understood that Edric would not extend himself unless there was some monetary compensation for his services. “I tell you dollars rule. Money helps to get you what you want.”

Edric lives in Barbados with his Barbadian wife and two children and spends most of his time in St. Vincent while devoting the weekends to his family in Barbados. He expects to stop trafficking within the next year so that he can spend more time growing fruits and vegetables for niche markets in the US, Canada and England. Moreover, Dollars hopes to capture the lucrative market from the tourist cruise shipping industry that is developing in the Caribbean. He has been experimenting with fruits such as melon as well as with vegetables such as squash on his one and half acre farm right outside Kingstown.

---

<sup>20</sup> Bequia is the largest of the Grenadine islands. It was well known for whaling and its beauty. It attracts tourists yearly, many of whom have homes on the island.

To accomplish his goals, Dollars has been very systematic in the handling of his business. I spent four months observing his business and how he handled his crew before the mealybug crisis disrupted his well-crafted plans. He worked from six in the morning until almost twelve at night on Mondays and Tuesdays to ensure that his shipment would be of the best quality. Dollars pushed both his ground crew of six men and his brother's boat crew of four men to work conscientiously and non-stop. His crew and those who supplied his produce would probably have described him as a mean taskmaster.

Dollars and I became friends quickly, in part, because I was a woman who was educated and from the United States. Moreover, I was of Caribbean heritage, thereby making our relationship even more acceptable, as he put it, "you are one of we." These characteristics helped to establish a fairly open and trusting relationship between us. For the next four months, until the mealybug crisis broke in early October, Dollars took me under his wing, not only to show me the ropes, but also to impress me with his importance as a trafficker in St. Vincent. We traveled throughout the island buying goods to ship to Barbados. Unfortunately, he never allowed me to travel on the boat because he said it was not the proper place for a lady. He wanted me to understand the issues that the traffickers face from his perspective.

We began working in early May after he agreed to become one of my male informants. He was delighted by my request and immediately pointed out some of the problems that beset the traffickers. "I believe that James Thomas (JT), the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association should not allow certain practices to continue within the shed. This place is unsanitary and a breeding ground for rats. The palettes that are against the wall at the back of the shed need to be removed, and the metal

poles laying about should be thrown out because they have not been used within the last five years. Additionally, JT should not allow Thelma's container to remain in the shed anymore because she does not clean that area and it adds to the serious problem that we have with rats. Besides, the shed is designated for packing not for serving as a warehouse for Thelma's goods."

Thelma was one of the more successful female traffickers who imported large quantities of foodstuff from Trinidad. She has been frequently accused of participating in illegal activities and is resented by most of the traffickers because of her close ties to Prime Minister Mitchell. This relationship has allowed her to import food and beverages into the country without too many restrictions. Dollars feels that she has taken unfair advantage of her position to abuse the Traffickers Association. Thelma does as she pleases, and so far, not even JT, has been willing to confront her regarding the container. Dollars believes that JT is wrong and needs to address this issue immediately.

We continued our conversation in the shed as he inspected the bananas, coconuts and plantains that were being prepared for shipment that afternoon to Barbados. As he walked back and forth, he explained some of the problems that the traffickers faced with the Vincentian Banana Association, and Geest, the British counterpart to Dole/Chiquita in the Caribbean. "I bought the bananas from Geest for \$4.25 a box (US\$ 1.59), which is very expensive, especially since I only paid a dollar per box until very recently. I blame the Vincentian Banana Corporation for the steep rise in prices because they have encouraged the farmers to be wasteful. It is we who suffer for their bad habits. You are not going to believe this, but at one point, the Corporation added bananas free of charge to your order, but then that was when no one wanted bananas."

The litany of complaints continued as we drove in his truck towards his brother's 87-foot boat. Four of his workers packed the bananas in the cavity below deck against the far back wall and then the sides and front as he constantly barked orders. The men laughed at his performance, which led to a lecture.

“You all laugh, keep it up. You like to hear me give orders, but I have to because of your attitude. It doesn't matter how long you men have been working for me, you still don't do things right, and I have to keep on top of you to make sure that my goods are handled properly.”

As I watched, one of the worker's informed Dollars that the phytosanitary papers were needed, and the Ministry of Agriculture did not have any one available to issue the papers. “Do you see what we have to go through?” he asked. “I have more than \$1,500 (US\$ 568.00) worth of bananas invested in this shipment plus \$4,000 (\$1498.00) tied up in the boat for fuel to lose that money. Let us drive up to the Ministry to find someone to inspect these goods.” An office worker at the Ministry informed us that the officer had gone to the country to inspect produce as one of the other workers had a death in the family. “These people know me and as you can see, they make no effort to work with me and the other traffickers. Can you tell me why there is no coverage? To make matters worse, the government insists on conducting business in the same old way. When are we going to get ahead?”

We were forced to drive to the airport to find the only available inspector. The young female inspector was polite, but firm when she told Dollars that it was impossible for her to leave the airport because she was expecting a flight with plants and produce. Frustrated and desperate, Dollars explained his predicament and asked the young woman

if she would reconsider. Finally she agreed to go down with us to inspect the goods. As we drove back to the boat, she explained that there were only four agents to inspect farm goods, two at the airport and the other two in town. When someone has an emergency, they have to make do because the Ministry of Agriculture had informed them that there was no money to hire a fifth person, or even to buy a car to help the agents to get around the island. She was tired of putting up her money in cases like this because she was never reimbursed. After the produce was inspected, Dollars gave the young woman transportation money to return to the airport. The phytosanitary documents were later taken to customs, and Dollars eventually received the necessary licenses to ship the goods to Barbados. The boat left by 7 p.m. that night.

Typically, we would leave the traffickers' shed at 12:30 in the afternoon in order to buy goods. Dollars, two of his workers and I would travel along the windward highway towards Sandy Bay, the far northern end of the island. We would make several stops, first to a small farm right outside Kingstown that was owned by a Rasta, who regularly supplied Dollars with plantains and peppers. Although Dollars remarked that the man was unreliable, he continued to buy from him because the produce was of high quality.

We would then drive to his 1 1/2 acres of land where two workers were taking care of goats and fowls such as chickens, turkeys and guinea hens. The chickens were kept in a cage where they were fed a special feed. Pineapples, papayas, mangos, watermelons and oranges were grown on the farm. He was also experimenting with butternut squash and cantaloupe in order to enter niche markets in the US, England and Canada. The farm also stored his supply of boxes to pack the plantains that he purchased on the road. As we

drove away, he informed me that he had to fire one of the young men because he was not doing his work properly.

As we drove into Georgetown, on the eastern side of the island, the rough waters of the Atlantic pounded the winding coastline, creating a majestic and breathtaking view that was not lost on either one of us. Dollars remarked on its beauty as well as its possibilities. "This place is one of the most beautiful areas on the island and either the government or some private investors should develop a zoo, an amusement park and hotels to attract Vincentians and other visitors, but as usual nothing will be done. Vincentians have no sense of vision. The big merchants with all their money should invest in such a project, but they prefer to see their money in the bank earning a pitiful interest rather than investing in the development of their island. I would love to develop this area but I don't have the backing. After all I am just a trafficker."

A few miles out of Georgetown, a Carib flagged the truck and asked Dollars to buy his plantains, which he purchased. Further up route, we were stopped by a woman who wanted Dollars to buy her plantains, which he refused because he had already promised to buy someone else's load. The woman continued to press by telling him that the plantains would be stolen if he did not buy them from her this week. He replied, "Woman, you are being unfair, what do you want me to do, tell the other person that I won't take his plantains? Nah, I can't do that. Let us pick up the coconuts."

When we arrived in Sandy Bay, Dollars drove directly to the home of a Carib family who frequently supplied him with coconuts. As I looked around, I was immediately struck by the contrast between the land and the physical structures. The rolling hills were adorned with lush vegetation such as flowering plants, shrubs and

bamboo; they provided a stark contrast to the inhospitable appearance of Sandy Bay. Dwellings were falling apart, and children played in tattered clothing, many without shoes. The Caribs withdrew to this end of the island after they were defeated by the British in 1797 and remained in imposed self-isolation. Over the years, the Vincentian government policy of benign neglect also did not encourage the Caribs to assimilate into Vincentian society at-large.

Dollars seemed oblivious to the sight as he proceeded with the business at hand. Four Carib men with the assistance of two of Dollar's workers loaded the truck with 45 bags of coconuts, placing each bag neatly one on top the other until the truck was fully loaded. While he paid the Carib men, Dollars explained: "These people work very hard and deserve every bit of money they get. It is a shame that most of them are so poor that they can barely make it."

From there, we drove to the farm of the other Carib man who had earlier sold Dollars plantains. The men cut and trimmed the plantain; Dollars weighed them, and I took down the individual weight of each hand. While I added the weights, the plantains were cut into fingers and packed directly into cartons. The Carib was paid based on the total weight of the plantains. We had been working steadily most of the day, and it was now 5 p.m. Dollars served tea from a small electric pot that he had received from one of his brothers in the US. The truck was well equipped with tea bags, coffee, sugar and other items. Dollars remarked that it was necessary to have these items available since he was constantly on the road.

On our way back to Kingstown, Dollars stopped at the home of an East Indian family to inform them that he would return the following morning to pick up the cartons

of bananas that had been pre-packed because the truck could not take any more load. Dollars dropped his workers off at their homes, then drove to a store owned by the Andrews, his good friends. Mr. Andrew, an East Indian Vincentian, believed that “the traffickers are invaluable to the economy, and it is a shame that they are not recognized for their services. Dollars is one of the exceptional ones.” It was obvious that the men had great respect for each other.

As we drove back, Dollars discussed the traffickers and the Banana Association. “The women” he stated, “are disorganized as well as unorganized. They are mistrustful, uncooperative, backstabbing, and think only of themselves. I don’t think that many of these women can survive because of their attitude.” Dollars’ feelings echo those of JT and other male traffickers. “The women,” he argued, “will never move beyond where they are now because they are unwilling to change. They didn’t understand that the markets no longer accept poor quality.” He continued:

“As for the Banana Association, that is another story. First of all, the farmers are being paid very little for their work, and they have no incentive to produce better quality bananas. Moreover, the farmers I believe also stick the Association with poor quality goods because of their attitude of ‘if I can get away with it why not’. It is this attitude that is costing St. Vincent dearly. Additionally, many of the farmers who received land as a result of land reform do not have the technical skills nor the money necessary to hire sufficient laborers to run a good farm. So, they must rely on family by taking kids out of school during the harvest to pick bananas. The teachers are equally as bad since many come from the farming community and are also involved in picking bananas for their

families. Education will never take priority in this country as long as students and teachers have to serve as farm workers.”

Dollars went on to state that “many of the bananas were of poor quality. The bad ones were slipped into the box along with the good ones. Since no one opens each box, farmers were able to get away with a great deal. Sadly, he said, many of these poor quality bananas end up in England and reflect badly on the country. Still, it is hard for them to care especially since they only got .8 cents a pound.

Interestingly, Dollars found himself in a predicament with the Banana Association in mid-June. He was refused a banana license because he had purchased more than five hundred bananas from truckers rather than the Banana Association. As a result, he was penalized by George Samuels, who was one of the men in charge of the Banana Association. He took me along with him to meet with Mr. Samuels, who upon seeing us stated that he didn’t have time for us. Nevertheless, he took us into a small room and proclaimed in a loud voice: “Yellow Man, I don’t have time for this.” Samuels was a tall, heavy set, bearded dark-skinned man who obviously disliked Dollars, who was visibly angry, retorted, “I called you, Mr. Samuels.” Samuels ignored the comment and proceeded to berate Dollars. “You believe that you rule--Dollars rule-- but I am going to teach you a lesson.”

Surprisingly, Dollars remained quiet and humble. I had never seen him respond in this manner. I intervened and asked Samuels if there was anyway that Dollars could receive the license needed to ship the bananas. “I don’t have time to speak to both of you” was his initial response. Then as he looked me up and down, he explained: “This man thinks that he can do anything and get away with it. He sat in a meeting where we

discussed the issue of boxes and is well aware and informed about the procedure. I am glad that he buys bananas and want him to continue doing so, but he must purchase them following the right procedures.”

“Nonetheless,” Samuels continued, “I am not going to give you a license for the more than five hundred bananas that you purchased from the truckers, however, you may ship the seven hundred that you purchased from the Banana Association. I am going to teach you a lesson.” Although he was visibly shaken, Dollars explained in a muffled voice, that he would lose great deal of money if he didn’t ship the bananas. “That is not my problem,” Samuels retorted rudely; “I want you to feel it.” Again, I intervened by informing Samuels that we had a mutual friend in common. We chatted a bit before he told Dollars to return later to sign an agreement that he was not to repeat the same behavior again. Eventually, Dollars got permission to ship all the bananas, but was told that he would not be granted a license to ship the following week. “I am ruined,” he informed me, “what am I to do. My clients depend on this shipment.” Dollars had no explanation for the antagonism between Samuels and himself. I could only surmise that this was not the first time that he had purchased bananas illegally.

JT, the President of the Traffickers and Small Business was not particularly sympathetic when we discussed the incident. “Dollars should stop trying to beat the system. He knows how it operates and should not expect to get away with bucking the system all the time.” Was Dollars trying to get away with undercutting the Banana Association deliberately, or was he simply trying to save money, as do all of the traffickers? In my observation, Dollar’s behavior is in keeping with the way in which traffickers operate their business. Cost cutting measures are essential if they are to make a

profit and so they try to steer through a system that extracts fees at every step of the way by evading or outwitting the Vincentian state bureaucracy whenever possible.

A week later, Dollars called to ask Miriam to buy bananas for him. She declined saying that he would not accept responsibility were she to get in trouble with the Association. "The man can wait until next week when he can ship without a problem. The problem with that man is that he is too greedy," she said. Dollars had to wait until his suspension was lifted before he could buy bananas.

Our trips continued, although Dollars forgot to pick me up on several occasions. He later explained that conditions in the countryside were bad as it had been raining for sometime. The dry river had over flooded making it difficult to get to Sandy Bay. He then related that he could get all the cartons of bananas from the Association that he wanted and at a cheaper price: "I am now paying \$5.00 (US\$1.80) a box when compared to the \$9.00 (US\$3.30) that I normally paid." He was delighted to note that during the week that he had been penalized, many of the same women whom he had berated refused to buy bananas from the Association. This show of support had beneficial effects for all. Nonetheless, his supply had decreased from over 1,000 boxes per week to 800 because of production problems. Farmers were moving back into arrowroot farming in hopes of making more money than they were presently doing from growing bananas.

In late September 1996, after three months had passed, one of Dollars' principal clients, Mr. Goodman, an affable, white middle-aged Barbadian visited St. Vincent to check on the condition of his shipment of bananas. Mr. Goodman sells bananas to the Barbadian school lunch program and several supermarkets. As a consequence of this seven-year relationship, Dollars was guaranteed a weekly income that allowed him to

employ five workers at a total cost of \$1,000 EC (\$377 US) for a three day work week. In addition, he was able to pay his brother \$4,000 EC (\$1458US) weekly to transport produce to Barbados as well as to pay the farmers and the Banana Association immediately for goods purchased. He proudly informed me that he always traveled with \$17,000EC (\$6369US) a week to pay for all expenses, so he was never in debt like the ladies. You have to know how to run a good business to stay on top,” he proclaimed.

Dollars never failed to point out the differences between him and the women petty commodity traders. He believed that his accomplishments were based on good management. A successful business, according to Dollars, depended on an individual’s ability to exhibit good judgment, fiscal responsibility and an understanding of markets forces, which were qualities that the women did not possess. As a result, most made just enough money to maintain their livelihood and return to the market weekly. As far as Dollars was concerned, this was not a true measure of success.

On Friday, October 4, 1996, Dollars, like the other traffickers, was concerned and upset when Barbados banned all Vincentian produce from entering their country. Nevertheless, he, like most of us, was hopeful that the matter would be resolved quickly and that he would be back in business before the end of October. Unfortunately, the relationship between St. Vincent and Barbados became worse during the ensuing months, thus forcing Dollars to accept the suggestion made by the Vincentian Ministry of Agriculture to purchase produce from Dominica. He was determined to maintain his market share until the crisis was resolved and willingly traveled to Dominica weekly to purchase produce through the Dominican Hucksters Association. Consequently, I saw

less of him from November 1996 through January 1997, as he spent most of his time in Dominica.

Taking advantage of a business opportunity, Dollars offered the service of his boat to the women traders who had also made arrangements to buy their goods in Dominica. Several complained to JT and myself that Dollars was charging them a very high rate to take their goods to Barbados. JT's only comment was "it is so typical of him. He would take advantage of the situation to make a dollar." I smiled and thought "dollars ruled."

**JT: "I Call the Shots."**

James Thomas (JT), trafficker, exporter and President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association was disarming, friendly, but arrogant. His position as the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association and membership in the Exporters Association made him very well known and well respected throughout St. Vincent. He was very much aware of the attention that was conferred on him because of his position, and moreover, reveled in the notoriety it accorded him. To support his point of view, he would remark "I call the shots." JT made it quite clear that as the head of the Association, he had complete authority and power. As a consequence, he made decisions regarding trade and trafficking without consulting or seeking the approval of the other speculators. It was this attitude which infuriated the traffickers and led them to describe him as pompous and "full of himself." The women believed that because he was concerned only with his own welfare, and that he would not represent their best interests. These differences helped create an antagonistic and contentious relationship between JT and the other traffickers.

JT argued that the traffickers gave him very little choice, thereby forcing him to completely take charge of the Association: “As you can see, the women are too busy and will not take time from their busy schedules to attend meetings, or even to discuss issues that are important to their well-being. So tell me, how would anything get done around here unless I do it myself? I certainly won’t get any help from them. As it is right now, they don’t contribute a penny to the upkeep of the organization, so I have to find ways to pay the monthly bills such as the phone and electricity. I also have to find the money to buy cartons, staples and pay the staff with the little that we make from selling the cartons, strings and felt markers. Yet, they believe that I am overcharging them for these services. When I ask them to pay their membership dues, no one has money, so I stopped asking and do what I think is best for all. Naturally, they complain that I want to run the show. Do I have a choice?”

It appeared difficult for JT to run the Association especially when the members did not participate in the everyday running of the organization and gave very little financial support. Notwithstanding, JT was a good administrator and had made every effort to maintain the viability of the Association. During my eleven-month stay, I got to observe the results of many of his efforts. His initiatives had helped to develop a training program to help new traffickers learn new marketing skills, client development, product selection and packaging. He also encouraged many of the older traffickers to start developing new business habits and asked me to intervene repeatedly by talking to them about changing their behavior.

In addition, JT worked closely with Mark Brody of the World Bank to begin a program to teach the traffickers how to select high quality produce as well as proper

cleaning procedures. Although JT believed that many would not change, he still hoped the program would have some impact, particularly among the younger traders. Both men invited me to participate in the project believing that my presence would encourage the women to be more receptive to new ways of handling their produce as I had developed a good relation with many of the women. I worked closely with Anselmo Warren, an agronomist from CARDI who was on contract to the World Bank for two days before the project was put on hold. Mr. Warren felt that the program needed to be better organized before he could continue. Unfortunately, this never happened because Mark Brody's tenure ended prior to its resumption.

JT had to endure constant complaints made by the traders about his ability to represent their interests with the Vincentian government and financial community. The general consensus among the traffickers was that if JT had been a more effective leader, he would have been able to secure loans on their behalf. He responded: "The women believe that I simply sit back without trying to find money to support projects. It is not easy getting loans when you have no collateral nor assets. The Association owns nothing. Perhaps, if the ladies paid their membership fees, we would have some money to make small loans during times of crisis, or use as initial start up money for the younger ones coming into the business. We might also be able to convince one of the banks to give us a small business loan. Presently, as you may have learned by now, the Traffickers and Small Business Association is in no position to offer any financial assistance to anyone. How can we?"

After working my first two months (March-April 1996) in the traffickers' shed, I had become sympathetic towards the problems that JT faced as President. He worked in

the office everyday from 8 a.m.- 4 p.m. even when he had to prepare his shipments for the regional and overseas markets. Additionally, he spent a great deal of time attending meetings held by government Ministries and other organizations such as International Farming and Development Agency (IFAD), and the Farmers Union pertaining to issues that might affect the traffickers. It is important to note that JT did not receive a salary for his services. The Association simply did not make enough money from the sale of cartons to pay his salary and maintain a staff of three workers: a full time secretary, a part-time carton builder and a part-time maintenance worker.

JT did benefit from his position as president. He had achieved status and recognition throughout the island as well as among other similar regional organizations such as the Dominica Hucksters Association. JT was fully aware that he had been well rewarded for his time and efforts since assuming the Presidency in 1991 because of the enhanced prestige and being privy to political circles. He has remained firmly in control and except on a few occasions has not been seriously challenged by the women despite their complaints.

On one such occasion, JT and Doris Bethune, a founding member of the Association had a serious argument. Miriam, the Association's secretary, informed me that JT had become loud and confrontational with Bethune. As I stood looking out the window in the office overlooking the shed, Doris called to me and asked that I come down to speak with her. When I got downstairs, Doris playing to her audience, the other traffickers and workers in the shed, informed me in a loud voice that JT had been "deliberately rude. I was sitting at the front of the shed with my goods, JT brought in a large quantity of boxes and demanded that I move my goods because he needed the space

to put the cartons. I tried to explain that it was impossible for me to do so. Furthermore, I told him that he was damaging my mangos, but he did not seem to care and continued demanding that I move.” At this point, Bobby, Bethune’s helper interjected, “JT was extremely rude to Doris. He was verbally abusive before storming out of the shed.” The other women working in the shed joined the chorus and exclaimed that he truly believed that he was in control. “This is our shed, and he can’t tell us what to do,” they responded.

As she continued her story, a young man approached us. He was a member of the Vincentian Press with whom Bethune had called to lodge a complaint. She wanted the story published so that Vincentians would learn how the women were mistreated by the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association.

“As a founding member and former President of the Association, I take great exception to JT’s behavior. He has been in office too long, and it is time to get a new administration. The entire group in that office needs to be replaced. JT believes that he has control over everything that goes on and that he can tell us what to do. Moreover, he told me that the others and I did not have the deed for the shed. JT has no right to speak to me in that manner. As the leader of the organization, JT should set an example for all. Instead, he behaves inappropriately and embarrasses the organization frequently. I believe that the traffickers should work together to get rid of this bunch.”

The reporter informed Bethune that he had wanted to speak with JT to get his side of the story. Since JT was out of the country on business, the reporter left. Bethune suggested that I speak to JT about his behavior and attitude towards the women traffickers. When I spoke to JT about the situation, he laughed and said: “Bethune could say anything that she wanted. All I asked her to do was to allow me to put the boxes in

the front of the shed. Besides, Larry (the Association's part-time maintenance worker) was moving the boxes to the back of the shed as I brought them in. Quite frankly, neither Larry nor I know what the fuss was all about. Bethune became vocal, and so did I. I am not going to allow Bethune nor the others to run the Association. She, like the others, has not paid any dues for many years. Moreover, they do not have a deed to the shed. It is open to all. Bethune should not be so high and mighty because she stole money from the organization-- that is why she was kicked off the Advisory Board. The funds were used for personal needs. If she wants a fight, I will provide her with one. I will give the newspaper information on her background."

