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Reclaiming the future through Small-Scale Agriculture: Autonomy and Sustainability in the Caribbean

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Reclaiming the future through Small-Scale Agriculture:
Autonomy and Sustainability in the Caribbean

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This dissertation is a political-economic analysis of land politics, foodscapes and foodsheds, and small-scale agricultural activities in plantation economies on the Caribbean island of St Kitts. Using ethnographic and geographic methods, such as participant observation, interviews, social network analysis, and foodshed mapping, I investigate the cultural and economic niche of local farmers, documented and analyzed the island’s foodshed, and provide a historical and economic background of St Kitts to link historical processes to contemporary spatial organization and agricultural practices. I consider the complexities of food inequalities and food sovereignty as farming and food production is and has been both a tool of oppression and one of individual and community empowerment for BIPOC communities. The findings contribute to discussions on economic anthropology, autonomy, food insecurity, land and labor politics, and globalization. This project has an applied contribution as it highlights means of navigating food insecurity, improving economic and agricultural policies, and promoting environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability.
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CHAPTER 1: Autonomy and Sustainability in Agricultural Spaces

Farm days start early, especially on Mondays as the afternoons are spent selling in the market in the capital city. Armstrong, one of the island’s most established farmers and a key participant throughout this dissertation, picked me up at 5:30 in the morning. On the way to the farm, he told me the plan for the day while I desperately waited for my coffee to kick in.

“Yesterday, we cut some cane so the first thing we have to do today is bring it down from the cane field to that clearing down by the water tank so the guys can cut it, wash it, and bag it. Then we will bring it down to the market.” “Sugar cane? I didn’t know you grew sugar cane,” I said, a little confused. I have sat in his truck listening to Armstrong explain the day’s activities many times and never heard him mention sugar cane and it was easy to miss things on his 50 plus acre farm. “Well, where did you think it came from?!” He said, teasing my inability to connect the dots. In all honesty, I did not know. I had seen neatly cut sugarcane in plastic bags at the market and other places around St Kitts periodically and knew some of it was imported. I had never seen it growing on his farm or any others I had visited. In fact, the only cane I ever saw growing was at the entrance to an agro-hotel and the Eco-Park, an agro-tourism demonstration farm established and run by the Taiwanese government, which invests heavily in agriculture in the Caribbean in order to build political relationships with United Nations members.

St. Kitts, part of a two-island federation in the Eastern Caribbean, produced sugarcane for roughly 350 years first as a British colony and then as an independent nation until the industry closed in 2005. St. Kitts was given and still maintains the nickname “Sugar City” even though sugarcane in St. Kitts is almost always discussed in the past tense and farmers now describe it as an exotic plant. I remembered another participant’s exclamation that “Sugar City ain’t got no cane.” Sugar cane fields were developed into hotels or housing projects, left to be taken over by grass or the jungle, or, like Armstrong’s land, converted into produce farms. I attempted to justify my confusion to Armstrong and he agreed that farmers tend to shy away from growing it for multiple reasons— long growth time, the link to plantation agriculture and enslavement, the difficulty in harvesting, and the toll it takes on the soil. “No one grows sugar cane...but it’s part of our heritage. I think tourists would like to see how sugar cane grows too,” he explained.

As we drove up the mountain towards Armstrong’s farm, I drifted into thoughts of sugar’s history on the island. The juxtaposition between the current invisibility of sugarcane in the island’s agriscape and the island’s history struck me as ironic as we bounced along one of the
many mountain roads that were built in the 16 and 1700s by Africans forced into enslaved labor by European plantation owners and colonists. The purpose of the roads was for overseers and plantation managers to move between cane fields. My sugary daydream was interrupted by Armstrong’s voice. “They call this area Jack-in-the-box,” he said, as he began to tell me about the maroon community that used to live in this area. Many groups of enslaved Africans attempted to escape bondage and make their way into the jungle for shelter. Unfortunately, most maroons were recaptured by their enslavers because remaining hidden was nearly impossible, even in the jungle, on such a small island. There is one celebrated group of enslaved Africans that were able to stay hidden in the jungle for some time but this group reached their legendary status for another reason. They would hide along the side of a small, rocky section of the road with a deep bend and ambush passing plantation managers and overseers, hence the name “jack-in-the-box.” Although there are no written accounts of this happening and even in the oral histories, the group was eventually captured and forced back into enslavement, the jack-in-the-box is an inspirational narrative of resistance and tenacity. Armstrong made sure to tell me this story frequently, typically with a little smile on his face.

We reached the farm just as Armstrong was finishing the story and we drove around to an area I had not been to before. He pulled the truck into the cane field where three employees were waiting. We hopped out and I followed the group into the clearing where the bamboo-like cane lay in messy piles that somehow made the straight stalks look tangled. Armstrong and his employees lifted armfuls of cane up and threw the bundles over a shoulder, gracefully carried them out to the truck, and tossed them into the back. “How hard could that be?” I thought to myself as I strutted towards a pile. I picked up a handful of stalks and hoisted them onto my shoulder, just as I watched them do. I had a hard time keeping my balance under the uneven weight of the long, thick stalks. I maneuvered out of the clearing, stepping on and over piles of cane, with the gait of someone who had way too much rum.

I tried in vain to toss the stalks into the truck but the long, heavy cane caused me to lose my footing and sent me twirling in a circle. The cane stalks left my hands only to collide with the side of the truck making a loud bang before the stalks and I hit the ground simultaneously, the only synchronized movement of the last few minutes. When I stood up and caught my balance, I collected the cane from the ground and made another attempt. This time, an employee gave my cane a little boost since I nearly took his head off in my drunken ballerina type twirl a few
moments earlier. While the workers looked on with concern, Armstrong thought it was hilarious. “I wish I got a picture of a white lady trying to carry cane!” he managed to wheeze through his laughter. A white person, let alone a white woman, in a cane field is more than rare, it was unheard of.

With a bruised behind and ego, I decided to try for smaller stalks and pieces while the guys handled the big and long stalks. After “we” loaded the truck with cane, we drove to the clearing by the water tank where they clean and bag produce. I discovered that pulling cane out of the truck is much easier than putting it in so I was happy to finally have a task I was able to accomplish. Armstrong’s employees quickly got to work peeling, cleaning, and bagging. They each held one end of a stalk and quickly took off the hard bark with a machete, hacking and rotating until it was all peeled. They then cut the stalk into four pieces with a few more hacks and plopped them into a bucket of clean water. Another employee fished them out of the bucket and put them into a clear plastic bag, quickly tied the bag off, and tossed it into a reused cardboard produce box, ready for transportation to the market. What looks like mindless whacking requires precision to produce even pieces with minimal waste. On a previous occasion, Armstrong learned the hard way not to allow me near a machete so I was not allowed to help with this task. “Come on,” he said. He had other tasks that needed to be done.

In many ways, the economy of St Kitts can be understood through its changing relationship with different kinds of agricultural production. European colonizers imposed large-scale sugar plantations on the land and people in the 1600s and integrated that sugar into the world economic market. Plantation owners maintained their sugar production on the 68-square-mile island first through forcing enslaved Africans into labor and then through exploiting freed Black laborers after emancipation. Even through the nationalization of the sugar industry in the 1970s and independence from England in 1983, plantation owners relied on an economically disadvantaged labor class to make a profit. The government officially closed the sugar industry after decades of booms and busts in 2005.

Like many Caribbean nations though, service industries such as tourism, began to be more profitable than agriculture in St Kitts decades before 2005. The first resort was built in the 1950s, the airport in the 1970s, and a port capable of docking cruise ships in the 1990s (Dyde 1999, Hubbard 2002). Agriculture now only makes up 1.1% of the GDP while tourism makes up 71.4% (World Bank 2017). The island no longer exports any agricultural crops, land and
resources are being rededicated to tourism and foreign residential development, and more people favor wage labor over agriculture. The government has also implemented neoliberal programs designed to increase foreign investment and pay off debts to the IMF accumulated in the years of the sugar industry decline. These include the Fiscal Incentives Act, which provides tax incentives to foreign investors and the “Citizen by Investment Program,” which grants citizenship in exchange for the purchase of land at inflated prices. Real estate agent Brian Kaasab noted that land in Frigate Bay jumped from 5 USD a square foot to 20 USD when developers moved into that area of the island. These issues are further explored in Chapters 2 and 4.

St. Kitts has three foreign owned universities: two medical schools and one veterinary school. Between the three schools, there are over a thousand students on the island at any given moment. These schools are clearly marketed towards foreigners, attracting students from the US, South Asia, Nigeria, and Puerto Rico, making them part of the service economy. The Minister of Tourism, Lindsay Grant, considers the universities “tourism 365 days a year because they have to get accommodation, they rent cars, buy food.” I return to educational tourism in Chapter 3.

As the island transitioned to an economy supported by service industries and foreign investment, the relationship local people have with the land and agricultural production shifted. Today, farmers like Armstrong have moved away from mono-crop export agriculture and grow a variety of different crops including cucumbers, cabbage, tomatoes, peppers, bananas, plantains, eggplant, and others.

Local agriculture was always vibrant and sustained many generations of Kittitians. As I will explore deeper throughout this dissertation, enslaved Africans began cultivating crops on provision plots in the mountain, first for subsistence but the sale of their surplus goods in internal markets eventually created economic autonomy for the producers. Production for internal markets and subsistence continued to be an important part of the economic and cultural landscape against the backdrop of industrial sugar production and many people continued to produce food for internal markets and subsistence after the sugar industry closed.

Today, agriculture’s importance to the island’s food and economic system has faded. In-and-out migration, remittances, the tourist industry, and a growing community of Canadian, American, and British expatriates continue to change the cultural and economic landscape, including the food system. KFC, Dominos, and Burger King are now popular eateries for locals.
Foreigners and foreign investors are opening multiple luxury resorts to compete with other Caribbean tourist destinations, which are supplied with food by imports.

Despite these changes to the food system, agriculture still has a visual presence in St. Kitts. Although the island has “town” and “country” areas, the island’s small size means these areas are not isolated from each other, culturally or physically. The closest agricultural town from the capital city is only a four-mile drive, the furthest at the very tip of the mainland is only twelve miles. Roadside stands are everywhere you look. You can see farms on the mountain from the city center and everyone knows an agriculturalist. As a result, Kittitians are connected to food production in ways larger countries are disconnected.

Agriculture’s importance to the history and cultural heritage of the island is clear but asking non-agriculturalists if agriculture is important to the contemporary cultural and economic fabric of the island yields mixed results, from a firm yes or no to “um maybe like 60%.” Kittitians do support their local farmers and vendors by shopping at roadside stands and street vendors but the actual number and economic impact of these sales are unknown because it is an informal cash business. What is not debated though, and is the focus of this dissertation, is the importance of agriculture to those that practice it as it provides food and economic sovereignty and a connection to their cultural heritage in a way that working in the service industries cannot.

Moreover, agriculturalists today see their work as a mechanism for sustainability and resilience. St. Kitts has an efficient food and economic system in the sense that it farms out the labor of growing food while they import consumers of service industries. The goal of the current system is not to be self-sufficient but to make a profit through the service industry and integrate into the global economy. This efficiency, however, is in direct conflict to resiliency. The current system is vulnerable to shocks such as extreme weather and pandemics, which disrupt food importation schedules and tourism. While their work is not valued economically or culturally now, the long-term goal of local producers in St Kitts is to build a local system of sovereignty, sustainability, and resilience in the event of disruptions in the food and economic systems.

This dissertation is a story of the dynamic, complex, and ever evolving world created by Kittitian agriculturalists as they navigate changing social, economic, and cultural landscapes. I consider agriculture’s meaning beyond purely making a living and explore how and why agriculturalists have created, reclaimed, reimagined, maintained, and given meaning to physical and ideological space. I explore how my participants use agriculture as a way to resist the global
capitalist food system and retain cultural memories and cultural values of social and community networks, entrepreneurialism, and autonomy for future generations.

**Situating Kittitian Agriculture in Anthropological Theory**

I explore Kittitian agriculture through multiple theoretical lenses. I use *political economy* to explore how colonization, enslavement, and history of externally controlled economies have impacted the island’s food system today (Goldschmidt 1978, Benítez-Rojo 1992, Slocum and Thomas 2003, Olwig and Besson 2005, Menzies 2011, Besky 2013). Colonialism has shaped the contemporary Caribbean, including St. Kitts, culturally and spatially (Benítez-Rojo 1992, Khan 2001, Trouillot 2003, Sheller 2003, Slocum and Thomas 2003, Boyce-Davies 2013, Ulysse 2007). Mintz (1985, 1989) highlights the role of sugar production as a primary source of income for colonial powers and central to the formation of the Caribbean economy and culture. Political economic theory, particularly the Plantation Economic Model, which is the focus of Chapter 2, allows me to explore the class stratifications that are necessary to allow landowners or entrepreneurs to produce appropriate surpluses for plantation systems to be successful (Wolf and Mintz 1957). Today, colonial powers often superimpose new mono-economies over existing colonial structures (Slocum 2006). Foreign elites often control these enterprises with decision-making power and profit pooled in other countries. The Plantation Economic Model demonstrates that the Caribbean continues to function as a plantation economy through export-oriented production, unequal access to job positions, and the concentration of wealth by foreign owned business (Williams 1942, Beckford 1974, Best and Levitt 2009).

Autonomy in relation to ownership of land and food production is a key theoretical concept applied to the Caribbean because of the history of externally controlled economies operating land monopolies (Mintz 1974, Trouillot 1988, Mintz and Price 1992, Besson 2002). During enslavement, the production and sale of foods grown on provision land was common among the African Caribbean population and provided some autonomy within the oppressive system (Richardson 1983:14, Mintz and Price 1992, Gomez 2005:93). After emancipation, the rise of village settlements was due to the “desire, on the part of slaves, for personal liberty and for land of their own” (Farley 1964:52). Besson (1995:300) argues family land in the Caribbean is not a cultural survival from Africa or Europe but represents culture-building by Caribbean peasants in response and resistance to the plantation system and other land monopolies such as
mining and tourism. Besson (2002) explains that access to and use of land allowed enslaved Africans to create and maintain autonomy and community.

In contemporary St Kitts, autonomy provides a practical point of analysis because as economies and governmental regimes transition, the experience of autonomy will also change. Different people will experience autonomy differently and autonomy one person or group might result in or require limited autonomy for others. Agriculturalists now use their work to achieve autonomy in different ways, from establishing and maintaining social networks that counter the individualistic capitalist structure to working towards food sovereignty. Others note the sense of freedom and emotional fulfillment they experience from being their own boss. Others discuss their involvement in agriculture as a means to maintain or create economic autonomy. In Chapter 7, I draw from Carla Freeman’s work on entrepreneurialism to explore how, for some of my participants, profit-making is key to their autonomy derived from self-employment.

One of the primary contributions of this research is to the theory and practice of food sovereignty. In addition to individual autonomy that agricultural work can provide, my participants use agriculture as a way to potentially create a more sustainable and locally controlled food system and buffer the country from economic shifts and shocks. While food security is often used in the public discourse around agriculture in St Kitts because of the popularity and acceptance of the term within multinational and non-government organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, food sovereignty highlights the cultural and economic importance of the access to land and food production. The paradigm grew out of peasant movements and protests following land restructuring in Latin America and is used to analyze power and decision making within the food system worldwide (Edelman 1999, McMichael 2005, Windfuhr and Jonsén 2005, Holt-Giménez 2006, Rosset 2006, Desmarais 2007, Wittman 2011, Alkon and Mares 2012, Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014, Boone and Taylor 2016). In 2009, Via Campesina defined food sovereignty as the right of communities to have “healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.” Carney (2012:72) summarizes it as “the people’s right to determine their own agricultural and food policies.” Food sovereignty connects community efforts to reform the food system to the global movement towards sustainable and locally-controlled food systems.
This project also draws from discussions of gender and labor in the Caribbean to explore gendered experiences of autonomy in agricultural labor. In the Caribbean, women have historically had paid jobs outside of the domestic sphere (Kelly 1983, Bolles 1996, Freeman 2000, 2014). While discussing female gender roles and ideologies of home and work life in her study of informatics workers in Barbados, Freeman (2000:5) describes labor as a way for women to “inscribe patriarchal notions of femininity and create a space of invention and autonomy.”

Scholars note that women of the African Diaspora create autonomy through participation in the market economies, particularly through the sale of food products in local and regional markets (Farley 1964, Trouillot 1988, Mintz 1989, Besson 2002, Williams-Forson 2006, Ulysse 2007, Mantz 2007). Today, women in St Kitts have particular roles within agriculture, mainly within the preparation and sale of goods at markets. Female led farms are not common and many women in agriculture are involved because of their husbands, fathers, or another man in their life. I use theories on gender and labor in order to understand these gender roles as well as the exceptions to these roles.

Finally, I use space as an overarching theoretical lens that ties together all the topics in this dissertation: the challenges within agriculture, social networks, place-making, resistance, and economic and food autonomy within agriculture (Corsín Jiménez 2003, Boyce-Davies 2007, Low 2017). I use spatial analysis to explore where agricultural activities take place: the farms, markets, provision plots, and foraging lands. I also use space as a theory to examine how my participants make a place for themselves ideologically and economically within tourism and the local food system. Using space as a lens allows for the exploration of issues such as who has the right to space and the politics of land use. This dissertation uses the term space to mean the physical locations where meaningful aspects of life play out as well as ideological space in the public discourse and imaginary that encompasses the popular imaginary of modernity and Caribbeanness.

Spatial theory and analysis, in conjunction with political economy, are appropriate to use in this context because St. Kitts is unofficially but very clearly segregated into white and black spaces, a result of colonization and the colonizers’ construction of space that still operates today. Food resources vary greatly through the island depending on the customer base, with the tourist and student areas much better stocked. Convenience and Chinese food shops spread throughout
the island’s villages means processed unhealthy foods are easily available even in rural areas. Access to land and housing are also restricted in this landscape.

The unofficial but very real segregation of the island means that tourism jobs are not available to all people. Those with limited education, language barriers, little experience dealing with foreigners, or no transportation to the tourism hubs are unable to find work. This often means that agriculture is one of a few career options.

Additionally, I focus on space and place because much of the agricultural work in St. Kitts is place-based. St Kitts is roughly 68 square miles. High-end neighborhoods are located on the peninsula but most of the 53,544 people in St Kitts live on the mainland. The rural villages are located around the base of the mountains and are where most of the agricultural activity, and this research, takes place. See Map 1 below for reference and Chapter 3 for an in depth spatial analysis of St Kitts.

As will be explored throughout this dissertation, farms are often on reclaimed sugar fields, sites of generations of trauma but also symbols of the endurance and strength of my participants’ ancestors and the way forward for future generations. Markets are also imbued with deep cultural and often familial heritage and reclaiming these spaces is active resistance to the mainstream food system, globalization, colonialism and neocolonialism, and the erasure of Black Kittitians from the cultural heritage their ancestors built. These reclaimed markets are the hubs of economic and social activity for farmers, vendors, and customers.

Agricultural spaces are important not just for their historical, nostalgic, and cultural properties but also because they allow people a space to maintain the land, soil, and pass down traditional knowledges, and reclaim their future through agricultural practices. These spaces have almost 400 years of history but they are given new practical and cultural meaning through their contemporary use built on top of that history.

Space also provides an analytical framework for exploring how Kittitians navigate a rapidly changing world, often changing without their consent, input, nor providing any benefits. Here, I draw from theories developed on food spaces within migrant communities. Although my participants did not move from their homeland in the same way, I argue that they do not have to migrate to have their “homes and homelands disrupted by globalization” (Low 2017: 1). Corsín Jiménez problematizes the anthropological focus on space that hinges on territory and/or diaspora by stating
For it is surely the case that ‘natives’ who stay put in a particular area move as much as those people who suffer displacement or are engaged in long-distance migration. The difference lies not in people's movement (people have always moved what is different now is the scale of their movements) but in people's relationship with one another as they move.\(2003:140\)

This dissertation demonstrates that social relationships between people, families, neighbors, citizens and their governments, all change as the island changes. People move in and out, governments change, the economy changes majorly, the landscape itself is changed dramatically by land development and construction of hotels and housing developments, climate change and other environmental factors. The landscape also changed when the sugar industry was closed and fields were abandoned. In many ways, the residents of St. Kitts, many of whom never even left their home village, are just as displaced as those who have voluntarily or involuntarily migrated. People are forced to develop new place-based identities (Low 2017: 1) and ways of living/surviving in the geographical locations they have lived their whole life. A community network of growers and vendors are connected to a St. Kitts that they did not technically leave but were taken from them.

Within the consideration of “space,” I draw from Black Geographies to make sense of the historical and contemporary spatial layout of the island that impacts and is impacted by the food system. Black peoples’ relationship with the physical landscape of the plantation and colonialism more broadly creates a “Black sense of place” (McKittrick 2011, 2013) which has significant impacts on the relationships between black people and their current landscape. A Black sense of place, which McKittrick (2011:949) defines as “the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounters,” indicates “how the relational violences of modernity produce a condition of being black in the Americas that is predicated on struggle.” Reese (2019: 8), in her study on the food system in a Black neighborhood of Washington DC notes that “a focus on Black geographies reinscribes Black ways of being, knowing, and doing as essential to understanding place-making, an often-neglected aspect of what it means not only to acquire food but also to experience one's community in the process.”
Methods

I draw on several short-term research trips between 2012 and 2018 and an in-depth ethnographic research trip from July 2018 to August 2019, funded by the National Science Foundation’s DDRIG (Grant #BCS-1756087). During my thirteen months of in-depth research, I relied on standard ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews as well as other methods such as foodscape mapping and spatial analysis.

I attempted to gain a full understanding of the island’s food system and local knowledges and experiences. As such, I interviewed people involved in many different aspects and levels of the agricultural and food system. I would like to make a short note on terminology for the sake of clarification. I use the local term “turnhands” when referring to people who do not produce themselves but buy wholesale agricultural products and resell them retail. “Vendors” refers to both turnhands and farmers who sell retail in the market. I refer to people who produce food for a profit as “farmers.” People who grow in their own private spaces are referred to as “backyard gardeners” or “gardeners.” “Producers” is a general term for both farmers and gardeners. “Produce traffickers” are people who organize the importation of agricultural goods, typically from other nearby islands like Dominica or St Vincent. I refer to people who make goods like hot sauces, jams, and beauty products from agricultural produce as “agro-processors.” The actors in this study often times inhabit more than one category. When I am speaking in general terms about people involved in agricultural activities, including farmers, turnhands, producers, produce traffickers, and agro-processors, I use the general term “agriculturalists.”