This incident showed the level of tension that existed between the traffickers and JT. The women were understandably angry and so was I. There was no doubt that JT had been disrespectful by dismissing the complaint as being insignificant. He also excused his behavior by pointing out that Doris had misappropriated the organizations funds. As far as JT was concerned, he had every legitimate right to demand that she move her produce since he was providing a service for the Association. After all, as he frequently proclaimed, "I call the shots." By not participating nor being involved in the Association, the women had abdicated control and authority to JT, who believed that he was not accountable to anyone for his actions. The women did have an extremely busy schedule, which made it more difficult for them to challenge his position. Therefore, JT continued to rule the Association with an iron fist. His only comment to my observation was "you don't know these women the way that I do."

He commented: "When I began my term as President of the Association, it was poorly organized so I had to work very hard to get it to where it is today. I have made

some progress, but as you can see, there is a great deal more to be done. The women still don't pay their membership dues and do not get involved in any of the activities that I try to organize. I invited Cecil Joseph, the head of the Dominica Hucksters Association to work with us on developing a strong Association. Sadly, our efforts have not been very successful. The majority of the women continues in their old ways and is still unwilling to participate in training programs designed to help them with the trade. Over the years, I have become less enthusiastic and don't believe that the women will change. My only hope for the trade is to get to the younger ones involved and maybe then we can salvage something. It is not easy working with these women and trying to maintain my own business at the same time."

Apart from his administrative duties, JT was also a business man, who had worked very hard since 1988 to expand his business beyond the regional market. He gave credit to his mother for teaching him the trade and his good business skills. The Thomas family had been trafficking since the late 1950s when JT's father sold live animals in Trinidad because they brought more money than agricultural goods. Eventually, he was forced out of the market when Caribbean governments enacted laws in the late 1960s that prohibited the traders from transporting live animals in small and unsafe vessels. Because trafficking was no longer as lucrative, most of the men who dominated the trade stopped trafficking by the mid-1970s, allowing more women into the trade.

JT's mother, Edna, took over the family business in 1975 by selling agricultural produce in Trinidad. She came to the office on a visit in June 1996 at my request because I wanted to learn more about the history of the trade. According to her, the trade was very different. "We cooperated and tried to help each other. For instance, if I sold all my goods

and my neighbor had a hard time selling her goods, I would take some to sell, so that she could get rid of everything. Also, if I knew that one of the women needed yams and could not find any, I would pick up yams for that trafficker if I came across any. It is not so today. The women do not help one another and are backstabbing as well as distrustful. They compete against one another all the time. So you see, they are destroying the trade. Poor JT, the women never fail to give him a hard time. That is because he is so successful.”

Edna continued the conversation in the traffickers’ office while JT transacted business with his overseas client. “He is good at the trade because I trained him well. From the time that he and his three brothers were children, I taught them how to choose the best ground provisions and fruits. However, it was only James who became a trafficker in the 1980s when I decided to stop trading. As you can see, he learned well and that is exactly why he is so successful today. Besides, he works very hard everyday to make sure that everything goes smoothly.”

“The women have it very easy today compared to when I was trafficking. They can ship their goods in bigger boats and can also travel by plane to Trinidad or Barbados. We had no such luxury. The boats that most of us traveled on were small and dangerous. It is a miracle that most of us did not drown. The goods that we shipped were thrown overboard often when compared to now. In addition, the market place was not very safe so there was lot of robbery taking place. The buildings where we sold our goods were not comfortable places, which made our lives difficult. You simply had to make do with what was available. Now, the Trinidadian government gives more protection to the speculators, and the market place is more suitable to their needs.”

JT listened attentively to our conversation. Edna continued. “The market began to change in 1966. Customers began to single out individual speculators. For instance, if I had a good customer and three of us had our goods side by side, the customer looked at your identifying mark and would not purchase from the others even though, I would suggest that he buy from the others. As far as I was concerned, it made no difference who he bought from, me or one of the other speculators. The customer explained that he preferred my goods because when he took them, they moved faster than other goods. You see some people were born with a gift from God so that everything that they put their hands to, it is good. There are some that are born slow and move slow. It’s the same way that their goods move. You see how JT moves brisk, and that is how his goods move- - brisk, too.”

Edna’s statements indicated that customers had already become more discerning and selective as early as the mid60s. Traffickers who sold high quality produce earned a good reputation, making it more likely that their goods would be sold more quickly. Her statement also supported the arguments that I had heard repeatedly since my arrival that the women had to change if they were going to maintain their market share. Since many customers demanded higher quality produce, the traffickers had to adjust if they were to survive in this business environment. Although the women appeared to be at a disadvantage, I pointed out to JT and his mother that despite the changes, the women had survived.

JT responded by saying that: “Trafficking will not survive much longer if the women do not change. As a trafficker, I understand the problems the women face.

---

However, I have made the necessary changes to meet the demands of the market place. I

always select the highest quality goods and pack them in new cartons.” From my observation during my travels with JT, I would agree. Like, Dollars, JT worked with a permanent staff of four men, each of whom was assigned a different task in the field. One was responsible for purchasing mangos, while the others bought bananas, citrus fruits and root vegetables.

JT and I began our first trip one morning in late May 1996. We traveled to the Martins, an East Indian farming household, with whom he had a very long relationship to pick up 500 Julie mangos and 129 Ceylon mangos that Neil, one of the workers, had selected. JT inspected the mangos before paying Mr. Martin \$187.70 (US\$ 70.30). The mangos were packed in the back of the large truck that JT owned and taken back to his house. The mangos were washed and left to air dry while we returned to the fields to meet with two other workers who also bought mangos for shipment to the United States and Canada. By 12pm, we picked up the men for lunch. Carmen, JT’s common-law-wife, prepared a lunch of corn beef, bread and juice. We joked and laughed a lot during the meal. JT told the men that I was the extra help and would do a day’s job for nothing.

By 1 p.m., we were back in the fields checking on the quality of the mangos that the men had chosen that morning. JT approved of the quality and explained, “I trained the men to choose the produce carefully. The mangos must be green, but not young. I send only those mangos that are about to ripen, but are not quite there, yet. By the time the mangos get to their destination, they are ready for sale.” We continued our rounds until 5:30 p.m., returning to JT’s home where Carmen roasted breadfruit and fried fish cakes for the evening meal. After eating, Carmen and I built 62 boxes and trays to pack the

mangos. We filled each box with 16 mangos, sealed them with JT's brand, and then stacked them on the porch for delivery the next day.

As we packed, Carmen took me into her confidence: "JT is very bossy and does not treat me well. Miriam (the secretary of the Association) and JT have been having an affair and now she is pregnant with his child. I don't speak to Miriam, nor do I go to the office. She actually tried to push me down the stairs when I was pregnant with my last son, who is now fourteen months old. When I told JT what happened, he did not believe what I had to say; instead he accepted Miriam's version of the story. Although he lives here, JT spends a major portion of his time with Miriam." I listened attentively, but made no comment.

"Do you think that he should treat me the way that he does?" she asked. "I have three boys for JT, and I left trafficking to stay home with them so that they would be well cared for. I depend on him for everything, and he is not very generous. I always have to find ways of taking care of myself. Thank God that my brother and sister who live in the States send clothes for the boys and send me a little money from time to time. I don't know what I will do if he decides to spend all his time with Miriam. I am not worried about the boys because he will take good care of them, but what am I to do?"

Our conversation was interrupted by one of the workers who asked us to stop building boxes and to begin packing the mangos. I was uncomfortable and did not want to get in the middle of a domestic dispute, nor did I wish to sever the good relationship that JT and I had developed since my arrival. I do believe that Carmen observed the interplay between JT and myself and probably hoped that I would intervene on her behalf against Miriam. Interestingly, JT and I never discussed the incident after that day, but

Carmen tried to develop a relationship with me during the ensuing months. I on the other hand, maintained my distance to avoid getting involved in a domestic squabble.

Once we finished working, JT drove us back to our homes in his pick-up truck. JT owned two vehicles and a three-bedroom house in Mesopotamia, the rich farming region of the country. Additionally, he owned seven acres of land where he grew vegetables and had fruit trees. JT had also planted Hawaiian papaya, a new variety that had been introduced to the island as a result of a business relationship that he had developed with an American businessman. The American provided seeds, fertilizer and some cash to get the project started. Sadly, the experiment failed according to JT because the Vincentian government never gave the technical support to the farmers that had been initially promised.

JT continued: “We received everything from that man, all we had to do was to grow papayas. Unfortunately, the farmers planted the trees too closely together and when some of them developed a fungus, it spread like wild fire destroying most of the trees. We asked for technical assistance, but no one in the Agricultural Ministry responded, so most of the farmers gave up, including myself.” I suggested that he contact the man in the US to ask him to reconsider the agreement. “I doubt that it is possible. In order to do business with that man, we need to have a large number of farmers involved. Most are disheartened and will not try again. I really don’t understand the government. We had a ready-made market. What else could we ask for? Prime Minister Mitchell claims that he wants to diversify agriculture. Here was his opportunity, and he did not take advantage. It was not going to cost the government any money, yet he did nothing. Is this the example he sets?”

By the time I arrived back to my apartment, it was approximately 10 p.m. I was tired and had developed an overwhelming respect for the work that all traffickers did. It was grueling, back breaking as well as time consuming. The next day, JT and his crew brought the produce into the shed to prepare for shipment later that afternoon on Dollar's boat. Miriam and I worked along side the crew for most of the day. At 5 p.m., JT paid his crew and bought dinner for Miriam and I as payment for our labor.

In September, JT stopped shipping to NY because he had not received full payment for the last two shipments he made. His NY client reported that there was significant spoilage. "That man has pulled this stunt before. I send the breadfruits, and he claims that when he receives them, many are spoiled. I know that it is not true. When I suggested that my brother who lives in NY be present when he receives the produce, he gave some excuse why it was not possible. So, I have decided that this is the last week that I will ship to that Jamaican. He is cheating me, and I can do very little from here. I have asked my brother to look around to find clients who are interested in Caribbean produce, but I will eventually have to travel to NY to take care of this problem."

JT's trip to NY was postponed as a result of the mealybug crisis that confronted the traffickers on October 4, 1996. During my last five months in St. Vincent, JT worked very hard to bring the women together to exert pressure on the government. In so doing, he organized meetings with the various ministries, organized a demonstration in conjunction with the National Farmers Union to exert pressure on the Vincentian government to show more concern at resolving the crisis. He also developed half an hour television program to inform the Vincentian public of the severity of the crisis. JT wrote letters to Prime Minister Mitchell asking for a meeting to discuss the problem. In

addition, JT took the opportunity to meet with the traffickers to discuss ways that the trade could be restructured and also to implement a training program that would prepare the women to meet the new market demands when the trade resumed. From the very beginning of the crisis, JT asked me to participate in the strategy meetings and discussions, saying that I was “one of them.” He believed that I had the background and education to work closely with the group to resolve the crisis, so I was included in most meetings with government officials and telephone discussions with the CARICOM Secretariat in Guyana.

### **SUMMARY**

I found it much easier to work with the male traffickers because I believed that my gender and class played a role in the way they related to me. They believed that my educational background provided them with a resource that they could tap into in order to further their business. As a result, they were much more willing to give me detailed information about their business transactions. More importantly, however, the men wanted to point out the differences that existed between the way in which male and female traders conducted business. In contrast to the women, the men were better organized, less competitive and understood the market place better. As a consequence, their businesses were expanding and were successful.

Although I empathized with the female traders, I often found their behavior taxing and puzzling. They were not as willing to share information with me regarding their business, but openly shared information about their family life. Interestingly, this behavior points out one of the differences that existed between the genders. Female

traders were much more concerned with family issues while male traders focused more on business matters and expanding trade into the extra-regional market.

The women also verbalized a desire to see more cooperation among the traders by reducing the amount of produce sent to the market, but they seldom practiced what they preached. Eventually, I began to agree with the men that the women were hopeless when even the newest member of the group behaved like the two older traders. Age and education did not appear to affect the way in which the women conducted their business. Female traders will continue to learn trafficking from a more experienced female trader and as a result, many of the old business habits will be picked.

Overall, both male and female traders were extremely proud of their accomplishments. They were independent, self-reliant and extremely resilient and have succeeded to some extent in a less than friendly business environment. It was, however, the mealybug crisis that threatened to further jeopardize an already tenuous situation. In the next chapter, I will discuss in detail the impact of the crisis on the traders and their response to the problem.

## **PART III: EVOLUTION OF A CRISIS**

### **CHAPTER SEVEN**

#### **THE PINK MEALY BUG: A CRISIS ON THE WINGS**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

Crises can disrupt the social, political, and economic life of a nation. The challenges created by critical events may produce changes in the way that people, organizations and the state function. This chapter describes the events, responses and behaviors of the actors: the traffickers, the states and the regional organizations as the mealybug crisis unfolds.

The chapter begins by describing the initial response of the traffickers to the Barbadian ban on Vincentian agricultural produce. It demonstrates how their individuality and competitive behavior prevent them from uniting as a political force to exert pressure on the government to act decisively to resolve the crisis. Furthermore, the narrative highlights how the crisis exacerbates the underlying tensions between the traffickers and the president of the Traffickers and Small Business Association. Additionally, it examines the Association's inability to sustain collective action and its lack of power within the community to initiate and influence government policy.

The role of the state in contributing to the severity and magnitude of the crisis will also be examined. The state's failure to act and apparent unwillingness to resolve the crisis point to its reluctance to assume responsibility for the problem as well as call attention to the issue of leadership. Who is in charge? Moreover, the section draws attention to the trade relation between the CARICOM states: Barbados, a more developed

state and St. Vincent, a less developed state. It also questions the effectiveness of the Caribbean Community to resolve crisis situations.

Special attention will be given to the role of the anthropologist during the crisis, and attempt to answer the following question: Should the anthropologist remain as a neutral observer or serve at times as an ombudsperson?

### **THE BEGINNING**

When I arrived at the traffickers' shed on October 7, 1996, after seven months of fieldwork, the atmosphere was somber, but buzzing with the latest news that Barbados had imposed a ban on all Vincentian agricultural exports to Barbados. The traffickers were visibly upset and worried about their livelihood, especially since the Barbadian officials made it quite clear to many of the women that no further shipment of Vincentian produce would be accepted in Barbados after Friday, October 4, 1996. This news was brought to the attention of those assembled, including James Thomas and me, by Madge, a veteran who had been selling produce in Barbados for the last fifteen years. She said, "We were told not to come back to Barbados until the Vincentian chief agricultural officer could guarantee the absence of the mealybug in St. Vincent. All of us who were there at the time, the boat owners and traffickers, told the chief quarantine officer that the mealybug was not in St. Vincent, but he did not listen. Instead, he told us to go back to St. Vincent and speak to our government. We were never told that St. Vincent had a problem, so I don't know what the Barbadians are up to."

JT addressed the group of eight traffickers who had gathered in the small office: "On Friday, October 4, I received a phone call from one of the Barbadian agricultural officers informing me that Barbados had imposed a ban on all Vincentian goods. As head

of the Traffickers and Small Business Association, I am expected to inform the traffickers about the ban and to warn them not to ship any more goods to Barbados until further notice. I was totally surprised, and immediately called Mr. Duncanson, the Vincentian Chief Agricultural officer who was also shocked by the news. Neither he nor any other government official had been informed by the Barbadian authorities that there was a problem. Since the Vincentian government had not been notified directly, Mr. Duncanson told me that nothing would be done until the Barbadians sent the proper notification. In the mean time, we will simply have to wait until something is done.”

The group was joined by additional five traffickers who on average had traded in Barbados for more than ten years. They were clearly distressed and this was borne out when Mr. McCloud, one of the male traffickers told the group: “A few of us have just spoken with the chief technical agricultural officer who informed us that nothing could be done by St. Vincent until the Barbadians sent an official letter telling us about the ban. JT, what should we do? How are we going to handle this problem? You know that all of us in this room depend on the trade to make a living. If we can’t resolve this problem quickly, I will be forced to take my boys out of school.”

JT tried to calm the group, but informed them that he had heard the same comment from the chief technical agricultural officer. “Mr. Duncanson is standing firm. He told me in no uncertain terms that Barbados must get in touch with St. Vincent before anything can be done.” Janice, one of the traffickers who lived in Barbados and who had recently returned to St. Vincent exclaimed, “I, too, was told that we should put pressure on our government. The Barbadians claim that they have been in touch with our government, but are refusing to provide any information.”

The traffickers believed that the Barbadians were telling the truth. Sandra, another trafficker who lived in Barbados and whom I had never seen before expressed the following: "It is we who are refusing to give the Barbadians the information. We know that we can't trust our government. Besides, the second person in command at the Barbados Ministry of Agriculture told those of us who live in Barbados that we should pressure the Vincentian government to do something about the problem. I was warned that no goods would be allowed until my government answered their questions regarding the mealy bug."

The room was silent for a few minutes until Mr. McCloud in a very angry voice spoke: "Our government is keeping the truth from us. We need to force them to discuss the problem with the Barbadians." JT agreed and called the Ministry of Agriculture to arrange a meeting for October 11 at 10 a.m., four days later. The group seemed reassured and left the office telling JT and me that they would keep their ears to the ground. As Sandra explained to me later that afternoon: "We are concerned that the trade will not resume, forcing many of us to withdraw our children from schools in Barbados. The Barbadians have a better educational system, thereby giving our children a greater opportunity to succeed. With a good education many of our children stand a better chance of finding employment in Barbados. Most of us who reside in Barbados don't want to return to ST. Vincent to live because we have no way of providing for our children."

"The Bajans" (Barbadians), Sandra declared, "are proud and arrogant. I live among them so I know and once their government tells them something is wrong with our goods, they, the Barbadians will not buy from us, so the trade is lost." Interestingly,

Sandra's comments point to the level of trust between the Barbadian government and its people. I tried to give her hope by telling her not to give up so quickly. It was just the beginning of the crisis, and it was best to give the governments a chance to solve the problem. Trafficking is important to St. Vincent, and I believed that Prime Minister Mitchell would work very hard on behalf of the nation to resolve the matter as quickly as possible." Sandra thanked me for my words of encouragement, but did not share my hopes. I also told her and some of the others who had gathered during our conversation that I would call on the Ministry of Trade to get a better sense of what was taking place and report back to them. I made an appointment with Mr. Ellison, the chief technical officer, for Tuesday, October 8 at 10 in the morning. JT was pleased by my initiative and said that he would follow up by making phone calls to the Ministry of Trade and Agriculture.

Additionally, I called Mr. Adams, the coordinator for Trade at CARICOM headquarters in Guyana whom I had met and befriended on his visit to St. Vincent in May 1996. He was aware of the problem, having been briefed, but explained that CARICOM would not get involved unless requested by both governments. Barbados did not have to consult the CARICOM Secretariat, nor did it need permission to impose a trade ban on St. Vincent if they felt that their country was at risk for infestation. The conversation led me to conclude that the Traffickers Association would not get any immediate help from the CARICOM. Moreover, it appeared that Barbados had acted within the guidelines outlined by the Caribbean Community and had not violated any trade agreement.

On October 8, Dollars came to the traffickers' shed to inquire about what was being done to resume trade between the two countries. JT asked him to join the 10 a.m.

meeting scheduled for Friday, October 11 at the Ministry of Agriculture. Dollars said that he was glad that JT called a meeting because he could not afford to lose any more money. He also mentioned that the Barbadians blamed St. Vincent for the problems facing the traffickers: "These people are serious and mean business. Unless we can prove that the mealybug is not in St. Vincent, we will not be shipping to Barbados any time soon." I agreed with him and left for my 10 o'clock meeting with the Ministry of Trade.

### **THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS POLITICAL ACTOR**

Mr. Ellison, the chief technical officer at the Ministry of Trade had not arrived at the office for our 10 am meeting. Twenty minutes later he opened the door, greeted me warmly and then kept me waiting for another fifteen minutes before beginning our meeting. Although initially annoyed by Mr. Ellison's nonchalance, I later realized that he was not trying to offend me, nor was this a power play. I had observed delays of this sort before. I started the conversation deferentially: "The traffickers are concerned about the ban and want to know how the Vincentian government plans to handle the problem, especially since Mr. Duncanson, the chief technical officer at the Agricultural Ministry informed the group that nothing would be done until St. Vincent received an official communiqué from the Barbadians." Mr. Ellison thought for a moment, "A communiqué was sent to Barbados," he remarked, "and we are awaiting a response. We are trying to get to the bottom of the problem."

I continued "does St. Vincent have the mealybug?" Mr. Ellison gave me a blank stare. Since I did not get an answer, I described what I had seen on Monday, October 7 while traveling with JT in the Kingstown area. "JT and I believe that we saw the mealybug, or what appears to be the mealybug on sorrel bushes in Mr. Johnson's garden.

He is a farmer and acquaintance of JT's. The three bushes were almost completely covered with a thick white substance that has destroyed most of the bushes. The remaining leaves were slowly withering away. Poor Mr. Johnson was afraid that the bug would also destroy his fruit trees because they are so close to the bushes."

After hearing my story, Mr. Ellison admitted that the mealybug was in the Kingstown area, but not in the rich growing area, the Mesopotamia Valley. He then asked: "Do you have any suggestions?" Nonplused and unsure of how to respond, I recommended that St. Vincent avail itself of the services of the CARICOM Secretariat to engage the Barbadians in a dialogue since the Vincentian government claimed that Barbados was unwilling to discuss the matter. "After all," I remarked, "The onus is on St. Vincent to prove that it does not have the pest on its soil." At this point in our conversation, Mr. Ellison suggested that I meet with Mr. Benjamin, the permanent secretary of trade.

Although I had met Mr. Benjamin several months ago at an official function, he did not remember my purpose in St. Vincent. We began our discussion in earnest after I restated the purpose of my stay on the island. "The women" I said, "are very worried about the crisis and wondered if the Minister of Agriculture is working with his counterpart in Barbados to resolve the problem. Is there any hope that this matter will be solved expeditiously?" He remarked pensively: "The agricultural people sent a message to Barbados through diplomatic channels on October 4. To date, we have not received any acknowledgment from the Barbadian government. However, the Trade Ministry is watching these events very closely, but can do nothing at the moment because this is a technical problem." My next question caught the permanent secretary by surprise. "Is the

mealybug present in St. Vincent?” His response was guarded and also very political: “It is difficult for me to say yes or no. I rely on information provided by the chief technical officer in the Agricultural Ministry, and so far, he has not confirmed the presence of the mealybug. Since I am not an entomologist, there is nothing that I, or the Ministry of Trade can do at the moment.”

I understood his position. As a government official, Mr. Benjamin was not at liberty to disclose what he knew to an outsider working on a research project. To do so would breach government confidentiality. Since the Vincentian Government had not admitted the presence of the pest, I told him the story of my visit to Mr. Johnson’s home in Kingstown.

“On Monday, October 7, JT and I visited a farmer in Kingstown to inspect some sorrel bushes that he thought were infected. Although neither JT, nor I, are entomologists, we thought it could very well be the mealybug based on radio broadcasts that gave information on the pest. The bushes had indeed been destroyed by a white mealy substance that could have been due to the mealybug. The farmer expressed great concern because the bushes were very close to several fruit trees and he was sure that they would become infected too.”

Mr. B. listened impassively as I elaborated: “The farmer told us that the bushes had been sprayed recently by workers from the Ministry of Agriculture, but so far it had not been effective.” “Where is this house located?” he asked. “In the New Mount Rose section of Kingstown” I replied. At this point, Mr. Benjamin smiled ever so slightly: “Perhaps there is something there that is destroying the plants, but it is difficult for me to

say what it is. The best thing for me to do is to inform the Ministry of Agriculture and ask them to send their workers back to that home to ensure that the treatment is working.”