In total, there were sixty-two participants in this study. Please see the table below for a complete participant break down. Guest (2006:76) states, “If the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief, or behavior among a relatively homogeneous group, then a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient, as it was in our study. But if one wishes to determine how two or more groups differ along a given dimension, then you would likely use a stratified sample of some sort (e.g., a quota sample) and might purposely select twelve participants per group of interest.” Hennink et al (2017) found that “code saturation was reached at nine interviews, whereby the range of thematic issues was identified. However, 16 to 24 interviews were needed to reach meaning saturation where we developed a richly textured understanding of issues. Thus, code saturation may indicate when researchers have ‘heard it all,’ but meaning saturation is needed to
‘understand it all.’” I was able to reach meaning saturation by both Guest’s and Hennink’s metrics with farmers and vendors. I was not able to reach saturation in the other categories.

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<th>Table 1. Participants</th>
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<td>Total Number of Participants*</td>
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*Some of my participants participate in more than one agricultural activity. For example, some of the employees of the Department of Agriculture were all also farmers. All participants were counted in every individual category in which they participate but only once in the total number of participants.

My recruitment was mostly done in my areas of participant observation. For example, I would strike up conversations with vendors and shoppers in the market or on the street and tell them what I was studying. They often responded with their thoughts on agriculture and an offer to help or a name of someone they thought to be knowledgeable. I would employ the same strategy at festivals and cultural events. I was also fortunate enough to meet a primatologist
working on the island who introduced me to some of her participants, a small few became mine as well.

I followed every lead in the beginning, which introduced me to many of the people represented here. Towards the middle of my research, most of my participants were men over 50. Prior to research, I developed a sampling goal where people from each gender and age range would be saturated and represented equally across the different types of agricultural activities. I began to try to even out my sample as per the sampling strategy. However, reaching my goal in each category proved to be impossible in practice. I did not meet any nor did my participants know of any women younger than 50 that farmed for a living. Even the employees at the school farm could not think of any of their female students that took to farming. Women under 50 involved in agriculture were involved in agro-processing and backyard gardening exclusively. This disparity represents the island’s economic and ideological push away from agricultural labor. Farming is seen as “dirty work” and something for uneducated people with no other options. Moreover, people, especially the younger generations, are less and less inclined to even shop at the markets because of changing diets and lifestyles on the island. I return to the topics of age and gender in agriculture in Chapter 4.

Several key participants were instrumental to this research and are mentioned several times across the chapters. Joyce is a woman in her 60s. She is originally from New York but met and married a Kittitian man while he was living in the Bronx. Eventually, they decided to retire to St Kitts. We met at the airport when I was leaving for St Kitts for my first stint of dissertation fieldwork and she was returning from a visit with her mother. I spotted her in the security line wearing a shirt that said “St Kitts and Nevis" above the black, yellow, green, and white flag. I struck up a conversation and we exchanged numbers. The following Saturday after my arrival, Joyce and her husband took me to the town market. They picked me up at 6 am from the apartment I rented in a rural village, which just happened to be one village closer to town than the village in which they lived. When we arrived at the market, she took me by the hand and introduced me to every vendor she knew. Many of the people that I met on that first market day became key participants and friends. In the beginning of my project, this impacted my recruitment because I only met those people who Joyce knew. Strategically, my first day in the market with Joyce was also my last, although she is a recurring presence in this dissertation as she was an instrumental person for my entrance to the field and in my Kittitian life in general.
Through frequent and regular trips to the market, I was able to forge my own space independent from Joyce.

Bobo was one of the first people I met at the market my first Saturday with Joyce. He is almost forty but has the energy of a twenty-year-old. He is loud, funny, magnetic, and typically surrounded by a crowd of people. He is the life-of-the-party type of a person, always dancing whether there is music or not, and always with a drink in his hand. He became one of my closest friends in St Kitts and frequently introduced me to new people, took me along on his farm days, and when he went foraging for coconuts. He sat for formal interviews and spent countless hours talking informally.

One of the people Bobo introduced me to was Mr. Armstrong, a man I would come to jokingly call my Kittitian dad because of his daily calls to check up on me and ask if I needed any produce. No one calls him by his first name. He answers to Mr. Armstrong, Armstrong, or Strong. One day, we stopped by his mother’s house on the way to the farm and she even greeted him with a warm “Mr Armstrong!” Armstrong is 63 years old and from a village just above town. He is intimidating, with a no-nonsense look on his face. I was afraid to introduce myself to him but Bobo sat me down and gave me a pep talk about Marcus Garvey being afraid of public speaking. So, I conquered my fear, walked up to Armstrong, and introduced myself. “What took you so long?” he responded. Armstrong is ever present in this dissertation. Aside from being a key participant and instrumental to my life in St Kitts, he is also one of the island’s most established farmers with one of the biggest and most productive farms.

At the market on a Monday, I met three members of the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative. Vibration, the member most often enlisted to sell at the stand on Mondays, became my point person in the co-op. He is in his mid-thirties and has lived in Sandy Point his whole life. He was a secondary school teacher but left to farm a piece of land with his cousin. Together with five other people, they decided to form a cooperative of farmers in their community. He taught me the way the co-op runs their wholesale business at the Monday Market, the way the Sandy Point Market works, sat for formal interviews, and took me to his farm for several workdays. He was also instrumental in gaining the trust and acceptance of the other more skeptical members of the group.

Joyce, Bobo, Armstrong, and Vibration are some of the most prominent in this dissertation, supported by the other participants that were wonderful enough to let me into their
lives during my research. Each person in this study has their own unique view on food, the economy, agriculture, and the future of St Kitts. I hope that all of their voices that are weaved together into this dissertation gives a picture of what agricultural life is like in St Kitts.

Most interviews took place on farms, in restaurants, offices, and in the car driving around the island. In some cases, as with government officials and businesspeople, the interviews were very formal, sitting at a desk with my recorder between us. I had my pre-determined interview questions typed and printed out and my notebook and pen open and ready. Others were less formal, driving in cars with the recorder in the cupholder with my notebook on my lap trying to write between bounces, sitting on the grass leaning against a tree, over a beer or a meal, or sitting on the curb in front of the market. Instead of the typed-out interview questions, I would refer to the set of general interview questions I kept written in the first few pages of my field notebook for casual and impromptu interviews. Many informal interviews with producers and processors happened during work when all our hands were busy. For these, I would let the interview take a more conversational structure and ask questions from memory.

Generally, I asked if I could record my interviews. Most participants were fine with it, some were shy but eventually warmed up to the thought of me listening to their voice on tape. With more private participants and groups, I would take notes during our interviews and conversation or after if we were engaged in an activity that was occupying my hands.

During interviews, I asked my participants questions about the food system in general, their involvement in agriculture or the food system, and their experiences as agriculturalists, gardeners, or consumers of local food. For those working in agriculture, I asked about their motivations to enter into and stay in their specific agricultural career. Specifically for farmers, I asked questions about the logistics of their farms, what they grow, when, how many people work the farm, where do they sell their produce, challenges, and any other thoughts they have on their careers and position in the food system. I also asked questions about the impact of tourism, the possibility of agro-tourism, the history of the land they farm on, and politics of land use.

I asked vendors, produce retailers, about their experiences selling produce locally, their clientele, changes in their profession over time, and where they see agriculture going in the future. Vendors are the eyes and ears on the street so to speak. They deal directly with customers and often city officials and police who have attempted to control where and when vendors can
sell. This gives vendors a different perspective on agriculture than farmers who sell their goods wholesale.

I focused my interviews and conversations with produce traffickers on trade, the market, policy, and agriculture in St. Kitts in comparison to their home islands and other islands where they sell their goods. As I was unable to travel around the Caribbean during my fieldwork, their narratives provided me with insight into Caribbean agriculture as a whole and what is specifically Kittitian.

With agro-processors, I asked about their business models, clientele, where they get the raw agricultural products, they use to make their goods, the future of their business and agriculture in St Kitts, and the challenges and benefits of agro-processing. During my interactions with backyard gardeners, I focused on the benefits and challenges of backyard gardening, their opinions on the mainstream food system, and their ideas on agriculture in St Kitts. I also interviewed government officials and real estate agents about the island’s food system and economy more generally.

During my time at the markets, I met and spoke with many consumers who shop locally. I only formally interviewed five people who are counted in my total number of participants. I focused my conversations on their motivations for shopping locally and what their experiences have been. As I will mention several times, the markets in St. Kitts are not conveniently located. Understanding why people go out of their way to shop locally was critical for understanding not only my participants’ position in the food system but also their cultural importance.

I conducted participant observation mostly at the town market twice a week, the Sandy Point Market once a week, and on various farms two to three times a week. It was necessary for me to divide my time between the two markets because of the different social and economic goals, actual and desired roles within the food system, and different customer and seller demographics of each. The town market, where I spent almost every Saturday and Monday for thirteen months, draws vendors from all over the federation and hosts regional sellers from other islands once a week. The Sandy Point Market is located in a rural village and is operated by a cooperative of family members and neighbors who are using food production specifically as a tool to combat food insecurities in their community, creating a different atmosphere and attracting different clientele than the town market. Participant observation in the town market consisted of helping vendors sell their goods, sitting with vendors at their stalls, or floating
around to the different stands chatting with vendors during their down time. At the Sandy Point Market, I was typically enlisted to help prepare cooked lunch that they serve on Saturdays or help sell produce in the roadside stand. Most often, participant observation in either market could be described through the cultural tradition of liming (hanging out), discussed more in depth in Chapter 5.

I also accompanied vendors as they sold in other locations, such as roadside stands and the universities weekly, joined participants as they grocery shopped, farmers as they sold their produce to retailers, and enlisted myself in helping the local coconut water seller collect young coconuts at least once a week. I attended festivals and events for holidays and celebrated days such as World Food Day, African Liberation Day, Easter, Christmas, Agricultural Open Day, and carnival. I also joined several agriculturalists on hikes in the mountain intermittently which proved to be some of the most valuable time. Interviews allowed me to give my participants a space to tell me their perspective and the things they felt were important for me to know. Participant observation, on the other hand, allowed me to feel, smell, hear, and taste spaces for myself, watch and participate in social interactions, and observe the subtleties of the markets, farms, events, and grocery stores.

During farm days, I would work alongside farmers and their workers, picking produce, weeding, or whatever task needed to be completed that day. Breaktimes, particularly when sudden bursts of rain would fall, and the workers would cram together in a shed or under a tree and wait out the rain, provided some useful conversational moments with farm workers.

For the spatial analysis section of this dissertation, I followed Lidia Marte’s (2007) concept of foodscape mapping. After fieldwork, I drew a concept map of the island's food system based on my own experience and my participants’ narratives about what food is produced, where and to whom producers sell, where producers get supplemental foods, and source sharing and bartering. The goal of this method is to define the “foodshed,” the places in which a population gets its foodstuffs (Getz 1991, Kloppenburg 1996) to explore where local producers fit into the local foodshed and track economic flow within the foodshed. Foodshed mapping also tracks food inequalities, the production capacity of local food producers, and highlights the possible links between ideas of space, land use, and production. This information was especially important in forming the arguments of Chapter 3.
My positionality as a white, young, female from an international university impacted my methodological approach and time in St Kitts more broadly, which is explained in the next section.

“Who’s the white girl?”- A Note on Positionality

As with all fieldwork and fieldwork relationships, and particularly in areas with the deep racial and colonial systems as my work, there is always an unequal power dynamic between researcher and participant. It is important to note that my skin color, class, gender, and nationality have affected my relationships, data, and field experience.

St. Kitts' population is 98% Black, mostly Afro-Caribbean people whose ancestors were enslaved and forced into plantation agriculture by European colonists. The other two percent of the population is a mix of Guyanese, Indian, Chinese, and white. Skin color is talked about very often in St Kitts. Particularly with my Rastafari participants, colonization and white supremacy were popular topics. Skin color is also used frequently as a simple identifier. In the US, most people try to avoid using skin color as a means for identification. I make this note because I was referred to as “the white girl” or “white lady”, frequently throughout my time in St Kitts, as a simple descriptive term, not an insult. For example, boarding a bus, it is common to pass the payment to a person sitting close to the driver before entering. “For the white girl,” they would say as they handed my money to the driver. At some point, I began to answer to “white girl” like it was my name.

The island’s history is one of colonization and white domination. White people on the island forcibly held economic and political control, first as enslavers, plantation owners, and colonizers, now as foreign investors, developers, business owners and the occasional Peace Corps volunteer or missionary. This rightfully caused potential participants to be skeptical of my intentions. Additionally, my research focuses on the economic activity that the colonists used to create these racial inequalities— agriculture. Thomas, citing Whitten (2007) states “the ‘settling’ of the New World also saw a twin transformative processes of racial fixing (of diverse African peoples into negros and diverse indigenous New World populations into indios) and racial flexibility (the various configurations of creolization, transculturation, and hybridity), and that these processes that became institutionalized through particular extractive labor regimes and constellations of citizenship that excluded non-European groups” (2016: 179, original emphasis)
When I first began working in St Kitts and Nevis in 2012, I was ignorant of the ways in which my positionality would impact my research and my participants. I went to Nevis as a Masters student on an archeological field school trip and felt an instant connection with the island. Within a few days, I switched my thesis topic from holistic medicine in the US to a study of holistic medicine in St Kitts and Nevis, which eventually evolved into this dissertation. It was very easy to get defensive when a potential participant would question my motives because my only intention was to study topics that were important to me in a place that I loved. Acknowledging issues of colonialism and white supremacy felt natural to me but truly understanding how they impacted my research and general experience in St Kitts and how these processes and my positionality impacted my participants took more self-reflection.

During moments when my participants were discussing colonization and white supremacy, I was often called upon to answer for the deeds of all white people. Specifically, as a white American, I was dealt an additional series of questions. Did I share Trump’s views of people of color? Did I support American imperialism? Did I work for the CIA? If I didn’t work for the CIA, what’s in it for me? Why did I want to do this research? Being honest about my love for the island, the close relationships I’ve formed over the years, and my interest in food activism were usually satisfactory answers to at least break the ice.

Not only does the history of the island affect my positionality but the current economic and social structure does as well. Most people who look like me in St Kitts today are tourists, students of one of the three American-owned universities, or wealthy migrants from Canada, Britain, or the United States, each group with a different negative stereotype attached. None have a reputation for integrating with locals for anything beyond economic or social benefit. The Caribbean is a popular sex tourism destination for white men and women. Also, attendees of one university on the island have an island-wide reputation for partying and being promiscuous with local, often married, men. Whether those reputations are valid or not, they created some tension for me as a young white woman studying a mostly male profession. Because of my previous work in Nevis, I was mentally prepared for the assumptions and the flood of questions about my personal life and intentions. In the past, I struggled with gaining the trust of women in my field sites because of this dynamic.

Despite the challenges, I was able to work my way (sometimes literally through farm labor) into the agricultural community in St Kitts. My persistence and willingness to put my hand
in the dirt on farms, and my ability and desire to spend my days in villages where no foreigners ever hang out made me stand out from the other white people on the island and earned me some credibility. The most important thing, in my opinion, in overcoming the very justified skepticism was the deep meaningful friendships I have been lucky enough to cultivate over the years. Because of these friendships, I did not have the typical “lonely ethnographer” experience in St. Kitts. In many ways, my social network there is wider and more meaningful than the ones in my hometown or my second home of Massachusetts. Many of these friendships are tangential or completely disconnected from my research but helped me in any case. The small population means most people know each other or have very few degrees of separation. Connecting with some key people early in my research and during past research projects helped open many doors for me. It was common to hear “Are you the white girl that was with so and so the other night” or “Didn’t I see you in town with so and so?” I thank them more specifically in my acknowledgments, but I return to them in this section because they made it possible for me to integrate into a place where I am very clearly an outsider.

In other ways, my positionality made fieldwork easier. As an international researcher, I was afforded privileges that are not available to most locals. The attention of and access to government officials beyond their campaign trails and photo-ops, invitations to meetings and social events with investors, developers, philanthropists, and entrepreneurs, and the like come to mind. I benefited from those things, as I am sure many other anthropologists do.

Additionally, being a young, white woman meant I stood out like a sore thumb almost everywhere I went, and people were not shy about asking me who I was and why I was there. Early in my fieldwork, “who’s the white girl?” was a common question floating around the markets, which were my main hubs of data collection and participant recruitment. I would get called over in the market and even walking on the street and get asked “What are you doing here? One of them is your husband?” referring to the group of farmers selling goods. The assumption that a woman would enter the market only as a partner or relative of a seller is not unreasonable, a point I will return to later in my dissertation. Because of this, I admittedly had to make very few “first moves” in my participant recruitment.

I realize that equal relationships in the case of a researcher and participant is impossible but I did my best to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships through reciprocation. As happens in most fieldwork, my initial plan for policy intervention did not work out as intended but I
contributed to my participants’ agricultural activities through labor and extension services. The information I wanted from each person was different as described in my methods sections and what each person needed from me was also different. In some cases, they wanted an extra pair of hands or set of eyes. Others needed help researching best practices or assistance ordering inputs online. Particularly with my participants in Sandy Point, our reciprocation came from an exchange of labor for information but it was also built on the exchange of information and ideas about agriculture, politics, history and heritage, and the like. While I did my best to be an ethical researcher, my positionality undoubtedly impacted my research. The history of St Kitts is tainted by colonialism, neocolonialism, and unequal racial dynamics that need to be considered while moving through this dissertation.

**Roadmap to this Dissertation**

Chapter 2 starts this dissertation with a political economic analysis of agricultural history in St. Kitts. Here, I give an overview of land ownership and agricultural production as well as an examination of how the ebbs, flows, and eventual closure of the sugar industry impacted the island’s food system. This demonstrates how the island’s colonial history impacts the contemporary culture, economy, and food system. Chapter 3 is an analysis of the space in which historic economic, political, and colonial systems play out in contemporary St. Kitts. I follow with a chapter dedicated to the challenges that many agriculturalists in St Kitts face in conducting their business and briefly note the strategies of overcoming the challenges and reasons some agriculturalists remain in the industry despite the hardships.

In the later chapters, I focus on the physical and ideological spaces of St. Kitts’ foodscape and the extra-economic results of agriculture, the reasons people participate in agriculture, and the strategies people use to navigate the challenges laid out in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 explores agricultural spaces as sites for social networking and in turn spaces to build community autonomy and sustainability. Chapter 6 focuses on place-making and reclaiming space as a way of reclaiming cultural heritage, resisting globalized food systems, and creating cultural sustainability. In Chapter 7, I concentrate on agriculture as an avenue towards economic and food autonomy. Here, I discuss agricultural production as food sovereignty and entrepreneurialism and my participants’ pursuit of ideological and economic spaces for local
produce in the island’s mainstream food system and in the service industry that now dominates the Kittitian economy.
CHAPTER 2: Political Economic Analysis of Agriculture and Food in St Kitts

Political Economy and the Creation of a Local flavor

In 2003, the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis’ Department of Culture held a competition to replace Goat Water as the national dish as part of a celebration to honor 20 years of independence. Michelle Flanders, a Chef from St. Kitts, was quoted in a newspaper article as saying that the country wanted a “more modern dish to represent the country.” According to the St. Kitts Department of Culture, the competition called for someone to “create a culinary dish that would encapsulate the characteristics and spirit of Kittitian and Nevisian people, while sharing their rich culture.” The judges were an owner of a high-end restaurant in the tourist area of the island known as the Sugar Complex and a Chef at the then brand-new Marriott, which at the time was the first and only chain resort on the island.

The winner of the competition was stewed saltfish, spicy plantains, breadfruit, and fried coconut dumplings, a modern dish with a 300-year-old history. The star of the new national dish, Saltfish, is in countless dishes in St. Kitts and in the Caribbean as a whole. Saltfish is dry salted codfish imported from Nova Scotia and sold in every grocery store and restaurant. High-end restaurants serve their versions of saltfish and fried dumplings on “local night.” Local spots sell “saltfish cookup,” the Caribbean version of a fried rice stir fry. Saltfish fritters and saltfish with Johnny cakes are popular home cooked meals. The other components of the new national dish, coconut and breadfruit, grow on trees wild in the jungle and in almost every backyard but are both originally from the South Pacific. Breadfruits, prepared in any way you could prepare a potato, are a side dish in almost every meal. Coconuts are used as flavoring for rice, desserts, and dumplings. They are also eaten raw and the juice of the young coconuts is a popular local drink.

In addition to the national dish, many other contemporary local dishes are composed of ingredients that are not native to St Kitts. At the market during the 2019 Easter season, a 30-year-old farmer named Jason told me to make sure I eat some saltfish and dumplings on Good Friday. I asked if that was what most people eat on Good Friday food. “Yes,” he said, “It’s a local dish but not a local dish. It's saltfish and flour. Nothing make here.”

But how did the Atlantic cod from Nova Scotia, Breadfruit from the Pacific Islands, South Asian coconuts, and imported wheat flour combine to make dishes that are considered representative of St Kitts? How did saltfish and dumplings become a traditional holiday meal?
The histories of these ingredients are interwoven with global trade, economic growth, Caribbean sugar production, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Historian John Parry acknowledged that the economic history of the Caribbean is written “in terms of crops for export.” In St Kitts’ case, the colonial history of St Kitts can be traced through an analysis of sugar production as colonists established plantations throughout the island. However, Parry (1955:1) argues that the economic history of the region is “the story of yams, cassava and saltfish, no less than of sugar and tobacco” that were brought over or grown for subsistence by enslaved Africans. I use monocrop agriculture and local food consumption and production as a lens to explore the Kittitian economy and culture from pre-colonization, through the many phases of the sugar industry, enslavement and emancipation, to the contemporary agricultural and foodscape. Through the island’s agricultural and food history, we can better understand the food system, agriculture, and socioeconomic geography today. This chapter sets up the context for the dissertation’s main goal of using food as a lens to study the political economy and autonomy in St Kitts.

**Indigenous Life and Diet Before and After Colonization**

Before the island was colonized by Europeans, St Kitts was home to tribes of Kalinago and Taino that migrated from South and Central America throughout the Caribbean. The indigenous diet consisted mainly of iguana, potatoes, manatee, turtles, lizards, snails, crabs, and native birds, most of which were hunted to extinction by Europeans within the first few years of colonization, and local alcohol made from tree roots, and bread made of cassava flour (Meniketti 2015: 101, Hubbard 2002:16). The early indigenous peoples brought cassava and yams with them from South America and they remained an important part of the diet.

Christopher Columbus first spotted St. Kitts and Nevis but it was not until the English and French settled the islands in 1623 that Europeans permanently settled there (Gordon 2005:2). The French and British settlers had begun to eliminate the native population through displacement, disease, and warfare as soon as they took over the island. In 1626, after mounting tensions and increasing hostility, the British colonists, led by Thomas Warner, attacked the Kalinago village, almost completely exterminating what was left of the indigenous population, including the island’s Chief. Today, the area is known as Bloody Point and the ghaut that runs from the location of the former Kalinago village to the ocean is known as Bloody River. A ghaut
(pronounced gut) is defined in the dictionary as “a small cleft in a hill through which a rivulet runs down to the sea.” Essentially, ghauts are valleys that run from the top of the mountain to the water that separate the flat lands used for agriculture.