Since he remained noncommittal, I added “ The Barbadians according to recent newspaper reports have taken measures to protect themselves from the mealybug infestation. They have imported approximately 1,000 ladybugs as a means of protecting their vegetation. Has St. Vincent taken similar steps to protect its vegetation?” Once more Mr. Benjamin gave me a wry smile: “Why not pose your question to the chief technical officer at the Ministry of Agriculture? I am sure that he will be able to provide an answer. I do not know exactly how the Ministry of Agriculture is handling the situation, but if the Trade Ministry were in charge, I can assure you that the matter would be disposed of differently.”

His response led me to question the relationship between the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture. Was there an underlying tension between the two? Would this tension make it difficult for them to work together in finding a solution to the crisis? Unraveling these questions took some time. As we concluded our meeting, Mr. Benjamin wanted me to understand that the mealybug infestation was an operational problem, which required a certain degree of technical expertise, which he did not possess.

On returning to the shed, I discussed the meeting with JT who agreed that the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture were keeping a closed lid on the issue. He decided to invite Mr. Benjamin from the ministry of trade to the upcoming meeting on Friday, October 11. In the mean time, JT urged me to set up a meeting with the chief technical officer at the Ministry of Agricultural because he believed that Mr. Duncanson might be willing to speak to me openly since I was conducting research on the traffickers to learn

more about the types of problems they faced going about their daily activities. The meeting was scheduled for Thursday, October 10 at 10 in the morning.

While JT and I contacted the various ministries, the traffickers were also making decisions about their livelihood as well as attempting to gather additional information from the Barbadians as to the status of the crisis. As a result of the Barbadian ban, some traders like Barnes, a successful male trafficker, did try other alternatives. He made arrangements to ship goods to Antigua and hoped in so doing to recoup his losses. Others moved into the Trinidadian market while still others tried selling their produce in the already saturated Vincentian local market. Dollars, on the other hand, was holding firm and reported that the Barbadians were still waiting for St. Vincent to respond to the ban. Moreover, he informed us of an impending ban on St. Lucian produce because the Barbadians claimed that St. Lucia had been infested by the pink mealybug as well. Fortunately, the women who shipped agricultural goods to Martinique and Trinidad had continued their trading activity without much difficulty. Nevertheless, many voiced their misgivings and concern about the eventual impact the mealybug crisis would have on their respective markets.

Mr. Duncanson, the chief technical officer, was a man in his late thirties or early forties. His office is cluttered with a number of bookshelves, several filing cabinets, a desk and table. A young man, who I later learned was his son was sitting at the table setting up a new computer. Mr. Duncanson asked my indulgence as he read through a report, spoke to his son, and gave instructions to a worker. After fifteen minutes, he began the meeting. I started our conversation carefully because he appeared beleaguered, and I knew that by adding one more voice to the chorus of those asking for information, I

was running the risk of alienating him. I asked him if the pink mealybug was present on St. Vincent.”

Mr. Duncanson looked at me expressionlessly: “ My people, (meaning the farmers) have not provided me with any information to say that there is a problem. St. Vincent does not have a problem. My assessment of the situation is based on reports that were gathered in the field as well as by discussion with the farmers. Consequently, I have informed Barbados in a communiqué on October 4, that we do not have the pest and have suggested to their Minister of Agriculture that they are welcome to visit St. Vincent anytime to inspect the fields. They can have the run of St. Vincent so that they can see for themselves that we do not have a problem.”

“Although this is partly a trading issue, as agricultural chief technical officer, I am expected to reassure the Barbadians that St. Vincent does not have a problem. My problem with this whole affair is that Barbados never approached me to discuss their concerns. I heard about their decision from the newspaper and the Traffickers Association. So far, no one in the Barbadian Ministry of Agriculture has gotten in touch with me. I forwarded a letter to the ministry of agriculture on October 4, and as of today, October 10, no one has responded. It is not up to St. Vincent to push the issue. Barbados, in my opinion has acted poorly. Is this any way to behave? What about letting governments deal with governments? The Barbadian government should have been in touch with the Vincentian government to inform us that there was a problem. Instead, Barbados behaved very high-handily.”

“ Frankly, ” Mr. Duncanson continued, “ it is difficult for me to speak openly with you since you are a consultant.” I quickly corrected this misconception, and told him that

I was working with the female traffickers conducting fieldwork as part of my dissertation. Though he understood the difference, he made it very clear that he could not provide much information because of his position as the chief technical officer for Agriculture prevented him from speaking freely on sensitive government matters. Nevertheless, I pointed out that it was important that the Vincentian government provide an accurate account of what was taking place if it wish to avoid being misrepresented by the media.

He remained ill at ease with our conversation. Realizing his discomfort, I asked him if he thought the Barbadians had underlying motives for canceling the trade, or if they were trying to protect their fledgling agricultural industry. He was not sure, but thought that it was a possibility: “ They are growing yams and other produce, but our products sell more cheaply.” I continued to explore other explanations for the ban: “Perhaps they wanted to protect their tourist industry especially since the pink mealybug would destroy not only the agricultural sector, but also ornamentals plants that were so important to maintaining the beauty of the island.” Mr. Duncanson thought this quite plausible.

Eventually, the discussion turned to CARICOM and the possibility that the Secretariat could serve as an intermediary in the dispute. “Unofficially” he remarked, “In my opinion CARICOM has not been effective because it has no true power. Power still remains in the hands of local governments, and so far none is willing to give up that power. Until governments are willing to think of the Caribbean as a region, CARICOM will not work. National interest constantly gets in the way of regional interest. Prime Minister Mitchell is one of the few leaders in this region that puts regional interest first, but has now realized, particularly since he has been slapped in the face so often, that St.

Vincent must go its own way. Local Vincentian interest is much more important, so the Prime Minister is now concentrating on pushing Vincentian issues in the international community.”

Notwithstanding, he felt that a third party could be used as an avenue or channel to open dialogue among the nations involved. We ended our meeting on a much friendlier note and I thanked him for taking time out of his busy schedule to speak with me. I reported back to JT who expressed his disappointment: “ These guys are not ready. They are not concerned about the people. They continue to collect their salaries while the women lose money and their market share. The people in the Agricultural Ministry know that St. Vincent has the mealybug. We will take the sample we got from Mr. Johnson’s farm to the meeting tomorrow. It will be interesting to see what they say about the sample.” He then reassured me that he had gotten word out to the Traffickers about the meeting. “The meeting was advertised on radio inviting the traffickers and all those involved in the trade to attend the meeting on Friday, October 11 at 10 a. m.

#### **THE MEETING: PLANNING STRATEGIES**

Friday, October 11 began ominously. It rained heavily for an hour and a half without ending and I was concerned that the meeting would be canceled. The streets were flooded and difficult to get through. Nevertheless, JT and I arrived at the meeting after 10 a.m. soaking wet, as we had to run a short distance from the truck to the building. Fifteen people were already seated in the conference room arguing very loudly with Celine Andrews, a Caribbean News Agency Limited (CANA) reporter. The women, like the Vincentian government held the press responsible for the ban on Vincentian goods. They

demanded that she leave the room because she was not welcome. Andrews was very offended and promptly left the room.

The meeting was convened by Mr. Duncanson who explained that the problem in question was a biological and agricultural matter. He indicated that the control of the pest could be best dealt with by technical experts who could explore solutions appropriate to the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, he hoped that together the group could develop a plan to deal with the matter.

JT was asked to present the issues that most concerned the traffickers: “As you have heard, several days ago Barbados banned the trade based on speculation that the mealybug was present in the region. Consequently, they are no longer accepting any produce from St. Vincent. That has affected our daily operation tremendously. We have heard a lot of speculation on the radio that official information has been sent out to the Barbados authority asking them to let us know our position and what we should do from this point forward. We are still at a loss as to where to go from here because a number of us, including boat owners and those who are still trying to get into the trade, depend on this for our survival.”

“The leaflets in front of you give you a breakdown as to the type of volume of produce that we do in Barbados yearly. In short, we are looking at over 4,000 tons of produced shipped as well as earnings of over five million dollars a year which are sizable amounts. This information was gathered from the two shipping agents that handle the trade. How accurate they are is another issue, but at least we have some idea as to the significance of the trade. I will stop here so that we can get some information as to what communications were sent to Barbados, and if we have received any response. As you

know the ban is affecting all aspects of our livelihood. I will now return the floor to Mr. Duncanson.”

The room was silent as we anxiously awaited Mr. Duncanson’s reply: “Let me respond to your questions. You said that you received information from Barbados telling you that there would be a cessation of trade between St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Barbados. I did not receive that information, except for what I got through you. This situation is particularly surprising because in the past, Barbados has informed us when there is a problem. Do you remember the letter of complaint that the Ministry of Agriculture received in October 1995 from Barbados? We were notified officially that St. Vincent was sending produce to Barbados with too much soil and were warned that if by January 1996 there was no improvement, the trade would be stopped.”

“As a result, we met with the traffickers and Mr. Thomas. We requested that you clean your produce thoroughly before shipping them to Barbados. As a matter of fact, we also arranged for many of you to receive training through the IFAD Project, and another project sponsored by the United States. You were given instructions on how to wash, clean and package your goods. Moreover, I ordered my quarantine officers to inspect all produce carefully and told them not to issue a phytosanitary permit to anyone that was not in compliance. Since then, we have not heard any complaints from Barbados, so I naturally assumed that all was going well and that you were carrying clean produce. I would have expected to have been notified if the problem continued, or if new ones had developed. Up to now, I have not received any ultimatums from the Barbados Agricultural Ministry telling me that trade had been suspended.”

“After speaking with Mr. Thomas, I immediately contacted Mr. Bates, the Barbadian chief quarantine officer. As he was not in, I spoke to someone else in the ministry and requested that they send us official correspondence as to the nature of the problem, asking them to let us know what they want us to do. Having done that, I then sent similar messages to the Barbados Agricultural officer, the Ministry of Trade and Foreign Affairs also asking them to explain the nature of the problem. That is the way governments communicate, not over the airwaves. So far, we have had no reply. Therefore, I do not officially know the nature of the problem between Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. As you can see by what I am holding in my hand, I have sent written messages to the various ministries in Barbados.”

Once more, the room fell silent. Finally, JT interjected: “ Suggestion. We are at a stand still. Barbados is not talking to St. Vincent and we have tried, but no one is coming forward. Is it possible that we can look at one or two of the regional organizations such as CARICOM and ask them to intervene on our behalf so that a dialogue can begin?”

Mr. Jacob, the director of the International Food and Agricultural Development Project (IFAD) addressed JT: “ Mr. Thomas, our project which I have been in charge of for the last six months has in the past made an effort to assist you. The project will be very happy to do so again. I have been in touch with the Agricultural Development Credit Union) out of Dominica (ADCU), but before I discuss the results of that conversation, there are a number of things that bother me that I feel should be brought to your attention. We have to do a proper house cleaning when we get this trade back on track. One of the things that has to change is the way that you package your produce. Come next year (1997), you will not be allowed to ship in any old box or bag. Packaging will be

standardized, otherwise you will not be granted a certificate to export your goods. You will not be able to ship unless you put the produce in standardized packaging.”

As the traffickers listened attentively, I wondered how the government would enforce these new measures since many traffickers have found ways to circumvent most rules and thus far have avoided direct control by the Vincentian government. The customs officials for instance could attest to the ingenuity of the women in circumventing the rules. Many openly admitted that over the years, it had been extremely difficult for them to get the women to comply with the rules.

Jacob also urged the women to discontinue the use of dangerous pesticides: “If it is one thing that the ladies need to do is stop using chemicals to treat their produce. I am speaking to all traffickers, but especially to the Trinidadian group because the Trinidadian government has brought the matter to the attention of the Vincentian government. I hope that when the trade resumes between Barbados and St. Vincent, the women will be more careful with regard to the type of chemicals that are used to treat the produce. Stop using dangerous petrochemicals and insecticides. You are going to kill somebody, and we don’t want that to happen. I strongly recommend that you follow the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Agriculture.”

“However, what really bothers me” continued Mr. Jacob, “is that we have a traffickers association that meets only when there is a crisis. This should not be the case. You should be meeting monthly to discuss issues that affects the trade. The market is changing, and you need to keep informed of these changes to ensure that you remain competitive. The only way that you can do that is by working with JT and the

Association. These are important issues that must be addressed by the Traffickers and Small Business Association.”

“Now that I have made these points, it is important that we return to the discussion at hand. I spoke to the ADCU in Dominica which is an organization involved in trade and agriculture. This organization has a set of experts on standby who can come to our assistance should we need them and the expertise to help us get the trade back on track. Secondly, since Dominican produce has not been banned, is it possible for you to go to Dominica, buy your produce, sell it to Barbados in order for you to hold your market? The point that I am making is that by buying produce from Dominica, you will generate an income.”

Many of the traffickers responded in disbelief. “How can you expect us to travel that far” was the general comment. Mr. Jacob told the group that it was simply one suggestion to hold their market until the problem was sorted out. “My advice to you is to look into the possibility, otherwise you may not have a market to return to when the problem is solved.” It was at this point that I asked several questions. “How viable is it for the traffickers to buy produce from Dominica? Have you factored in the following: the cost of air travel, St. Vincent to Dominica, Dominica to Barbados; the cost of the agricultural produce and finally shipment to Barbados? Do you have any idea of the overall cost?” Mr. Jacob informed the group that he really did not know how much it would cost, but felt that ADCU would be able to assist the group in calculating the cost of doing business from Dominica.

Although I agreed with Mr. Jacob that it was important for the women to maintain their market share, I was also very concerned about how well they would fair financially.

Could they make a profit? The women had already been complaining of declining profits and now they were being asked to incur additional expenses to hold on to the Barbados market. How well could they survive under these conditions? Predictably, most did not do very well in the ensuing months, even those who made the trip from Dominica to Barbados. Mr. Jacob was not sure, but pointed out that the traffickers had strong competition from another Caribbean neighbor, the Dominican Republic. "We have lost most of our market in St. Martin to the Dominican Republic as they ship by container load. Let me warn you, should the Dominican Republic start shipping to Barbados that would be the end of the trade. It would be extremely difficult for you to recoup your market, especially since they sell their produce even cheaper than you do." Unfortunately, the local Barbadian importers had begun buying bananas from extra-regional sources including Chiquita Brands in Costa Rica (The Nation, January 21, 1997).

"This may not be the best solution" remarked Mr. Duncanson "but it is the best that we can do for the time being. I know that you will suffer financial losses, but as Mr. Jacob stated, this may be the best way to retain your market share. You are the only ones, however, who can decide as to the efficacy of this plan. I would like to suggest that you work with a Dominican middleman who can buy and ship the goods directly to Barbados and in so doing reduce the cost of doing business. You will not have to travel weekly, but can rely on the broker."

I was very concerned with this plan in view of the difficulty that the traders who shipped to Martinique were having. They too had a similar system, but often complained of its ineffectiveness. The traffickers were not happy with this recommendation and grumbled loudly. Mr. Brown, one of the farmers who came to the meeting objected

openly by stating: “How is this going to solve my problems, or those of any other farmer? You are not addressing the problem. I have been reading a great deal about the mealybug in the newspaper and so far I have not heard any member of the government make a statement informing the Vincentian people as to the veracity of these stories. No one has denied these stories.”

Mr. Duncanson became indignant and retorted: “Hold on a while, I am surprised that Mr. Brown is making such an impassioned plea. The Minister of Agriculture has made it clear to the media that we do not have the pest in St. Vincent. It is obvious that Mr. Brown is only listening one way. When you do that you are ruffling me. The Minister of Agriculture issued a release to every media house denying the presence of the mealybug. The editor of the Barbados newspaper *The Nation* called me on the phone, but I do not entertain any conversation on the phone because I do not know to whom I am speaking. I faxed them the fact sheet that we had released to the Vincentian press and it was printed in *The Nation*. Moreover, the Minister of agriculture on his radio broadcast denied that we have the mealybug in St. Vincent. How come you did not hear that?”

He continued in an angry tone: “The Minister of Agriculture has repeatedly denied the presence of the mealybug. Have you been listening?” Barbara, one of the women who traffics to Barbados, exclaimed, “I am not in Barbados, so how can I read the statement.” “Do you listen to the radio?” Mr. Duncanson replied angrily. “Let me cool down a little bit. When I saw the first issue of one of our newspapers, I personally called the newspaper to let them know that the information printed was incorrect and that they were jeopardizing the well being of our country. I explained that by publishing false information, they were destroying the country and the trade.”

“I know the service that you ladies provide weekly. The Ministry of Agriculture collects information that tells us how important your trade is to the nation. I have the information right here, the number of women and men who sell, the amount of produce that you send weekly to Trinidad, Barbados, Martinique and other areas and the dollars that are earned. I am well aware of how important the trade is to our country. Our government will handle the problem. However, I would like us to focus on what we can do to help remedy the situation.”

While Mr. Duncanson accepted a phone call, the crowd continued to revile and blame the press for the ban on Vincentian goods. He returned and said: “I have just been on the phone with the Honorable Prime Minister Mitchell who called to convey his concern and has asked me to keep him fully informed about the decisions arrived at here today.”

JT who had been silent for most of the meeting interjected: “There is something that I want to say about the Dominica situation. Dollars has already committed his boat, and he is going up there to look at the produce situation. I intend to contact Dominica, and I will try to find out the price for the produce and carton prices. I will have the information available at the traffickers shed.” It was difficult to hear JT as the women were in an uproar by this time. The idea that they would have to travel to Dominica to buy their produce was very disconcerting to most.

Barbara who was sitting beside me was very upset and commented in my ear: “I can’t imagine myself traveling to Dominica and then to Barbados. What profit will I make? By the time I spend my money to fly to Dominica, buy produce, ship the goods and then fly to Barbados, what will I make? This is crazy.”

JT was forced to speak loudly because the noise in the room was deafening: “ I will have the information as soon as possible and then you can make arrangements with Dollars to ship the goods to Barbados.”

Angela, another woman who sells in Barbados was incensed and responded to the suggestion belligerently. Mr. Jacob looked her directly and in a firm voice stated “I am not going to dishonor you by being rude. What we are looking at are alternatives and one of them is to buy produce from Dominica. Those of you who are not happy with this suggestion can leave.” The noise level rose to a deafening pitch, and at this point, no one controlled the discussion.

Mr. Duncanson attempted to regain control by introducing Mr. Benjamin, who had walked in during the outburst. He apologized for his tardiness and expressed his concern. “We at the Ministry of Trade are very worried about this situation. The Ministry of Agriculture has sent a letter to Barbados, but so far, we have not had a response either from the Ministries of Trade or Agriculture. We at the Ministry of Trade are considering bringing the matter to CARICOM. I informally spoke to CARICOM in the hope of making a formal protest. These matters should be dealt with bilaterally, that is between the Barbadian and Vincentian governments. Since that did not occur, we are also considering asking the CARICOM Secretariat to intervene on St. Vincent’s behalf. Now let us put our cards on the table. We at the Ministry of Trade recognized the importance of the traffickers to the Vincentian economy and I personally have always taken a keen interest in the activities of the traffickers. We also realize that you help the farmers get their goods out of St. Vincent and the Grenadines so we are eager to get this trade reestablished as soon as possible. I also want you to know that the Ministry of

Agriculture has assured us at the Trade Ministry that the mealybug is not here in St. Vincent.” Mr. Benjamin’s show of support was well noted by the group who remained silent for a few minutes after his speech.

Mr. Scot, a member of the agricultural staff, quickly seized the moment to air his views on the ban imposed by the Barbadians. “I am not certain, but this may have been an opportune time for Barbados to pull the plug on us. The mere fact that Barbados has not chosen to respond, or even written a letter providing a reason why the traffickers are not allowed to ship produce to Barbados has led me to speculate. From my position, I do not believe that they have any proof. Generally, there are certain procedures and guidelines that are followed with this type of operation. It seems to me that Barbados is using this opportunity to implement a ban. I say this because those of you who have been traveling to Barbados must be aware that Barbadian farmers are now able to produce many of the same goods. Some of the farmers have been lobbying the Barbadian government saying that they have not been getting the kind of support from the supermarkets because of the stuff coming in from St. Vincent.”

“Barbados is going through what we would call an economic restructuring. The economy is really tight in terms of money and a lot of the money is coming out of Barbados to here. Another thing that is changing is consumer taste. Barbadians are now looking for what we call top of the line quality goods and as Mr. Jacob stated, the way that some of you export your stuff is not the kind of way that some of the Barbadian people want to see it. I feel that this is much more than the mealybug. And whatever diplomatic moves we make, it is important to address all of these issues, not just the mealybug problem. Even if we get the trade back as soon as possible, we still need to take

all of these things into consideration and deal with them.” The room broke out in applause.

“I agree with Mr. Scott, ” I exclaimed. “ A couple of days ago, a Barbadian reporter on a radio broadcast reported that Barbados was not yet out of the financial woods. The government, he explained, was very concerned about the cost of living as well as trade issues. In my opinion this problem is much more complex than we have been led to believe. Mr. Scott maybe right in his suspicion. There could other underlying factors that contributed to the Barbadian government’s decision to ban Vincentian agricultural goods.” People shook their heads in agreement and broke out into loud a discussion.

Mr. Benjamin tried to get the attention of the group, but found it difficult because most were too busily talking to their neighbors to pay attention. Eventually, and with great effort, he commanded their attention: “ This is a serious matter. We are at a place where governments are talking about trade, trade liberalization and a stage where there will be greater movement of trade between countries. But, it is important to note that we are also becoming more competitive, and you, too, must become more competitive. One of the ways that you can do so is by buying the best quality produce and packaging them carefully. They should also be presented in such a way that people in the market place would be encouraged to buy from you. This problem is not limited to the traffickers, but includes the farmers. They too need to understand that the quality of our produce must be improved if we are to remain competitive. Farmers must work harder to produce the best.”

**“I concur with the Minister,” I remarked. “You should take this opportunity to address many of the issues that have been discussed here today such as having a strong association, standardization, proper packaging and presentation of your goods. It is also important that you educate yourselves regarding the changes in the marketplace. As an observer for the past eight months, I have paid close attention to the ways in which many of you conduct business and have concluded that many of you undersell or underbid each other. In addition, most of you flood the market weekly with too many goods, resulting in a substantial decrease in profits. Perhaps it is time that you examine your habits so that you can begin to exercise some measure of control over the market. It is important that you keep in mind that the Barbadian consumers are now demanding higher quality goods and are comparing your products with those coming from the United States, Central America and the Dominican Republic. You must export the best quality produce if you are to retain your share of the market.”**

**I continued: “Most of you in this room however, are concerned with the suggestion on the table. I would be willing to travel to Dominica with those of you who are interested in exploring the possibilities of purchasing goods from Dominica.” Sandra, Mary, Lorraine and Ruth expressed interest in the idea and wanted to discuss a bit further after the meeting. Mr. Duncanson encouraged the women to accept my suggestion and concluded the meeting by stating that the government would continue in its efforts to solve the crisis as quickly as possible, and that he hoped the traffickers would seriously consider buying their produce from Dominica.**

**JT and I returned to the shed and were greeted by at least ten people who had been at the meeting. They wanted to continue the discussion, so a brief meeting was held to**

talk about purchasing agricultural produce from Dominica and shipping their goods with Dollars. The women were not comfortable with both ideas and made it clear that they did not trust Dollars. Sandra said she would rather deal with Roger, another boat owner, with whom she had a good working relation than with Dollars. The others concurred. JT ended the meeting by asking them to be patient while he tried to get in touch with Mr. Joseph, the president the Dominican Hucksters Association to work out the details. He spent the rest of the afternoon trying to reach Mr. Joseph, but was unsuccessful. In the interim, Dollars stopped by to inform us that he would be traveling to Dominica on Tuesday, October 15. He would report back to JT as soon as he returned.

### **THE AFTERMATH**

The week of October 14 began very quietly. Many of the women who shipped to Trinidad conducted their business outside on the street. Mr. Andrews, one of the field supervisors from the Ministry of Agriculture Quarantine division and JD, the field quarantine officer, were sitting in the shed waiting to issue the phytosanitary permit to the traders. Both felt that the Vincentian government had handled the mealybug situation poorly. They believed that trading would not be resumed until St. Vincent provided an honest answer to the Barbadians. "We should admit that the pest is here, but is contained in the downtown area of Kingstown" Mr. Andrews declared. "Moreover," he continued, "we should put certain procedures in place, which would let the Barbadians know that we are handling the situation properly."

JD, the other quarantine officer, added that: "The field officers are also in the dark. We have no idea what is going on. The fact of the matter is that the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Mr. Lewis, seems to be running the show. That man is an

economist and knows nothing about the technical aspects of agriculture. It is Mr. Duncanson who should be in charge, but this does not appear to be the case. We will have to wait just like everyone else to learn the truth.” Both men were not very optimistic and felt that the trade would not begin again for quite awhile.

I was very alarmed by my conversation with the quarantine officers because it pointed to a split within the Agriculture Ministry. Who was in charge? Was it the permanent secretary as the men suggested, and if so, what did that mean? I shared my misgivings with JT who smiled and bid me welcome to Vincentian politics. “Mr. Duncanson is limited in what he can do since he takes orders from the permanent secretary and that man is incompetent. I should know because I deal with him all the time. He will not listen to logic and believes that he has all the answers. It is going to be difficult for us to come up with a solution if he is truly in charge.”

Throughout that week, the traders came in and out of the office trying to get information. JT and I kept calling the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture, only to be told repeatedly that no new developments had taken place.

Bethune, JT’s nemesis, stopped by to inquire if there had been any progress: “I don’t believe that the trade will resume, and I am worried. Like many of the other traders, I will have no choice but to sell my goods in St. Vincent. Do you have any idea what that means for all of us financially? Why don’t you go to Barbados to find out what is really going on? The Barbadians will answer your questions, I am sure. You and I both know that Vincentians will never get the truth from Prime Minister Mitchell.”

I told her that I would think about her suggestion, but felt that the Vincentian government would misconstrue my visit to Barbados. They might see it as interfering.

Instead, I urged her to be patient and leave it up to the governments involved to work on resolving the problem. She was not very happy, nor hopeful.

A number of traffickers who shipped to Trinidad and I met that week. Madelyn, Yvonne, and several others expressed their concerns because several of the speculators who traded in Barbados were now sending goods to Trinidad. "This will make matters worse for us who work the Trinidad market," proclaimed Yvonne. "You know that our market is already saturated; now it will get even worse. As it is, most of us are struggling and with new people entering the market, we will be lucky if we earn anything. I guess we will all starve together." I tried to reassure them by saying that JT and I were in touch with the ministries and were sure that the government was doing its best to get the trade back on track. "Those people don't care. They are being paid, so why should they care about the traffickers," were Yvonne's parting words as she left the office.

JT spent the week of October 14 trying to reach the Dominican Hucksters Association. He called everyday, but was never able to speak to anyone other than the secretary. His messages went unanswered which prevented him from getting information to help the traffickers decide whether or not to buy from Dominica. JT was frustrated and did not understand why he had not received a phone call from the president of the Dominica Hucksters Association. His only alternative was to wait until Dollars returned from Dominica with information that could then be disseminated to the traffickers. In the mean time, JT attended the steering committee meeting of the IFAD project where he learned that the government had nothing new to report. Apparently government officials were still maintaining their silence and were waiting for a response to their communiqué of October 4.

Mr. Jacob, the head of the IFAD project, according to JT, was less than sympathetic when they spoke about the plight of the traffickers at the meeting. Jacob believed that it was now entirely up to Barbados to communicate with St. Vincent and until that happened, no further attempts would be made by the Vincentian government to contact the Barbadians. JT was dismayed by his attitude: "It does not seem to faze the authorities one bit that the traffickers can't work and have no income. Of course, these guys don't care because they are still collecting a pay check." I encouraged JT to remain optimistic, in spite of what appeared to be "a do nothing position" adopted by the government. However, it was difficult to stay hopeful, especially when government bureaucrats always repeated that they could do nothing until they heard from Barbados.

During that week, I spoke to Mr. Duncanson in relation to my travel plans to Barbados. Surprisingly, he expressed enthusiasm for the idea: "I will call Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) in Barbados to make the appropriate arrangements. You will be able to see first hand the changes that have been taking place in their agricultural sector and perhaps that might give you a better understanding of what is taking place right now." However, arrangements were never made, nor was any explanation ever given. Eventually, through the assistance of the American Embassy in Barbados, arrangements were made to meet with several Barbadian government officials.

On the morning of October 17, Mr. McCloud, one of the male traffickers who shipped to Barbados, visited the shed after speaking to Mr. Bates, the Barbadian chief quarantine officer, because he was very concerned about the lack of progress that had been made thus far. Mr. Bates informed him that he still had not received any calls from

the Vincentian chief technical agricultural officer. He also made it clear that he would not entertain any further conversations with the traffickers and would only deal with Vincentian government officials. Frustrated and angry, McCloud demanded to know what the government was doing. Mr. McCloud had identified me as one of the leaders and wanted to share with me his deep concerns regarding the crisis. I had no answers, except to urge him to be patient, and that the government was doing its best. He stared at me in disbelief because my statement belied the reality of the situation.

Suddenly, Mr. McCloud asked if I would consider traveling to Barbados on behalf of the traffickers. “Mr. Bates will speak to you; I am sure. He is a nice man and is willing to work with the traffickers. The problem is here in St. Vincent.” Even though Mr. McCloud had attended the meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture on October 11, and had heard the chief agricultural Officer State that several attempts had been made to reach the Agricultural Ministry in Barbados, he did not believe him. Instead, he unquestioningly accepted the word of Mr. Bates, a Barbadian official whom he deemed highly trustworthy.

McCloud also wanted to let JT know of his dissatisfaction with the way in which JT was handling the crisis. He felt that JT as president of the Traffickers and Small Business Association should have exerted more pressure on government officials to act quickly and decisively to resolve the problem. “He is not pushing those government people enough, but then JT does not have to worry about an income like the rest of us. He can still ship to the US and Canada.”

These comments called attention to the underlying tension, which existed between the traffickers and JT. They had often questioned his sincerity and dedication to

the Association. Whether he could truly represent the interests of the speculators was a question that surfaced frequently. I tried to allay his fears by telling him that JT had been working very hard and was just as frustrated by the lack of progress and the poor communication by government officials. Though somewhat appeased, McCloud still hoped that the Association would take some immediate action against the government.

The women returning from Trinidad that Friday also reported that their sales were sluggish. As I circulated around the dock, many complained that it had been unusually difficult to sell most of their goods because of the increased number of speculators in the market. Ms. Carter, one of the traffickers who usually sold produce to the Barbadians and was now shipping to Trinidad, suggested that the traffickers should meet to discuss ways in which they could help each other. Bethune, who had overheard our conversation, agreed that something should be done, but in the meantime asked that I speak to one of the traders who had recently met with Mr. Bell, the Minister of Agriculture in St. Vincent. Bethune felt that this woman might be able to shed light on recent developments.

Initially, the woman, Ena, who had shipped produce to Barbados weekly for the last ten years and whom I had never met before because she lived in Barbados, refused to speak with us, leading Bethune to comment: "Do you see why the traffickers can't get ahead? These women are impossible. She has information that is useful, but yet she won't share it with us. Can you understand that?" Eventually, Ena informed us that Mr. Bell had offered very little hope. He blamed the Barbadians for the impasse and had articulated the now familiar refrain that nothing would be done until Barbados

communicated with St. Vincent. Those listening to the conversation were angry and upset because it meant that the trade was dying and so was their livelihood.

Later that day, Ms. Carter stopped by the shed to inform JT of several rumors that she had heard. Jackson, one of the male traffickers who regularly shipped to Barbados was refused entry into Antigua because that island, too, had subsequently banned Vincentian produce. Carter claimed that they were also imposing a ban on Vincentian goods because of the mealybug infestation. Furthermore, she was told that other Caribbean nations were ready to bar Vincentian goods from their respective markets. JT was exasperated and did not know quite what to believe with all the rumors. Additionally, he now faced another problem. The sale of boxes had dropped precipitously since the crisis, reducing the income of the Association and raising the possibility that the office would have to be closed. The prospect was unsettling because the shed was the center and hub for all the activities of the traders and the Association. JT welcomed the meeting planned for October 21 so this latest issue could be discussed.

## **THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS GRASSROOTS ORGANIZER**

### **Planning Demonstration**

On Monday, October 21, I went to the dock to remind the traffickers about the 12 p.m. meeting. Thelma, one of the most successful regional traders who was often suspected of having relationships with Trinidadian drug dealers was eager to attend the meeting to articulate her disapproval of the other traffickers. She had claimed that the women were neither progressive nor forward thinking. Thelma believed that the mealybug crisis might shake the ladies out of their lethargy. "I will be brutally frank with

them and I might even give them some tips on how to run a successful business. Please don't get angry with me if I am a bit harsh, but they need to hear the truth."

On my way back to the shed, I bumped into Mr. Benjamin, the permanent secretary from the Ministry of Trade who impressed upon me that he and Mr. Watson, the Minister of Trade, were exploring other options and also expressed his concern as well as dissatisfaction with the lack of progress, even though they recognized that the solution to the problem lay outside their domain. He wanted me to know that the staff at the Ministry of Trade was prepared to do everything in their power to help solve the problem so that the trade would resume quickly.

When I finally got back to the shed, Mr. Andrews, the supervisor of the quarantine division of the Ministry of Agriculture was waiting for me with a copy of his quarantine report in which he outlined ways that St. Vincent could improve its handling of agricultural produce. He had been reluctant to share the report with the chief agricultural officer, his superior, because Andrews claimed that Duncanson was not open to suggestions. This conversation lent support to my belief that the Ministry of Agriculture subscribed to a rigid chain of command, which was seldom challenged, and that the technical workers were uncomfortable in expressing their ideas or opinions.

We then discussed Barbadian attempts to develop its agricultural sector. Andrews did not believe that the ban had anything to do with the Bajans trying to protect their fledgling agricultural sector, but was rather their way of protecting themselves from the mealybug. The pest, he explained, is very difficult to control since it attacks fruit trees shrubs and ornamentals. Since Barbados had such a large tourist industry, it could ill afford to have its landscape destroyed by the pest. Moreover, the cost of controlling the

pest was high and would mean that the Barbadian government would have to spend a substantial portion of its budget to containing the pest. According to Andrews the response of Barbados to the Vincentian situation made sense.

At noon, the shed was crowded with those traffickers who mostly sold produce to Barbados. However, none of the women who traded in Trinidad could be counted among those present in the room. I had invested a great deal of time urging the traffickers to attend the meeting only to be disappointed by the low turnout. Obviously, they had not been convinced of the importance of their presence to ensure the success of any action recommended by the Traffickers Association. Nonetheless, I started the meeting in JT's absence as he had been delayed for more than a half-hour and the traffickers were getting agitated. The group made it clear that despite their dislike for JT and his high-handed behavior and arrogance, they still expected him as head of the association to be their Joshua breaking down the walls of Jericho.

"This is your business," I remarked, "you and JT should decide on how best to handle this crisis." "How would you handle it?" cried out a voice at the back of the room. I responded: "I can only offer suggestions. You have to decide on the best course of action for yourselves and the organization. It is important that you call and visit the Ministry of Agriculture every day to let them know of your concerns and demands. You should go individually and in groups to constantly remind those in power that the problem needs to be addressed immediately. Your livelihoods are at stake."

Mr. McCloud and two others took center stage to complain that JT was not doing enough on their behalf because he could not feel their pain as he was still earning money from his other endeavors. It was at this point that Thelma walked into the meeting and

immediately interjected her presence: “JT has been working very hard to keep this organization going, but has gotten tired. Most of you refuse to support or help him. I won’t have you speaking badly about JT who works so hard to keep this place going. In my opinion, you are the problem. Most of you insist on taking too many goods to the market every week. No wonder you have so many difficulties. It is about time that you learn to stop bringing any and everything to the market. Why don’t you choose the produce carefully, and for goodness sake, limit your supply?”

Taylor, a Vincentian white farmer from the Mesopotamia Valley who depended on the traders, agreed with Thelma, adding that the meeting was called to explore ways of keeping the trade alive and not as a critique of the traffickers. He urged the group to find another alternative other than the one proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture to buy produce from Dominica which did nothing to assist the Vincentian farmers. After a much heated debate, we felt that one of the best ways to get the government to acknowledge the problem was through collective action. Thelma, as a strong supporter of the Mitchell government, disagreed by saying that the government was not responsible for the ban and should not be held accountable. The traffickers ignored her statement and voted to hold a demonstration against the government.

As the deliberations continued, I became more uneasy with my leadership role, as the government could accuse me of encouraging dissent. I tried to distance myself from the process by repeatedly stating that the final decision regarding the demonstration would have to be made by JT, as president of the Association. He was briefed on his arrival at 1 p.m. and immediately endorsed the idea that had been put forward, but made it clear to everyone that he expected his or her full cooperation. “Let me warn you,” he

declared, “if you don’t show up on Friday, this demonstration won’t work, and I will not put my neck out there again.”

Everyone present agreed that they had to do their part, yet many still voiced their concerns with JT’s leadership. Sandra, like so many of the traders, who lived mostly in Barbados, recommended that the group give JT a chance before demanding his resignation for incompetence. “Sandra is right” I pointed out, “more importantly, this is not the time to ask for his resignation because you are facing a serious problem that needs your undivided attention.” Heads nodded in assent. The demonstration was scheduled for Friday October 25 from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. with each individual present agreeing to contribute \$20 (\$7.45 US) towards the purchase of posters and refreshments.

After the meeting, JT and I discussed the proceedings. Surprisingly, he was not upset by the suggestion that he resign. Instead, he was delighted by the number of people that had attended the meeting. “There were more people here than I anticipated, perhaps it is time for a woman to run this organization,” he jokingly remarked. “You seem to have tremendous influence with these women, and what’s more, they actually listen to you when you talk.” I smiled and replied that they probably felt more comfortable with a woman at the helm. Upon reflection, I now realize that the women accorded me a leadership role partly because of my growing empathy and perceived organizational ability. We spent the entire week preparing for the demonstration. On Tuesday, he called the media to alert them to the impending action against the government, thereby ensuring that the event would have proper news coverage. He also informed the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture about the rally, prompting Mr. Benjamin, the permanent secretary of Trade to invite JT to a meeting with Mr. Watson, the Minister of Trade. Pleased by the

response, JT believed that the news of the demonstration was already having a positive impact and perhaps would persuade government officials to open a dialogue with the Barbadians. Instead, both men asked JT to postpone the rally for at least ten days, thereby giving the government an opportunity to put certain plans into action. Mr. Watson felt that the demonstration could jeopardize any future meetings between the two governments. JT interpreted their request as one more ploy by the Mitchell administration not to deal with the issue and also as a way to avoid negative publicity for the country. Nonetheless, he agreed to consider postponing the demonstration.

JT found himself in a difficult position. By delaying the demonstration, he ran the risk of alienating the traffickers, especially since they were already suspicious and openly questioned his authority. He knew that they would not understand, but more importantly would misinterpret his political strategy as just another way for him to advance his own personal agenda. On the other hand, JT also wanted to appear cooperative to government officials and in so doing hoped to acquire political leverage for the Association that could be used at a future date. JT later changed his mind after a heated debate with the permanent secretary of Agriculture who had refused to discuss the mealybug issue at the weekly IFAD meeting. Frustrated and angry, he remarked: "Those people don't care because they collect a pay check. Nothing will be done by these guys, so we are going ahead with this demonstration. The only way that I will change my mind is if the Prime Minister asks me to do so."

On Friday, the day slated for the demonstration, I arrived at the shed promptly at 8 a.m. only to be disappointed by the small turn out. Sandra and Ben, her live-in mate and helper, were the only three people there waiting. Immediately, I got a sense of

foreboding. Was this a sign of what was to come? Was the demonstration a failure even before it had begun? To make matters worse, Taylor, the white Vincentian farmer informed me when he got to the shed that Mr. McCloud, one of JT's strongest critics was not going to participate in the demonstration because he claimed that he had developed a bad rash under his arm which prevented him from taking part. "I knew that McCloud was not going to show, he has a lot of mouth, but..." Taylor's sentence trailed off without being completed. My misgivings increased, and I wondered if we would get this assembly off the ground.

Slowly, the traffickers arrived, first Linda, then Sarah and Betty. At 8:30, JT called and asked me to organize the refreshments. By 8:45 there were only ten people assembled, so Ben volunteered to go down to the dock to recruit other traffickers and ship captains to join the group. JT got to the shed by 9 a.m. and was also concerned by the low turn out. Linda who had now been waiting for an hour commented: "Do you see the problem? You can't depend and trust the traffickers. Where are they when you need them? Both Sarah and Betty agreed: " We can never get anywhere."

In spite of the poor turnout, we loaded the truck with the placards, refreshments, fruits and vegetables to take to the Ministry of Agriculture. However, I remained behind as per my agreement with JT in order to avoid being thrown out of the country. I walked to the office of the Ministry of Agriculture and stood on the sideline watching a disaster unfold. There were only twenty people marching across the street from the Ministry with placards, shouting the slogan "end the crisis," leading Celine Andrews, the reporter from CANA to comment "this turnout is too small to have any impact." She was right, so I took it upon myself (after informing JT) to walk down to the customs area and dock to

recruit the women coming in from their travels. Many of the speculators told me that they knew nothing about the demonstration which I found hard to believe in view of the fact that news about the demonstration had been publicized by the press and by word of mouth.

As I circulated, I spoke to Yvonne and Madelyn who complained that business was very bad that week in Trinidad. As a result, they were forced to leave part of their goods on consignment with some of the Trinidadian vendors. "They are killing the market for those of us," Yvonne stated. "We have to do something soon, otherwise, none of us will be able to make a living." I urged them to join the others because their show of support was needed to send a message to the government. I then spoke to the women returning from Martinique who also claimed that business was poor because the Dominicans had taken over the market and had undersold them. Martha and a few of her colleagues finally decided to join the group at the Ministry as soon as they had finished going through customs. In essence, I had spent part of the morning badgering, persuading and coercing many of the traders to participate in the protest.

By the time that I got back to the ministry at 11:15, the crowd had grown to about sixty people, and JT was ecstatic because now the demonstration could be considered to be a success. Moreover, the picketing had been documented by both the print and visual media guaranteeing full coverage in the newspapers following day and on the six clock evening news. JT issued the following statement to the press: "We had a meeting two weeks ago with the Ministry of Agriculture indicating our concerns and to date we have had no response regarding what is presently happening to the trade. We are also asking them to clarify whether or not the pink mealybug is present in St. Vincent. The Ministry

of Agriculture needs to state clearly with some proof, if necessary, whether or not the mealybug is present here in St. Vincent. The Barbadian officials are expecting an answer to this question before the ban will be lifted.”

Even though the assembly was disbanded at noon, the adrenaline was flowing, and some of the ladies insisted on moving the demonstration to the radio station to show their displeasure with Glenn Jackson, the popular radio announcer. He had been blamed by the Mitchell administration and the traffickers for the ban imposed on Vincentian produce. Jackson had been instrumental in uncovering the story and had denounced the government on his weekly broadcast, leading many Vincentians to believe that he was single-handedly responsible for the ban. They returned after spending a few minutes. JT distributed the refreshments and farm goods that had been displayed to convey a sense of the economic impact that banning these goods could have on the agricultural sector, traffickers, farming community and nation at large. JT gave the Agricultural Ministry a week to make contact with the Barbadians before convening another strategy meeting.

Before leaving the area, I was curious and asked Taylor to explain the absence of the farmers, especially since so many had complained that they had lost money as a result of the ban. “It is so typical of them not to support something like this. You see, many of them are still able to sell goods to the women because many are now shipping to Trinidad. The prices of the goods have been falling steadily: for example, plantains that sold at .45 cents before the ban are now selling at .25 cents a pound. The farmers tend to be shortsighted and are not thinking about the future.”

The demonstration had been a success in spite of the division that existed among the women. “These women are divided, and since the ban does not directly effect

Trinidad, many did not see a reason to participate or show their support,” JT explained. Their outlook, in my view, was just as shortsighted as the one exhibited by the farmers, particularly since by their own account, the ban was having a dramatic effect on sales. More than ever, I understood JT’s attitude towards the women for even in the face of catastrophe, they could not put aside their differences to work towards the well being of all traffickers.

### **NO RESPONSE**

Sadly, there was little reaction to the demonstration, and we were at a loss as to what to do next. Dollars brought information from Dominica, which made JT rethink the possibility of establishing a relationship with the Huckster’s Association. Dollars reported that he had been successful and was surprised by how much cheaper goods were in Dominica. Plantains there sold at .25 cents a pound as compared to .35 cents a pound in St. Vincent. He added that bananas, coconuts and sweet potato were also cheaper to purchase. However, he was spending \$1000 more a week for transportation and labor, thereby decreasing his profit, though not enough to prevent him from buying from the Dominicans. Dollars believed that the traffickers should begin to do business out of Dominica, even though they would lose some money. JT listened attentively, but later commented, according to Ruth, one of the traffickers contemplating buying goods from Dominica that Dollars was making a killing by selling to some of the women who regularly ship to Barbados at a substantial mark-up. The majority still was not willing to work with Dollars because they claimed he only cared about himself.

I met with Mr. Ellison, the chief technical officer from the Ministry of Trade at Sid’s Pub, a sports bar. The room was covered in dark mahogany wood, and the walls

featured pictures of famous cricket players. Ellison spoke openly about what was going on. He claimed that Mr. Benjamin, the Permanent Secretary, could not be expected to do much as he was a very timid man. So far, he reported, no one in the government had done much to help the traffickers: “The demonstration had no impact because neither the farmers nor the banana industry were involved.”

I responded by saying that the traffickers contributed at least nine million EC dollars to the economy during the last ten months according to the Barbadian newspapers. This figure was much more than JT had estimated. Ellison was impressed by the numbers but then commented “this figure meant nothing to the government and was frankly not sure that anything would be done. “Had this been a trade issue,” he said, “my minister would have gone directly to the Barbadians, and the situation would have been corrected by now. Don’t expect any help from the Permanent Secretary, he is only biding time until he retires next year.”

I repeated my conversation with Ellison to JT who was now beginning to lose hope. We had not heard one comment from anyone in the ministry; it was as though the demonstration had never taken place. The only good news that JT had heard was that the Barbadians had called for a meeting with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. But our hopes were dashed when the Vincentian Agricultural Minister announced that he would not attend because he had not received an official invitation. JT was enraged: “That man better attend that meeting on November 2. Otherwise, I will call for more demonstrations, and this time I will demand his resignation.” So, he called for a meeting with the traffickers on Monday, November 4, which was announced on radio later that day.

The women who traded in Barbados were anxious. They either called or stopped by the shed to ask if there was any news. They were getting desperate because many were beginning to use the little money that they had saved over the years to make ends meet and had no place to turn to once that money was gone. The Association did not have any money and thus could offer no financial assistance -- a fact that was not lost on most of them. Bethune again approached me about meeting with Barbadian officials on their behalf. Upon overhearing our conversation, the others asked if I would indeed consider it for they were growing desperate. I tried to explain once more that the Vincentian government would not look too kindly on such a visit, and that the matter should be left to both governments.