There is a plaque commemorating the massacre that reads “Bloody River: River named in memory of the massacre of indigenous Americindians inhabitants by the British settlers in 1626. It is said that this river ‘flowed with blood’ from the upstream ambush and violent killing of hundreds of Kalinago people.” The remaining Kalinago were enslaved, murdered, or exiled to Dominica before 1640 (Hubbard 2002:18).

Today, there is no sizable population of indigenous people living in St Kitts. The island does, however, maintain the connection to the native population through place names, such as Liamuiga, which was the Kalinago name for St Kitts. Also, food such as cassava and yams that the Kalinago people introduced to the enslaved Africans are still heavily present in the contemporary Kittitian diets.

**European Colonization and Establishing Plantation Economies: 1625-1830**

At first, European colonists were mostly middle to lower class men who brought indentured servants, many from Ireland, and prisoners as laborers. Soon, more colonists came over to set up plantations. St Kitts, like the other former colonies in the Caribbean, is what Best and Levitt define as a plantation economy in their Plantation Economic Model. While every nation is different, Best and Levitt outlined several broad characteristics plantation economies in the Caribbean region share. Plantation economies are foreign-owned and export-oriented appendages of a metropolitan economy (Girvan xvii, xix: 2009), set up as “overseas operations of an integrated enterprise whose ultimate control was located in the metropole” (Best 2009:11). A plantation economy has a passive incorporation into the international economy, meaning one that relies “on metropolitan initiative and entrepreneurship and on exogenously determined external demand. When resources are depleted or external demand changes, the economy regresses” (Girvan xxi: 2009).

Plantation economies, including St Kitts have gone through three phases which Best and Levitt describe as the pure plantation economy, modified, and further modified. The pure plantation economy was set up by Europeans during their colonization of the western hemisphere and is characterized by “sugar and slavery” (Best 2009:7), the “slave plantation as the locus of
production of metropolitan enterprise producing commodities exclusively for sale or resale in metropolitan markets” (Best and Levitt 2009:14). As characteristic of pure plantation economies, the focus of the British colonizers in St Kitts was to profit through the production of cash crops through the exploitation of the local resources and enslaved labor, “which was itself a traded commodity” (Best 2009:10). Sylvia Wynter echoes plantation economy theorists stating, “the Caribbean area is the classic plantation area since many of its units were 'planted' with people, not in order to form societies, but to carry on plantations' whose aim was to produce single crops for the market” (1971:95). Mintz (1983:11) also observed that the Caribbean islands were used by the colonists “to export their produce to the metropolis in exchange for finished products.”

Colonists in St. Kitts began cash cropping with tobacco, indigo, and ginger (Hubbard 2002: 24). When tobacco profits plummeted due to overproduction in the 1650s, the colonists turned to sugarcane production for the export of sugar, molasses, and rum (Klippel 2000; Hubbard 2002, Gordon 2005) which was already a popular export crop in Hispaniola and other established Caribbean plantations (Benítez-Rojo, 1996). Plantation owners used enslaved Africans as the primary labor force on the sugar plantations after their failed attempt at using Irish indentured servants. European merchants began to import captured Africans by the end of the 1600s but the slave trade begun as early as the 1500s (Gomez 2005:63).

According to Collingham (2017:51), plantation owners in the Caribbean region needed 20,000 new enslaved workers a year to maintain their labor force because of the inhumane working conditions causing a high mortality rate. Sylvia Wynter (1971:95) recognizes “the plantation-societies of the Caribbean came into being as adjuncts to the market system; their peoples came into being as an adjunct to the product, to the single crop commodity, the sugar cane which they produced.”

As sugarcane production increased, small landholdings of independent farmers were consolidated into sugar plantations as large tracts of land were needed for sugarcane planting (Hubbard 2002:27). Sugar plantations in St Kitts were modeled after Dutch-factory plantation units, “which every aspect of the process from cultivating to refining” was done on the plantation, giving the owner full control of the product and the profit (Collingham 2017:47). Meniketti (2015:17) observed that it is also likely that the English colonists were inspired by the Irish plantation model in which plantations spread over large pieces of land. In line with the findings of scholars that have discussed how organizers of the plantation system not only
organized the economy around the plantation but also crafted the physical landscape around it as well (Higman 1986, Hauser and Hicks 2007, Delle 2014, Gonzalez-Tennant 2014, Meniketti 2015), Enslaved Africans were housed in villages organized around the sugar fields. During plantation agriculture, these villages were moderately self-sufficient in the sense that people lived and worked in the same village and often relied on subsistence plots and village agriculture for their food. Since all plantations were self-contained and independent from each other, individual plantations were in competition with each other for labor and markets to sell their sugar (Frucht 1978: 91).

A global trade network was created around the newly established colonies in the West, bringing goods and labor into the Caribbean and exporting raw materials such as cotton, salt, and sugar (Collingham 2017: xvii). The Dutch dominated trade for much of the Plantation era (Hubbard 2002, Meniketti 2015) until Britain built up mercantile ships and navy ships to protect them in the 1650s. In 1651, Britain passed the Navigation Acts that stated that all goods from British colonies were to be channeled through England regardless of the destination and could only be carried on British ships (Hubbard 2002, Collingham 2017:55). Best and Levitt define this as the navigation provision, a characteristic of a plantation economy in which “goods are transported by metropolitan carriers and associated services provided by metropolitan intermediaries.” This meant an increase in the number of British mercantile ships and a naval fleet to protect them, which was funded by the slave and sugar trades.

By 1680, sugar was the principal plantation product in St Kitts and throughout the Caribbean region (Meniketti 2006:59). The high price and low production costs of sugar made Caribbean sugar plantation owners, some of the richest men in Europe and the Caribbean islands, some of the most profitable British colonies. St. Kitts and Nevis were at the forefront (Hubbard 2002: 27). Large plantations continued to monopolize the best arable land to produce sugar and other export cash crops with the labor of enslaved Africans and a small number of indentured servants. At the height of the slave trade, the Leeward Island plantation owners were importing an average of 6000 captured Africans a year. Through this exploitation, St. Kitts became such a prolific and profitable producer of sugar that it was given the nickname “Sugar City.”

The French lost control of their portion of the island in 1713 and French plantations were sold to British landowners at auction in 1717 (Hubbard 2002:74). This allowed the British to increase sugar production. According to the St. Kitts’ railway, there were 200 estates producing
sugar by 1775. Sugar production rose from 1000 tons in 1710 to over 10,000 tons in 1770 (Dyde 1999:32).

As characteristic of passive economies that rely on demand in the metropole as their only source of economic development, when the external demand for resources change, the economy declines (Girvan xxi: 2009). Cheaper cane sugar producers elsewhere and the mass production of beet sugar globally caused the demand for St Kitts sugar to decline as early as the 18th century (Williams 1944, Mintz 1985, Ahmed and Āpharoja 1996, Hubbard 2002). Additionally, Dutch merchants continued to trade molasses, sugar, and other consumer goods with British colonists despite the Navigation Acts’ prohibition. It was particularly easy for the Dutch to trade with St. Kitts because of the proximity of the Dutch islands Saba and St. Eustatius (“Statia”), only 35 and 7 miles away respectively. In St. Kitts and Nevis, the common slang term for smuggled goods became known as “Statia Sugar” (Higham 1921:37 in Meniketti 2015:88). In the mid-1700s, the British cracked down on this illegal trade and smuggling which led to a short, yet unsustainable boom for British sugar.

French and Spanish involvement in the American Revolution disrupted British trade in the Caribbean. British ships were stopped by the French, causing shortages of staple goods on St. Kitts and the other islands and hindering the export of sugar and molasses. The price of food increased and the islands were unable to meet their food needs locally. Many of the rich plantation owners started to leave the island and return to England with their profits, renting their plantations out or leaving them under the command of their overseers (Hubbard 2002:81). Hubbard noted that 300 whites fled St. Kitts in 1778 to avoid bankruptcy. The French colonies, in contrast, were mostly settled by plantation owners who developed and implemented agricultural systems which exploited and brutalized forced laborers. Through this organized violence, the French colonies eventually surpassed British sugar production and were able to sell at half the price. In 1783, British Caribbean “representatives in London petitioned for a resumption of trade with North America on the old terms,” which was denied on the grounds that the “United States were now a foreign power, outside the system of imperial preferential trade” (Parry 1955:17). The colonies could sell sugar, molasses and rum to the United States but were ordered to import saltfish, grain, and timber from Canada or England only. Unfortunately, Canadian and English imports were only available in smaller quantities and at higher prices than their counterparts in the United States (Parry 1955:17).
The first thirty years of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a slow decline of the Caribbean sugar industry. By 1805, beet sugar was invented by a German chemist who answered Napoleon Bonaparte’s call for an alternative to Caribbean sugar after losing Haiti (Hubbard 2002: 109). While beet sugar would not impact the sale of Caribbean sugar for another 50 years, it signaled the fragility of the industry.

Large-scale production in places like St. Kitts took sugar from a luxurious and exotic product reserved for the ruling class to a “daily necessity for the European factory proletariat” (Mintz 1983:112). In 1820, the British government lifted the laws that allowed only British sugar, carried on British ships to be sold in Britain. With free trade, the price of sugar dropped, making it more affordable for lay British citizens but damaging the sugar plantation owners’ profits drastically. Many plantation owners in St. Kitts had filed bankruptcy by 1822 (Hubbard 2002).

Despite the decline in sugar production as early as the end of the 1700s and through the 1820s, the wealthiest plantation owners were able to maintain their social and political influence and continue the production of sugarcane on their plantation. Plantation agriculture brought an influx of Europeans and Africans to St Kitts but simultaneously monopolized most of the arable land. The next section provides an overview of the ways in which the growing population met their food needs through importation and subsistence farming on limited land.

**Food and Diet during Plantation Agriculture**

In the early days of colonization, the settlers ate much the same foods as the native people (Hubbard 2002) They also were able to grow on small garden plots. Letters written by plantation owner Christopher Jeaffreson in the 1680s describe orchards and small gardens dotting the landscape of St Kitts (Hubbard 2002).

During sugarcane cultivation, much of the food in St. Kitts was imported because the scarcity of land for growing food was inherent in the plantation system. Most arable land was devoted to export crops, and the islands were densely populated. As such, they often experienced local food deficits and relied on imported food (Richardson 1983). Dutch and French merchants began importing goods such as beef, cheese, flour, corn, beer, wine, and liquor to the settlers in the Caribbean regularly (Collingham 2017). Upper-Class plantation owners ate expensive imported beef and other meats, imported cheese and wine, and sweets made with imported
English flour (Collingham 2017). Meniketti (2015) adds that Guinea fowl, turkeys, and African goats were also imported to St Kitts and Nevis and the wider Caribbean region. The very wealthy plantation owners could devote some arable land and cattle to raise as meat, but most colonists relied on salted beef imported from New England colonies (Collingham 2017). As early as 1774, colonists noted that the stores were full of European goods (Schaw 1774 in Inniss 1985). The English colonies had the advantage of having a relationship with North American territories also under English rule so they were able to easily exchange sugar, molasses, and rum for “two vital articles of food; wheat flour, chiefly for the use of the European settlers, and saltfish, which was the principal relish and the main source of protein in the diet of the slaves” (Parry 1955:11). The diet of enslaved people was also supplemented by imported food. In his analysis of skeletal remains on Brimstone Hill Fortress on the Caribbean side of St. Kitts, zooarchaeologist Walter Klippel (2000) found that 18th century enslaved Africans were surviving primarily on low-quality barreled beef imported from North America and England.

Atlantic cod is an important part of the contemporary Caribbean diet, but it began as a cheap way to feed forced laborers. While the trade of salted fish can be traced back to the ancient Maya (Goucher 2014), many scholars note that Viking and Basque fishermen were the first to salt cod for European markets. By the 1500s, salted cod was gaining popularity worldwide. Kurlansky (2003) notes that fatty fish must be stored in airtight containers to prevent the fat from going rancid. Cod, on the other hand, has almost no fat so it can be air dried and stored anywhere, making it the perfect fish for salting. Atlantic cod was caught mostly in British colonies but in some French colonies in North America. Newfoundland was the most popular Atlantic Cod fishery and supplied much of the world, followed by Massachusetts.

Salted Cod was wildly popular in Europe and the Mediterranean but sellers needed a market for the spoiled or low-quality parts of the fish unsuitable for upscale markets. They soon developed trade relationships with Caribbean plantation owners who needed a cheap, high-protein food source that they could feed their enslaved labor force. Northern colonies traded low-quality salted cod for Caribbean sugar, spices, coffee, rum, and of course, salt which was produced by enslaved laborers on several islands including Bonaire and Turks and Caicos. The northern colonies then sold the Caribbean goods and their high-quality salted fish, salted with Caribbean salt to European and New England markets (MacKie 1991; Kurlansky 1997, Goucher 2014).
Salted Cod was dubbed “the West India Cure” by Newfoundland Atlantic Cod fishermen to describe the cheap way to preserve fish for profitable markets in the Caribbean. The West India cure was made by drying and salting the cheapest parts of the fish and creating an extremely profitable product that traveled long distances without spoiling (Kurlansky 1997). Because it was cheap and traveled well, slave masters and slave traders fed salted cod to enslaved Africans both enroute to the Americas and once they were on the plantation. Eric Kimball (in Goucher 2014:12) dubbed it the “meat of all the slaves in the West Indies.” The saltfish, as it became known in the British Caribbean, that was fed to enslaved Africans was primarily the dark, tough pieces of fish with lots of bone (MacKie 1991). As it was going to feed enslaved Africans, plantation owners wanted to spend as little money as possible to provide the work force with the salt and protein needed to keep them working with no concern for quality (Kurlansky 1997). Plantation owners would also feed their exploited and enslaved workforce the entrails and skin of oxen and other animals.

Today, saltfish is soaked overnight or boiled before eating to remove most of the salt but enslaved Africans would consume the salted fish as it was. This was necessary because of their grueling work regime, working sixteen or more hours a day in the Caribbean sun (Mackie 1991, Kurlansky 1997). According to Kurlansky (2003), salt in the Caribbean holds magical powers. It can be used to keep away evil spirits, break spells, and must be avoided during ritual because it will deter the good spirits. Saltfish is the main ingredient in countless dishes and it is part of the national dishes of three Caribbean Nations, Jamaica – Ackee & Saltfish, St Kitts & Nevis – Stewed Saltfish with Dumplings, Spicy Plantains & Breadfruit, and St Lucia – Green Fig & Saltfish. Despite the popularity, my participants often describe saltfish as “poor man food,” most likely due to its origins as slave food. In truth, saltfish is one of the most expensive proteins you can buy today. Breadfruit, also a main component in the national dish and a staple in the Caribbean diet, is also present in the Caribbean because of colonization. The French first brought this Polynesian plant from Tahiti to St. Vincent as part of an experiment testing which plants could survive in the Caribbean (Meniketti 2015).

Small plot provisioning has also been a strategy for meeting food needs within the enslaved population and then later freed Black people. The flat lands on the mountain side and the lowlands were monopolized by the sugar industry during production “but from early, the planters gave the slaves plots of land on which to grow food to feed themselves in order to
maximize profits” (Wynter 1971:99). Gomez notes (2005:93), “the enslaved had to squeeze in
time to attend their gardens, usually on Sundays, holidays, and around noon during the week,
when they had a two-hour respite.” Local Kittitian legend says that their forefathers and mothers
would smuggle seeds of important plants with them when they were taken from Africa in order
to safeguard their culture as much as possible. Many ethnobotanists and other researchers have
validated that this was a common practice for captured Africans on their way to the “New
contrast to the monocrop agriculture of sugarcane neatly laid out in perfect rows, destined for
external markets, the provision grounds are hidden in the jungle, immersed in the existing
landscape and used for the “cultivation of subsistence foods such as yams, cassava, and sweet
potatoes that represent edible staples and the economically viable roots of the internal markets”
(DeLoughrey 2011:58). While these provision grounds were provided not out of benevolence but
to cut down on the cost of maintaining the labor force, plantation owners were often still
reluctant or negligent when making sure some land was set aside for provisions so St. Kitts
“enacted a law requiring plantation owners to set aside sufficient land to feed their workforce” in
1793 (Klippel 2001: 1191).

Provision Plots became an invaluable part of Caribbean culture and “the focus of
resistance to the market system and market values” (Wynter 1971:99). The provision grounds
“contributed a vibrant, alternative economy to the monoculture of the plantocracy” (DeLoughrey
2011:62) because enslaved Africans, and later free Black people were able to sell surplus goods
from the provision grounds at weekly markets (Richardson 1983:14, Mintz and Price 1992,
Besson 2002:86, Gomez 2005:93, Williams-Forson 2006) “to their masters, to other slaves, or to
other free men” (Mintz 1983:112).

Plantation agriculture and transatlantic trade were profitable and sustainable only as long
as the plantation owners were able to exploit enslaved people for unpaid labor, even after the
trade of people was prohibited. The next section explores how emancipation impacted Kittitian
society and the economy.

Emancipation and Sugar Production 1830s-1912

On 25 March 1807, British parliament signed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act which
prohibited the trafficking of people from Africa. Still, 123 newly captured Africans were
imported to St Kitts on record. Richardson (1983) notes that many more were likely imported without record. Furthermore, the abolition of the slave trade only prohibited the importation of enslaved Africans from Africa (Williams 1944). The sale and transportation between colonies, especially from older colonies like Jamaica which had a surplus of enslaved laborers and the newer colonies, still occurred until the official abolition of slavery twenty-seven years later (Williams 1944). Because planters on other colonies and smugglers were willing and able to trade enslaved people, the Caribbean planter class was not directly impacted by the abolition of the slave trade. Historian Eric Foner, in his 2008 National Public Radio interview “End of Slave Trade Meant New Normal for America,” notes that the abolition of the slave trade was, however, a direct precursor to the abolition of enslavement all together. Until British parliament abolished slavery in its colonies August 1, 1834, Caribbean plantation owners supported their business through the exploitation of enslaved people. Furthermore, emancipation did not immediately release Black people from enslavement. Those over the age of six were forced to serve a period of apprenticeship under their former owners, which lasted for six years for field laborers and four years for other workers (Olwig 1993:93). Apprentices were required to work forty and a half hours a week in exchange for food, clothing, housing and medical care (Olwig 1993:93). Additionally, apprentices had the “option” of buying their freedom and legally could not be sold or beaten (Hall 1971:16).

Emancipation took plantation economies from pure plantations, which relied on unfree labor into the second stage of plantation economies, *plantation economy modified*, which is characterized by “wage labor in the plantation sector and the creation of a residential sector producing for domestic and export markets” (Best and Levitt 2009:14). Sugar profits fell after emancipation as most plantation owners were unable to adapt their business model to do without the exploitation of enslaved people, despite retaining newly freed Black people as low-wage laborers. Gomez (2005:59) notes, “labor exploitation was key to the expansion, and critical to such labor was the capture and enslavement of Africans.” It was common for large plantations in the Caribbean to own over one hundred enslaved Africans at one time (Gomez 2005:87).

By the 1850s, St. Kitts and the other sugar islands were no longer the economic focus of Britain, which by this time had opened free trade, lifted duties on non-British sugar, and went through the industrial revolution. At the same time, beet sugar made up a quarter of the world’s supply. By the 1890s, Kittitian cane sugar was lucky to sell for production cost but averaged £2
less than its production (Hubbard 2002: 123). Many plantations were abandoned, sold, or leased to their workers in the mid and late 1800s (Hubbard 2002:117).

Creating the Village

Traditionally, Caribbean free villages, “rural, agricultural communities established to enable post-emancipation Afro-descendants to eke out a livelihood in a setting that was the antithesis of the highly restrictive and threatening spaces they had previously known” (Slocum 2017: 425), have been defined by scholars through the lens of their disconnection with the plantation (Mintz 1958; Besson 1979, 2002, 2016). In her examination of the free villages in the Caribbean as places of resistance and catalysts “for a sense of autonomous or alternative living,” Slocum (2017) notes that “the Afro-Caribbean village emerges as one site for uncovering Afro-descended smallholders’ fraught relationships with larger economic structures” and “the space of the village (as a physically delimited place) [provides] material/physical and social resources that buffer—in some cases annul—that relationship.” However, Marshall (1979) notes that “planter policy and land access shaped whether and in what volume the formerly enslaved withdrew from the estate” (In Slocum 2017: 432 n2).

In St. Kitts, some freed Black people were able to establish villages on unused land or abandoned plantation land. In 1840, a customs officer named John Challenger sold small lots or tracts of land to newly free laborers (Dyde 2005), in a residential area known today as Challengers Village. Additionally, some people were able to clear land for farming and living (Richardson 1983), particularly to grow root crops in the highlands (Farag, et al 2005) but economic opportunities outside of sugar cultivation and available arable land were extremely limited. Those who could, left for larger islands or found wage work as skilled laborers or craftsmen but, in line with Marshall’s observation, many people continued to live and work on the plantations. Even the established villages off the plantation were often on land owned by plantation owners (Frucht 1978, Hubbard 2002). Laborers were tied to the plantations “through its tenancy-wage dependence on landlord-capitalist plantation owners and operators” (Frucht 1978: 91). Anthropologist and historian Robert Frucht (1978: 92) notes that “the right to rent and the privilege of using estate lands for provision-ground and pasture depended on regular employment on particular estates. The power of eviction was often used as were the various contract laws, preventing workers from seeking the most favorable wage rates among competing plantations.” The unequal relationship between Kittitian laborers and the plantation remained
until the closure of the industry in 2005. The relationship between workers and the plantations changed marginally after the nationalization of the industry, although many argue the state just assumed the role of the plantation owner. This is discussed further later in this chapter.

**Exploitation and Resistance**

Despite the decline of the industry, sugar remained the island’s main industry for decades. As sugar continued to decline, plantation owners abandoned, sold, or leased their property. Still, the wealthy plantation owners were able to maintain their life of luxury through the exploitation of their laborers. Many freed Black people often continued to work the fields because limited jobs, land space, or other financial options existed for former enslaved Africans. The sugar industry, like most capitalist industries, goes through cycles of booms and busts. During the busts, plantation owners have “the ability to postpone adjustment to unfavorable circumstances by consumption of human capital,” a power which they exercised by overworking, underfeeding, and underpaying their workers, especially in times of economic crisis (Best and Levitt 2009:15). For example, an earthquake destroyed much of the stone buildings on the island in 1843. By postponing their circumstances through the exploitation of laborers, many of the wealthier plantation owners were able to rebuild after the earthquake. They were also able to afford to keep up with the advancing technologies which improved sugar quality and output.