The Trinidadian market became depressed as the numbers of traffickers selling in the market had increased weekly since the ban. Many traffickers did not sell most of their produce, and thus were in debt to the farmers. "How am I to pay for my goods when I can't even sell them," lamented Yvonne. "How can I remain in the market when I continue to lose money every week? Do you have any idea how much money I have lost in the past two weeks? Hundreds, I tell you. Right now, I owe JT for the boxes, the farmers for the produce and all that I was able to collect this week was \$330 dollars (\$124 US). How is that going to help me?"

As I listened to more of these complaints, I knew that eventually I would have to make a decision regarding meeting with the Barbadians. Even Jones, one of the boat owners stopped me to have a discussion about his situation. Since the ban, he had not made any money and was very concerned. He did not know where or to whom to request help. He recounted his experience in Dominica: "It was the voyage to hell. I was told not

to dock, so I kept the boat some distance from port and remained there for two days without any one from customs boarding the boat. It was then that I decided to go to meet with the customs officer, but was told that I was not welcome and that I was to leave the premises immediately if I did not want to be arrested. Naturally, I left. What I don't understand is how Dollars can move about Dominica without any problem? I am sure that he blackballed me to the officials." I felt sorry for Jones, but there was not very much that I could say or do except to invite him to the meeting on Monday, November 4.

I also invited the Permanent Secretary of Trade to the meeting on Monday after talking with him on the street. He too had heard about the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States meeting with the Barbadians and was surprised by the response of the Minister of Agriculture to not attend. In his opinion, the minister should not stand on ceremony when the problem affects the country. According to the news report he had heard, Barbados would send a quarantine officer at the expense of St. Vincent to check on the produce before it was shipped to Barbados. Off the record, he thought that St. Vincent should pay if it would mean the resumption of trade. The Agricultural Minister never attended the meeting.

### **WE MEET AGAIN**

On Monday, November 4 thirty five people attended the meeting called by JT, including Mr. Benjamin, the Permanent Secretary for Trade, Mr. Andrews, from the quarantine division at the Ministry of Agriculture, and boat captains Jones and John. The traffickers who attended were mostly those who sold in the Barbados market. JT discussed issues such as pricing, marketing, packaging, competition, training and the resumption of the Barbados trade. He stressed that the post-harvest procedures must be

changed and that traffickers should be prepared to follow a new system that he hoped would be instituted fairly quickly. The traffickers were informed that proper cartons would be used and that they would be facing more stringent inspection from the quarantine section. Mr. Andrews concurred with JT and stated that the quarantine division would soon be instituting new measures.

The traffickers were very agitated by the lack of information and wanted to know what the Association was going to do to exert pressure on the government. Interestingly, both Mr. Andrews and Mr. Benjamin hinted subtly that the traffickers should demand answers until they received justice. Benjamin and Andrews thought that more demonstrations should be planned until such time that their demands were answered. We ended by establishing a committee of five, Mr. McCloud, Linda, Mr. Andrews, Captain John (the owner of the small boat, the Melinda), and a marketing specialist to be appointed by Mr. Benjamin to work on standardization issues. I also suggested that the traffickers form a credit union under the aegis of the Association which could provide funds in time of crisis as well as show lending institutions that they had assets. Everyone loved the idea, but the traffickers did not follow up.

With each passing day, the traffickers became even more desperate. Bethune, Linda and Betty asked me again to meet with the Barbadians on their behalf. What could I say? They were facing tremendous financial difficulties with no end in sight. How could I say no to them when their cries for help were being ignored? Additionally, we had become very close during the crisis and for the first time since my arrival in St. Vincent, I truly felt that I was one of them. I called Delmos Jones, my advisor in New York, to ask for advice and guidance. I felt that I owed the women something and would like to help.

**Besides, they trust me.” His response made me very angry. “It is your call; I am not there and don’t have all the facts, so you are the only one who can make the decision. Beware, if you choose to take action, make sure that there is someone to fill your shoes when you leave.” Of course, there was someone to take my place; I thought, JT, was the President of the Association and would still be on hand after any mediation I performed.**

**I had expected Delmos Jones to solve my dilemma and was angry because he had left the decision entirely up to me. I wanted him to tell me what to do, after all he was my advisor. Instead, he warned me that my actions could have tremendous consequences and wanted me to be aware before I proceeded. On hindsight, I now realize that I wanted Delmos Jones to tell me that it was all right to meet with Barbadian officials since I had made the decision to do so, and felt disappointed when he did not.**

**JT and I called the Ministry everyday, sometimes twice a day in the hope of hearing some positive news. Instead, we were told the familiar refrain that there was nothing to report. We kept the channels of communication open between the Association and the Ministries, even though we knew that there would be no information to report to the traffickers. In the interim, JT flew to Dominica to meet with the Dominican Agricultural Diversification Unit to learn what procedures needed to be followed if the traffickers were to buy produce from that country.**

**While he was out of the country, I had a meeting with Mr. Stanley, the head of the Vincentian Chamber of Commerce who had taken the initiative to arrange a meeting with the Barbadian Chamber of Commerce. The Barbadians, he explained, were very interested in resuming the trade since many merchants use cheaper Vincentian goods in their business. Bakeries, for example, were being hard hit because they had not been able**

to buy coconuts, which are processed into coconut oil for baking. This group had gotten together and pressured the Barbadian government to schedule a meeting with the Vincentian government in the hope that the two could resolve their differences. The meeting was to be held in Barbados.

Stanley invited both Ministries to the meeting with the Barbadian Chamber of Commerce, but was doubtful that they would attend. Mr. Benjamin at the Trade Ministry was surprised that Mr. Stanley had taken the initiative to arrange a meeting of the parties. He willingly agreed to send someone from his office to the meeting. I was unable to reach Mr. Duncanson, at the Agricultural Ministry to ascertain if he would attend. Stanley was concerned that they would not attend particularly since there were reports coming from both the BBC and CANA stating that the Minister of Agriculture was not going to attend the meeting organized by Mr. Stanley because he had not received an invitation. Stanley learned that Mr. Duncanson and the Permanent Secretary of Agriculture were in St. Lucia to work out an arrangement for Vincentian exporters to use the St. Lucian International Airport as there is no international airport in St. Vincent to export produce to foreign markets. He could only hope that a representative from the Ministry would participate in the meeting on Saturday, November 9.

Apart from the mealybug crisis, tension and dissatisfaction with the Mitchell government was growing. The Cable and Wireless Union called a general strike on November 8 to let the government know of worker discontent with its domestic policies. Union organizers complained that the government supported foreign companies over the needs of the Vincentian workers. Teachers and students complained that the schools were

ill equipped to facilitate learning. The traffickers had still not returned to work, and women's groups were concerned about women's rights.

The mood on the street that day was festive. People lined the streets eagerly in anticipation and in support of the marchers. There were more than 100 demonstrators with several cars and trucks parading in downtown Kingstown. The marchers stopped near the cable and wireless building to hear a number of speakers denounce the government. Many traffickers participated in the hope was that the march would spur the Mitchell administration into some type of action.

We learned that someone from St. Vincent may have attended the meeting organized by the Mr. Stanley of the Vincentian Chamber of Commerce, but we had no knowledge as to the outcome. The only information we were given was that there would be another meeting on November 23 either in St. Vincent or St. Lucia. That meeting was held in St. Lucia, and we learned through a news broadcast that the trade between Barbados and St. Vincent would resume by the beginning of December. The Ministry no longer communicated directly with JT. Everyone was excited and looking forward to working again. JT took the opportunity to meet with several traffickers to impress upon them the importance of changing their behavior and following the protocol outlined at the meeting in early November.

I did receive a call from Mr. Duncanson confirming the news report. He informed me that there would be another meeting with Antigua, St. Lucia, Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines to finalize the resumption of trade, and he expected the women to be working by early December. On another note, he still encouraged me to travel to Barbados because he thought that I would get valuable information about their

recent agricultural development. He suggested that I write a letter to Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) in Barbados asking them to facilitate my visit to Barbados. I told him that I would give it serious thought and would let him know of my decision.

With Christmas rapidly approaching, the women were excited that they would again be able to earn a living. Unfortunately, the trade did not resume as promised and no one gave us any information as to why not. Eventually, the Vincentian Agricultural Ministry told us that Antigua and Barbados never showed. When Mr. Stanley checked with the Barbadians, they claimed that it was the Vincentians who never called the Barbadians to confirm the meeting. JT and I were very angry. I commented that someone was lying, and the women were the ones suffering. I felt that these men were playing politics with the lives of the traffickers. JT concurred and added: "What are these women going to do? Maybe we should call another meeting of the Association." A meeting was called for December 9 to plan further strategies. JT felt that it was time to ask for a meeting with Prime Minister Mitchell.

Dollars stopped in the office to complain that the women who were now trading from Dominica had carried their bad habits with them. It was difficult to work with them and informed us that he was under tremendous pressure. His is the only boat from St. Vincent that has been allowed to transport goods from Dominica to Barbados. Dollars had originally traveled by plane to Dominica, but later brought his boat in from Barbados and in so doing, led Dominican customs officials to believe that his boat operated directly out of Barbados. Presently, the boat needs a new engine, which meant that he had to remain on the sideline for a little while, thereby causing him to lose money. Despite his

complaints, Dollars did make a handsome profit because, as JT put it, he had cornered the market.

On Monday December 9, as usual I went to customs and the docks to remind the women of the 10 a.m. meeting. In spite of my efforts, very few came to the meeting; instead most excused their absence by saying that they had to take care of the documentation for their goods before they could attend. Ten o'clock would generally be a bad time to have a meeting, and I was surprised to hear that JT had called the meeting for that time. Although many complained that the Trinidad market was impossible and getting progressively worse each week, few seemed to care sufficiently to come to the meeting to discuss the problems they were facing as a result of the ban. Only fourteen people attended, and I wondered if they too had lost hope and felt that very little would be accomplished by the meetings being held. In reality, however, the women were consumed with getting their produce to market and had no time for anything else.

JT had invited Cheryl Campbell and Mr. Emmanuel from the National Farmers Union to participate in the deliberations. They urged those present to form a strong association and to consider developing a regional group. In so doing, the politicians in the region as well as their local government officials would be forced to listen to their voices. It was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Prime Minister asking for a meeting. Should the Prime Minister not respond, it was decided to invite farmers, supermarket owners and all others involved in the trade, directly or indirectly, to demand a meeting of regional leaders. We spent the rest of the day drafting a news release and a letter to the Prime Minister asking for an audience.

The traders suspended trade during the Christmas holiday to spend time with families and friends. Many complained that they had little to celebrate in 1996 as a consequence of increased competition, falling prices and the ban on produce imposed by the Barbadians. JT and Mr. Emmanuel of the NFU spent the holidays planning a half-hour television program sponsored by the Traffickers and Small Business Association and the National Farmers Union to inform the nation on the seriousness of the mealybug crisis.

The television program was aired on January 3, 1997 with Celine Andrews, the CANA reporter as the moderator. Amongst the discussants were Mr. Emmanuel, the President of the National Farmers Union (NFU), James Thomas (JT), the president of the Traffickers and Small Business Association, and Mr. Cummings, an agronomist and Chairman of the Banana Farmers Movement. The program focused on the Barbadian trafficking ban on Vincentian produce, the banana industry and the five-year development plan initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture. Both JT and Mr. Emmanuel emphasized the economic impact that the ban was having on the farmers, traffickers, exporters and the nation at large. JT informed the public that the traffickers had exported approximately 6,000 tons of produce to Barbados as of September 30, 1996, and had brought in revenues of \$9 million dollars EC (\$3,370,786 US) to the country.

Moreover, they stated that the government had not responded to either the written inquiries sent by the Barbadians, or to requests made by the NFU and the Traffickers Association. Mr. Emmanuel remarked: "There seems to be a hands off policy on the issue. Rather than coming out and saying what the issue is, you get somebody thinking that you are a politician, or that you want to bring down the government" Mr. Cummings

added that “there should be no hiding and dodging of the issue. If the pink mealybug is here, then the government should come out and forthrightly say that it is here. Measures should be taken to deal with it if it is here. So far, as a farmer, I can say that I have not seen its presence, but if it is here, we need to deal with it.”

The panelist then turned their attention to the questions of diversification and the banana industry. All agreed that if the industry is to remain competitive, farmers, businessmen, government and the region had to work in concert to improve the quality of the bananas. St. Vincent had not been able to meet the 80% quality standard imposed by the European Community (EC) and had been warned repeatedly by European buyers that unless it came up to standards, Vincentian bananas would not be accepted in the British and EC markets. JT took the opportunity to interject that poor quality bananas that were normally sold in the local and regional markets were now being shipped to the United Kingdom. The loss of markets and the ensuing oversupply caused some farmers to send what would have been rejected under the existing standard to the international markets. They also felt that the diversification program had not been successful so far because the government had not provided the farmers with an alternative to bananas. Hence, farmers would continue to grow bananas until they could make a living by selling other produce.

Even after the airing of the program, there was no response from the Prime Minister. JT called the Prime Minister’s office and was eventually told that Mr. Mitchell would not be available as he was traveling on official business. JT was very angry and felt that it was time for the Mitchell government to be voted out of office. He believed that the Prime Minister’s lack of concern was further proof that the government did not care about the plight of poor people of St. Vincent. After all, JT reasoned, how could he

turn his back on those who needed his help most? There was very little that I could say to console him or the traffickers. I, too, had lost hope and it was at this point that I decided to take a trip to Barbados.

On January 8, 1997, I contacted the United States Embassy in Barbados to ask for assistance. Upon my arrival to St. Vincent in March 1996, I had been informed that the United States Embassy would assist me if it became necessary. I spoke to Fran Wickham-Jacobs the educational liaison officer at the US Information Service who made the arrangements for me to meet with Dr. Benton, the Associate Chief Technical Officer for agriculture, and Mr. Sanders, the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I introduced myself to both officials as a graduate student from New York doing fieldwork with the traffickers in St. Vincent. I explained that as a researcher, I was not representing the government, nor the traffickers, but was interested in learning more about the reasons why Barbados had banned Vincentian produce. Dr. Benton was very open and candid. He informed me that he had been away when the ban was imposed and felt that perhaps his government had acted prematurely. Although he believed that the trade would resume shortly, the traffickers would be required to adhere strictly to certain criteria such as proper standardization, packaging and removal of all soil from produce. In addition, they would not be allowed to use dangerous pesticides to clean their produce.

Mr. Sanders, though polite, made it very clear that he blamed the Vincentians for the present impasse. He implied that the Vincentian government was aware of the problem and had not been honest with his government. Barbados had to protect its shores from the pest and unfortunately, the traffickers and others like them got caught in the middle. Nevertheless, he believed that the matter would be resolved shortly, once both

parties sat down at the table. I left Barbados reassured and for the first time since the crisis began in early October, felt that the women would begin trading soon.

The traffickers were pleased by the news that I had brought back from Barbados. A few days after my visit, a communiqué was issued by the Barbadian government inviting the governments of St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Antigua to send a representative to the meeting. The traffickers were elated by the news and I made sure that they did not credit my visit with the turn of events. Though flattered, I explained that the meeting would have taken place despite my visit with the Barbadians. Unfortunately, when I left the country at the end of January 1997, nothing had been resolved.

#### **POSTSCRIPT**

I have kept in close communication with James Thomas, President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association since I returned to the United States. He informed me that the trade to Barbados was no longer as lucrative as it was prior to the ban on Vincentian produce. In early 1997, much to the dismay of the traffickers, Barbados began to buy bananas from Chiquita Banana Brands in Costa Rica despite the dispute between the CARICOM countries, the European Union and the United States. The women have been forced to compete with cheaper and higher quality bananas.

At the beginning of January 1997, the newspapers in St. Vincent and Barbados continued to report on the mealybug infestation. Searchlight in the Agri-Business section reported that the pink mealybug affair was a national concern and urged the nation to come together to solve the problem as quickly as possible. The Barbados Advocate pointed out that mealybug had spread to other areas in the Caribbean and concluded that it would only be a matter of time before the pest infested the island of Barbados.

An impasse between St. Vincent and Barbados continued until March 1997 when the all of the parties (St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Barbados) involved in the dispute came to an agreement. According to JT, the Barbadians would be allowed to inspect the produce in St. Vincent before these were shipped to Barbados. As a result, the ban was partially lifted and the first-transshipment cargo was allowed to clear the Barbados port for shipment to the United States. The traffickers were allowed to resume the trade with the stipulation that they ship their produce in smaller boxes. Although it would cost them more money to trade in Barbados according to JT, he still believed that they would make a decent living.

JT welcomed the new procedures, especially since he had advocated for the change--standardization. JT was delighted because the women finally had to comply with standards. In so doing, he felt that they would remain more competitive since the Barbadians had begun to buy bananas from Chiquita Banana. Sadly, the trade was suspended again after a few months because the Barbadians were dissatisfied with the lack of cooperation from the Vincentian government. JT was upset and was even more discouraged by these events. As a result, he decided to import chicken from the United States to sell in the countryside and had encouraged Yvonne to join him in this new venture. To date, the business is thriving.

Dollars remained fairly successful throughout the crisis though by the beginning of January 1997, he, too, competed with dollar bananas from Costa Rica. Martha, according to JT, had not given up the fight and continued to trade in Martinique despite the problems she faced. Many of the other women returned to Barbados where they struggled to regain their market share. It is my understanding that the trade was no longer

as lucrative as it had been prior to the ban. Nevertheless, the women created an organization in Barbados, independent of the Vincentian Traffickers and Small Business Association, to represent their interests.

The Minister of Agriculture was removed, and I can only speculate that the mismanagement and the furor created by the mealybug crisis may have contributed to the removal of the Minister of Agriculture from his post. The chief agricultural officer remains in his post.

### **SUMMARY**

Upon reflection, I remember leaving St. Vincent with a sense of apprehension and tremendous concern for the traffickers. Many were still out of work and those who continued to work, were barely making ends meet. Yet, in spite of these problems, they still refused to work together to save the trade. The crisis had not brought them together as I thought it would, but had rather exacerbated the division that already existed among the groups. I finally came to accept as well as to understand that traffickers were business people whose principal aim was to maximize their profit, or as Homiak argues, are sole proprietors who compete with every other to buy and sell produce (Homiak 1986). Even in the face of a crisis that was having a devastating impact on the trade, the women continued to conduct business in the same old way.

Moreover, the events described in the chapter also point out the inherent weakness of the Traffickers and Small Business Association. Although the Association was initially formed to influence and confront state policies that would have a direct bearing on the trade, it never fully developed into a vibrant organization that could sufficiently lobby for change because it lack of support from its members. Additionally,

the organization had become too closely identified with its president, creating tension and conflict between the membership and the leadership. As a consequence, the president could not sustain any collective action, thereby preventing the organization from having a strong impact on the state.

During the crisis, the state seemed reluctant to assume responsibility even though there were clearly nationwide concerns and implications (Hart et al 1993). St. Vincent's refusal to give a definitive response to the public and to its trading partners created further suspicions that the government was deliberately hiding the truth. It is also interesting to note that communication between and within the Ministries often appeared to be lacking raising the following questions: Who was ultimately in charge? Who were the principal players responsible for resolving the crisis? Finally, to whom is the state accountable? These questions will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

I also left St. Vincent with several questions regarding the role of the anthropologist. Should we remain neutral observers or advocates for those with whom we study? Are we responsible for giving back something to our informants? These are questions I also address more fully in the ensuing chapter.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **TRAFFICKERS AND THE VINCENTIAN STATE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The ethnography of the mealybug crisis illustrates very well the relationship between the Vincentian State and the traffickers, especially the women and their voluntary association. The first part of the chapter analysis the Vincentian government's decision to not admit the presence of the mealybug pest within St. Vincent. That decision precipitated a crisis, which resulted in a significant loss of income for those, involved in the trade of primary goods, and contributed to the loss of credibility for the state. How much did the evaluation of the situation by government officials contribute to the crisis? Did they miscalculate the severity of the problem? Or was their attention directed to more pressing domestic issues, such as recovering from several scandals that had plagued the government since 1995. In addition, there were the policy problems of increasing the pace of development, resolving the high unemployment rate and/or tackling the problem of agricultural diversification? Finally, how did the political structure determine the government's ability to manage the crisis?

This chapter also examines the reluctance of the women to exert pressure on the state to resolve the crisis. It also discusses their role as petty capitalists and marketeers where each person's individual enterprise is more important than the collective needs and interests of the group. This behavior suggests that gender issues do take precedence in the case of the female Vincentian trafficker when compared to those of the male traffickers. In addition, this section focuses on how this lack of solidarity helped government officials behave as though the traders were unimportant actors in the unfolding drama,

and whose interests, namely, the resumption of trade, was not sufficiently compelling to warrant any aggressive action.

The third section of the chapter analyzes the role and the ability of the Traffickers and Small Business Association in mobilizing the traders to engage in any sustained and prolonged action against the government. Moreover, it examines the relationship between the head of the Association and the traffickers, a relation fraught with varied antagonisms and animosities. It also points to the individualistic and paternalistic styles of the leader when dealing with the membership.

The final section of the chapter looks at the problems that I encountered as I conducted the research. The crisis as it unfolded led me to rethink the role of the anthropologist. Should we be only neutral observers, who remain dispassionate and uninvolved, as implied by anthropological methods? When is it appropriate to become involved, whether as an advocate or ombudsman? What if anything do we owe our informants who closely work with us, and who may face unexpected challenges that could severely change their lives?

### **STATE BEHAVIOR: A VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM**

To understand the mealybug crisis, we must examine the factors that may have influenced the Vincentian government to publicly deny the presence of the pest, and that may have led the state to become recalcitrant and insouciant as the crisis evolved. Had government officials become too preoccupied by more urgent problems, or had they simply miscalculated the severity of the mealybug infestation?

When I left St. Vincent, I was convinced that the government was responsible for the economic effect resultant from the mealy bug crisis. Government officials created the

crisis by not admitting the presence of the pest and made the situation worse by steadfastly refusing to meet with Barbadian officials to discuss the problem. In so doing, the Vincentian government created additional hardship for the traffickers and the nation at large. At the time, I was perplexed and confused by the government's lack of response especially since Prime Minister Mitchell in his October 1996 Parliamentary address acknowledged the valuable contributions of the traffickers to the Vincentian economy. Why did the government seem so reluctant to act? More importantly, why was there such a dichotomy between the government's political rhetoric and its behavior?

I concluded that the government's behavior could be explained by its disparaging attitude towards women. Prime Minister Mitchell and other members of his cabinet did not mobilize their forces quickly enough because most of the traffickers were women who traditionally are seldom given credit for their economic role. Generally, women's contribution and participation in the development of the economies of the Caribbean are consistently ignored (Ellis 1986). I speculated that the attitude of government officials towards women could best be explained by the prevailing attitude held throughout the region, if not the world, that a woman's work was economically insignificant. In spite of Prime Minister Mitchell's remarks noting the contributions of the traffickers to the national economy, it was apparently not enough to rally the government behind the traffickers and those who would be hurt by it.

How could I have remained truly objective, when from my arrival on the island I was bombarded with newspaper articles that excoriated the Prime Minister and his cabinet for one repeated offense after another? My point of view began to take shape from the first glaring headline that I read in *The Vincentian*, entitled "New Management

for Ottley Hall” (March 29,1996). The article reported that the government was prepared to turn over the management of the Ottley Hall project to a local accounting firm. The Mitchell Administration, I learned, had been accused of mismanaging the project designed to create jobs for Vincentians by repairing yachts and sailboats while simultaneously bringing much- needed foreign revenue into the country. Even though it had been hailed by government officials as a step toward the country’s quest for development. JT and others knew that the nation was faced with amortizing the debt because the Italian firm contracted to build the marina had defaulted on its loans to several banks. The country had been left without a marina and was now further in debt. The newspapers had criticized Mitchell for jeopardizing the welfare of future generations of Vincentians since they would ultimately be left responsible for paying off the debt. An article in the *Vincentian* by PC Hughes, a member of the elite class, and one of the Administration’s harshest critics, was not so generous, as he openly accused government officials of stealing money from the Ottley Hall project (The Vincentian November 1, 1996)

Another story circulating among Vincentians included the Parnell Campbell story (previously discussed in chapter four) that accused the Attorney General of improperly obtaining an interest free loan in August 1995, from an offshore bank. This story led me to scrutinize the government’s ethical standards (The Political Handbook of the World, 1997). My suspicions deepened when it was reported that the Prime Minister had quipped “that boys will be boys,” as an explanation of the behavior of his Attorney General. Furthermore, JT, as well as other Vincentians with whom I had discussed the matter, informed me that Mitchell had made no attempt to reprimand his Attorney

**General.** The Attorney General resigned in late September 1995, but retained his parliamentary seat as back-bencher, and continued as chairman of Prime Minister Mitchell's New Democratic Party (NDP). This left many Vincentians critical of the ethical standards of the Mitchell Administration (*The Political Handbook of the World* 1997).

There were additional stories circulating around the country during the following months, especially the weekly commentaries by PC Hughes, that provided additional evidence to support my critical views of governmental officials. Hughes accused Mitchell (whom he called "The Squanderer") of selling the country out to foreign nationals in exchange for money and openly blamed him for contributing to the poor economic conditions on the island (*The Vincentian* November 1, 1996). Moreover, he accused Mitchell and his Chief of Police of allowing drug traffickers to transport drugs from St. Vincent to other parts of the world. In his opinion, St. Vincent had become a sanctuary for illegal drug money. Hughes, referring to the late Haitian dictator Francois Duvalier claimed that Mitchell had done more damage to the country than ten "Papa Doc" dictators could have done (*The Vincentian* November 1, 1996). Hughes claimed that the Prime Minister ran the country as though it were still a plantation and his personal fiefdom. Many Vincentians I knew agreed with this assessment, and I was sympathetic with Hughes's point of view.

My discussions with JT, as well as with some middle class informants, shaped my views of Vincentian politics. These Vincentians were fiercely vocal, often describing the Prime Minister as autocratic and self-serving. Moreover, they described him as person uninterested in the welfare of the nation, but a man willing to sacrifice the well being of

future generations for the right price. Though much of their opinion was based on conjecture and anecdotal evidence, I accepted their position without reservation because my analysis concurred with theirs. During my daily travels with the traffickers across the island, I witnessed struggles that many Vincentians faced in obtaining a living. Given their struggle to survive, I questioned the commitment of the Mitchell government to improving the life of the ordinary Vincentian. Moreover, the handling of the mealy bug incident convinced me that government had no genuine concern for improving the life of the ordinary Vincentian.

News of the mealybug infestation first appeared in the newspaper. The daily headlines in late September through early October 1996 were replete with questions about the presence of the mealybug on the island. Both *The Vincentian* and *Searchlight* newspapers intimated that the government was aware of the infestation, but had done nothing to prevent its spread. More importantly, they demanded that the government inform the public so that measures could be taken to protect the agricultural sector from being completely destroyed, as it had happened in Grenada. The newspapers felt that the public had the right to know such information, particularly since it could affect their livelihood. Government officials remained silent in spite of the daily stories and in so doing, further encouraged the antagonism of the press towards the Mitchell Administration.

The way in which the government's handling of the mealybug crisis demonstrated the insensitivity of government officials toward the poor. JT and I had tried numerous times to convince government bureaucrats and the Prime Minister that the traffickers could not survive very long without the government making every effort to restore the

trade quickly. Demonstrations, letter writing campaign, and meetings with subordinate officials had no observable policy effect upon the Mitchell Administration. Mitchell felt no reason to meet with JT, signaling his disinterest in the matter.

Clive Bishop commented that the reaction from top officials could have only been described as incredulous, insulting, nationally destructive, and regionally disastrous (Searchlight January 17, 1997). I had worked closely with JT since October 4, 1996, the crisis erupted, in an effort to convince government officials that the problem needed to be addressed promptly. Since there was no apparent attempt being made by the Mitchell government to end the impasse with Barbados, I asked myself what chance did most poor Vincentians have to survive when their government refused to act on behalf of the traffickers, a group who by its own admission had contributed substantially to the state treasury. Furthermore, the traffickers provided jobs for many Vincentians, such as boat owners, truckers, farmers, and many underemployed young men. Additionally, the traffickers bought supplies, such as cartons, ropes, staples and other items from Vincentian merchants, thereby helping to support the national economy. I was convinced that most Vincentians did not stand much of a chance and they would continue to struggle economically no matter whom was in power.

In hindsight, it was easy for me to make such a shortsighted assessment. The rumors and allegations of government corruption and my personal experience during the crisis led me to make rash judgments about the Mitchell Administration. St. Vincent as a small polity, faces many problems, including, though not limited to, the legacy of the plantation system, problems of sustainable development, high unemployment and economic diversification and the loss of banana revenues and government corruption. It is

possible that government's actions and response to the mealybug problem were shaped by constraints of socio-economic and political structures and mentality handed down from colonialism.

Historically, St. Vincent, like other Caribbean nations, has faced continuous struggle to survive since the arrival of the Europeans to its shores in the 15th century. Beginning with the war of annihilation against the indigenous peoples, the Caribs, who were sent to present day Belize and Honduras after a long and protracted war (as discussed in chapter four), the people of St. Vincent have been subjected to one crisis after another. As a consequence, Vincentians have become habituated and inured to their problems and have developed strategies to cope with the constant onslaught of uncertainty and insecurity. Not only have they had to respond to natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, droughts, numerous hurricanes and pest infestations, but they have also had to deal with the economic exploitation by European powers and most recently the United States.

St. Vincent has been dominated or influenced by foreign powers for five hundred years. Early European domination led to an economic system and socio-political structures always shaped by a confluence of external political and economic forces that favored the interest of outsiders and the island's elite class. The monocrop plantation system, designed to extract wealth from the island, ruined the physical environment by depleting the soil. It created a hierarchical class that rests upon the shoulders of its laborers. This struggle continues today between St. Vincent and the foreign influences that continue to unduly dominate the island's economy, and the livelihoods of its people (Richardson 1983).

Overspecialization and dependency on the trade of a single crop has been the hallmark of the Vincentian economy beginning from the 18th century when sugar then arrowroot and later cotton dominated. With the advent of less expensive crops from other countries, all three declined in importance, positioning St. Vincent for susceptibility to serial crisis (Grossman 1998). St. Vincent is continually at the mercy of external forces, making it difficult for the government to find much needed revenues to support itself while guaranteeing the well-being of its citizens. The dictates of international capital continues to influence state policy and hence its survival (Glasberg and Skidmore, 1997).

### **THE BANANA INDUSTRY**

St. Vincent's economy remains predominately agricultural, with banana being a primary product. Although agriculture only accounts for 15% of the GDP, it employs at least 25.1% of the labor force, and accounts for the largest share of export revenue. Overall, bananas comprise 39% of its exports to Britain and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries and contributes some 42.2% of the value of domestic merchandise exports in 1995 (The Europa World Year Book 1997; Statistical Abstract of the World 1994; The World Fact Book 2000). The agriculture sector is critical to the survival of the state. Since St. Vincent depends on the sale of bananas and root crops for its livelihood, any disruption, including the pink mealy bug infestation, is viewed with considerable alarm.

The banana industry was already in crisis before the mealy bug incident. British supermarkets had been complaining about the poor quality of the Vincentian bananas when compared to what they call "the dollar bananas" from Central America and Africa. Competition from these areas placed tremendous pressure on the government is

maintenance of its market share. The St. Vincent Growers' Association, a statutory corporation established in 1954 to function as the central buyer/coordinator, had tried to maintain the viability of the industry by encouraging farmers to produce better quality bananas by paying them based on the quality of the banana produced. Farmers, however, continued to complain that the Association paid them little to nothing and required that they work very hard for the meager earnings. As a result, they felt they had no incentive to grow the best quality produce. As Dollars explained during one of our many conversations, farmers felt cheated and abused by the Association. Hence, most saw no reason to increase the yield and improve the quality of the bananas in view of the Eastern Caribbean dollars \$0.2875/lb offered by the Association (Grossman 1998).

It has also been difficult for St. Vincent to compete with the larger plantations of Central America and Africa. The largest farms in St. Vincent are in the 60 to 70 acre range. Most farmers own less than five acres of land, which they use to cultivate bananas and root crops. The government's land redistribution program has exacerbated the situation by creating additional small farms, making it even more difficult for the country to produce bananas on the same scale as African and Latin American producers. Furthermore, Vincentian farmers are often not as technologically sophisticated as their counterparts in other regions of the world because the Association does not have the financial resources necessary to provide them with the latest technological innovations. As a consequence, yield per acre remains low.

The farmers and the Mitchell Administration have also had to face additional problems with the banana industry. The government as well as the farming community has been extremely concerned by the actions taken by the United States and several Latin

American countries against the European Union. Even though the Latin American countries together control 42% of the European market, as compared to the measly 8% market share held by the Caribbean region, they demanded that the EU change its policy towards the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) (*Newsweek* April 28, 1997). *The Searchlight* reported that: panic had started hitting the farming community over the news that the US and four Latin American countries were trying to destroy St. Vincent by taking the matter to the World Trade Organization (WTO) (*Searchlight* March 21, 1997). Since the WTO ruled in favor of the US and the other litigants, the Caribbean will no longer receive preferential treatment in the European markets. As the EU Commission pointed out, the destruction of the banana industry would have devastating consequences, not only for the economy, but also for the social and political stability of the Caribbean countries (*The Vincentian* March 21, 1997). St. Vincent and the Caribbean region face yet another crisis.

Any disruption in the sale of bananas by pest infestation would not only be harmful to the well being of the farming community, but also to the welfare of the state. The Vincentian economy and the state budget would be hit hard by the loss of income from the sale of bananas. The government derives income from bananas directly and indirectly. It receives income directly through the levy of an export tax on bananas, traditionally set at 3 percent but reduced to 2 percent in 1994. Indirectly, the health of the banana industry greatly impacts the overall level of economic activity on the island; it also affects the general level of private spending, and consequently, influences the collection of import and consumption taxes revenues crucial to the government budget (Grossman, 1998).

The changes that will occur, as a result of the end of the Lome Treaty will mean additional competition in the EU market, further depressing prices. The loss of revenue is expected to have a significant impact on both the Vincentian State and the livelihood of the farmers. One of the major questions confronting the Mitchell Administration as a consequence of WTO ruling and the end of Lome trade agreement would be how to diversify the economy quickly enough to prevent a complete collapse of the country.

Given the banana industry issues, it is plausible that Mitchell's attention may have been consumed by this problem to not pay attention to the pink mealy bug infestation until the problem became a national problem. The pest, according to Ramón and JT, was known to be present on the island as early as 1995, although there had been no official confirmation. They claimed that samples had been sent to England for testing, but the results never been publicly disclosed. Subsequently, a campaign was launched by the Ministry of Agriculture to help the public identify the pest (*Searchlight* January 17, 1997).

Jingles on the radio described the pest and urged Vincentians to be cautious and report any sightings to the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture took limited action by removing and burning some plants that were supposedly infected (*Searchlight* January 17/997). It appears that the Ministry of Agriculture attempted to prevent the problem from getting out of control. The National Farmers Union held a workshop to make farmers aware of the threat of the pink mealy bug and the dangers that it posed to agriculture and food security. The farmers were given tips on how to identify the bug and information on its social, economic and environmental impact. They were shown a video on the ravages of the pink mealy bug in Grenada (*The Vincentian* March

29, 1996). In view of these measures, the Administration believed that the country had been insulated against the pest.

Once the crisis became full blown, the Administration appears to have only one option: remain silent. The government faced the serious problem of how to protect an already ailing agricultural sector. The banana trade had to be protected because of its contribution (approximately 41.8% of the value of domestic merchandise exports in 1996) to the state's coffers (*The Europa World Yearbook 1999*). Therefore, I believe that the government's reluctance to publicly disclose information regarding the pest was its way of protecting an important source of revenue. As such, the Administration may have consciously decided not to admit the presence of the pest on Vincentian soil. In so doing, it maintained the facade that all was well while it tried to protect the trade.

The regional market is very important to the state treasury. The bananas that were rejected for sale in the international market were generally sold in the regional market. Through the traffickers, the farmers sold their surplus and sent rejected produce to Barbados, Trinidad and Martinique. Consequently, the farming community and the government benefited as farmers earned additional dollars, and the government collected taxes and other fees. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the government may have taken measures to protect the industry and the trade and did so by not admitting the presence of the pest on its soil.

#### **DRUGS: THE NEW FORM OF EMPLOYMENT**

In addition to the problems in the banana industry, the Mitchell government has also had to face the substitution of bananas with drugs. The problems in the banana industry have led many farmers to look for other options to survive. Planting marijuana

(ganja) instead of bananas was one of those options. For example, one of the young farmers openly admitted to me that he had planted marijuana to sell in the regional market. As he explained during our conversation: “What would you have me grow, tomatoes and then what? You want me to sell it in the market like everybody else? What could I earn? How can I feed my family?”

The Mitchell Administration was well aware of these sentiments and had been warning the international community that his government would be facing another serious crisis-- the increase in the drug trade--if the banana industry were destroyed. The Caribbean region was reported to be responsible for 40% of the cocaine and heroin sold in the United States, and the eastern Caribbean in particular, of which St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) are a part of what was considered to be a steppingstone and the fastest conduit for traffickers (*Newsweek*, April 28, 1997). SVG had been accused by the US of being second to Jamaica in marijuana production, making it probably the island’s largest export earner (*The Vincentian* March 29, 1996).

The marijuana trade had grown so significantly that it prompted the United States government, with the permission of the Mitchell Administration, to send troops to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to destroy the crop. It was a difficult task because the hilly terrain on these small islands provides cover for the marijuana plants, thereby making it difficult to completely eradicate the cultivation of the crop. Another one young farmer explained: “No sooner do the Americans destroy my field that I move further into the dense mountainous regions. They will never be able to destroy all our fields.” *The Vincentian* newspaper reported in one of its editorials that the fight against the drug war was not successful. The fall in the price of banana production was forcing farmers and

young people into the lucrative production of marijuana cultivation as an alternative cash crop, a means of survival (*The Vincentian*, September 6, 1996). As Iris Walker, a Vincentian farmer, stated to a *New York Times* reporter: "Marijuana farmers should be accepted as a necessary evil," because farmers throughout the Caribbean had been left with few alternatives to survive (*The New York Times* March 4, 1999).

Not only had Mitchell been under tremendous pressure from the US to stop the burgeoning marijuana industry, but he also had to answer to allegations made by the Barbadians. The Barbadian government accused the Mitchell Administration of helping Barbadian drug dealers break the law as well as not doing enough to solve the drug problem (*Sunday Sun* January 1999). In addition, Mitchell was forced to respond to criticisms that members of his cabinet were receiving kickbacks from drug dealers and offshore banking officials. *The Searchlight* also reported that the Eastern Caribbean had been reaping millions from drug cartels and were also under threat of being taken over politically by these cartels (*Searchlight* September 27, 1996). Notwithstanding, the Prime Minister had "his hands full," with the aforementioned domestic issues.

High unemployment was another problem that warranted the attention of the Mitchell Administration, especially since it hovered around 20%, according to the figures reported in the 1991 census. The government was faced with a daunting task of diversifying and stimulating an economy to increase the number of jobs available while at the same time preventing many young Vincentians from entering into the drug trade. Although peasant farming provided work and income for 75-80% of the population since the 1950s, many farmers have been forced to seek other paying jobs because the size of

their land holdings were too small and banana production could no longer provide for all of their needs (Grossman 1998).

The manufacturing sector has been very weak with jobs being limited to work in the garment industry, the assembling of electronic components and the processing of agricultural goods- - rice-milling, rum distillation, flour, brewing and dairy production. As a result, it has been difficult for Vincentians to find work in this sector, especially the young, whom I often observed hanging around street corners or rum shops during the day. In 1995, this sector only employed 8.5% of the labor force, and so far, the government's efforts to attract additional businesses to the country have not been very successful (*The Europa World Year Book* 1997).

To solve some of the country's pressing problems, Prime Minister Mitchell turned his efforts towards increasing the number of tourists coming to the main island of St. Vincent. According to *The Vincentian*, Mitchell staked the future of the country on tourism. In his address at the official opening of The Vincentian Community College, he remarked that the country was experiencing the closing stages of trade protectionism and faced a battle to protect its banana markets in Europe. Mitchell made it very clear that the country's banana production could not compete in cost with that of Latin America. Consequently, he stressed the significance of tourism to the country: "St. Vincent and the Grenadines have been blessed with beautiful climate and good weather to profit from tourism. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world, and this multi-island nation is strategically located to reap maximum benefits from the trade. We have targeted the middle and upper end of the market, and we want to keep it that way" (*The Vincentian*, February 14, 1997).

Mitchell hoped that by targeting the more affluent tourists, he could increase this sector's contribution to the GDP. During 1993-1997, tourism accounted for approximately 3% of the GDP. In his campaign to make the mainland more tourist friendly, the Administration encouraged the construction of luxury hotels, such as the Camelot and a new shipping berth to facilitate the increase in the number of stop-over and cruise ship visitors (Vincentian Statistical Office: 1993-1997 indicators). In so doing, he expected to stimulate the economy and increase the number of jobs in the country. In spite of these efforts, tourism to St. Vincent continued to lag behind the yacht-based arrivals to the Grenadines. Nevertheless, the number of visitor arrivals in 1995 increased by 36.6% to 218,014 and revenues from the trade increased by 44% to US \$47.2m (*The Europa World Year Book 1997*).

Although I have examined some of the reasons that may have been instrumental in why the government did not pay sufficient attention to the onset of the pink mealy bug infestation, the fact still remains, however, that the Mitchell Administration mishandled the situation once the crisis evolved. I believe that government officials misperceived the severity of the pest infestation and compounded the problem by repeatedly denying the presence of the pest on the island. In so doing, they precipitated a crisis that spiraled out of control and led to the ban on Vincentian agricultural goods by the Barbadians. In addition, the government's policy of nonaction and its wall of silence created an impasse between Barbados and St. Vincent that became more difficult to manage and to resolve as the months passed.

It is important to note that this policy made the government appear irresponsible and leaderless. There was no coordinated effort or strategy developed to respond to the

press. The repeated denials made by Mr. Duncanson, the Chief Technical Officer at the Ministry of Agriculture, only served to reinforce the suspicion held by the press that the government had once more lied to the nation about a serious problem. This cover-up could have had tremendous ramifications for the farmers, traffickers, exporters and the nation at large. As a result, the press became unrelenting by bombarding the country with stories and questioning the honesty of the Administration in regards to the presence of the pink mealy bug on the island. These stories were picked up immediately by Barbados because Vincentian newspapers were sent to Barbados weekly for printing. As a result, the Barbadians became privy to the information immediately, which subsequently led the Barbadian government to ban all Vincentian produce coming into their country on October 4, 1996. These articles simultaneously painted an unflattering portrait of Vincentian government officials, who were generally described as incompetent, dishonest and untrustworthy.

During the ensuing months, there was no systematic and comprehensive plan developed nor implemented to contain the pest other than burning and spraying the infected plants. Unlike Barbados, St. Vincent had not imported any natural predators that would destroy the pest. Although JT and I were among the many who had informed Mr. Duncanson, the CTO, that we had seen the pest on several trees and plants in downtown Kingstown, we were told that what we had seen was something other than the dreaded pink mealy bug. Nonetheless, we were assured that an investigation would be carried out and were later apprised by the CTO that the tress was sprayed and the plants were burned. However, neither the farmers nor JT and I were informed as to the nature of the pest.

More importantly, the farmers were not given any instructions on what to do, other than call the Ministry should the problem re-occur in the future.

It was also apparent that the internal structure at the Ministry of Agriculture was very hierarchical, which created obstacles in the management of the crisis. According to JT and certain members of the staff at the Ministry of Trade, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, an economist, did not allow the CTO, an agronomist with some knowledge on pest control, to be a part of the decision-making process.

Additionally, field supervisors and officers frequently complained to me that they had been left out of any discussion regarding how to contain the pest. They believed that their knowledge of the terrain should have been factored into any plan to eradicate the pink mealy bug; however, their superiors never availed themselves of their knowledge, nor sought their input. Interestingly, the field officers agreed with the actions and position taken by the Barbadians to ban all Vincentian goods from entering their country. As one supervisor remarked: "It is in their best interest to keep Vincentian goods out of their country, especially since no one here seems to be telling the truth."

How much did the Prime Minister understand regarding the seriousness of the situation? Had the Ministry of Agriculture informed him about the spread of the pest in the Kingstown area? Had Mitchell been assured that the pest infestation was under control? Had he even informed by Mr. Duncanson, as I had that "My people have not reported a problem, therefore we have no problem." It is difficult to know how much Mitchell knew about the issue, but based on the Prime Minister's leadership style, I would argue that he was probably aware of the infestation from the very beginning and more than likely been kept abreast of all developments as the crisis evolved. For

example, Prime Minister Mitchell called Mr. Duncanson, the CTO, during the first meeting with the traffickers to show his concern and reassure the group that he was making every effort to solve the matter quickly. Moreover, the CTO's position as an operational level manager would have required, in this very hierarchically structured government, that his superiors be informed of all actions taken. As a middle tier manager, the CTO's input would have been limited to the implementation rather than the formulation of any policy.

The government's policy- -not to act-- became self-evident immediately. The Minister of Agriculture made it clear that St. Vincent would not participate in any meetings with the Barbadians until they issued the proper communiqué to the Vincentian government. Rather than being proactive, the government decided to stand on protocol, in spite of the ramifications that it would have for the country. During several conversations with JT and me, the Chief Technical Officer expressed his dismay and anger at the Barbadians because he believed that they had acted precipitously. Furthermore, it was his opinion that had they consulted with St. Vincent as they had in the past over other problems, the crisis could have been avoided. Since the Vincentians had precipitated the crisis, it was incumbent upon them to work with Barbados and not the other way around to resolve the problem.

As such, the CTO informed JT and me that the Vincentian government felt no obligation to pursue the matter until the Barbadians acted in a proper manner. Nonetheless, he stated that St. Vincent would overlook the behavior of the Barbadians and permit them to comb the island in search of the pink mealy bug. If at any point the Barbadians accepted this offer, arrangements would be made to allow them to visit the

island. I found the government's position untenable and difficult to understand, especially when it was obvious that St. Vincent was to a great extent responsible for the crisis. What was more shocking was when the President of the Chamber of Commerce organized a meeting between the feuding parties only to learn that St. Vincent would not participate. The Administration's attitude- - standing on diplomatic protocol- - made no sense when the people that would suffer the most, the majority of the farming community and the traffickers, had very little recourse other than to depend on the government to resolve the problem.