Frucht (1978:93) notes that despite the economic hold the plantation owners had on their employees, the workers still held small acts of resistance against the plantocracy. Frucht’s work focuses on active resistance within the sugar industry such as striking. He makes note of the biggest strike in Kittitian history in 1894 when fieldworkers struck right before harvest and lit the cane field on fire in the process. There was a violent backlash from the plantation owners but the strike led to eventual higher pay. Frucht credits this act of resistance for motivating the plantation owners to mechanize and streamline sugar production to increase profits and yields without demanding more labor from their workers. In the next section, I explore how the sugar industry transitioned to what Frucht (1978) defined as the Modern Plantation System through the building of a sugar processing plant, drastically changing the sugar production process and providing a much needed but temporary boost to the sugar industry.
1911-1960: Sugar’s Comeback

The “slide of commodity prices and the collapse of the world economy in the 1930s” (Best and Levitt 2009:14) signaled the end of the “plantation economy modified” and brought the Caribbean region to the plantation economy further modified. Best and Levitt described plantation economies further modified as having organized labor with industrialization. St Kitts, however, began industrializing as early as 1911. Because sugar production fell by half after Emancipation and continued to fall through the nineteenth century, a private group of investors from a London-based company attempted to streamline the industry and increase profits by constructing a modernized central sugar processing factory in 1911, along with new infrastructure to transport cane, including an 18-mile cross-island train. The train brought cane from the rural villages to a centralized sugar factory right above Basseterre. This meant that, for the first time in almost 300 years, plantations were no longer self-contained and the sugar production was separated “by ownership and location” into an agricultural sector in the cane fields and an industrial sector in the factory (Frucht 1978:93). While the plantation owners still maintained control over their estates, they were no longer processing the sugarcane they produced. Instead, they sold their cane to the factory. This modernized factory system allowed St. Kitts to produce sugar long after other islands abandoned the practice by reducing manpower and increasing production capabilities and thus increasing profits.

World War I provided a boost to the industry as beet sugar from Europe was no longer coming to the United States, opening a market, and increasing prices (Hubbard 2002). By the 1920s, sugar prices were back down to pre-war prices and dropped by another half during the depression. In spite of the post-war price drop and the Great Depression that marked the time in between World War I and II, plantation owners were still able to make a profit by refusing to pay higher wages or provide holiday bonuses or other benefits, typical of a plantation economy. Kittitian workers’ conflict with the management of the plantations and the foreign-owned factory resulted in intensified race and class conflicts while the agricultural laborers continued in their unequal but co-dependent relationship with the plantation (Frucht 1978). Frucht (1978:93) notes that the modernization of the sugar industry “carried with it, into the modern era, the socio-political inequalities of the Nineteenth Century.” He characterizes the time period as one of poor housing and diet, high infant mortality, and oppressive laws that prevented workers from seeking better wages on competing plantations. It was also a time period when benevolent societies such
as the Universal Benevolent Association and their newspaper the *Union Messenger* started to emerge as advocates for workers’ rights. The plantation owners still had the advantage of political and economic power and landownership which often meant they were not only bosses but also landlords who could threaten eviction which hampered participation in and power of the unions (Frucht 1978).

Again, in WWII, sugar prices rose because of high wartime demands in what former plantation owner Phillip Walwyn described as the sugar industry’s “last hurrah” in his book, *More Rain More Rest*, a first-person account of the process of and his feelings towards the nationalization of the sugar industry as a plantation owner. During WWII, 51,000 tons of sugar were produced on 160,000 acres on sixty estates (Dyde 1999). All the sugar produced was sold to Great Britain at a guaranteed price. Still, “the higher cost of imported goods offset the benefits of the price rise” Hubbard (2002: 137). The German presence in the Caribbean strained the already fragile economy of St. Kitts. German U boats regularly sank supply ships coming from Europe and exports from the islands, as well as inter-island commerce ships. As a result, imported goods such as flour were unattainable and “agricultural self-sufficiency had sustained the population to a great extent” as the island returned to the pre-1700s diet of cassava flour (Hubbard 2002: 137).

Shortly after WWII, tourism was beginning to pick up in St. Kitts and the Caribbean region as a whole (Mintz, 1985, Olwig 1993, Pattullo 1996, Lorde and Drakes 2011). The 1950s also saw modernization within the sugar industry and the replacement of human labor with mechanized labor such as cane loaders. This mechanization increased efficiency and productivity of the sugar industry but caused negative impacts on the workers by cutting down on the number of employees needed and changed the cutting and packing process. One of the major impacts of the change in the cutting and packing process, as Frucht (1978: 95) points out, was that workers were now working on their own instead of in gangs, which “individualizes the cutting process, reducing co-operation and creating competition among workers from which only the planters gained.” The modernization of the industry also impacted the Kittitian economy as a whole by increasing its dependence on foreign-built technology, fuel, and machine parts.

Also during this time, the British government recruited Caribbean people, including Kittitians, to work in their factories and hospitals in order to replenish a depleted workforce after WWII. With many Kittitian workers leaving for the promise of a better life in the metropole and
the ability to support their family at home through remittances, cane cutters were brought in from places like Guyana to fill the void left by the migrating workers (Frucht 1978:96).

On October 6th, 1952, St. Kitts held its first local election under universal suffrage. Prior to this, participation in elections was limited by a property qualification, excluding the landless class of workers. In 1967, St Kitts was granted Associated Statehood with a full internal self-government under the first Premier, Robert L. Bradshaw. Despite the modernization of the industry, universal voting rights and the election of the Labour party, and the efforts of Unions to improve conditions, the St Kitts’ plantocracy was able to hold political and economic control over the island until a revolutionary action taken under the leadership of Robert Llewellyn Bradshaw. The next section discusses Bradshaw’s nationalization of the sugar industry, including the factory, railway, and all sugar fields and plantations, and the repercussions of taking control away from the plantocracy for the first time in hundreds of years.

The Nationalization of the Sugar Industry

The 1970s started what Richard Frucht (1978: 91) called the Nationalized Plantation System time period of post-emancipation sugar production in St Kitts. Robert Bradshaw, the premier at the time who had a long history as a fighter for worker’s rights, even serving as president of the Saint Kitts and Nevis Trades and Labour Union (TLU) in the 1940s, spearheaded an initiative for the government to take control of the sugar factory, the railway, and all the agricultural land, including the sugar fields beginning in 1972 (Hubbard 2002: 152).

Governmental intervention in the sugar industry was implemented to lessen the control of the planter class who had held economic, governmental, and land control over the island for 300 years and address the “historical short-comings of the plantation system” such as “declining sugar production, growing financial problems, rising unemployment and the social tensions and anxieties which flow from those problems” (Buckmire 1978a:65). Philip Walwyn, whose grandfather employed Robert Bradshaw’s mother on his plantation, recognized that “a handful of families owned all the land and sugar was eighty percent of the economy” (2018:25). His book about sugarcane production and its nationalization proclaims that was “the normal ratios of ownership and control in a capitalistic society. But no longer acceptable in those post-colonial era days, when looked at in black and white” (Walwyn 2018:25).
The nationalization of the sugar industry did not become official until the passage of the Sugar Estates and Land Acquisition Act in 1975 and the purchase of the sugar estates, which accounted for seventy percent of the arable land, from the plantation owners for 20 million USD (Buckmire 1978a:65, Hubbard 2002: 151). Plantation owners interested in staying on the island were allowed to keep their homes and property with non-sugar businesses such as inns. The nationalization of the sugar industry did not go unchallenged by the plantation owners. Phillip Walwyn describes the ten years in court as a waste of time. “One does not take lightly having one’s property seized, and seized it was” (2018:16), he said, even though he received almost four million US dollars for land his family acquired through marriage into a family who had colonized St Kitts and was allowed to keep his house, an inn, and 20 acres of farmland. Additionally, some side deals to sell the lands privately were made and exactly how the sugar fields left the plantation owners’ legal possession remains unclear (Hubbard 2002:152). For the Walwyns and other plantation owning families, the nationalization of the sugar industry meant that they lost the political and economic power that they had been forcibly holding on to since colonization in the 1600s. For the local people, the nationalization of the sugar industry was intended to mean local control of economic and natural resources, a release from white domination, and a diversification of the economy.

Walwyn, calling the government after the nationalization of the sugar industry the “new masters,” described the takeover as “simply a changing of the guard” and not the emancipatory revolution it was portrayed (2018:25). While Walwyn was obviously biased, the nationalization of the sugar industry brought the sugar workers higher pay but did little to change the social structures of the island as the government took the role of the ruling class of planters (Hubbard 2002:152). Best and Levitt (2009:15, 16) note that in export-oriented plantation economies, the “decision-maker in the hinterland” will function as the planter, even as economies change because there is no seismic shift that takes the economy from passive incorporation, characteristic of a plantation economy, to active incorporation, involving local entrepreneurship and interindustry linkages.

Willie Dore, Permanent Secretary for the Department of Agriculture during the government takeover of the industry, was much more optimistic of the process and the future of agriculture in St Kitts, spearheading the Sugar Industry Rescue Operation (SIRO) in the time period between the start of the government’s takeover of the sugar industry and the Sugar Estates
and Land Acquisition Act. Dore discussed this initiative with me during an interview in 2019. Despite being 94 years old at the time, he recalled with considerable ease and accuracy dates, tonnages, and planting techniques. They were able to increase sugar production from 22,000 tons in 1972 to 25,000 in 1975. In 1977, the island produced 41,700 tons of sugar, which according to Dore was the highest ton per acre in the recorded history of sugar cane production in St Kitts (cross referenced with Buckmire 1978a, McDonald 1978). Dore credits the improvement to a different variety of cane that they imported from Barbados. The new cane produced more per acre, grew faster and upright for easy harvesting, and had less fiber so it was easier to mill and produced more juice. By the end of the year, the Sugar Industry had to invest in new mechanized cutters and bring in more field laborers from Guyana. In that year, fifty-five percent of the agricultural land was used for sugarcane (Buckmire 1978a:69).

The nationalization of the sugar industry was only three years prior to Frucht’s writing in 1978 when he asked “Another question that comes to mind as a result of nationalization has to do with the traditional privileges that workers enjoyed as employees of particular estates. Some Nineteenth century survivals are important to the working class - the right to cultivate estate lands for provisions (which right has in fact been expanded and aided by the State Corporation) and the right to pasture livestock.” Despite Frucht’s concern, the agricultural land not used for sugar, including the steeper slopes above the sugar lands and the ghauts continued to be used to grow food and tree crops and to graze livestock (Buckmire 1978a:69). However, “extensive multiple cropping, the small size of the holdings, the varied methods of marketing the produce and large numbers of landless farmers” made tracking non-sugar crop production challenging (Buckmire 1978a:70). Moreover, sugar’s domination of the island’s agricultural economy meant that “the majority of the people in the agricultural sector of St. Kitts, therefore, are sugar oriented and thus are not agriculturally trained in managing small farms and growing food crops” (McDonald 1978).

In an attempt to manage these issues, the government implemented initiatives to increase sugar and non-sugar production. The National Agricultural Corporation (NACO) was formed after SIRO ended in 1975. The job of NACO was to “engage in the production of sugar cane, foster the development of the sugar industry, assist individual cane farmers, encourage other industries on land which was unsuitable for sugar cane and foster agriculture generally by utilizing the land when not used for cane by growing other crops” (McDonald 1978:21).
Nevertheless, St Kitts continued to import a majority of their food. As sugar declined and more labor was needed in tourism and other industries, Kittitians had increased purchasing power and access to supermarket food. Mayers' (1979) study of household level food consumption found that Kittitians spent the largest portion of their weekly expenditures on rice, flour, cooking oil, and fresh meat. While Mayers made no mention of backyard gardening, farming, bartering, or source sharing and made no distinction between local and imported food, he did note that “the lower income groups bought essential commodities which nevertheless took a heavy toll of their incomes, whereas the higher income groups bought more expensive foods which were not necessarily more nutritious” (Mayers 1979:517).

Imported food was always necessary for the island but at some point, it also became a preference. Buckmire (1978a:66) noted that, despite the government’s attempt to restrict the importation of peas, beans, white potatoes, onions, canned soups and canned vegetables, Kittitians prefer “flour and rice over yam and sweet potatoes over cassava” and with “such a consumption pattern it is clear that St. Kitts and Nevis is in no position to produce all the food consumed.”

In addition to importing a majority of their food, St Kitts continued to export very few non-sugar agricultural products despite the country’s strategic location that would allow them to “exploit the agricultural commodity markets of the Caribbean ’complex, CARICOM, and Metropolitan States” (Buckmire 1978a:66). The only notable exception is their periodic exportation of peanuts, grown by estate workers and small farmers on fallow sugar fields, to the surrounding Caribbean islands. In his study specifically on the potential of peanut production that same year, Buckmire (1978b) observed that, while St Kitts did export some peanuts, they also spent $173,035 EC over the ten years prior to his study on peanut imports from the United States. Peanuts are an important snack food in St Kitts still today. At the time of Buckmire’s study (1978b:234), it was “a Saturday evening tradition for the children to obtain their small packets of roasted nuts from the roadside vendors who thus had a lucrative business. The estate workers, who were the only producers of the crop, often used immature peanuts as a vegetable after the full pods were selected. The immature pods were boiled and served as a cooked vegetable.” He recommended an increase in production from 1120 kg per hectare to at least 9641 kg per hectare as he was able to do in controlled plots to reduce the import bill.
Despite the changes made to the structure and management of the sugar industry and the attempted refurbishment of non-sugar agriculture, tourism, which had been on the rise since the 1950s, surpassed sugar in contribution to the nation’s GDP for the first time. (Olwig 1993, Daniel 2009, Clarke and Barker 2012). The construction of an airport in the 1970s helped tourism surpass sugar as the primary economy. Sugar would never regain its place as ruler of the Kittitian economy. The next section discusses how this shift in economic power impacts the island’s agricultural and food system during the time the nation was rallying for and eventually was granted independence from Great Britain for the first time since 1624.

The 1980s: Independence and Citizen by Investment

St. Kitts and Nevis became an independent federation within the British Commonwealth in September 1983 under the first Prime Minister Kennedy Simmons. That same year, the National Agricultural Corporation (NACO) reported that “agriculture production satisfies only 30% of the domestic food requirements, while it is felt that the potential exists for this figure to reach as high as 65%.” In an attempt to reach that potential, NACO “implemented a developmental policy of diversification of agriculture” by maximizing “the use of existing arable land for increased food production to meet local demand and improve the nutritional status of the country at large,” producing crops for export, promoting agro-based industries, and creating employment opportunities in agriculture” (Kelly 1983). Within that initiative, Willie Dore, who had switched positions and was now the manager of NACO, began a project called the Peanut Project to include peanuts as part of the national agriculture scheme along with sugar. During our interview in 2019, he reminisced on his plan to use peanuts to increase the health of the island’s population, sugar yields, and the economy. Peanuts replenish the soil of the nutrients sugar depletes, making it the perfect crop to plant on fallow fields. Additionally, the growth rate and heights make it easy to intercrop between sugarcane rows. Peanuts are also an exportable crop and provide food and employment for Kittitians. Dore’s project eventually grew to 600 acres of peanut fields. Unfortunately, after a big sale of 240,000 pounds of peanuts to Barbados, Dore parted ways with NACO in 1988, and the peanut project withered.

By 1984, the sugarcane area cultivated declined 4% but the “total production increased by about 5%; yields rose from 31.5 tons per acre in 1987 to about 34.4 tons per acre in 1988” (World Bank 1990:3). Despite the rise in yields, sugar, which remained central to Kittitian
culture and economy and under the control of the government, was still operating at a financial loss because of the decline in global prices throughout the 1980s, according to the World Bank report.

Concurrent with the decline of sugar production, non-sugar agriculture production rose, which is in line with my participants’ remembrance of the 1980s as the golden age of small-scale agriculture. While non-sugar agriculture contributed only 1.4% to the GDP, “white potato production increased from 35,000 pounds in 1986 to 235,000 pounds in 1988. Carrot production increased from 50,000 pounds in 1986 to 100,000 pounds in 1988. Cabbage production also increased from 50,000 pounds in 1986 to about 100,000 pounds in 1988” (World Bank 1990).

Many of my participants credit the increase in non-sugar agricultural production to the Central Marketing Corporation (CEMACO), which, despite being open from 1973 to 2009, is mostly discussed among my participants as functioning the most efficiently in the 1980s. CEMACO “was a marketing agent for non-sugar agricultural produce. CEMACO acted as an outlet for farmers to dispose of excess supply of a product, and functioned as a price stabilizer, absorbing excess supply and preventing prices from falling” (WTO 2012). In 1978, CEMACO was reorganized to include, “off-farm storage facilities,” “distribution and transportation of the final product to the identified consumer,” “regulation of production and working knowledge of future markets local, intra and extra regional,” “identification of the consumers thus producing accordingly,” “quality control in keeping with the nutritional status of the Society and the desires of the identified consumers,” and “pricing of the commodity” (Buckmire 1978a).

The CEMACO building which still stands abandoned, is located on the edge of the capital city, Basseterre. Farmers were able to bring their products there instead of selling privately. A farmer from the countryside of the island, in a conversation about the state of Kittitian agriculture during my fieldwork in 2019, reminisced about how agriculture has changed over the years. “Back in the day there was a depot. They would have called it CEMACO. Central Marketing Corporation. When a farmer, back then, would produce whatever he could produce and [CEMACO] would, if you don't have [transportation], they would come and collect it. If you have [transportation], you would just drop it off and they would sort the food and pay you accordingly. I feel there is a definite need for something like that again,” he said. According to an employee at the Central School Farm Project, a working farm designed to teach primary and secondary school students agriculture through hands-on techniques, “producers were able to
produce without fear of not being able to sell their goods so they were more stable. It is hard to find your own market as an individual.” Additionally, having a market such as CEMACO allowed farmers to take risks when it came to growing different produce because they had a guaranteed market.

At the same time, a rapid growth in tourism allowed the country to increase the GDP by 5% annually from 1984 to 1988, which “offset the weak performance in sugarcane production caused by the reduction in import quotas in the US” (World Bank 1990). According to a 1990 report from the World Bank on the economic performance of St Kitts and Nevis, stayover traffic increased at an annual average rate of 15% from 1984 to 1987 and increased by 6 percent in 1998. The United States constituted a large portion of these stayover visitors at 36 percent in 1986 and 42 percent in 1988. Moreover, the government of St Kitts decided to expand from traditional tourism to include educational tourism. According to the Minister of Tourism, St Kitts solicited Ross University and it was opened in 1982. While this was the first venture into educational tourism, it became an integral part of the contemporary Kittitian service industry.

While the tourist boom of the 1980s presented a potential market for non-sugar agriculture, the World Bank’s 1990 report correctly predicted the precarity of non-sugar agriculture due to tourism and construction for tourism likely drawing away labor. Furthermore, Hurricane Hugo closed out the decade by devastating the island in 1989, destroying twenty percent of the sugar crop (World Bank 1900). Thirty years later, Hurricane Hugo is widely talked about by my participants as the moment even non-sugar agriculture hit the point of no recovery.

The government of St. Kitts and Nevis has implemented other outward-looking neoliberal policies and programs designed to increase foreign investment and pay off external debts such as the Fiscal Incentives Act, which provides tax incentives to foreign investors. The most notable program to come out of the 1980s and one that has a substantial role in the Kittitian economy today, is the Citizen by Investment Program (CBI), which started in 1984 and grants citizenship to foreigners who invested in real estate. Single applicants must purchase a government approved property for a minimum of 400,000 USD or purchase 200,000 USD worth of shares in a real estate company that owns CBI approved real estate or development projects. With the purchase of a property, the investor receives a deed which must be held for a minimum of five years. After five years, they are allowed to sell the property and retain citizenship. With the investment in a company, the buyer receives a share certificate and a Shareholders Agreement which can be sold
after seven years. Investors in property are also exempt from taxes, including the Alien Landholding Tax, for a period of time that is specified in their contracts. St Kitts does not have withholding tax or personal tax.

All routes to CBI include additional fees of about 90,000 USD spread out among International Market Agents, CBI form fees, passport application fees, processing fees to the government, legal fees, and bank fees for escrow accounts. All investors get full citizenship rights, including the right to vote. “Note the implication of 12,000 floating passports if they all return to vote at the same time. Including Another 15,000 ex-patriots in England, US, and Canada. And only 55,000 residents,” said a Kittitian-born real estate agent who sells CBI approved properties. Although he insists that most CBI passport holders are primarily interested in the passport for “ease of business-related travel” so they have no interest in voting in the elections, he admits it is a calculated risk for the country.

Citizen by Investment differs from traditional real estate and tourism in several important ways. Primarily, CBI participants do not have to reside or even visit St Kitts in order to purchase a home or condo and obtain citizenship. This means that they might not bring money directly into the economy in the way that tourism brings foreigners in to patronize local businesses. Instead of creating a space for local agriculture and bringing more people into the island to stimulate the local economy, the money that CBI brings into the island remains in the hands of the elites, business owners, lawyers, real estate agents, and bankers. Sugar was operating at a loss but, as noted earlier, the early to mid 1980s were the peak time of government support for non-sugar agriculture. This move towards foreign investment that allows foreign developers to build on and sell land while completely alienating locals from all profit signaled a trend that would lead to the end of governmental support of sugar and non-sugar agriculture.

With sugar and non-sugar agriculture struggling, the island increasingly focused on tourism and foreign investment until the sugar industry was officially closed in 2005. The next section discusses the decade leading up to that decision.

The 1990s, and early 2000s

In 1991, the World Bank gave St. Kitts and Nevis a one-million-dollar loan to support the St. Kitts and Nevis Agricultural Development Support Project, which supported sugar and non-
sugar agriculture. Despite this initiative, agriculture and in particular, sugar and molasses prices, production, and amount exported fell in the 1990s and was unable to recover.

In 1993, St Kitts became a member of the World Trade Organization, whose “main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible” by providing a space for member states to settle trade disputes. Plantation economies and passive incorporation mean policies of “indiscriminate opening of the economy to imports and to foreign capital as prescribed by the rules of the World Trade Organization, the conditionalities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the terms of bilateral trade agreements with developed countries” (Girvan xxii: 2009).

In 1999, St. Kitts’ 30 working plantations were producing 30,000 tons of sugar, which they sold at a loss despite preferential prices by the United States and European Economic Community (EEC) (Dyde 1999:51). The sugar industry “sustained annual financial losses exceeding $35 million per year after 2002 and had accumulated debt amounting to $315 million EC by the end of 2004” (Clarke and Barker 2012: 10), which is about 116,556,583 USD. Additionally, according to Barrientos (2005 in Clarke and Barker 2012: 9), “the contribution of the agriculture sector to the real GDP declined from 15.6% in 1980 to 5.2% in 2004.”

Concurrent to sugar’s decline, tourism continued to intensify. In 1990, the World Bank observed that “the country seems to be on the verge of a major expansion in tourism with the opening up of the Southeast Peninsula and major developments in Frigate Bay” with the construction of an access road, sewage systems, and a water pipeline in the late 1980s. The island soon built a port capable of docking cruise ships (Dyde 1999, Hubbard 2002), further allowing the tourist industry to prosper.