It is also important to consider the relationship between the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Agriculture. My interaction with the various actors in both of these Ministries led to me to conclude that the relationship between them was fraught with difficulty. The fact that Mr. Benjamin, the Permanent Secretary at the Trade Ministry deliberately encouraged me to ask the CTO at the Ministry of Agriculture if the pest was present on St. Vincent made me realize that relations between the two Ministries were problematic. My suspicions were later confirmed when Mr. Ellison, the Technical Officer at the Ministry of Trade stated bluntly during one of our conversations that the pink mealy bug problem would have been resolved quickly had it been under the jurisdiction of his Ministry. In other words, Ellison implied that the crisis had not been handled well by the officials at the Ministry of Agriculture because the officials were not very competent. The Ministry of Trade did not appear to be openly involved in the ongoing problem except for the occasional participation of the Permanent Secretary in meetings held by the Traffickers and Small Business Association.

Bureau rivalry between the two Ministries may have impeded the development of a comprehensive plan of action and also contributed to the failure of the Administration to manage the crisis. The crisis was twofold: on one level, the pink mealy bug infestation was an agricultural matter that required the attention of expert agronomists and entomologists to create a plan of action to control the pest. On another level, it was also a trade issue that required the assistance of the Ministry of Trade to facilitate any discussions with the Barbadians on the resumption of trade. Unfortunately, Mitchell did not bring the Ministries together in concert to work out a plan of action. Instead, the Ministry of Agriculture handled the problem independently, consulting only occasionally with the Ministry of Trade, which was problematic. In my opinion, the input of the Trade Ministry was essential in resolving the stalemate between St. Vincent and Barbados because the problem involved both areas of the government. The fact that the Ministries did not cooperate or coordinate their efforts goes to the heart of the Mitchell Administration's ineffectiveness as a government.

Finally, the absence of Prime Minister Mitchell's voice during the crisis speaks to several key issues: the quality of the decision making process of his Administration; the abdication of responsibility by the government; the inflexibility as well as rigidity of the Administration with regard to its policy of non-action. These factors are central to any understanding of the pink mealy bug crisis in St. Vincent. In the final analysis, the government failed to resolve the problem adequately. It was not until January 17, 2000, four years after the crisis began, that trade resumed on a regular basis. It is also interesting to note that the Mitchell government was eventually forced into a confrontation with the Vincentian public in which the Prime Minister was asked to resign

for losing touch with the people and for treating them with contempt and disregard (*The News*, 4/28/2000, *The Vincentian*, 4/28/2000).

## **THE TRAFFICKERS**

### **The Traffickers' Response**

When I left St. Vincent, I was not only angry and frustrated by the government's lack of response, but I was equally angered by the response and behavior of the women traffickers. I did not understand their reluctance to engage in collective action against the government, especially when their livelihood was in jeopardy and their occupation itself was at great risk of being destroyed. In my opinion, the Vincentian female petty commodity traders had become just as intractable and insouciant as the government. No longer did I admire their tenacity and independence. Instead, I disparaged the group for its unwillingness to work together in order to bring about an urgently needed solution to the pink mealy bug crisis. I believed that the women as well had stood by and waited while the government did nothing.

As the crisis evolved during the ensuing months, I wondered why the women traffickers had allowed the Mitchell government to get away with not responding to the problem that was slowly eating away at their business. Moreover, since it had become apparent that the Administration had not taken any steps to resolve the ban on Vincentian produce, why had they not held daily demonstrations and sit-ins at the Ministry of Agriculture and Trade, or even at the Prime Minister's Office? Why had they been so reluctant to participate in any form of collective action? I questioned their behavior even further: had JT and the other male traffickers been right when accusing the women of being too selfish and too consumed by their own individual interest to unite in struggle

for the common good of the group? What would it take to motivate the women -- an act of God? Perhaps!

Although JT and I had tried to bring the group together, we could not sustain the momentum for very long. The women found one excuse after another to explain their behavior such as “the time is not right; I have to clear my goods; I have to clean and package some of the goods that just came down from the country.” Despite the excuses, it did not deter us from trying to organize the group. While I spent much of my time badgering, cajoling, and pressuring the women into action, JT scheduled and participated in meetings with government officials to discuss ways to end the ban on Vincentian produce. He had also held meetings with the traffickers to prepare them for the new procedures that would be put in to place, i.e. standardization measures, once the trade resumed.

In my zeal to organize the women, I did not realize that I had become the self-appointed co-leader of the Traffickers and Small Business Association. Shrewdly, or perhaps wisely, the traffickers allowed me to fight their battles, thereby allowing those who traded in Trinidad and Martinique to continue with their daily routine uninterrupted. Unwittingly, I had been placed in the same position as JT; that is, given the authority to assume part leadership of the Association. As a result, the women could concentrate on their respective business enterprises knowing that JT and I would be championing their cause. To a great extent, it absolved them from any responsibility towards resolving the problem at hand. The women explained that JT as a man and I as an educated American female, would have more access to those in power and could therefore maneuver more easily through the maze of the Vincentian political system. We, according to Doris and

Madelyn, were obviously more comfortable in the public domain, and as a result, could better represent the interest of the group. They were sure that our voices would be heard.

### **Female Traffickers and The Political Domain**

According to Olive Senior, Caribbean women do not openly challenge male-dominated political structures (Senior 1991). This was very evident in St. Vincent during the pink mealy bug crisis. No matter how hard JT and I tried to get the women to participate in demonstrations against the government, other than those who were directly affected, most would not engage in sustained political action- -a behavior that baffled me. Female traders explained that it was difficult to participate in these activities because it interfered with work. In addition, the traffickers seemed reluctant to create alliances with other groups such as the Cable and Wireless Union, the National Farmers Union and the Teachers Union that were also engaged in bitter confrontation with the Mitchell Administration over recent government policies. The traffickers did not consider the significance of creating strong ties with other groups that had similar problems. In so doing, they missed the opportunity to make the government more accountable for its actions. How can this behavior be explained?

To do so, I had to examine some of the broader factors within Vincentian society that may have led many female traffickers to resist open participation in political activities. Women throughout the Caribbean are not socialized to be political actors. They are expected to be supportive, that is, available for fund-raising, campaigning or the mobilization of other women in membership drives (Clarke WICP 1986). As a rule, women serve in auxiliary capacities, working behind the scenes and generally they are not working in the inner circles of their respective political parties (Senior 1991). Only

most recently, have women run for political office or have been appointed in cabinet positions in several Caribbean nations.

In spite of these changes, the “position of Caribbean women remains ambivalent. On the one hand, they have along tradition of economic independence and authority within the household. On the other hand, they still have secondary status within society at large, and have to contend with several problems arising from sexual discrimination” (Brydon et al. 1993:24). Caribbean women like many women throughout the world are subject to many expressions of male dominance (Brydon et al. 1993).

Politics is considered to be a masculine activity in which men exercise power. Power, therefore, is synonymous with masculinity as well as is related to the public domain. Since women are relegated to the domestic realm where they have very little political power, the Vincentian traffickers may have decided not to engage in collective action because such an activity might be misconstrued and considered inappropriate. Inasmuch as politics is construed as masculine, the female petty commodity traders may have wished to avoid any action that would compromise their femininity, grace, and lady-like characteristics (Senior 1991). Thelma, for example, one of the more successful female traders, who had direct access to the Prime Minister, commented: “ Politics is a man’s business, a place where women did not belong.” She, like many of her associates, felt that politics was best left to men.

The marketplace has allowed the traffickers to break free from the conventional rules imposed upon women by the Vincentian society (Durant-Gonzalez 1985). Yet, they seem uncomfortable when extending this behavior beyond the marketplace into the public/political domain. Many still accept the notion that a woman’s place is in the home,

thereby reinforcing existing gender stereotypes that unfortunately continue to subordinate women.

These ideas and beliefs limit the ability of women to defend their interest individually or in groups (Clarke 1994); Cuales 1988) suggest that few women in the region have taken action with regard to gender inequality. Perhaps that may partly explain why women do not push Caribbean governments to act on their behalf. This was illustrated clearly by the behavior of the Vincentian traffickers during the pink mealy bug crisis. Unless coerced, the women traffickers would not confront the government to end the crisis. The demonstration that was held did not impress or persuade the Administration to change its course of action (or non-action).

The women traders with whom I spoke firmly believed that it was not in their best interest to challenge or make public demands on government officials. Some felt that these actions would do more harm than good. Hence, many moved away from collective action and participated in the demonstration only after I had convinced them that it might send a strong message to Prime Minister Mitchell that the traffickers expected a speedy resolution to the crisis. Though most agreed in theory that collective action could make the difference, they preferred to exercise their individuality and leave the resolution of the problem to JT. After all, it was his responsibility as the leader of the Traffickers and Small Business Association to fight for their interest. Besides, as a man, he was well suited to task at hand. Clearly, the women understood the role of men in Vincentian society—men were the leaders.

It did not prevent them from asking me to intervene on their behalf. Since I was perceived as an outsider, I would probably not be held to the same standards or

conventional role assigned to Vincentian women. As a result, the traffickers (both men and women) asked me to represent their interests to the Barbadian government. In spite of my gender, many believed that I was in a unique position to negotiate a solution to the problem because my education entitled me to certain status and privileges within Caribbean societies. Therefore, they presumed that Barbadian government officials would listen to me. Moreover, many felt that my insider/outsider status, that is, an American of Latino-Caribbean heritage, might be advantageous in my discussions with Barbadian officials because they respected Americans and at the same time would appreciate my Caribbean roots.

### **Gender Issues**

Another reason for the low level of female participation in collective action may be explained by the fact that female consciousness has not yet crystallized around women's issues (Senior 1991). Female traffickers, in my observation, did not see the need to mobilize around the pink mealy bug crisis because they did not fully understand the relationship between collective action and access to power. Collective activity would have encouraged the Vincentian government to move quickly to end the ban on Vincentian produce. It was unlikely that the Mitchell Administration would have remained impassive had the traders developed a strong lobby, which voiced their dissatisfaction about the way the government was handling the problem. Clarke suggests that governments seldom commit extensive resources to aid unrepresented sections of the population unless groups develop a sense of their own interests and are able to forcefully articulate demands on policy-making centers (Clarke 1986).

It appeared that the women traders did not understand the importance of moving beyond their individual needs to collective interests. No matter how hard JT and I tried, we could not get them to comprehend that as women traders, they shared a lack of resources, a poor support system, a terrible transport system and certainly very little government support. However, the need to maintain the trade was not viewed as a collective effort, but rather as an individual one. Although most of my informants agreed that the trade was at great risk because of their behavior - - flooding the market with too many goods, not packaging the goods properly- - none still changed their individual response to the problems faced by the traffickers.

The mealy bug infestation had very little impact on the prevailing attitudes of the group. As far as the majority was concerned, the ban was more of a problem for those who traded in Barbados than for the entire trafficking community despite the fact that the traders who sold produce in Trinidad constantly complained that the Barbados group was killing their market. Regardless of their respective markets, the traffickers had been affected financially by the ban on Vincentian produce; yet, they would not unite in a concerted effort to pressure the government into action. By working with the women on a daily basis, I learned that female traders did not support each other. However, when the pink mealy bug crisis broke, I at least expected them to put aside their individuality to work together as one in order to save the trade. Unfortunately, the crisis did little to radicalize the group. Instead, the women continued with business as usual.

In fact, the female petty commodity traders were only concerned with socio-economic or “bread and butter” issues. In my zeal to organize the women, I had forgotten how they perceived themselves. The women saw themselves as entrepreneurs,

not as women in business. As such, they were more interested in improving the socio-economic position of themselves and their children than in enhancing the status of women in general (Clarke 1986). Gender issues and feminist ideologies were abstractions, which most had no time to consider. They were much too busy earning a living instead of entertaining these ideas that were viewed as irrelevant and unimportant.

At the time, my interest in gender issues prevented me from understanding how the women traders perceived themselves. I was too busy promoting my ideas on how they should organize as a group to grasp the fact that this was not their primary concern. In my opinion, it was imperative that they mobilize not only to push the government into action, but also to sensitize it to their needs. The crisis was a golden opportunity for female traffickers to make their voices known. Imagine my chagrin and disappointment when they decided not hear “my call to arms.” As far as I was concerned, they were partly responsible for the government’s inaction. The lack of female consciousness was the root cause of their problems. It was a pity, or so I thought, that the women did not use the mealy bug crisis to articulate women’s rights.

In my efforts to convert the women into feminists, it never occurred to me that I was behaving like the old colonial mistress, who had taken the responsibility upon herself to elevate the consciousness of the slave; or, perhaps, like middle and upper-class women throughout the Caribbean who had initiated various programs to help the poor change their behaviors. Sadly, I was guilty of practicing ethnocentrism, and more importantly had blurred the boundaries between researcher and activist. My objectivity had been seriously compromised.

Nonetheless, it did not prevent me from keeping with my agenda. By taking action, the women traders could force the government to work closely with the Barbadians to end the ban. Collective action would bring about change and would finally make the Traffickers and Small Business Association a powerful lobby that could make the government accountable for policies that directly pertained to the interest of the inter-island trader. My problem, of course, was convincing them to unite. They were polite and even listened attentively, but never followed up on any of my suggestions. As a result, I became increasingly frustrated and angry, which eventually led me to believe that the male traffickers were right: the fact of the matter is that the Vincentian female trafficker, like most poor women in the region, are more concerned with bread and butter issues than they are with feminist ideology, a reality that I refused to acknowledge at the time.

#### **Trafficking: A Strategy for Survival**

Women traders, like most poor women in Caribbean, are the sole providers for their households. The overwhelming majority of poor females in the English-speaking Caribbean are in charge of producing, providing, controlling or managing those resources essential to meeting daily needs (Durant-Gonzalvez 1982; Ellis 1986; Brydon & Chant 1993; Toney 1997; Mohammed & Perkins, 1999). They are often given credit for continuously providing for their families. Essentially, poor women are the mainstay or the breadwinners of Caribbean families even when there is a male who resides within the household. As a result, women have learned to cope well and in the process have developed strategies to ensure the survival of the family. Trafficking is one such strategy employed by poor women.

In societies plagued with high unemployment, trafficking became a vehicle through which poor unskilled women could support their families. It provided them with job opportunities, steady cash income, while at the same time it enhanced their individual status and prestige. It also gave women a sense of pride in their accomplishments. They were able to pay for their children's education and purchase a house and a vehicle. Moreover, trafficking gave women a certain amount of flexibility, which allowed them to still exercise control over their households. More importantly, trafficking also allowed women to become financially independent. To some extent, these factors may have prevented the traffickers from seeing how collective action could put an end to the ban on Vincentian agricultural produce.

Although some traffickers temporarily stopped trading, others re-routed their efforts to the Trinidad and Martinique markets. Still others focused their attention on the domestic market. For example, Doris who ordinarily sold yams, taros and eddoes in Barbados, decided that her only alternative was to sell items such as hair bands and clips in the local market. She explained that her sales, though minuscule in comparison to those in Barbados, provided some income for her family while she waited for the trading ban to end. Doris like so many other women traders accustomed to crisis had learned to be flexible and adept at finding ways to support the family. In their struggles to survive, the women had learned to "make do" (Senior 1991).

Since the women were still able to "turn a hand" and earn a little something, they saw no need for collective action (Senior 1991). Jenny, a trafficker who had been trading and living on Barbados for example, moved into the Trinidadian market to support her three children who were living and going to school in Barbados. She had to

continue working because the children depended upon her since there was no male presence in the household. Unfortunately, the money that she received periodically from one of her children's fathers was not enough to maintain the entire family during the crisis. Jenny explained that she could not sit back and wait until the Barbadians ended the ban: "We have to eat. If I don't make money, who is going to provide for my three children?" Even though many of the traffickers found themselves in a similar situation, it was not sufficient to persuade them to join the picket line. The reality of being a poor woman in the Caribbean made it difficult for these women to think about anything else but earning a living for their families. Hence, women's rights issues had very little meaning and were not foremost in their minds.

### **Women as Small Scale Entrepreneurs**

Nevertheless, I refused to acknowledge a very important point: that traffickers were independent businesswomen who invested a great deal of time in running their businesses. As part of their routine, they negotiated with farmers and boat owners, hired truckers and packers as well as maneuvered through cumbersome government bureaucratic systems in order to get their produce to market. In doing their jobs, traffickers learned to be tough, assertive, demanding and self-reliant. Other than family and kin, traffickers seldom relied on the assistance of their colleagues in getting their goods to market. Therefore, it was quite understandable why traffickers would not be willing to give up their individuality and hard earned achievements for the benefit of the group not even for short term, a factor that I did not understand at the time.

As a matter of fact, I believed that the ban would have encouraged the women to develop better collegial relations, which would have led to the formation of a cohesive

group (Clark 1994). Instead, the women were more concerned with retaining their shares of the Trinidad and Martinique markets than in developing a collegial relationship among them. Though many expressed sympathy for the women who traded in the Barbadian market, they were not anxious to rally around them. The Trinidadian group felt especially threatened by the Barbados group because many began to trade in the Trinidadian market. The newcomers flooded the market with additional produce, resulting in further decline in prices. Many complained but did nothing to change the situation. For example, Yvonne, like so many of the traders who sold produce in Trinidad, lamented that the newcomers were killing the market: "They are going to make matters much worse for us who sell in Trinidad regularly, but what can we do? I know that they have to eat, but we can't sell in the same market. The ban has to end quickly if we are all to survive."

Although she complained bitterly, Yvonne, like her colleagues, was not willing to join forces with other traffickers to protest against the government's actions nor would she attend any of the meetings held by JT to discuss the problems. When I asked her to join the discussions and demonstration, she explained apologetically that she was far too busy preparing or clearing goods to attend either the meetings or demonstrations. Ideally, Yvonne subscribed to the notion that traffickers should form a collective and cohesive body that would work for the common good of the Association. However, in practice, she was far more concerned with increasing her margin of profit than in group solidarity.

#### **JT, THE TRAFFICKERS AND THE ASSOCIATION**

From the very beginning of my research, I realized that the Traffickers and Small Business Association was not very effective. In 1983, it had been established to improve the economic conditions of the traders and also to represent their interest. Although the

Association had been successful in acquiring a building on the dock near the customs office, it had not managed to win the minds and hearts of the traffickers. Furthermore, it had very little support from the traffickers; consequently, its financial resources were limited. Most did not pay dues or attend meetings. When asked why they had not contributed to the upkeep of the Association, most responded by saying that they had either forgotten or had never benefited by being a member. The traffickers had lost interest because many felt that the organization was the personal fiefdom of JT, the de facto President. Their apathy was most clearly evident during the mealy bug crisis when the majority refused to attend meetings or take part in a planned demonstration. Sadly, they allowed their dislike for JT, who was “too authoritarian,” to get in the way of establishing a strong and effective organization that could represent their interests.

Although the Association had an organizational structure and a chain of command, JT had remained the President of the Association beyond his three-year term of office. He had been elected in 1990 with the support of the traffickers because he was well respected and believed to be the right person for the job. Initially, JT worked hard to improve the conditions of the traffickers. He negotiated the best prices for cartons and other supplies needed by the traders to contain the cost of doing business. JT was also responsible for expanding trade and because of his efforts, Martinique became a strong trading partner. However, as JT became disenchanted with the behavior of the traders, he made unilateral decisions for the Association without consulting the board or the membership.

His actions provoked very strong responses from the traffickers who by then complained openly that he had overstepped his boundaries. JT dismissed these

complaints by stating: “I get no support or help from the women, and so I make decisions that I think are in the best interest of the Association. Let them complain all they want, but you can be sure that not one of them will lift a finger to work with me in developing this Association. I do what I think is best. I run this Association not them.” In so doing, he created an antagonistic relationship between himself and the traffickers that had a debilitating influence on the Association.

Apart from his arrogance, JT was often described as “self-serving,” a characteristic that hindered the relationship between the traffickers and the Association. The women made it very clear to me that JT had benefited substantially from his position as President of the Association. He had expanded his business, became part of the exporters group and had gained some measure of political influence locally and regionally. The Presidency had given him opportunities to meet other men of influential positions who were instrumental in helping him expand his business beyond the Caribbean. As a result, JT developed an extensive network of business associates and government officials who had given him access to information that was important to his business. There was no doubt that JT had benefited personally from his position as President of the Traffickers’ and Small Business Association.

Sadly, this perception was what influenced the way that the traffickers related with the Association. The majority of the female traders viewed JT and the Association as one. The two had become so intertwined in their eyes that it had become almost impossible to separate one from the other. Therefore, they would not support any program or plan developed under the aegis of JT, as he would be the only one to benefit. The traffickers’ feelings toward JT clearly explained why so many refused to be mobilize

and to attend meetings. However, little was done to elect anew president because the women were much too busy with their own affairs to pay particular attention to the Association.

In addition to the personality differences, the Association had limited resources. Many commented repeatedly that the Association could do little to assist them even in the best of times. Everyone was in agreement that if the Association been stronger, then the traders would have been in a better position to weather the mealybug crisis. The Association could have provided short-term loans and assisted in expanding their thrust into new markets. In addition, many felt that JT had not done enough to explore and find foreign funding to help the Association get on its feet. There were several programs through Stabex and the World Bank that JT could have requested seed money to help the traffickers. Programs such as the one established in rural India that provided loans to poor women could have been used as a model to develop a similar program in St. Vincent. Unfortunately, JT had his hands full just keeping the Association afloat instead of investigating these resources and the women were much too preoccupied with their own businesses to pursue the matter. In part, it was this kind of insularity that also prevented the Association from being successful.

Finally, JT was ineffective because he did not have the power or authority like the Ghanaian “ohemma” or “queen mother” to organize the traffickers in the local and regional markets. An “ohemma” is a respected elder who has complete authority and influence over the Kumasi traders of Ghana. In addition to being elected by the traders, she can draw on culturally legitimate patterns of leadership from traditional society or chiefly precedence to legitimize her authority (Clark 1994:248). As a result, she can

discipline traders when they break the rules or default on credit agreements and can settle disputes quickly and efficiently. More importantly, she controls and influences everything that happens in the marketplace (Clark 1994:248). To date, JT has not been able to control the behavior of the traders nor influence the marketplace.

Unfortunately, the President of the Traffickers and Small Business Association can only rely on the limited power derived from the office itself and not on traditional society or chiefly precedence to legitimize his authority. Therefore, JT's role was limited to buying and selling cartons, preparing shipping bills for individual traffickers and developing new markets. The office never gave him extensive powers, so that it was difficult to mobilize the women in times of crisis. The Ghanaian "ohemmas" routine functions, on the other hand, position them well to expand their regulatory role temporarily in time of crisis. They could respond to either economic threats of commercial restrictions or other emergencies quickly and effectively (Clarke 1994).

### **THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS POLITICAL ACTOR**

Alicida Ramos suggests that to do anthropology is a political act anywhere in the world, regardless of the anthropologist's degree of awareness and recognition of this fact. Furthermore, she maintains that anthropologists must not remain apolitical or neutral especially when the rights or the livelihood of those with whom they work are threatened and/or violated. In her study of Brazilian indigenous groups, she states that anthropologists, as social agents, cannot afford the seclusion of an ivory tower. They must become activists in order to defend the powerless. Consequently, Ramos advocates an anthropology that combines academic seriousness with political engagement (Ramos 2000).

Yet, the very nature of anthropological inquiry requires that anthropologists remain impartial and dispassionate when documenting events and stories of those that they study. Moreover, they are taught to respect the cultural practices of the “other” and in so doing, must not get overly involved in the problems of their informants. But not to do so, is in some way inhumane. The fact is that anthropologists are in a far better position than most to speak for the people they have lived among (Bohn Gmelch 1988). Hence, when circumstances require their intervention, they must be willing to act as political agents and advocates, a lesson that I learned first hand as I was doing my research.