The early 2000s also saw a major jump in tourism projects. Recognizing “their former sugar industry as a potential resource for heritage tourism” (Dodds and Jolliffe 2013), the government of St Kitts and Nevis began to define former plantations to repurpose into small bed and breakfasts in 1993. The sugar transportation train began giving stay-over visitors and cruise ship day trippers tours in 2003. According to the St. Kitts Scenic Railway, the train is a “living link to a past when sugar ruled the island's economy.” In 2003, the tourist industry jumped to another level with the construction of its first chain resort. The Marriott towers over the small resorts with its 5 floors, 320 Rooms, 69 suites, and 9 meeting rooms. There is also an 18-hole golf course, casino, full spa, and a fitness center. The Marriott is 121 rooms larger than the
largest hotel at the time, the 268-room Jack Tar Village, now the Royal St. Kitts Hotel. Kaasab, a local real estate agent who sells high end properties noted that the brand name of the Marriott brought many North American tourists and eventually expatriates to St. Kitts. “People started buying land and prices skyrocketed. Before Marriott was built, plots of land in Frigate Bay were 5 USD a square foot and then rose to 20 USD a square foot. Some empty lots cost millions of dollars now.” This made this land unavailable to local people. Additionally, Kasaab went on to explain that the Alien Landholder License which charges foreigners an extra 10% of the property value was lifted for people purchasing on Frigate Bay.

Best and Levitt note the plantation economy was established “in the first place by political colonization but it is maintained by the operations of the predominant economic institutions.” In that way, St. Kitts’ externally oriented economy based on tourism and foreign direct investment continues to maintain the primary characteristics of a plantation economy, a hinterland tied to the metropole with passive integration into the international economy. The government struggled to keep the sugar industry open because of the historical and economic importance on the island but in 2005, they made the decision to close it down officially. The next section discussed the closure and the impact it had on land, labor, and the food system of St Kitts.

**The Official End of the Sugar Industry**

St. Kitts’ sugar industry was struggling to compete on the global economic stage, even after the government nationalized production in the 1970s. Losses mounted with the “antiquated factory and railway, diminishing acreage, and intense international competition” (St. Kitts Scenic Railway). In June of 2005, the European Union proposed a new Sugar Regime, to be implemented in 2006 which would remove the vital preferential prices with Europe. At the time of the EU proposal in 2005, “sugar was estimated to contribute annually only around 4% of the GDP in St. Kitts. The new regime meant that extremely small island sugar producers like St. Kitts would be required to (fairly) compete with other much larger international sugar producers whose economies of scale and financial backing dwarfed the capacity of the local sugar industry” (Clarke and Barker 2012: 9). St. Kitts’ sugar producers were unable to compete with large international sugar producers like Brazil and the United States without preferential prices (Pattullo 1996, Klak et al. 2011, Clarke and Barker 2012, Clarke 2016). Denzil L. Douglas, the
Prime Minister at the time, announced that the sugar industry would officially close after the end of the 2005 Crop. Clarke (2016:54) added that “the closure of the state-owned St Kitts Sugar Manufacturing Cooperation (SSMC) in 2005 was a strategic choice by the Government of St Kitts and Nevis in response to losses in production, increasing indebtedness to the local banking system, and global changes in preferential market access.” Clarke (2016:56) calls the closure of the sugar industry “a result of the competitive mismatch between internationally competitive, large sugar producers and the ailing sugar industry in a small island state.” In short, sugar production was costing the government money. The last “sugar train” rattled into the yard and the factory machinery was shut down on July 31, 2005, bringing an end to over 350 years of sugar production on the island (St. Kitts Scenic Railway).

Sugar's slow decline over the decades allowed for incremental change on the island but the government's decision to close the industry in 2005 allowed them to divert resources into tourism and development projects which were more aligned with the needs of the global economic market. Furthermore, the closing of the industry allowed the Citizen by Investment Program and other investments to increase because it freed up land that was formally designated to sugar production for mostly international developers and investors. The same year of the sugar industry closure, St Kitts completed major renovations of the airport, extending the runway over sugar fields so it was big enough to facilitate large-scale international travel. The government also built Port Zante, a 36-slip marina and 60 duty-free shops around the cruise ship port dredged in the 1990s.

By this time, education had become a major part of the tourism industry. In 2000, St Kitts acquired its second school, Windsor University School of Medicine. DeVry purchased Ross University from its founder Robert Ross and his partners in 2003. The amount it was purchased for varies greatly between sources. In 2007, Dr. Ross opened the University of Medicine and Health Sciences. The Minister of Tourism, Lindsay Grant, noted that the universities and their students help boost the economy and the tourism numbers. “I consider [the universities] tourism 365 days a year because they have to get accommodation, they rent cars, buy food. If you pulled Ross and the others out of the system, we would have a hard time because even when they go away for vacation, the supermarkets can tell. Just by their numbers, they know when Ross University is on break because the numbers drop” he said.


When the industry closed, the train that was built in the 1900s to transport sugarcane to factory in town was repurposed by a private company, St. Kitts Scenic Railway. Today, it runs a train and bus tour of the island in what the website calls a “unique partnership between Government and private enterprise.”

Map 2.1 shows the thirty-mile route that the “living link to a past when sugar ruled the island's economy” brings passengers “can hear this story from our own people, hear the songs we sing, have a cool drink with us, and wave at our children as we pass through the villages where many of us live” (St. Kitts Scenic Railway). “This is the real Caribbean, the way it has always been, on an island that most people have never seen or heard about,” the website boasts as if time stands still in St. Kitts.

Despite the ways people involved in tourism and foreign investment essentialize and marginalize the communities in which they conduct business, for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), including St. Kitts and fifteen other Caribbean nations, the decline in agriculture means that tourism is the only growing economic sector (Scheyvens and Momsen 2008: 23). In line with that observation, total visitors to St Kitts have increased by 232 percent from 2000 to 2014, according to the Eastern Caribbean Bank. Agriculture now only makes up 1.1 percent of the GDP compared to 5.2 percent of the Caribbean Regional average. Tourism makes up 71.4 percent of the GDP compared to the regional average of 67.5 percent (World Bank 2017). The most recent World Bank figures state that .2 percent of the population is employed in agriculture, 48.9 percent in industry (construction, public utilities, etc), and 42.1 percent in services (tourism and other tourist related industries).

Despite the obvious attention tourism was receiving, the Ministry of Sustainability released a report in 2006 that stated that “the ending of sugar production and the shift from sugar cane cultivation should result in an increase in alternative forms of agricultural production.” The stated intent was for the government to focus on developing non-sugar agriculture, particularly
crops, livestock, and fisheries between 2006-2013 to decrease the island’s dependence on imports, which at that time was seventy five percent of its annual food consumption. In that vein, the Sugar Industry Diversification Foundation was established with National Bank Trust Company in 2006. According to the SIDF, “its primary purpose was to assist the government to transition from sugar as the main industry to a more diversified economy by researching and funding the development of alternative industries.” Still, all roads lead to tourism and foreign investment as the SIDF is another route to citizenship through Citizen By Investment. Foreigners who were not interested in investing in real estate on the island could now be eligible to apply for a passport once they make a direct contribution of $250,000 to the Sugar Industry Diversification Fund (SIDF) or $150,000 to the Sustainable Growth Fund (SGF) for a single applicant. Additional fees apply for dependents and spouses.

Real estate agent Brian Kaasab also noted that developers began to push the SIDF and SGF avenues for CBI when they began to run out of property. Since the price of CBI by way of donation is much cheaper than purchasing property, the pendulum swung too far in the other direction and it eventually began to hurt the real estate market. Developers then started promoting real estate again by pointing out that, while donations to SIDF or SGF are the cheapest options towards becoming a citizen by investment, the buyer does not receive anything tangible or resalable. To navigate the limited land area of the island, even considering the newly vacant sugar fields, and to make a profit without pushing solely donations, CBI developers started building smaller and smaller residences. Instead of buying a house for 450,000, investors could get an apartment or condominium for the same price or even more.

As predicted, the “continued passive incorporation into the international economy will continue to reproduce the syndrome of the past” (Girvan 2009: xviii), tourism, including the universities, while increasing the island’s cash flow, did not cure the island from the issues of the plantation economy. While tourism is not an “export,” the industry is still outwardly controlled and owned. In line with a plantation economy in which the owners of the means of production, the resorts and schools are owned by international corporations, exploiting local wage laborers as they collect the profits. All three universities cater to foreign students who come from the mainland US, Puerto Rico, South Asia, and Africa. Most leave the island to practice in their home countries once their classes are complete and even do their clinical rotations in their home countries. Even the locally owned businesses that profit from the tourism industries such as taxi
services, local restaurants, and tour guide companies, are governed by external demand. As a whole, the tourist experience is crafted for the consumption of people from the metropoles and exclusionary for the local population, as such is sensitive to external shifts in demand.

Since St Kitts was settled by Europeans in the 1600s, the island has experienced changes in political control, global economic fluctuations, changes in technology, and demographic shifts. What remained constant was sugar production. The end of sugar production in 2005 was more than just the closure of an industry, it was an end of a cultural and economic era that caused a complete reimagining of Kittitian life.

**Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter gave an economic history of St Kitts, focusing on the many booms and busts of sugar agriculture as technology and international demand shifted to the eventual closure of the industry and the simultaneous rise in tourism and foreign investment. The history of St Kitts and the Caribbean region as a whole since European colonization is often discussed in terms of the plantation economy but a dynamic local culture grew in spite of and as a result of the plantation economy. To return to John Parry’s observation that the history of the region is “the story of yams, cassava and saltfish, no less than of sugar and tobacco” (1955:1), this chapter also focused, where possible, on subsistence food production and consumption practices. In many ways, the Caribbean continues to function as a plantation economy with export-oriented production, unequal access to job positions, and the concentration of wealth by foreign owned businesses (Williams 1944, Beckford 1974, Best and Levitt 2009). Karla Slocum notes that new mono-economies are often superimposed over existing colonial structures (Slocum 2006:258). The next chapter will explore how the plantation system has shaped the contemporary physical landscape, spatial layout, and food and socioeconomic systems of the island.
CHAPTER 3: Spatializing St Kitts

A few months before my attempt at carrying sugarcane with Armstrong, he invited me to his farm early on in my fieldwork. This was the first of many adventures with Armstrong during which he taught me many different things about life, history, and agriculture in St Kitts. At this time, I knew little about the island beyond the area between my apartment and the capital city of Basseterre. It was still dark at 5 in the morning when Armstrong picked me up for a day of work. He and his brother who works for him pulled up, and I climbed into his rattling twenty-five-year-old pick-up truck. His truck could be an archeological site in itself. He has phone numbers written in thick black sharpie all over the door panels and dashboard. A pile of produce boxes, plastic bags, and a collection of farm tools took up the small backseat of the truck’s cab, almost blocking the back window and even spilling into the front seat slightly. There is an assortment of fruit in the center console. “Eat this” he says as he hands me a bunch of silk figs, small sweet bananas that grow in the mountains. I munched on the figs as we made our way to the other side of the island on the only main road. Armstrong pointed out the old sugar factory which sits just above the capital city. The once essential building for the Kittitian economy is now a skeleton of rusted metal that people drive by daily, hardly even noticing.

Our first stop was a grocery store on the opposite side of the island. Armstrong needed to drop off boxes of produce for the store. I did not have a car so prior to this trip, I had only been in grocery stores in the capital, where I was easily able to get to by bus. He invited me inside with him. As I stepped through the door, I forgot I was on a rural Caribbean island. There were American brand goods everywhere. Piles of beautiful produce from the US and Mexico and featured prominently in the middle of the entrance was a display of vegan cheeses, vegan mayonnaise, and plant-based meats. My initial excitement faded into curiosity. Armstrong explained that many of the American students shop here so they needed to be well-stocked with goods popular with Americans, clean, and without the strong smell of the town store owned by the same family. It also meant that the store was significantly more expensive. I resisted the urge to spend all of my grant money on vegan cheese and followed Armstrong to the back room where he dropped a few boxes off, on credit, for the produce manager to weigh and price.

I walked back to the truck, still reeling from my teleportation from the Caribbean to the US and back and we restarted our journey to the farm. Like most farms in St Kitts, Armstrong’s farm sits on flat land on the mountain side. We turned off the main road onto a narrow road that
weaved through several villages before tapering off to a dirt road at the base of the jungle. The dirt road began in the ghaut. As we drove higher up the mountain, the narrow dirt road became increasingly encapsulated in jungle vegetation typical of a ghaut. These old roads through the mountain were built to access and move between the sugar fields. In the years since sugar closed, the roads are left to the jungle, cleared only by the traffic of farmers and the water department who come up here regularly to check the quality of the mountain reservoirs. As we bounced along, Armstrong told me stories of Maroon communities and rebel fighters that became infamous for attacking plantation managers as they rode between the plantations, the once booming but now bust dairy business that used some of the fields above us as pastures, and about how the sugar workers used these ghauts as provision grounds during production. In the way Basso’s participants told stories of their landscape as a way to pass on morals and ideals that the group valued (1996:38), the stories Armstrong told as we rode through the mountain demonstrate the deep-rooted cultural values of resistance, autonomy, and respect for the torment their ancestors endured.

In the middle of the ride, Armstrong stopped his truck and hopped out. He disappeared into the jungle for a few minutes and emerged with two fruits called manciport. I had heard about this fruit often but have never tasted it or even seen it. Armstrong pulled out a knife and cut through the thick light brown skin. He pulled the sweet orange flesh away from the big middle seed and handed it to me to taste. “These used to be everywhere. We used to throw them at each other when we were growing up. This is all I could find now” he said. As my time in St Kitts went on, I noticed that, like Armstrong, many of my other participants frequently use manciport as an example of landscape change, particularly after sugar, because their disappearance has been drastic. I did not know it at the time but this was my only chance to taste this fruit in my time in St Kitts.

Now sufficiently full of fruit, we continued on our way. We exited the jungle high on the mountain side on Armstrong’s farm which straddles two former sugar plantations. The deteriorating chimney of the sugar mill sticks out of a cluster of huge mango trees just above one of the fields. He uses those former sugar fields to grow things like pineapples, string beans, sugar cane, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and a variety of fruit trees, among countless other things. He gave me a tour of the farm before we got to work. The jungle-covered mountain that
we had emerged from looks like a painting in the backdrop of the perfect rows of the fields that curved with the hillside.

We walked past his field of guava trees and down along a path lined with coconut palms to a lookout. From there you can see clear down the mountain, past the checkerboard of agricultural fields and the village below, to the ocean. As we stood under the coconut palms looking out over the former sugar lands, the spatial divisions, unofficial segregation, and unequal food distribution I read about in preparation for this trip came to light just as the sun was rising above us.

In Setha Low’s *Spatializing Culture* (2017), a comprehensive review of ethnographies and theories of space and place, she defines social *production* of space as the exploration of how spaces are conceived, built, and created that “emphasizes the history and political economy of the built environment and landscape, providing insights into how and why they came into existence” (Low 2017: 10). In contrast, the social *construction* of space explores “differently distributed meanings, experiences, local knowledge, and individual as well as collective understanding of place, spatial relations and representations” (Low 2017:68). While Low notes the separation of social production and social construction of space, she notes that the “basic assumption is that space is socially constructed as well as material and embodied, and the aim is to develop a framework- *spatializing culture*- that brings these ideas together” (Low 2017:4).

In this chapter, and throughout the dissertation, I draw inspiration from Low’s concept of spatializing culture to weave together both the production of space as it relates to the purposeful establishment and configuration of plantations, villages, the capital city, and the exclusive tourist and high-end areas and the construction of space as it relates to the ways in which my participants navigate and give meaning to the built environment of the plantations, city, villages, and tourist areas and the natural landscapes such as the mountain and former sugar plantations and fields.

Drawing from Low and scholars such as Kathrine McKittrick, Margaret Marietta Ramírez, and Ashanté Reese who have critically analyzed spatial exclusion, the use of and relationships to space, space and colonialism, and space as resistance, this chapter provides a description of the geographical spatial layout of and economic resource distribution in St Kitts. This chapter also introduces the ways in which my participants navigate, give meaning to, and are excluded from these spaces, particularly agricultural spaces, and how the island’s history
impacts the island’s economy, demographic, food ideologies, and the livelihoods of agricultural producers today to provide the context for the subsequent chapters that will explore these concepts in depth.

**St Kitts: The anatomy of a cricket bat**

St Kitts is, to borrow an analogy from Kittitian primary school education, shaped like a cricket bat. Each part is clearly defined and is unofficially segregated through economic status into black and white, poor and rich spaces.
The face of the bat is called the mainland, where much of the island’s history took place. The remnants of the past are highly visible today. The mainland was significantly important for the island economy during plantation agriculture. In her work on the difficulties of integrating female former sugar workers into a post-sugar economy, geographer and St Kitts national Joyelle Clarke identified a region in St Kitts she refers to as the “sugar belt.” The sugar belt, the toe of the bat, consists of five parishes on the north and northeast section of the island. Although sugar production dominated the entire island’s economy, she defines the sugar belt as the parishes which had the highest concentration of sugar workers and the largest percentage of land under sugar cultivation (Clarke and Barker 2012:6). She notes that these parishes had higher poverty and unemployment rates compared to the rest of the island (Clarke 2016:61).

The sweet spot of the bat, Mount Liamuiga is a 3,792-foot dormant volcano that rises out of the center of the mainland, the middle of the cricket bat with her two daughter mountains. Prior to 1983 when the name was changed to Mount Liamuiga as a nod to the indigenous name for the island, Liamuiga, meaning fertile land, the mountain was known as Mount Misery because of the physical and emotional torture that took place on the mountain-side plantations. The mountains are part of the Central Forest Reserve National Park. According to the park’s management plan, it was originally set up for “the purposes of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development” shortly after the sugar industry closed and the island made the choice to switch to service industries. Before 2005, St Kitts had not had a major economic shift since sugar cultivation began almost 400 years ago, which dramatically changed the island’s natural and cultural landscape forever. Planters replaced the natural vegetation on all arable land with sugar cane (Farag et al 2005: 2; Richardson 1983; Meniketti 2016:55; Wilk 2006:10). The rainforest, which today is designated as part of the Central Forest Reserve covering Mount Liamuiga was the only natural landscape not completely disrupted by colonists and sugar producers (Beard 1949). Low (2017:211) echoes Massey (2005), states “space and place are always under construction, produced by local and global interactions and constituted by multiple bodies, collectives, and trajectories.” In that way, the closure of the sugar industry and the intensifying tourism industry, changed people’s relationship with the land, which spaces are important, which spaces are occupied, and how space is used. Development increased on the island but so did the realization of the cultural, historic, and natural resources of the rainforest that could prove invaluable in drawing foreign visitors. The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis,
with support from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States’ OECS Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods Project and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) designed the park to protect the natural resources of the mountain.

Villages are scattered along the base of the mountain and the Central Forest Reserve, stretching from the ocean up into the hillsides. When the sugar factory was built just above Basseterre in 1912, the skeleton of which Armstrong pointed out on our first day working together, another village of its employees grew around it. Many field workers remained in the villages close to the plantations where they worked for generations. Many former field workers and sugar factory employees and their families still live in their respective villages despite moving into different careers in the service sector such as taxi driving or food service after the industry closed. Still, as Clarke (2016) noted, the rural villages are still the poorest areas on the island. Villages today do not have the means to be self-contained as during plantation agriculture so travel in, out, and between is vital to rural life. There is one main road that skirts around the coastline of the mainland. Circling that road is a reliable and inexpensive public transportation system. Just stand on the side of the road and wave down one of the usually elaborately painted Toyota Hiace minibuses, referred to simply as buses, blaring soca or dancehall and for 2 Eastern Caribbean dollars, or 1 US dollar, you can travel to and from town from anywhere on the main road.

All three American universities on the mainland. The University of Medicine & Health Sciences and Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine are located on the Caribbean side of the island slightly north of Basseterre. Windsor University School of Medicine is located on the opposite side of the island in a town called Cayon. The University of Medicine & Health Sciences has about 300 students from Puerto Rico and the mainland of the US. Windsor University brings in 60 to 80 students a semester to the island. With each student staying on the island for about 5 years, the number of Windsor students on the island is about 300. Ross University is the largest foreign university bringing in over 500 students per year. Combined, there are over a thousand students on the island at any given moment. Combined, there are over a thousand students on the island at any given moment. Windsor and the University of Medicine & Health Sciences do not offer on campus housing but both have agreements with condos and resort residences. Both have agreements with The Royal St. Kitts Beach Hotel in Frigate Bay. Windsor has additional agreements with the Sugar Bay Resort in Frigate Bay and the Bird Rock
Beach Hotel in Bird Rock, in between Basseterre and Frigate Bay. UMHS suggests students look for housing at the Marriott residences as well as apartment developments in the neighborhoods around campus. While Ross has on campus housing, only about 150 students live on campus which means there are about 350 students living in Frigate Bay and in housing developments surrounding the school, according to their admissions office.

Aside from the few middle-class housing developments that house middle-class Kittitians and some students who do not live in Frigate Bay, most of the mainland is made up of rural villages except the capital city of Basseterre and two official towns, Cayon on the Atlantic side and Sandy Point on the Caribbean side. Both Sandy Point and Cayon are agricultural towns within the area that Clarke (2012, 2016) identified as the former Sugar belt. They both have their own stores, gas stations, and police stations. Many of the farmers in this study are from Cayon and Sandy Point. Unlike Basseterre, both towns are far from the tourism hubs of the island and have little tourist or foreigner traffic, with the exception of the few local businesses in Cayon patronized by Windsor students. Cayon is home to the only UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, an area designated by UNESCO as a biodiverse and protected ecosystem, in the Anglophone Caribbean. The Biosphere attracts some tourists on guided hikes or bus tours. Similarly, Sandy Point has the only UNESCO World Heritage Site in the federation, former British fort Brimstone Hill, which is a very popular destination for tourists on both guided and self tours.

The splice of the bat, Basseterre, is the only urban area on the island. It sits on the southwestern coast of the island’s mainland. Referred to by most people simply as “town,” the capital is the home of almost all the retail stores, government headquarters, the courthouse, the main post office, the library, the college, the cruise ship port, and the National Museum. Most buildings in Basseterre were built by English and French settlers and have been refurbished and repurposed into local businesses and residences. The grocery stores and the public produce market, which I will return to in the following sections, are also in the capital city.

In the center of town is Independence Square, built in the 1770s. It was designed to look like a Union Jack with a fountain in the middle and pathways from all corners leading toward the center. Originally, Independence Square was the central slave market where plantation owners and other slavers would purchase enslaved Africans, a fact left off the informational signs in the square, which instead focus on the island’s independence from Great Britain in 1983. Independence Square was also the original gathering space and public market where enslaved
people and, after emancipation, the formerly enslaved and free Black people were able to come sell their produce off their provision grounds. Wentworth’s West India Sketchbook Vol. 2 (1834: 6) described the square as:

The market-place of the negroes, where they assemble to gossip and quarrel, as well as to dispose of their stock, to the infinite annoyance of the inhabitants of the surrounding buildings, who have their peace invaded by the interminable hubbub of their voices, seasoned with the compound effluvia of their persons and their cooking.

According to the St Kitts National Archives’ archivist Victoria O'Flaherty, there are references in an early 19th century volume of the minutes of the council and assembly, who were meeting in the courthouse, where the councilors complained that there was too much noise coming from the market in the square. Today, the square is a hangout, a shortcut when walking, and a gathering place for cultural events that will be described further throughout this dissertation. The food trucks that line the southwestern side draw the weekday lunch crowd. It is also popular for tourists because of its closeness to the cruise ship port, the history of the space, and the beautiful fountain surrounded by benches and flowering trees.

When thinking of the Caribbean, many would picture white sandy beaches, luxury resorts, warm weather, and mixed drinks served in coconuts with straws. This version of the Caribbean, while in stark contrast to the rural village on the mainland, is manufactured for visiting tourists and local elites in Frigate Bay and the Southeast Peninsula. Frigate Bay, the first frontier of the tourism industry, sits just south of Basseterre in what would be the shoulder of the bat. There were hotels in town and one locally owned hotel in Frigate Bay but the tourism game changed in 2003 with the opening of the Marriot. Frigate Bay is now a densely developed residential area for foreign and local elites, students, and the beacon of tourism and nightlife with a strip of beach bars, the Marriott, several high-end and American-style restaurants, a grocery store, and coffee shops. The development grew and spread beyond Frigate Bay. This growth and spread was aided by the government of St Kitts and Nevis who, with help from the US Army Corps of Engineers, had the foresight to build a nicely paved road from the mainland all the way to the very tip of the peninsula in the 1980s. Until relatively recently, the paved road was, as Brian Kassab called it, adapting Sarah Palin’s infamous quote, “a beautiful road to nowhere.”

The Southeast Peninsula, the handle of the bat, is a stretch of land about a half of a mile wide and almost 7 miles long that extends out from the shoulder. The peninsula’s dry and rocky
soil means it is poor agricultural land so during industrial sugar production, it was left unused for the most part aside from subsistence harvesting of the salt ponds by locals. With its beautiful beaches on both sides, it is currently the crowned jewel of high-end tourism. Kasaab noted that the building of the Marriott in Frigate Bay was the jump start to tourism that the island needed but currently and for the foreseeable future, the peninsula is focusing on high-end luxury boutique tourism using St. Bart’s as a model because they do not want to lose the island charm that brings tourists to St. Kitts. In 2018, the Park Hyatt opened. It has 87 rooms, 48 suits, a full spa, and multiple swimming pools. There are also two multimillion-dollar gated residential communities, a mega yacht cruise ship dock and marina with a boutique shopping center and eateries, and several bars, restaurants, and beaches that are hot spots for the local elite and tourists.

Frigate Bay and the Peninsula are “seemingly public but actually private” spaces (Sibley 2002: xi) in that they are geographically and economically exclusionary. In contrast to black spaces on the mainland, most white locals, foreign elite, and students live in and frequent Frigate Bay and the Peninsula. Houses on the peninsula range from 4 million USD and up and in Frigate bay, 1 million and up. The main road that circles the mainland does not go to Frigate Bay or the Peninsula. That means that the affordable public transportation enjoyed on the mainland does not extend to Frigate Bay or the Peninsula because buses are prohibited from traveling on those roads. The beaches on the mainland are often referred to as “local beaches” which are directly opposed to the “tourist beaches” with the manicured beaches, restaurants, and bars. Even working in the tourism industry without personal transportation can be impractical. Additionally, those with limited education, language barriers, or limited experience dealing with foreigners, are unable or unwilling to find work in the service industry.

Food Flows- Where food comes from

In the years since sugar production ended, many former sugar workers continued to work as sugar producers and produce on provision grounds in the ghauts for subsistence and sale at the weekly public market as they did when they were working as sugar workers. In line with DeLoughrey’s (2011:63) observation that in Jamaica, provision grounds were “the less accessible and often mountainous land bequeathed from plantation owners because it was deemed unfit for sugar cane,” Kittitian provision grounds were often in the ghauts since most of
the preferable land was used for growing sugar cane (Richardson 1983:70). They are less appropriate for agriculture because their uneven, rocky ground is challenging to plant and difficult to access, especially with machinery. They are also wet and get little sun because of the thick jungle canopy, which has caused some farmers to move out of the ghauts and to the former sugar fields, leasing the land from the Department of Agriculture or squatting.

There are two hundred and eighty-four registered farmers on the island who grow cucumbers, tomatoes, ground provisions, lettuce, onions, peppers, breadfruit, Christophine, pineapples, bananas, and many other Caribbean crops. Fruit trees are becoming increasingly popular among farmers as wild populations of fruit trees in the mountain are dwindling. Because of the volcanic soil, water access, and rainfall, the mainland is the primary location for agriculture, with a few exceptions such as backyard gardens, and coconut palms in Frigate Bay and a small farm on the Southeast Peninsula. Most farm plots are between three and five acres but there are some as large as seventy acres.

Guyanese migrants have a strong presence in Kittitian agriculture. They were brought over as cane cutters and, like many local sugar workers, took up produce farming after the industry closed. There are also new migrants from St. Vincent who came over to farm in St Kitts. Through a political affiliation, Taiwan also has a strong presence in Kittitian agriculture, sponsoring and running several farms and agricultural training and granting programs.

While some people informally transport small quantities of produce to other islands, almost everything produced in St Kitts is consumed locally because no formal exportation channels exist. Turnhands from Nevis often come to buy produce from Kittitian farmers to resell in their town market. During mango season, Nevisian turnhands often bring them over to sell to the Kittitian turnhands because of Nevisian mangoes’ reputation for being sweeter than Kittitian ones. The produce St Kitts and Nevis sell to each other is not considered importing or exporting because they are a federation but it is important to note the interisland exchanges.

In addition to the farmers on the island, people also participate in agro-processing, using raw produce to make jams, jerky, hot sauces, tea bags, and the like, which they sell at markets, festivals, and in grocery stores. Some people participate in subsistence agriculture to meet or supplement their food needs. The number of people participating in subsistence provisioning through backyard gardening is unknown because many do not register with the Backyard
Gardeners Association. The Backyard Gardeners Association is not highlighted as much as the other associations and some of my participants were not even aware that it existed.

Local production, however, only makes up for a small fraction of the food in St Kitts. Because of structural factors that inhibit agricultural productivity and prosperity on the island, including politics of land ownership and food and labor ideologies, which will be discussed in the next chapter, eighty percent of the food in St Kitts is imported from the US, Mexico, and a few nearby islands despite the active and important agroscape of St Kitts. Walking around the grocery store, one can see berries, apples, lettuce, avocados from Latin America and the United States sold by faceless and disconnected industrial agriculture name brands such as Dole and Chiquita outnumber the local goods. St Kitts also imports many name brand American processed food products from the United States. Informally, many people have family members and friends abroad, mostly in New York, send barrels of goods. These goods often include food stuff such as canned and dry goods.

Regional produce from nearby islands occupies a space that is neither local nor foreign. Economically, regional produce is imported just as produce from anywhere else in the world. Culturally, they are sometimes considered or marketed as local because they come from similarly small Caribbean islands and turnhands often develop personal and economic relationships with the farmers directly, creating that connection that is missing from the industrial agricultural products in the grocery stores. The small island camaraderie can also lead consumers and turnhands to sometimes view regional produce from similar small islands as “close enough” to local. Still other times turnhands and especially farmers make clear distinctions over the quality of Kittitian produce in comparison to regional produce from elsewhere. St Kitts imports their regional produce from St. Vincent and Dominica. Turnhands from the two islands bring tubers which are called ground provisions in St Kitts, plantains, and bananas by boat alternating every other week. In September 2017, Hurricane Maria severely disrupted Dominica’s agricultural industry. It was not until recently that they began to export produce again and most of their coconut palms were destroyed. St. Kitts’ own coconut palms suffered a severe blow when a disease called Lethal Yellowing wiped out a majority of the trees. As a result, most of the coconuts in St Kitts and elsewhere in the Caribbean are from St Vincent. This produce is mostly bought from Dominican and Vincentian wholesalers to resell at the market and at street stands. Turnhands from Dominica and St. Vincent also sell to the grocery stores. Since completing
fieldwork, at least one of my participants has started bringing in bananas from St. Lucia due to Dominica’s struggle to recover and St. Vincent’s struggle to supply their customers and the void in the market left by Dominica.

The next section describes the web of distribution channels in which wholesale and retail channels through which local, regional, and global foods are sold to consumers.

**Food Flows- Where food is sold**

Resource distribution, including access and availability of food, is crafted in accordance with the socioeconomic system created by the colonial and imperial political and economic systems currently and historically in place in St Kitts. Food in St Kitts is sold in a variety of locations such as formal grocery stores, convenience stores, sit down restaurants, snackettes and other local takeaway shops, roadside stands, and food courts in the cruise ship port and in two other locations, and markets. These food distribution channels vary greatly across the island in terms of what foods are available, food prices, and food quality.

**Prepared Foods**

Formal eateries where you can buy prepared food are scattered around the island. There are several upscale restaurants in town as well as on the peninsula and Frigate Bay. In town, there are also Chinese food shops, a Subway, a KFC, two Dominos, and a Burger King which are just as popular with locals as foreigners. The cruise ship port, Port Zante, also has several sit-down restaurants and a food court featuring local and Jamaican, Indian, Middle Eastern, and American fare which all cater mostly to cruise ship passengers and students.

Chinese food shops spread throughout the island because of their increasing popularity with locals meaning processed unhealthy foods are easily available even in rural areas. Throughout the island there are local shops and snackettes in the villages. One participant noted that “every village has a chill spot.” These local spots usually sell local fare such as fried fish, fried balls of dough called Johnny cakes, soup, and patties. These spaces are almost exclusively patronized by locals and the occasional anthropologist.

The formal and informal eateries usually buy wholesale from local farmers and fisherman, produce traffickers from Dominica and St. Vincent, and international produce importers. Some restaurants and snackettes have their own farms or kitchen gardens. To buy fresh
produce and other goods for cooking at home, most people buy from grocery stores, produce turnhands, or from the farmers and fisherman themselves.

**Grocery Stores**

The grocery stores are the primary spot for food shopping. Depending on the location of the store, the quality varies greatly, with the cleaner, nicer stores in areas with a larger population of students and tourists.

Rams is the largest grocery store chain in St Kitts with four locations. It was opened in 1935 and is still family owned and operated. They have a location right on the main road in the capital city that is utilized mostly by locals. The three other locations are mostly used by students and tourists because of their location in the nicer areas of St Kitts. One is in the same area as Ross Veterinary School. One is in a middle to upper class residential neighborhood close to the shoulder of the bat to follow the comparison from the last section, and the last is across from the Marriot. A turnhand praised the family’s ability and willingness to work together and pass down the business. These spaces are not officially segregated but based on their price points and locations, they are primarily patronized by foreigners and local elites. Farmers are often not able to patronize the same stores with which they do business.

Best Buy is the only 24-hour grocery store in St Kitts which is close to Ross but is also very popular with locals. It is cheaper and not as fancy as the newer Rams. There is one Hosford IGA Valu Mart in St Kitts, on the main road, that was opened in the 1970s but they diversified into other things besides grocery stores so they are not competing in the same way Rams and Best Buy are. Valu Mart’s parent company Hosford is a local company that also sells car insurance, cars, and other non-food related products. Independent Grocers Alliance (IGA) is an international brand of grocery stores which started in the US in 1926. Each store is independently owned and operated.

Ashanté Reese, in her 2019 book on black exclusion from and resistance to the hegemonic white food system that restricts access to food in Washington DC, finds that the systematic displacement of grocery stores from a neighborhood was a symptom of food apartheid that her participants have to actively and inactively work to endure and overcome. In St. Kitts, there is a growing number of grocery stores with fuller shelves that are hypothetically easily accessible geographically but there are often hidden roadblocks to access. High prices,
culturally mismatched goods, and limited public transportation to and from the “good areas” means that it is often easier and, in some cases, the only option to shop in the village in which you live. Residents of rural villages must depend on the small convenience-type grocery stores around the island’s mainland, often owned by Chinese migrants, that typically offer mostly canned and packaged processed food and a very small section of usually overripe fruits and vegetables. For consumers looking to buy local or regional produce more directly, there are three markets in St Kitts and many street turnhands located in town and sporadically around the island.

*Sandy Point Agricultural Co-op Market*

On Saturdays, the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative Society runs a market, which is the focus of Chapter 6, where they sell fresh produce, local juice, and homemade prepared foods. Sandy Point is a rural agricultural village located on the north end of the Caribbean side of the island about a thirty-minute car ride from town. To get to Sandy Point from my village, I had to take a bus to town and then a different bus to Sandy Point. Without a car, this took about an hour. When in Sandy Point, the options for food are limited. There is, of course, the corner store and Chinese food takeaway but the closest large grocery is several villages closer to town.

The main entrance to the market is right on the main road in the center of the village but the property spreads to the street behind. There is a gate next to the roadside stand on the main road which takes you into the market grounds. Most days at the market are quiet. Passersby from the neighborhood and nearby villages come to buy produce from the roadside stall Tuesday through Friday. The market’s busiest days are Saturdays. With the grant that allowed the co-op to build the roadside stand, they also converted a standalone building in the back of the market grounds which was used as a slaughterhouse during the heyday of the market into a kitchen where they prepare cooked food for sale on Saturdays.

Prior to my fieldwork in St. Kitts, my only experience with island markets was the craft markets outside of cruise ships. They are typically hectic, crowded, with a particular set of cultural codes, and many vendors who rely on tourists’ purchases to survive. During my fieldwork in Nevis and the beginning of my work in St Kitts, my market experience was limited to the town market which, like Sandy Point mostly services locals, is an energetic multi-vendor competition for customers. In contrast, most customers of the Sandy Point market are residents of Sandy Point or close by villages. Additionally, the Sandy Point Co-op is the only vendor in
the Sandy Point Market so it has a calm, community atmosphere that comes from the single vendor system.

Contributing to the atmosphere of the market is the deep social networks among and between the co-op members and customers and the ideals of the co-op that they impart on their community. All the active members of the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative identify as followers of the Rastafari spiritual movement, which influences their ideals of community, space, and food. As followers of the Rastafari faith, the members of this co-op have specific ideals around community and commensality. Rastas are well-known for communal living in general. In many places around the world, Rastas live on communes. In Sandy Point, the co-op members do not live together on communes, or even farm the same pieces of land, but they hold the same community ideals.

Their location and the fact that they are open to sell fresh local produce 5 days a week means that the residents of Sandy Point and the nearby villages have an outlet for food aside from the ever-present convenience food shops.

Coconut Farm

The spatial divisions between socioeconomic classes in St Kitts are exemplified by taking a 25-minute 10-mile drive from town to the Coconut Farm on the Southeast Peninsula. The Coconut Farm is a fenced in three-acre plot that is owned by a member of a local wealthy white family who have owned businesses on the island for generations.

The farm is open to the public all week but they run a Saturday market. The entrance is marked by a pretty wooden slate gate with a professionally made printed sign for the Coconut Farm hanging on it. The peninsula is drier than the mainland which gives the market a beachy feel. The white sand parking lot is small, holding about six cars on one side and the produce vending on the other. The market has only five small table displays and everything that is sold there is from the three-acre farm or bought wholesale from local producers (See Image 3.1). Much like the Sandy Point market, the size and lack of competition creates a calm atmosphere.

The Coconut Farm is very clearly marketed towards tourists and expats. The produce is displayed under a shade-giving arbor in woven baskets that reminded me of something on display at Home Goods or Pier 1 Imports. They also sell homemade bread, smoothies, beer, juice, and coffee and they offer yoga several times a week. Their prices are much more
expensive than in town. Unlike town, where goods are priced based on type of goods and availability, the Coconut Farm has a blanket price for everything. They sell everything for $5 EC a pound across-the-board except avocados are 5EC each regardless of size. For comparison, most things in the town market are sold by the pound and between 2 and 5 dollars a pound. An avocado’s price at the town market also varies by size but five dollars would be the largest. Since this market is on the Southeast Peninsula, public transportation is not available. Without a car or paying a taxi, a trip to the coconut farm would be a three-hour walk. Because of the location, price point, and general air of exclusivity, most locals, especially those without a car, shop on the mainland. Most patrons of the Coconut farm say that they have not seen any local shop there. None of my local participants have mentioned it as part of their foodscape.

While the farm is small, expensive, has a limited selection, and located all the way on the tip of the peninsula, it made a noteworthy impact on the food system. The owner of the farm also owns a popular tourist restaurant on the beach, which the farm supplies with produce. During an informal conversation with the owner and a farmer from Sandy Point, he admitted he used to patronize local farmers but now grows almost all of his own produce. One Saturday, another anthropologist and I were chatting with a Canadian couple who had relocated to St. Kitts. I asked if they frequented the market at the Coconut Farm and they said it is their Saturday morning routine. Since the farm opened in April 2018, they have come every Saturday morning. Previously, they did their produce shopping on Saturday mornings at the market in town. They are not an anomaly. The Coconut Farm market let's tourists and expats enjoy local produce from a farmer’s market without having to venture into the town market.

My first time at the Coconut farm, a farmer and extension officer took me there as part of his rounds. Since the owner is now a registered farmer, his farm is assigned an extension officer. The farm manager, originally from Guyana, rode up on his John Deer. The extension officer introduced us and the manager offered to give us a tour of the farm. Tours are free to people who want them. He took us around the three-acre farm pointing out what grows where. They grow standard things except one melon, called Cucuzza, the manager brought from Guyana. He brought us down to the brand-new farmhouse which was built by one of the owner's friends from Sweden. Hoping to get in on the growing agro-tourism industry on the island, the owner set the farmhouse on Airbnb for $225 a night. On the bottom floor of the house, which is an open-air deck, chairs, lounges, a grill, a small bathroom and the kitchen (See Image 3.2). Upstairs is a
bedroom and a balcony which overlooks Nevis and a field of coconut trees. The Coconut Farm’s pretty basket displays, location next to the Park Hyatt, upscale rentable farmhouse, coffee, and yoga, is not designed for the average person. The most popular market in St Kitts is located in the capital.

Image 3.1
Town Market

In contrast to the rural community market in Sandy Point and the upscale beachy Coconut farm is the main public market in the capital city. Under the management of the Department of Agriculture, the public market is a multipurpose public space at the edge of Basseterre (See Maps 3.2 and 3.3 and Image 3.3). Turnhands and farmers sell their produce twice a week, Mondays and Saturdays but the market functions differently depending on the day. Mondays are wholesale days where turnhands and produce traffickers from Dominica and St Vincent sell their goods to turnhands. Saturdays, turnhands and farmers sell their produce, agro-processed goods, and produce from Dominica and St Vincent retail. On both market days, local sellers are charged 5EC and 10 EC for non-locals, which is collected by the market manager, an employee of the Department of Agriculture.

Early Saturday morning is one of the busiest times in town next to Friday afternoon and evening. It is the biggest grocery shopping day. Vendors begin to set up around 5 in the morning, some earlier. I once asked Delvin, a 37-year-old farmer from far in the countryside, what time he gets to the market.

“I get here at 5:30”
What time is too late for you to come?
“530” he said with a smile
What time is too late for the customer to show up for the best selection?
“530” he said laughing

On a typical Saturday morning, I get off the bus in town around 7, which, according to Delvin and other vendors, is late for produce shopping. The market is the busiest around 6 so the produce has been picked over by 7. As Armstrong says when I’m late for the market, “the early bird gets all the berries.” The market is far from the center of town and regular foot traffic. From the bus stop, the market is about a 20-minute walk to the other side of town. The walk starts quietly. Town seems to be recovering from the Friday night partying. The closer I get to the main road, the louder the voices of the crowd get. Street vendors, mostly turnhands, are set up all down the main road ending outside the market. Across the market is the beach where the fishermen sell their catch.

Before the market is the ferry terminal where you can catch ferries to Nevis throughout the day. Surrounding the terminal parking lot are bars and snackettes that open for the Saturday morning crowd. Produce vendors set up along the edge, the bars blast music, a preacher stands on the outskirts attempting to talk over the crowd. “Now we are dependent on tourism. What happened to the agriculture business? It's in the word of God. We are to plant and grow crops. We are to rest the soil after we get food out of the soil. Let the grass and manure make the land fertile to produce better crops. Amen. Then rest. That's why God gave us the sabbath. Hello. God is talking to the earth. He is speaking to the nation” the preacher said into the crowd of people gossiping, arguing, and dancing. Vendors are yelling to passersby what goods they have. Close your eyes and Saturday morning could still be Friday night.

Another block’s walk past the terminal until you reach the market. It is a big green building across from a small beach. Bobo the Jelly Man, a Kittitian farmer and one of my key participants, is set up on the beachside. He got his nickname because he is locally famous for selling jelly water across from the market on Saturday mornings. Jellies, young water coconuts, are called so because their immature flesh has not yet hardened into the flesh of an adult coconut we are used to seeing as flakes, shredded coconut, or coconut milk so it has a jelly-like quality. Bobo is usually surrounded by people waiting for him to chop open a jelly and pour the sweet water inside into a bottle for them to take. He tosses the empty coconut shells into a pile on the sidewalk that will eventually spill onto the street. Periodically, he will chop the empty jellies in
half and hand them off to vendors, market goers, or an anthropologist, to scoop out the sweet jelly-like flesh to eat.

The fisherman also set up on the beach front, cleaning, portioning, and selling their fish to the crowd of people. It is a hectic energy. Customers form in swarms rather than lines, elbowing each other out of the way so they can get their pick of fish. Fishermen are running fish out to people in cars. Arguments sometimes break out between fishermen and their customers or between customers over wait times or service orders. It looks like a nightmare a retail employee would have the night before Black Friday. Across the street, vendors are lined up outside the market hoping to catch shoppers before the vendors inside have a chance.

Inside the market is significantly quieter than the street. Concrete tables run in rows. Unlike the pretty, orderly basket displays of the coconut farm, produce is laid out in piles directly on the concrete tables. Vendors are almost always set up in the same spot each week. Some are clumped close together near the entrance, some in sporadic patches, some all alone in a corner or row by themselves. Inside the market, there are two built-in stands where agro-processors sell local juice, cassava meal, local homemade snacks and soups, dried fruit, hot sauce, jams, among other things. There is also a small restaurant called National Food Eatery that sells local dishes like cornmeal, fried fish, dumplings, and saltfish.

Occasionally, a young person or two will make their way into the market as well but, for reasons discussed in the next chapter, most of the customers in the market are middle-aged and older locals who come to the market to do their weekly produce shopping. On the right hand side of the main entrance, there is a door to a refrigerated section where butchers sell their butchered livestock on Saturdays.

On Mondays, “It’s a different market,” according to Armstrong while explaining why I need to go to both markets to get the full experience of the Kittitian agricultural scene. Monday is a wholesale day. Armstrong is one of the most productive farmers on the island and sells what he does not sell to the grocery stores to turnhands on Mondays. Bobo also sells the produce off his farm to turnhands Mondays. Most other Kittitians are there to purchase goods to resell.