Initially, I had remained impartial, however, when the mealy bug crisis began and later evolved into a debacle, I became an advocate for the traffickers. I attended and organized meetings, met with Vincentian governmental officials, planned a demonstration and assisted JT in writing a letter to Prime Minister Mitchell. I was uncomfortable with my new role because the traffickers expected me to solve the crisis for them. For example, Doris, JT’s nemesis, believed that if I had met with the Barbadian government on behalf of the traffickers, a solution would have been forthcoming. She suggested that I meet with officials at the Barbadian Ministry of Agriculture to inform them about the problems facing the traders. Initially, I was reluctant to follow-up on her request because I feared that my intervention would be misinterpreted by the Vincentian government. However, as the crisis evolved and the government’s policy of non-action became its only weapon in the fight to reestablish the trade, it became increasingly more difficult for me to ignore the request especially when others had also joined the chorus.

The traders were sure that the Barbadian Ministry of Agriculture would listen to my appeals because I was a researcher from the United States.

The traffickers, many of whom had become my friends, were in serious financial trouble. Some stopped trading while others bought produce from Dominica in an attempt to hold on to the trade. Still, others sold produce in an already stressed Trinidadian market, as they would weather the storm until the ban was lifted. Despite these survival strategies, the traffickers were facing serious problems- -a fact that I could not ignore because I felt that I owed them something. I worked very closely with them for more than seven months, and they had willingly shared very intimate details of their lives. More importantly, the traffickers had not asked or expected anything back in return for their cooperation and friendship. The truth of the matter is that informants gain very little from anthropological research. As Martha aptly pointed out at the beginning of our relationship, "None of us have ever benefited from any of these studies. The only ones that benefit are the researchers."

Anthropologists need to recognize whether they like it or not that they are political agents as well as activists who at times will be called upon to represent "the other." I strongly believe that it is our responsibility to do so. It is an invaluable lesson that I learned during my first fieldwork experience in St. Vincent.

## **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I examined some of the factors that may have been responsible for the response of the various actors involved in the mealy bug crisis. Such factors included scandals, high unemployment, a developing drug problem and the loss of banana revenues.

Interestingly, the state responded to the mealy bug responded with a policy of non-action. While the traffickers responded to the situation by not working together or fully supporting the Association in its quest to get the government to act quickly to resolve the crisis. As a result, the trade was never fully resumed until 1998 and many of the traffickers never recovered from their financial loss.

I also explored the role that anthropologists should play in the lives their informants. Anthropologists that we need must be prepared to take a more active role in the lives of their informants when the need arises since to do anthropology is indeed a political act. It is our responsibility to help wherever and whenever we can.

## **CONCLUSION**

Philip Wheaton suggests that survival and struggle are two of the underlying themes which have dominated the historical and the present reality of the Caribbean (Sunshine, 1996). Although I agree with his conceptualization, I would like to suggest that crisis be included as an additional theme which has also shaped the region. In examining the history of the Caribbean, its present reality and analyzing the pink mealy bug infestation in St. Vincent, I was struck by the series of unbroken and episodic crises that have confronted Caribbean people through the years. From the struggle for emancipation to the struggle for independence, crisis has been endemic to the region. As such, it made me reconsider the way in which I conceptualize the term crisis.

Episodic crises require the reallocation of funds from already scarce resources that have been budgeted to deal with ongoing problems. The end result is that the economies of these resource poor nations will suffer even more because they might perform at an even lower level. Hence, the Barbadian government's response to the pink mealy bug

crisis is understandable in view of the additional expense that it would incur to contain the pest and prevent the denuding of the land. The Barbadian tourist industry depends on the beauty of its terrain.

Decisions made during episodic crisis should also be analyzed in the context of the way in which the actors have responded to other such critical events. The Vincentian government's decision not to reveal the presence of the pest on its soil was not surprising based on the manner in which it handled other recent crises such as the Ottley Hall and Parnell Campbell scandals. Moreover, in studying the pattern of crisis resolution in St. Vincent, the present government did not behave out of character nor respond any differently than its predecessors.

However, it is important to take into account that decisions, even those that appear to be questionable, as in the case of the pink mealy bug crisis, may have been based on information that was not privy to the general public. Additionally, the Vincentian government like other Caribbean governments has been plagued by other critical events that may have influenced the way in which the crisis was handled.

The traffickers like so many others throughout the region have learned to survive and endure crises. The mealy bug crisis could be considered one more event in a series of events that they have confronted the petty commodity traders. As a result, they have developed coping mechanisms that have allowed them to function and in so doing maintain their livelihood.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### CHAPTER ONE

- Afonja, Simi. 1986. "Changing Modes of Production and the Sexual Division of Labor Among the Yoruba." In *Women's Work*, E. Leacock and H. Safa, eds. Pp. 122-140: Ma:Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc.
- Barnhardt, Karen A. 2000. "Crisis." In *Knowledge and Power in the Global Economy: Politics and The Rhetoric of School Reform*. Gabbard, D. A., ed. Pp. 17-24: New Jersey: Lawrence Relbaum Associates.
- Barnett, Homer G. 1975. "Cultural Borrowing and Invention and the Meeting of Cultures." In *A Reader in Culture Change: Volume II Case Studies*, Brady and Isaac, eds. Pp. 3-10. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Brady, Ivan and Isaac Barry. 1975. "Introduction." In *A Reader in Culture Change: Volume II Case Studies*. Brady and Isaacs, eds. Pp. ix-xiv. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Dupuy, Alex. 1983. "Case Study Slavery and Underdevelopment in the Caribbean: A Critique of the Plantation Economy Perspective." *Dialectical Anthropology*: 7:237-251.
- Fallers, Kenneth. 1975. "The Predicament of the Modern African Chief: An Instance From Uganda." In *A Reader in Culture Change: Volume II Case Studies*. Brady and Isaacs, eds. Pp. 111-146. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1963. *Agricultural Involution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Greenfield, Sidney M. 1968. "Culture-Historical and Structural Functional Orientation and The Analysis of the West Indian Family." In *The Family in the Caribbean*. S. Gerber ed.
- Harrison, Faye. 1988. "Women in Jamaica's Urban Informal Economy: Insights From a Kingston Slum." *New West Indian Guide* 162 (1&2):103-128.
- Henry, Frances and Pamela Wilson. 1975 . "The Status of Women in the Caribbean: An Overview of their Social and Economic Roles." *Social & Economic Studies* 24(2):165.
- Manyoni, Joseph R. 1982. *Methods in Caribbean Anthropological Research: A Reconsideration*. *Anthropologica* XXIV:167-191.

- Mintz, Sidney. 1966. The Caribbean as a Socio-cultural Area. *Journal of World History* 9 (4): 912-937.
- n.d. "North American anthropological contributions to Caribbean Studies." Prepared for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Royal Institute of Linguistic and Anthropology, Leiden.
- Mohammed, Patricia and Perkins Alethea. 1999. *Caribbean Women at the Crossroads*. West Indies: Canoe Press University of the West Indies.
- Newsweek. September 1990.
- Rubin, Vera. 1960 . "Cultural Perceptive in Caribbean Research." In *Caribbean Studies: A Symposium*, V. Rubin, ed. Pp. 110-122.
- Safa, Helen I. 1986. "Economic Autonomy & Sexual Equality in Caribbean Society. *Social and Economic Studies* 35(3): 1-21.
- Schiller-Riva Berliant. 1981 "Plantation Society & The Caribbean Present , Pat I: History, Anthropology and the Plantation." *Plantation Society* 1(3): 387-409.
- Service, Elman. 1975. "The Prime Mover of Cultural Evolution." In *A Reader In Culture Change: Volume I: Theories*. Brady and Isaacs, eds. Pp.101-108. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Sharp, Lauriston. 1971. "Steel Axes for stone-age Australians. In *Conformity and Conflict*. Spradley and McCurdy, eds. Pp.446-460. Boston and Toronto: Little Brown Press.
- Smith, M.G. 1965. *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1960. "Africanism In the Caribbean." *Caribbean Studies: A Symposium*, Vera Rubin, ed. Pp. 34-45.
- Smith, R.T. 1962. *The Negro Family in British Guiana* . London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- 1988. *Kinship and Class in The West Indies: A Genealogical Study of Jamaica and Guyana*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sunshine, Catherine. 1996. *The Caribbean: Survival, Struggle and Sovereignty*. Washington: EPICA Publication.
- Susser, Ida. 1982. *Norman Street: Poverty and Politics in an Urban Neighborhood*. New York: Oxford University Press.

t'Hart, Paul, Rosenthal, Uriel and Kouzmin, Alexander. 1993. "Crisis Decision Making: the Centralization Thesis Revisited." *Administration & Society* 25 (1) 12-23.

Thomas, Clive Y. 1988. *The Poor and The Powerless*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1992. "The Caribbean Region: An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory." *Annual Review Anthropology* 21:19-42.

*USA Today*. July 1987.

Welch, David A. 1989. "Crisis Decision Making Reconsidered." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33: 430-416.

White, Leslie. 1959. *The Evolution of Culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill

Wolfstein, V.E. 1967. "Some Psychological Aspects of crisis leadership." In *Political leadership in industrialized societies*, J. Edinger, ed. Pp. 155-181. New York: Wiley.

Worsley, Peter M. 1971. "Cargo Cults." In *Conformity and Conflict*. Spradley and McCurdy eds. pp. 461-468. Boston and Toronto: Little Brown Press.

## CHAPTER TWO

Alvarez, Sonia. 1989. *Engendering Democracy in Brazil*. Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press.

Bailey, Kenneth D. 1978. *Methods of Social Research*. New York: The Free Press.

Byrdon, Lynne and Chant, Sylvia. 1989. "Introduction: Women in the Third World: An Overview." In *Women in the Third World*, Lynne Brydon and Sylvia Chant, eds. N.J: Rutgers University Press.

Clarke, Roberta. 1986. "Women's Organization: women's interest. " *Social and Economic Studies*, 35(3).

Ellis, Pat. 1986. *Women of the Caribbean*. NJ: Zed Books.

Gmelch Bohn, Sharon. 1988. "A Field Work Experience: Irish Travellers in Dublin." In *Urban Life*, George Gmelch and Walter P. Zenner, eds. Pp.169-186. Illinois, Waveland Press.

- t'Hart, Paul, Rosenthal Uriel and Kouzman Alexander. 1993. "Crisis Decision Making: the Centralization Thesis Revisited." *Administration & Society*, 25(1) pp.12-33.
- Farmer, Paul. 1992. *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foster, Barritesu Eudine V. 1992. "The Construct of Postmodernist Feminist Theory for Caribbean Social Science Research." *Social and Economic Studies* 41(2): 1-43.
- Lind, Amy. 1992. "Power, Gender, and Development: Popular Women's Organizations and the Politics of Needs in Ecuador." In *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy and Democracy*, Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, Mona, Jamaica: The University Press of the West Indies.
- Long, Cerroni, E. L n. d. "Life and Cultures: The Test of Participant Observation.
- Molyneux, Maxine. 1985. "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution in Nicaragua." In *New Social Movements and the State in Latin America*, David Slater, ed. Amsterdam: CEDLA.
- Ramos, Alicida Rita. 2000. "anthropologist as political actor." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 4(2)-5(1)172-180.
- Susser, Ida. 2001. "Introduction." In *Cultural Diversity in the United States*, I. Susser and Patterson, eds. Pp. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd..
- Thomas, Clive Y. 1988. *The Poor and the Powerless: Economic Policy and Change in the Caribbean*. London; Latin American Bureau Limited.
- Turner, Victor. 1968. *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life*. Zambia: University of Manchester Press.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

*Carib News* February 1995.

*Searchlight*, September 1996.

-- September 1996

-- October 1996.

St. Vincent National Radio Station (1996). *Regional Action for Control of the Pink Mealybug News Program*.

*The Barbados Saturday Advocate* 1997.

*The News* September 1996.

--- October 1996.

USDA, APHIS, PPD. Washington DC June 1996. North American Plant Protection Organization. *Pink Mealybug from the Caribbean, A Pathway Risk Assessment*.

USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. The Hibiscus or Pink Mealybug, Fact Sheet: Plant Protection and Quarantine, June 1996.

USDA Animal and Plant Inspection Service (1997). Predators and Munch Heartily on Mealybugs. ss/1997/05/pinkmeal.tx..

USDA APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine. *Pink Hibiscus Mealybug*, Fact Sheet.

USDA and Plant Quarantine and International Services (1996). *Biological Control of the Pink Hibiscus Mealybug, Maconellicoccus hirsutus (Green), in St. Kitts, West Indies*.

*Weekend Nation* January 1997.

*West Indian Crusader*, September 1996.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

Anthony, Kenny, D, MP. 1998. "It's Caribbean Integration: The Future Relationship Between Barbados and the OECS." *The Journal of Eastern Caribbean*. The Institute of Social and Economic Research: The University of the West Indies.

Beneria, Lourdes and Roldan M. 1987. *The Crossroads of Gender and Class*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Brizan, George. 1984. *Grenada, Island of Conflict*. London: Zed Books, Ltd.

Clarke, Edith 1966. *My Mother Who Fathered Me*. London: Allen and Unwind.

Cosover, Mary Jo. 19 . "St. Vincent." In *Islands of the Commonwealth Caribbean: A Regional Study*, S. Meditz and D. Hanrraty, eds. Pp. 332-345. United States Army: Washington, DC.

- Douglass, Lisa 1992. *The Power of Sentiment: Love, Hierarchy, and the Jamaican Family Elite*. Colorado: Westview Press, Inc.
- Duncan, Ebenezer [1941] 1970. *A Brief History of St. Vincent with Studies in Citizenship*. Kingstown, St. Vincent, West Indies.
- Durant-Gonsalves. 1985. "Higglering: Rural Women and the Internal Market System in Jamaica." In *Rural Development in the Caribbean*, P.I. Gomes, ed., pp.103-122. NY: St. Martin's Press.
- 1983. "The Occupation of Higglering." *Jamaican Journal* 16(3):2-12
- Flambeau. 1965 -1968. The Kingstown Study Group. 1-9. Kingstown, St. Vincent.
- Gonsalves, Ralph. 1994. *History and the future: A Caribbean Perspective*. St. Vincent: Quick Print.
- Green, Cecilia. 1988. *The World Market Factory: A Study of Enclave Industrialization in the Eastern Caribbean and its impact on Women Workers*. St. Vincent: CARIPEDA
- Groomsman, Lawrence. 1998. *The Political Ecology of Bananas*. North Carolina. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Heyer Young Virginia. 1993. *Becoming West Indian: Culture, Self and Nation in St. Vincent*. Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institute.
- Katzin, Margaret. 1959. "The Jamaican Country Higgler." *Social and Economic Studies*. 8: 421-40.
- Knight, Franklin and Palmer Colin. 1989. *The Modern Caribbean*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Newsweek*. April 1996.
- Osirim, Mary Johnson.1997. "We Toil All The Livinglong Day." In *Daughters of Caliban*, Counselo Lopez Springfield, ed. pp. 41-67. Bloomington: University of Indiana
- The Europa World Year Book(s). 1984 - 2000.
- The Political Handbook of the World*. 1996. NY; CSA Publications State University of New York.
- Richardson, Bonham, C. 1997. *Economy and Environment in the Caribbean*. The Press

University of the West Indies and The University of Florida Press.

Rubenstein, Hymie. 1987. *Coping With Poverty: Adaptive Strategies in the Caribbean Village*. Bolder, Colorado: West View Press.

*Searchlight*. September 1996.

--- May 2000.

Smith, M.G. 1998. "Stratification in Grenada." In *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Torres, Whitten eds. Pp. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Smith, Raymond, T. 1988. *Kinship and Class in the West Indies: A Genealogical Study of Jamaica and Guyana*. NY: Cambridge University Press

St. Vincent Governmental Statistical Office. 1990.

*The Vincentian*. March 1996.

--- February 1997.

*The Sunday Sun*. January 1999.

Sunshine, Catherine. [1973] 1996. *The Caribbean: Survival, Struggle and Sovereignty*. Washington, DC: EPICA

Toney, Joyce. 1997. "Women, Urbanization and Structural Adjustment in St. Vincent." In *Globalization and Survival in the Black Diaspora*. Charles Green, ed. Pp.227-246. Albany State University of New York Press.

*Unity Press*. March 29, 1996.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

Bell, Jeannette. 1986. "Women and Entrepreneurship." In *Women of the Caribbean*, Pat Ellis, ed. Pp.47-50. London: Zed Books.

Brizan, George. 1984. *Grenada, Island of Conflict*. London: Zed Books

Bush, Barbara. 1990. *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

- Clarendon Hannah. 1986. "The Hucksters of Dominica." In *Women of the Caribbean*, Pat Ellis, ed. Pp. 56-59. London: Zed Books
- Cox, Edward L. 1984. *Free Coloreds in the Slave Societies of St. Kitts and Grenada, 1763-1833*. Knoxville, Tenn.: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Durant-Gonsalves, Victoria. 1983. "The Occupation of Higglering." *Jamaican Journal*. 16(3): 2-12.
- 1985. "Higglering: Rural Women and the Internal Market System in Jamaica." In *Rural Development in the Caribbean*. Gomes, ed. Pp. 103-122. NY: St. Martin's University Press.
- Eastern Caribbean Report on Dominicans, Hucksters, Traffickers and Grenadians .n.d.*
- ECLAC 1988. Draft Report on the Petty Commodity Trading in the Eastern Caribbean.
- Ellis, Patricia "How Extension Services Can Enhance The Role of Women in Agricultural Development." *Cajanus*. 1984. 17(1): 8-15.
- Freeman Carla. 1997. "Reinventing Higglering Across transnational Zones: Barbadian Women Juggle the Triple Shift." In *Daughters of Caliban*, Consuelo Lopez Springfield, ed. Pp. 68-95. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gomes, P.I. 1985. *Rural Development in the Caribbean*. NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Harrison, Faye. 1998. "Women in Jamaica's Urban Informal Economy." In *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Torres and Whitten, Jr., eds., pp.413-435.
- Higman, B.W. 1984. *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean 1807-1834* :Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Isaac, Annette. 1986. "Women in Small Scale Enterprises." In *Women in the Caribbean*. Pat Ellis ed. Pp. 51-54 London: Zed Books, LTD.
- Katzin, Margaret. "The Business of Higglering in Jamaica." In *Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean*. Michel Horowitz. ed. 1971. The Natural History Press.
- LeFranc, Elsie. 1988. "Higglering in Kingston: entrepreneurs or traditional small-scale operators?" *Caribbean Review* 16(1) 15-17.
- Matos-Rodriguez, Felix V. 1995. "Street Vendors, Pedlars, Shop-Owners and Domestic: Some Aspects of Women's Economic Roles in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820-1870." In *Engendering History*, Shepherd, Bereton and Bailey, eds. Pp. 176-196. NY: St. Martin's Press.

- McFarlane, Glen. 1984. "A New Breed of Higglers Emerges." *Cajanus* 17(1): 1-5.
- Mintz, Sidney. 1955. "The Jamaican Internal Market Patterns: Some Notes and Hypotheses." *Social Economic Studies* 4: 95-103.
- 1957. "The Role of Middle Men in the Internal Distribution Systems of a Caribbean Peasant Economy." *Human Organization* 15:18-23
- Momsen Janet, H. 1993. "Development and gender divisions of labour in the Eastern Caribbean." In *Women and Change in the Caribbean*, Janet H. Momsen, ed. Pp. 232-246. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press
- Simmonds, Lorna. 1987. "Slave Higglering in Jamaica 1780-1834. *Jamaica Journal* 20(1):31-38.
- St. Vincent Traffickers Small Business and Association Membership Lists. 1991 - 1996.
- Yevilton, Kevin. 1998. "Gender and Ethnicity at Work in a Trinidadian Factory." In *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Vol. 2. Torres and Whitten, Jr., eds. Pp. 396-413. Bloomington, Indiana. Indiana University Press.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

Semi-Structured and Structured Interviews. March 1996 - February 1997.

Clark, Gracia. 1994. *Onions Are My Husband*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Freeman, Carla. 1997. "Reinventing Higglering Across transnational zones: Barbadian Women Juggle the Triple Shift." In *Daughters of the Caliban*, C. Lopez Springfield, ed. Pp. 68-95. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Yevilton, Kevin. 1998. "Gender and Ethnicity in a Trinidadian Factory. In *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*, vol..2, Torres and Whitten, Jr. eds. Pp. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

Hart, Paul 't, Uriel Rosenthal and Alexander Kouzmin. 1993. *Crisis Decision Making: The Centralization Thesis Revisited in Administration & Society*. May 1993. Vol. 25: 1, 12-33.

Homiak, 1986. "The Huckster of Dominica." *Journal of Inter-American Foundation* 10(1):30-37.

Interviews and Meetings with Government Officials in Barbados. January 15-17, 1997

Meetings with Coordinator for Regional Trade, CARICOM Secretariat. September 27 - October 3, 1996.

Meetings with the President of the National Farmer's Union.

*The Nation*. January 21, 1997.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Bohn Genlch, Sharon. 1988. "A Field Work Experience: Irish Travellers in Dublin." In *Urban Life Readings in Anthropology*. Gmelch and Zenner, eds. Pp.169-186. Illinois: Waveland Press.

Clark, Gracia. 1994. *Onions are My Husband*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Clarke, Edith. 1986. "Women's organizations; women's interests." *Social and Economic Studies*, 35:3.

--- 1971. "Land Tenure and the Family in Four Selected Communities in Jamaica." In *Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean*. Michel Horowitz, ed. The Natural History Press.

Ellis, Pat. 1986. *Women of the Caribbean*. London: ZED Books, Ltd.

*The Europa World Year Books*. 1996-1997, 1999. London. Europa Publications Limited.

Glasberg, Davita and Skidmore Dan. "The Dialectics of St. Economic Intervention: bank deregulation and the savings and loan bailout." *The Sociological Quarterly* 38(1):1-23.

Gonzalez-Durant 1983. "The Occupation of Higglering." *Jamaican Journal* 16(3):2-12.

Higman, B. W. *Slave Populations of the British Caribbeans: 1807-1834*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press.

Lawrence, S. 1998. *The Political Ecology of Bananas*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina.

Mandle, Jay R. *Patterns of Caribbean Development: An Interpretative Essay on Economic Change*. 1982. New York. Gordon at Breach: Science Publishers Inc.

*The News*. April 2000.

*Newsweek*. April 1997.

*The New York Times*. March 1999.

Ramos, Alicida. 2000. "Anthropologist as Political Actor." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. Vol. 4 (2)-5(1): 172-189.

Sanday, Peggy Reaves. 1982. *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins on Sexual Inequality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Senior, Olive. 1991. *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English Speaking Caribbean*. Bloomington, Indiana. Indiana University Press.

*The Political Handbook of the World*. 1997. New York: CSA Publications, State University of New York.

Richardson, Bonhman. 1983. *Caribbean Migrants*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press

*Searchlight*. September 27, 1996.

--- October 1996.

--- January 1997.

--- March 1997.

*Statistical Abstract of the World*. 1994.

*Sunday Sun*. January 1999.

*The Vincentian*. March 29, 1996.

--- October 1996.

--- September 1996.

--- November 1996.

--- February 1997.

--- April 2000.

*Vincentian Statistical Office*. 1993-1997. Indicators.

Wheaton, Philip E. "Introduction." *The Caribbean Survival Struggle and Sovereignty*. Catherine Sunshine. Washington DC EPICA Publication.

Williams, Eric. 1970. *From Columbus to Castro. The History of the Caribbean*. New York: Vintage Books.

Yevilton, Kevin. 1998. "Gender and Ethnicity at Work in a Trinidadian Factory." In *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Vol. 2. Torres and Whitten, Jr. eds. 1998. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.