A produce boat comes in from Dominica or St. Vincent and sells their produce mostly wholesale to local turnhands and some farmers who buy what they do not have. Dominican and Vincentian ground provisions, such as yams, dasheen, eddoes, and tania are popular with Kittitian farmers and turnhands because they are labor and time intensive and require wet,
mountain climate that is more popular in the other islands than St Kitts. Since most people come to buy goods from the boat, the market is quiet before they come, which is anywhere between 12 noon and 6 pm. Along with their produce, the boat brings in a whole new energy. The boats dock at the deep-water port on the other side of town and truck their produce over. The trucks are overflowing with boxes of produce. They drive into the market and begin to unload their boxes and bags. Before long, their produce drowns out the local produce, taking over most of the stalls.

Turnhands swarm the stands in order to get the best produce. The energy is almost manic. The volume and crowd increase tenfold as turnhands from the street dart inside and people are talking and laughing, arguing over prices and who has the right to buy the best produce. One of my key participants, Tine, a farmer and turnhand in her 60s, sets up her stand across from the market every day except Sunday. While she works, she watches for the boat. When she sees the truck filled with produce from the deep-water port on the other side of town, she and the other turnhands bee line into the market. The goal is to get to the truck with the first rush as to get the first sweep of produce. Tine will take note of her own produce and purchase what she lacks, mostly plantain, banana, provisions, and coconut, throughout the day so she can purchase only what she needs.

Mondays and Saturdays have purposeful crowds who are coming specifically to the market for particular goods, either for personal use or to resell. Unlike street vendors and grocery stores, the market’s location and hours of operation mean that the vendors are unable to get business from browsers, impulse buyers, and other people who might not be at the market at 6am on a Saturday.
Street Vendors and Turnhands

Street stands are usually operated by farmers or turnhands. They have a reputation for being pushy, business savvy, bargain hunters. They are often but not always, women and relatives or spouses of farmers who sell their goods. Turnhands also frequent the market, especially on Mondays, to purchase goods wholesale from farmers and turnhands from Dominica or St. Vincent. Since the market is on the far end of town, many farmers and turnhands have moved out of the proper market and into the street. Some right outside the market. Others in the heart of town. Several set up right outside of the cruise ship port to collect business from tourists off the cruise ship who often wander into town.

The vendors that have remained in the market often blame those who left for the demise of the market and claim that business is better for everyone when they sell in a central location. Those who left argue that their produce needs to be more accessible to customers and potential customers to compete with the ever-convenient grocery stores, at least one being open 24 hours a day. An older turnhand in the market noted that “we are in the fast life generation” and people do business in town and buy things from the grocery instead of local. Even those who buy local, are more likely to buy from the vendors who set up on the street throughout town instead of walking
down to the market. Customers will purchase goods at the grocery stores or the more expensive but significantly more convenient turnhands to avoid the schlep to the market. Many vendors in the city set up right outside the doors of the grocery stores and on busy streets so you very rarely have to divert from your path to make a purchase. Their locations mean that street stands have the advantage of attracting passersby and impulse buys whereas the market is a destination in itself, set far from casual foot traffic. Additionally, many vendors are also set up five or six days a week as opposed to the two days a week that vendors are in the market. On Saturdays, the market’s only busy day for retail, many turnhands will set up close to the market to attract the crowd looking for goods before they reach the market. There are also vendors who set up at various locations around the island such as rural villages and major roundabouts for those who want to purchase goods but do not want to deal with the traffic and stress of town. Others set up outside of town to capture a different clientele, such as students or people in rural villages. Pam, a middle-aged farmer who sells her produce in a middle-class neighborhood once a week noted that she prefers to stay away from the hectic and competitive public market in town. Others who do not wish to sell at the markets or in town find other retail strategies such as non-placed based sales or selling at universities.

Universities

Most students do the majority of their grocery shopping at the grocery store by the universities and in Frigate Bay and Bird Rock but there are some options for those who would like to buy local produce. One local turnhand named David sells local, regional, and imported produce all purchased wholesale from the respective outlets. On Wednesdays, David is joined by several other local vendors, including a white local college-aged woman who sells homemade baked goods, a local farmer and agro-processor, a white English woman who relocated and now makes a living selling hand painted postcards, and owner of a local restaurant for the weekly Ross University Farmers Market. The farmers market is set up under a long, thin covered pavilion- about two picnic tables deep and about 8-10 long. Around the pavilion, there are little shacks selling different things. There is a boba tea kiosk, a smoothies and coffee kiosk and a little “burgers and fries” type kiosk. For a fee of 800 EC dollars a year, the vendors are allowed to sell their goods to students, who are mostly American, for about three hours once a week. While students are exposed to a very small number of local vendors, this does increase business
for those who sell, and in the case of David, increases business for other local producers and regional producers at the market where he purchases much of this produce.

_Private and informal/non-placed based sales_

Much of the Kittitian agricultural economy happens informally with the producers doing much of the leg work in terms of bringing their goods to the consumer. This way of selling is much different than the place-specific selling discussed in the previous sections. These sellers conduct a fluid operation where the whole island is their market.

Agro-processors and local producers often sell their goods at events and fairs such as Agricultural Open Day. Some producers or foragers sell to agro-processors who either sell their goods in the market, in grocery stores, or informally. CJ, a 35-year-old who frequently goes into the mountain to forage for medicinal roots like Kakanga and Sarsaparilla which he sells to agro-processors who do not have the skill or stamina to forage in the mountain.

In contrast to produce traffickers who sell at the market, some produce traffickers choose instead to sell wholesale to grocery stores and informally to consumers directly, eliminating the turnhands as distributors. Elvis, a 30-year-old Vincentian migrant and produce trafficker, brings in a boat full of produce every three weeks with bananas, plantains, yams, eddos, tania, passionfruit, turmeric, ginger, golden apples, coconut (green and dry), coconut oil, seasoning and hot pepper sauce. He identifies customers, mostly grocery stores and agro-processors who buy in bulk wholesale, through an informal chain of social networks and transports the goods to them. Local farmers also sell their produce to grocery stores semi-informally by showing up and asking to speak to produce managers who will agree or disagree to take their load on the spot. None of the local producers, foreign importers or agro-processors in this study were able to set up guaranteed or contracted drop offs at grocery stores. Local production is unpredictable, for reasons discussed in Chapter 4, making it hard for grocery stores to rely on producers. Moreover, grocery stores often buy from the producer with lower prices. This often leads to fierce competition and underpricing, further throwing off the already unstable market.

While this chapter is about spaces, it is also about the use of the spatial environment that has been created by political forces out of their control. These produce vendors navigate their foodscape by moving through and around the island instead of setting up in one central and permanent location.
Chapter Conclusion

St Kitts has experienced many economic changes, especially within the last twenty years, which have had a ripple effect throughout the island, changing land use and landscape. Spaces that were once vital to the Kittitian economy, such as sugar plantations are decaying and being swallowed up by the jungle or being turned to produce farms. The ghauts are being used less frequently for farming and fruits that were once plentiful are now scarce. The government’s main economic focus changed to service. Money and resources are pooled in Frigate Bay and the Peninsula and there is an influx of thousands of tourists, expats, and students. Despite the changes, the current spatial divisions are based on a socioeconomic class system that was constructed in tandem with historic and contemporary colonization which this chapter and last attempted to highlight through an explanation of the food and economic systems from the pure plantation economy to the present.

Following Reese’s example in her asking “How have Black people been challenged by and resisted unequal food access?” (Reese 2019:5) and drawing from Low’s concept of the social construction of space (2017), the subsequent chapters explore how agriculturalists navigate their food system and how they have created, reclaimed, re-imagined, maintained, and given meaning to agricultural spaces. In some cases, this is active resistance to the hegemonic structure that has been dominating their way of life for generations while other times my participants' uses of space are “Practices of everyday life that are neither loud nor attention-seeking,” “Simply making a life” (Reese 2019:2). In her discussion of Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1988) Peasants and Capital, Karla Slocum (2017: 430) notes that there is a “value of cultivating with a self-defined purpose and satisfying one’s sustenance in an Afro-Caribbean village to which one has ties over generations, even when economic autonomy as a producer in that village is unattainable.” We see that play out here in my work where agriculture simultaneously represents complex social and cultural histories on one hand and the potential for sustainable food and economic systems. My participants’ relationship to the land and to the broader economic and social landscape of the island means that, for them, agriculture is deeper than a “job” or a way to make a living. The importance of agriculture to my participants is especially apparent when we take into consideration the myriad of challenges stemming from the plantation economy that agriculturalists face, which I focus on in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: Small-Scale Agriculture in Postindustrial St. Kitts

And yet the plantation died, wounded by a dastard class of white men who fled back to the mother country. The ones who stayed either denied or reveled in their decline as fields dried up or were taken over by land reform. Neighbors disappeared; the mother country enforced Crown Colony government, and lesser suitors like beet sugar dethroned King Sugar. In their place rose a new breed of white men who was sometimes black. They were merchants, machine men, and dealers, men who brought the Americans. Men who turned plantations into guesthouses or hotels if they were near the sea. Moneymaking shifted to a new kind of Massa.

-Marlon James, John Crows Devil

A “New Massa”: Queen Tourism’s succession to the throne

Liamuiga, the indigenous name for the island and namesake of the volcano, means “fertile land,” and any farmer will tell you that the soil lives up to its name. “You know, your hand will start to grow roots if you leave it in the ground too long,” Bobo said. I heard many variations of this saying but all involve the soil’s ability to sprout anything, from inanimate objects to living beings sitting too still. So why, then, does St Kitts import almost 80 percent of their food?

The government and elites in St. Kitts built the island’s economy around industrial agricultural production of sugar for the global market but the sugar industry crashed as producers and customers abandoned Kittitian sugar for "cheaper costs, new pools of resources or raw materials, or sites with weak environmental regulations” (Vaccaro, Harper, and Murray 2016:1) in places such as Brazil, Hawaii, and India. Like many Caribbean countries, the government of St Kitts has responded to the disconnection to the global sugar market by reconnecting to the global economy through tourism, the “new Massa” (master) Jamaican novelist Marlon James mentions.

The government’s chosen path to reconnecting with the global economy means that most of their resources are devoted to service industries. The Ministry of Tourism gets a significantly larger yearly budget than the Department of Agriculture. Agriculture was allocated 10.2 million XCD in 2019 and 10.9 million XCD in 2020. Tourism was allocated 24.7 million XCD and 25.1 million XCD for the same years, respectively. This was in addition to the 32 million XCD cruise
ship port that was completed in 2020\(^1\). This chapter discusses the impact of this connection, disconnection, and reconnection has on local small-scale producers’ autonomy and their production from finding labor and obtaining inputs, to raising their produce to maturity, to finding markets for their goods. The next section focuses on the politics of land use and access.

**Rooted plants and un/uprooted farmers - Politics of Agricultural Land Use and Ownership**

The plantation evidences an uneven colonial–racial economy that, while differently articulated across time and place, legalized black servitude while simultaneously sanctioning black placelessness and constraint. In the Americas, free labour under bondage thus marked black working bodies as those ‘without’—without legible-Eurocentric history narratives, without land or home, without ownership of self—as this system forcibly secured black peoples to the geographic mechanics of the plantation economy. (Kathrine McKittrick 2011:948)

The issue of land use and ownership originally prompted the focus of this study while in St Kitts on a research trip in 2014. During a farm visit, my hosts discussed an access road that the government built through the farm. To them, this represented the government’s disregard for their profession and their needs. Most, if not all, governments reserve the right to seize land under eminent domain but land precarity is worsened in St Kitts by the government’s policies on land ownership. The government maintains the position that farmland should remain under government ownership and control considering the island’s history of plantocracies. National discourse is that the transfer of crown lands into a national trust is “for all Kittitians to have fair and equal access” (Clarke 2016:60), but that does not always work out in practice.

According to Lowitt et al’s study on factors affecting the innovation potential of small-scale farmers in four Caribbean nations, including St Kitts, only thirty-five percent of people owned the land they live on and only eight percent of the farmers owned the land they worked at the time of their research (2015:1371). This creates a contradictory sense of placelessness and constraint as farmers are tied to the land through their profession, yet are landless.

Further complicating land politics is the controversial Land-for-Debt-Swap Bill of 2012 which transferred ownership of 1200 acres of agricultural land to the St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla

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\(^1\) XCD is the abbreviation for the for the Eastern Caribbean dollar, the official currency of eight Caribbean island countries: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The exchange rate is set to be 2.7 XCD to 1USD. Conversationally in St Kitts, the local currency is referred to as EC.
National Bank. This settled a debt accrued during the final years of sugar production when the industry was operating at a loss. The government has since repurchased 400 acres of that land but 800 acres of the 12,355 acres of arable land in St Kitts (World Bank Data Bank) are still under the control of the bank left overgrown and unused or it has been sold to developers for the construction of residential neighborhoods, student housing, and hotels. While this is a low percentage of arable land, it came up frequently in interviews and conversations as an example of the government's lack of consideration for providing land to farmers, which adds to fears of perceived land precarity and mistrust of the government.

While purchasing land earmarked for the Land-for-Debt-Swap is technically an option, it is unattainable because of the exorbitant price and farmers are not given the option of buying government agricultural land. Hopeful farmers must request land to lease from the Department of Agriculture. Many people have stories of having their requests denied, ignored, or taking years to come through. Farmers who are allocated land must commit to paying a lease for the duration of their occupation of that land. Dion’s father and grandfather both farmed on the same land for generations without being given the option of buying the land. “Even though my father is there on the land, even though he born there, he reared there on the land, you still have to go and sign a lease to pay” he said. Others squat on government agricultural land or unused land allocated to the Land-for-Debt-Swap, a particularly precarious occupation. Farmers feel that their place and space are insecure. In her 2016 study of female former sugar workers, Clarke notes that “Over 80% of respondents agree that the loss of farmland impacts the country's quality of life, and another 67.5% are very concerned that farmlands and their respective communities were being converted into non-farm activities.”

A 1982 World Bank report stated, “Since the Government owns most land, real progress in diversifying agriculture will be delayed until a land tenure and land use policy is formulated.” As noted by Lowitt et al (2015:1371), “more secure farmland tenure is generally associated with more profitable and sustainable agricultural production, with positive implications for household income and food security.” Almost 40 years after the World Bank's report, all agricultural land still remains under the control of the tourism-focused government.

A year after I began reflecting on land use and ownership in St Kitts, a developer from Trinidad and a group of other foreign investors built the agro-hotel, Kittitian Hill. “We found the ideal setting to embark on this journey among 400 acres of organic farmland on St. Kitts that
stretches from high on the slopes of Mount Liamuiga to the beach 1,000 feet below, where the Caribbean Sea meets the Atlantic,” boasts the website. The area is beautiful, lush, and with a breathtaking view of the neighboring islands of St Eustatius and Saba but this “found” land was already in use by local farmers. One farmer had been farming on fifty acres where Kittitian Hill is now. To build the hotel, the government revoked the farmer’s lease and assigned him one and a half acres of low-lying land. He had to adjust his production size drastically and abandon the fencing, water distribution systems, and long-term crops like fruit trees that had been thriving on his original farm. In addition to having to abandon investments, farmers had to reimagine their entire agricultural operation when the government relocated them to different ecological zones as farmers depend on their generational agro-ecological knowledge to make decisions about what to grow, when to plant, when to reap, and how to tend to their plants. Crops that thrived on the mountainside farms will not grow well in the dryer, sunnier lowlands. According to an employee of the Department of Agriculture, one and a half acres was the standard plot size for displaced farmers, regardless of their original plot size. Some displaced farmers were farming their original land for decades or even generations. Another farmer from the same area lamented over the emotional moment the Kittitian Hill construction crew bulldozed his grandfather’s fruit trees that he climbed as a child.

When the government displaces farmers from their land, they impact more than just the individual farmers. Farms act as gathering places, places of family and cultural heritage production, knowledge production and transmission and exchange, social networking bonding, food production for individuals, families, and villages. Displacing farmers puts these community assets in jeopardy. Farmers and their communities are under constant stress of their lands being exploited by transient outsiders who come to absorb the island's resources.

Kittitian Hill was the most extreme example of land seizure my participants mentioned. Most incidents involved subtle encroachments on property lines, access roads cut through farms, and over development. While accompanying an extension officer on his farm visits, I commented that the area was beautiful before photographing the farm’s rolling hills against the backdrop of the jungle-covered mountain. He commented that it was just temporary until the government builds on it. I asked if that was an actual plan or an assumption. He responded that “St. Kitts is getting more developed, and I always think the more the place develops, the less lands gonna be there for production you know? I don't know what plans they got but
development is expanding fast. People need housing and there's gonna be less land for agriculture production.” Anxieties over land access are ever-present, especially as developers have exploited most of the buildable land in Frigate Bay and the Peninsula. The next section focuses on farmers’ struggles to work the land even when they are able to access it.

“The government nah study all we”: Lack of inputs and extension services

When farmers are able to acquire land, either through a lease or squatting, they need to invest input into the land in order to reap any rewards. Some farmers can buy inputs such as seeds, plastic mulch, drip lines, fertilizers, and small farm equipment online or from the local garden center but most cannot afford the high importation tax. The underfunded Department of Agriculture tries to meet their needs but with almost three hundred registered farmers on the island, quantities of inputs are limited. If the Department of Agriculture receives a shipment of seeds and distributes them to the farmers, many farmers will all have the same produce at approximately the same time. Of course, the obvious solution would be to stagger production but many farmers rely on the Department of Agriculture for inputs because of high importation costs for individuals. Vibration noted that this often means that resources are limited and spread thinly among producers. He used melons to illustrate his point stating, “ok let’s suppose you have an acre of land. You split it in four so you have quarter acres to put in one crop now. Let's say watermelons, you plant a quarter acre of melon this month. You put in a quarter acre next month and you want to put in another quarter acre after that. By the time you reach to the fourth crop, they're out of seeds. They're out of chemicals and fertilizers so that hamper's production.”

Owning larger equipment like tractors requires huge amounts of start-up capital and funds for maintenance yet they are essential for land preparation. A few people own tractors and run private plowing services but they are costly due to the high owning and operating costs. Most farmers rely on the Department of Agriculture to prepare their land for a smaller fee. The Department of Agriculture only has two tractors to service all 284 registered farmers on the island. The high demand during planting seasons often results in waiting a month or more for the tractor. Waiting a month could be detrimental for a farmer. “If you got to wait two weeks, a month, sometimes two months to get the land prepared, by that time, you could have had a crop ready to reap and been ready to put back in something to follow up” said Vibration.
The tractors are also symbolic of the government’s abandonment of agriculture after the sugar industry closed. I once asked a farmer what happened to the tractors and other machinery from the sugar industry. “All of them, they sold out to other countries. One or two persons who had the money bought but most of them went to Antigua because the government at the time, they weren't seeing the future of agriculture like how it is. Or they never had it in thought. They just were thinking tourism, which I felt that was craziness. We need at least 10 working tractors on the island” he said.

Lowitt et al (2015) found that lack of trust between actors and institutions hindered overall potential in agricultural innovation. In line with their observations, my participants do not trust that they are a priority for the government or the Department of Agriculture. Dion noted that as a farmer and extension officer, he understands the points of view of both the Department of Agriculture and the farmers. “The government itself did not take on any agriculture project. They prefer to let the individual do it and support the individual in terms of education and technical advice but the farmers are not confident in the department. They feel like they're not getting enough support, you know, where they are supposed to get it” he said.

Most producers are quick to point out that the government officials often appointed to positions within the department are not agriculturalists by trade. Some people find this leads to a disconnection between initiatives and needs of the farmers. For example, many of the farmers and customers at the market express their desire for a more enticing shopping experience to draw customers to the market, something the Department of Agriculture has no serious plans to do. “A majority of people in the government, they're not agriculture minded or they interested in it but they're not involved in it. So, I mean, I don't know if it gonna take a farmer to reach in that position and change up the thing” said a farmer.

Others discuss their dissatisfaction with the system of extension officers on the island. Extension officers are employees of the Department of Agriculture who are meant to provide guidance for farmers to increase productivity. A farmer in his mid-thirties expressed his dissatisfaction with the system stating, “I don’t really benefit from an extension officer coming to my farm because they don’t really do anything.” He went on to say that his extension officer just comes to take notes on what he is growing for the crop projection and then leaves. Some noted that the officers hardly come to visit, even when requested. Others have better experiences with their assigned officers but most discuss the fact that the extension officers are often
competing farmers, which is a conflict of interest and, at the very least, creates an environment where the farmers are hesitant to take advice, even from dedicated and well-intended officers worried that they would purposely give out misinformation to cut of the competition. This further inhibits local food production as farmers are often in need of education, advice, and materials.

Even when the initiatives proposed by the Department of Agriculture seem promising and align with the wants and needs of agriculturalists, there is a disconnection between discourse and practice. I heard countless stories of attempted export avenues that never materialized, educational programs that only ran once, canceled programs, speeches in which government officials praise agriculturalists and tout farming as the “way forward” while withholding resources.

Not having access to seeds, helpful extension services and education, equipment, or any meaningful investment in agricultural infrastructure hampers production levels and breeds feelings of exclusion and disenfranchisement. As one farmer put it while discussing the problems of their crucial reliance on the government, “the government nah study all we.” In addition to resource distribution, the government's favor of tourism over agriculture manifests in other ways as well. In the next section, I discuss how the focus on tourism and other service industries impact ideals of acceptable or desirable careers in St Kitts.

**Farming is Dirty Work: Agricultural and labor ideologies**

“Kittitians these days don’t wanna do this kind of work eh?” said Pam, a middle-aged farmer from an agricultural village on the far north of the island and one of the few female farmers. I went to visit Pam at her street stall where she sells her produce once a week. To sell at her stand, Pam must take the day off her farm because she has trouble finding people willing to work for her. Almost every farmer I spoke with mentioned similar experiences as Pam regarding their difficulty finding employees and the public’s general negative attitudes towards agricultural work. “Everyone is running from farming on a whole” said Delvin, a 37-year-old farmer. Evelyn, a turnhand who retired from teaching to sell in the market with her elderly mother, noted that only a few younger people are getting involved in agriculture. When the older farmers get old or die, no one is left to take their place, she said. My participants’ observations are confirmed by the
Department of Statistics that states the percentage of the labor force involved in agriculture dropped from about 2 percent in 2013 to about 1 percent in 2016.

Agricultural labor has the stereotype of not only being physically hard but not being profitable or economically sustainable. “Personally, I feel like agriculture needs to be taught in a different level within the schools. Farming can be a very lucrative business if done the right way with the proper resources and proper management. If you plan the thing right and you maintain, you could actually get something proper out of what you do.” Vibration said of the lack of business education in the agricultural program in public schools. “They also never tell us that there are a lot more careers in agriculture that you can do without actually going into the farming. You can be an extension officer, you can be a horticulturalist that deals with flowers, you could be an engineer. you could be a chemist” he continued. Ana, a 34-year-old backyard gardener and agro-processor with a very successful food brand and two equally successful beauty lines, noted that people do not see agriculture as a viable career. People think agriculture is just about growing things but they do not see the potential in it. She sees it as the farmers’ and backyard gardeners’ responsibility to demonstrate the broader picture of agriculture so the public sees how to make it profitable. “People have to stop thinking of agro-processing just as jams,” she said referring to her beauty lines. Ana’s out-of-the-box thinking allowed her to start businesses making soap, lotions, haircare, and make-up out of the plants she grows in her garden. “That is still agro-processing” she noted.

Agricultural education begins in high school and some of my participants note that introducing it earlier might generate more interest. “You need to start from primary, from the lowest level as possible, so the children can get more of a sense of what it is and what it entails […] so they get more interested in it” said Vibration. Ana has similar thoughts on education stating that high school, when people are into their looks, friends, and popularity, is the worst age to try to introduce something that requires kids to get dirty. Ana feels that children should be taught when they are at an age where they will see it as play. She mentioned that on a trip to Trinidad, she learned that they have a mascot called Agro Man who teaches primary school children about farming. She feels St Kitts could benefit from an initiative like that.

In contrast to agricultural careers, careers in tourism or office jobs are seen as clean, modern and profitable. When I asked my friends on the island why they chose careers other than farming they usually responded with some variation of not wanting to perform manual labor in
the hot sun. Evelyn noted that many former sugar workers even gave up their subsistence plots and backyard gardens when they went into non-agricultural industries. When the government shut down the sugar industry, the fifteen percent of the country’s labor market that was employed in sugar (Clarke and Barker 2012:2) had to find employment elsewhere. St. Kitts’ Ministry of Sustainable Development (2005) noted that tourism was the main outlet for these newly unemployed workers. Dion worked as an estate manager for the sugar industry when the industry closed. While he remained in farming, he discussed the government’s transition programs stating, “What will happen is that we try to put them into the tourist industry, give them new skills. You know, train them with new skills and that kind of stuff but not into farming” Similarly, Sharrone, who runs a corner shop in town and keeps a backyard garden, told me that her husband worked as an accountant in the sugar industry and was retrained through a government program to be a taxi driver.

Unlike agriculture that is not introduced to students until high school, tourism is introduced in primary school. The “Hospitality Immersion Program” brings students to participating hotels “to have an interactive experience with the hospitality industry” which is touted by the organizers as the backbone of the economy. In an interview with the local newspaper a manager from a participating hotel stated “You are not only helping the vacationers to have a great time but because it’s such a fun and vibrant industry you feel like you are on vacation yourself.” On the contrary, farmers feel that their profession is not given the praise and attention they need. Bobo observed that the government is not helping people get into farming in the same way stating, “Most young people ain’t got no land. They don’t have the finance to cut up a piece of land to start farming, and the government not making a motion to help people,” he said.

Even those who want to farm or would potentially be open to it are not encouraged and, in some cases, actively discouraged from it because of the negative feelings towards agriculture and the need for service industry employees. Ana noted that in the 1970s, people started pushing their children into professions other than agriculture. My participants mentioned that the youth equate agricultural work to “slave labor,” physically demanding, and “dirty work.” Vibration, a 35-year-old farmer with the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative said “I think from the schooling that we got, most people have agriculture to be sort of stigmatized. It’s hard, dirty work. Yeah that's the teaching we got for most of us.” Many repeated Vibration’s comments
about farming being considered “dirty work” in conversations about their struggles to hire reliable employees. Delvin thinks people look down on agricultural work, so not only do they resist working in the fields, they even feel embarrassed to be seen at the market or selling food.

Pam discussed the negative stereotypes assigned to agriculturalists themselves when reminiscing about her introduction into farming. She went to school and did well, so when she started farming, the people in her life accused her of not having ambition. People think farming is for people with no other options and no education.

The members of the Sandy Point Agricultural Co-op also agreed that, from their experiences, young people are discouraged to go into agriculture. Their parents, even those that were or are farmers, pushed them to go to college and find office jobs. Much like Pam’s experience, one farmer in the co-op said that his parents tried to talk him out of being a farmer because he went to university off the island and was qualified for other careers. In a similar conversation with Mrs. Nisbet, an older farmer and agro-processor with land just under Kittitian Hill, she rejected the stereotype that farmers are unintelligent stating “most poor people have a lot of sense but don’t have the resources. You can’t be poor and have no sense.”

Acquiring land and planting are only the first steps in a long process that brings produce to customers. Next, farmers have to protect their crops from pests and extreme weather, adjust to climate change, and provide their farms with adequate water, which will be the focus of the following sections.

“The Place Hot”: Climate change, droughts, and hurricanes

In the fall of 2017, two category five storms, Irma and Maria, battered the Caribbean within two weeks of each other. These storms were unprecedented in size, strength, and the destruction they left in their path all over the Caribbean and the southern United States. St. Kitts avoided the direct impact of the storms but was still left with battered shorelines, flooded homes, and damaged businesses. The main island road through the capital city was buried under sand drifts, brought ashore by the massive swells. Farmers lost crops, fruit trees, and greenhouses. Many of the skeletons of greenhouses are left standing years later with tattered off-white cloth which used to serve as the walls and roof, blowing in the wind like the white flag of surrender to the elements.
The economic and social interconnectedness of the Caribbean islands means that damage in one place impacts the entire region. Most of the produce in St Kitts is imported from Dominica by producers and sellers who typically deliver goods every week, which local market women buy and resell in the town market (See Mantz 2007 for an ethnography of Dominican sellers called hucksters). The severe damage in Dominica caused by the storms and the subsequent disruption to produce importation impacted turnhands in St Kitts and their customers. As I was conducting my fieldwork in 2018 and 2019, the Dominican boats were just beginning to come on a regular basis again. In the meantime, producers from St Vincent tried to fill the market void but struggled to meet the demands of the majority of the region.

The 2017 hurricanes are an extreme reminder of something that farmers are faced with everyday; climate change. Every farmer in St Kitts is aware of climate change because they see it affecting their daily lives in a way that non-agriculturalists may miss. The most notable observation is the lack of rain. The Department of Agriculture’s website observed “With the increased drought period in the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, farmers have suffered great losses due to the lack of rain. The unpredictable changing weather has also shown negative impacts for investment in agriculture.” “The place hot” is a common refrain among farmers and in the market when talking about production levels and the lack of rain. Evelyn remarked that it has only been in the last three years or so that St Kitts has really started to experience water shortages due to lack of rain. She noted that coral islands with the white sand beaches are used to dry weather but for volcanic islands with the black sand like St Kitts that usually have enough rain, adjusting to the limited water supply is a challenge. In early April of 2019, Vibration observed that the dry season was starting early. “We might be in for a very hot dry season this year. It started out so already. The place is already brown. So, we may have some problems.” I asked if it was drier than normal to which he responded, “For this time of year. Yeah. This month is where we normally get brown like that but it’s already brown. It seems to me like it's on a decline. To tell the truth, 2015, that was the election year, was one of the worst I've seen. 2015 was a really dry one. Hot. Scorching summer. Because it was almost like a drought. Last year, it wasn't too bad, but this is starting out almost like 2015”

Others have noted that the ghauts, the valleys that run from the top of the mountain to the ocean, used to run with water like rivers but are drying up. A farmer and eco-tour guide from an agricultural village on the Caribbean side of the island said that the ghauts are “not flowing like
they did” when he was growing up. “These streams used to produce water every day of the year. These days we are lacking of water. We don’t get the amount of water we would normally have.”

A farmer in the Sandy Point Agricultural co-op observed the change in water availability within the last few years. “The sad thing is that close to where we're farming, there's a water dam that actually feeds water to the community of Sandy Point, where when we first started farming, for the first two or three years, literally every day for the first two or three years, there was overflow from that water catchment that was just running every day. Every day for two or three years. It stopped now.”

Climate change not only shortens the growing seasons by causing extended droughts, it makes the growing seasons unpredictable. Mrs. Nisbet observed they either have too much rain or not enough rain. Bobo echoed her comment saying that too much rain causes the crops to mold or not grow properly and, when the ground is too wet, farmers are not able to plant. In a conversation about low production levels, Bobo said that the rain schedule is all off so their planting, growing, harvesting schedules are off too. Traditional strategies for planning when to plant, such as following the moon schedule, are not working any more. Using potatoes as an example, he said the leaves grow, making it seem like the plant is ready to be reaped but when he pulls up the root, there are no potatoes.

Climate change needs to be addressed at the global level, but we see the effects play out in the microscale in St. Kitts. With the increase in frequency and severity of droughts, rainfed farms are even more precarious. Many feel that this is more reason to invest in irrigation to redistribute mountain’s ground water, which is the focus of the next section.

**Access to Water on Farms**

I returned home from working on a farm high in the mountain. After a day of tilling, planting, and weeding, I was caked in mountain soil. I walked in, kicked off my shoes and headed to the sink. I lifted the faucet handle and nothing happened but the unmistakable shh glub glub shhh sound that comes from an empty pipe. I opened the cabinet under the sink and dragged out a 3-liter jug stored for such an occasion so I could at least wash my hands. During the dry season, the Water Department shuts off the water to the rural villages on the mainland in the afternoons or evenings. Only during extreme periods of drought do they cut off or even restrict water in the wealthier areas. Having water in your home shut off on a regular basis is
inconvenient and especially frustrating when you know more privileged areas on the island have water pouring from faucets and shower heads, watering lawns, golf courses, and flower gardens. Anthropologist Barbara Rose Johnston said it- “water scarcity is relative…” (2011) Putting frustration aside, you can make do with a few stored water jugs under your sink. Crops, on the other hand, cannot.  

Like land, water is a vital resource for farmers to which the government restricts access. Even high in the mountains, most fields are in direct sunlight and have no access to groundwater or rivers. Most farms do not have infrastructure to have running water or irrigation systems, relying solely on rainwater. Rainfed farms are not only vulnerable to drastic seasonal rainfall fluctuations, but they are also sensitive to changing global climate patterns.

Despite water being “the most important factor in farming,” as Tell said, there are no island-wide irrigation systems and no plans to create one. Some farmers self-fund low-tech water distribution projects on their farms, such as homemade water catchment systems out of plastic drums or cement cisterns in which they collect rainwater and distribute it to their fields through drip lines. One small cooperative received a grant to install water tanks on solar-powered timers on two farms. They still rely on rainwater to fill the tanks but the timers allow for more precise watering and water rationing.

Dion explained that the lack of water is holding producers back. “Our farmers will tell you they need the water. They can't plant without the water and especially now. You need irrigation to plant so.” Glenn, a farmer from a village towards the north end of the Atlantic side of the island echoed the same thoughts. “I have to work twice as hard without irrigation,” he said. Irrigation systems would help farmers spread production out more evenly through the year, reducing competition for wholesale and retail customers. An employee at the school farm discussed that planting throughout the year and in rotation is impossible without proper access to water. Dion noted that “March, April, May, that's the start of the dry season. The days are longer and we get less rain so the place is very dry. It's difficult to plant big crops and get good production during these periods so you have to be able to balance the two and know what to plant, when to plant them in order to- That's one reason why we have the problem with the big companies because that's where they say we're not consistent because we're not getting the rain consistent so we could plant consistent” Bobo echoed these thoughts in a similar conversation.
during the dry season saying, “As I tell you, water is a big factor because right now the rain nah fall like that so with that now, we need irrigation. That's why food does go scarce every year.”

There have been periodic small-scale projects funded by the government or organizations such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), but these projects are often extremely limited in scope and follow-through. One of these projects installed water catchments in four agricultural villages. The water catchments were essentially large ponds that would allow farmers to catch and utilize rainwater. While this initiative seemed promising, there was miscommunication between the government and farmers in terms of maintenance and upkeep. Fences were built around the water catchments. The government upheld their stance that it was the farmers’ responsibility to maintain the catchments, but simultaneously refused to give them keys for the gates since the catchments were government property. The problem was never resolved. Two of the catchments eventually became unusable when the pipes clogged or rotted. One catchment was damaged in either an accidental brush fire or deliberate act of arson. The last was built with no pipe running from the catchment to the farms.

A former Permanent Secretary and several extension officers have mentioned that the Department of Agriculture does not have the money or resources to provide irrigation for the agricultural lands and that water is scarce on the island as a whole. Many of my participants have heard the same argument from government officials but they feel that this is a deliberate disregard for farmers’ needs as the government provides water and resources to others on the island.

The lack of water on farms exacerbates competition between local producers and regional imports. Dominica, for example, has much more ground water sources than St Kitts, making production easier. Bobo once said that, due to the number of rivers on the island, Dominica would flood if you threw a spoon of water on it. Water also has an echoing effect on another major hindrance to farming—monkeys. Monkeys are the most destructive agricultural pests in St Kitts. A farmer from the Sandy Point Co-op discussed how the lack of water leads to deficient production levels that could potentially help ease the monkey burden. “Water is a serious problem for farmers. That with the monkeys. I think if we got the water, the production would be up so we could even put in a crop for the monkeys. In the time that they take to finish that, I might actually get something for myself,” he said. In the next section, I discuss the damage done by monkeys and the government’s refusal to implement any relief.
“Monkey don’t play”: Managing unrelenting agricultural pests

One day early in my fieldwork, Bobo took me into the mountain to explore the sugar fields and “look mango.” We drove up as high as we could but decided to trudge up one particularly overgrown road. As we walked, we started to hear music, which got louder as we continued. Eventually, the music reached a crescendo as we came to a farm nestled in the mountain. Like most farms, this one has a small shed on the periphery where farmers usually store their tools and take their afternoon breaks when the sun is at its hottest. This shed was the source of the music so I assumed the farmer was having a mid-day party and we continued on our journey. On the way back down the mountain after eating our weights in wild mango, we bumped into the farmer walking back up towards his musical farm. As is customary in St. Kitts, we stopped to exchange pleasantries. During our conversation, he explained that he had to run to town but he was worried about leaving his farm to the devices of the quick working monkeys who can eat, or at least bite, a field of crops within a few hours on an unattended farm. He was hoping that the music would trick the monkeys into thinking the farmer is there so they stay away. Monkeys are intelligent animals who learn farmers’ tricks quickly so the music only works about half the time. Bobo commiserated with stories about crying over fields of produce destroyed by monkeys. After that, I noticed that monkeys came up in any conversation about agriculture in St Kitts, even unprompted.

If you ask a farmer in St Kitts what they think is the biggest issue in agriculture, most will answer something along the lines of “Well, besides the monkeys…..” before mentioning any other topic. My participants notice the monkeys are getting more destructive now and reaching areas of the lowlands when they had previously stayed in the mountain. Since hurricanes Hugo in 1989 and George in 1998 destroyed the fruit trees in the mountains, monkeys now come down looking for food. Ethnoprimateologist Kerry Dore (2018:928) noted that she heard similar sentiments from her participants during her research on human and non-human primate interaction in St Kitts.

Dore (2018:925) also noted that “the Kittitian landscape has been modified and reshaped in ways that significantly benefit monkey movements” since the closing of the sugar industry. She found that the increase in monkey populations outside of the mountain is a direct result of the sugar industry closing as monkeys were “limited in geographic range to the Central Forest Reserve and southeast peninsula by sugar industry infrastructure (i.e., the provision ground
buffer zone, human activity in the cane fields, tractors, and rangers hired by each estate to shoot monkeys entering the fields)” (2018:928).

Monkey destruction causes financial loss, frustration, and animosity towards the monkeys and the government. In some cases, farmers abandoned their property for lower lands with less monkeys. One day after working on his farm, Delvin showed me the entrance to the trail that leads to the top of Mount Liamuiga. The dormant volcano’s crater is a popular attraction for both locals and tourists. On the way to the mountainside trail entrance, we drove past many fields overtaken with grass. I asked Delvin why these fields were left empty. He said that these farms were close to the jungle so the monkeys must have run people from their property. Later, Delvin’s suspicions were confirmed by several farmers who told me they relocated from that area to areas with fewer monkey issues. In other cases, farmers have sought out other sources of income or abandoned farming altogether. Monkey trapping for the island’s biomedical facility, who will periodically pay for captured monkeys, has become a new profession that provides supplemental income. James, a farmer in his 60s, has given up farming completely and now makes his money capturing monkeys. Ira, an agro-processor who rents a permanent booth in the market, began selling agro-processed goods because he was losing too much money from monkey damage as a produce farmer. The farmers in the Sandy Point Co-op have focused on producing hot peppers as monkeys tend not to bother them as much. Other farmers have decided to “pause” their produce farming while they work in construction or other professions with hopes of returning to farming when an alternative source of income is set up. During the Monday market, the difference the monkey problem makes in agriculture is highly visible. Evelyn observed that producers from St Vincent and Dominica can produce more food and compete with local farmers because they do not have monkeys.

Karen, a backyard gardener who just returned from living in the US for many years, suggested a monkey season the way the US has a deer season. Others support a culling and sterilization program or complete eradication. Another idea farmers have expressed would be for the government to set up a reserve where tourists could visit the monkeys without them risking the farmers’ produce.

The monkey problem highlights the overarching issue for local agriculturalists—the government’s protection of the tourism industry to their detriment. Businesses in the tourism sector use the monkeys as a marketing tool. They are on mugs, shirts, shot glasses, postcards,
and anything else you can imagine being purchasable at a cruise ship port. “Monkey men,” people who make their living charging tourists to take pictures with captured baby monkeys, frequently circulate the cruise ship port, scenic lookouts around the island, and other tourist traps. These baby monkeys are small, adorable, interactive, and usually dressed in cute outfits. The opportunity to hold a “wild” monkey is a big draw. Some tourist bars and restaurants feed wild monkeys to entice them to hang out. These establishments then advertise on their signs and websites, enticing customers to come “relish an up-close experience with monkeys.”

The Department of Agriculture’s website recognizes that “with an increase in the monkey population and consequent significant increase in the devastation of crops, a number of farmers have down-scaled the size of their operations due to the increased cost of their operation to address the damage done by the monkeys.” Their only solution to this issue is to encourage backyard gardening stating “by increasing the number of backyard gardeners across the Federation there will be some significant impact on the establishment of a viable and sustainable agricultural economy which eventually shall lead towards addressing the issue of food security and climate change.”

This is problematic for multiple reasons. It does not help farmers who rely on crop production for their livelihoods. There is no long- or short-term plan to deal with the monkeys in a way that benefits farmers. Additionally, not everyone can or wants to keep a backyard garden and even those that do still struggle with the monkeys. Karen, a dedicated backyard gardener who lives in the lowlands, discussed her struggles with the monkeys.

“I personally think there are more monkeys than people,” Karen said laughing. She echoed a common saying among Kittitians regarding the monkey population. An accurate population assessment of the monkeys has never been done but it is easy to see why people feel that way.

“When I go to the market and I hear the farmers cry that they plant 20 rows of cabbage or pineapples and they don’t get any or potatoes and they only get one bag. Because the monkeys pull them up and bite them up and destroy them. And to protect the farmers, I think the government needs to do something about these monkeys,” Karen continued.

“Even here in my little backyard, they will pull up my potatoes and my beets!”
Really? All the way down here” I asked, surprised that Karen has monkeys in her yard in her residential neighborhood in the lowlands.

“I haven’t seen them for a couple days. I hope they aren’t listening to me,” she said, pulling her shoulders up to her ears and turning her head right and left pretending to scan for eavesdropping monkeys.

“They will be walking on the fence and they go in and get the mangoes from the next-door neighbor and then they’ll get back on the fence. But yeah, they will pull up my things. My scallions! One day, I’m inside and I’m smelling scallions and I say hmm?’” She sat straight up and smelled the air and put her pointer finger to her lips. “That little monkey was out there just pulling them up and breaking them! Not eating them. So, I chased him and he was peeking to see if I was looking at him. I had to stand outside to make sure he didn’t come back!”

Without the government’s support, farmers and backyard gardeners have to deal with monkeys in their own ways. Karen is retired but many backyard gardeners have full time jobs and are not home during the day to chase monkeys away from their crops. Most farmers are on their farms from sun-up to sun-down, but it is impossible to be everywhere at once so it is often challenging and, in some cases, impossible to guard one’s farm. Farmers are prohibited from living on their leased farms so they are not there as consistently as needed to protect their crops. Armstrong noted that farmers must get to their farms early in the morning, before sunup “to run the monkey” because “monkey don’t play.” Shooting monkeys was a productive method of population control during sugar production. Plantation owners would hire people to patrol the perimeter of the properties, keeping monkeys in the mountain. Now that farmers are working fields independently, that method is no longer effective. It is difficult to own a firearm in St Kitts legally and removing one monkey at a time makes little difference to the population. Some farms have dogs but the monkeys quickly learn where the dogs are and even the length of their chains. Electric fences can be effective but they are expensive and require regular maintenance and large or odd shaped farms are difficult to fence. Additionally, the issues of land ownership discussed in an earlier section makes farmers hesitant to invest in large projects on their farms. Other pests like wild hogs and livestock are manageable with a regular fence, but that, too, requires upkeep and an investment on land that belongs to the government.

When farmers are able to raise their crops to maturity and reap them successfully, they now face the challenge of finding a market and distribution channels. The following sections
focus on the unstable market, competition between farmers, and the lack of desire for local agricultural products.

**Fast Food for a Fast Life Generation: Lack of demand in the mainstream food system**

“As much as the Caribbean is known for fresh foods, we import a lot,” said David, a turnhand, one day while he was at the Monday market buying Dominican produce to resell to American students at the universities.

Food preferences are shaped by many factors but many of my participants feel that contemporary cultural influences from the United States are currently making the most impact. The popularity and convenience of grocery stores, Chinese food, and fast food like Burger King, Subway, Dominos and particularly KFC has grown exponentially. A friend from Nevis proclaimed with disbelief that “Even on Sunday, there is a line out the door of KFC!” An employee of the school farm once said that “people in St Kitts have an idea that foreign is better. They see American things on TV and that’s what they want.” Tine echoed those sentiments one day in the market. Sitting with her at the market, a man in his thirties came in to buy produce. I made a comment about how I am usually the youngest person in the market and she responded by saying that diets are changing on the island because people watch American and British shows and want to emulate the culture.

The school farm employee’s statement that “people in St Kitts have an idea that foreign is better” is not a new thought and in many ways, is deeply ingrained in the island’s food system as colonization and enslavement have shaped the contemporary Kittitian foodscape and foodways. As mentioned in the last chapter, plantation owners forced enslaved Africans into subsistence farming to meet their food needs. Conversely, plantation owners ate mostly imported foods. Imported foods such as wheat flour also developed a high status. This was rekindled during World War II, when the ever presence of German U-Boats prohibited goods from being imported. Cassava, arrowroot, and breadfruit now represented poverty, war, deprivation, and scarcity. An agro-processor named Ira explained that they ate cassava and arrowroot regularly to cut down on their cornmeal and wheat. Ira noted that when other things became available, these traditional foods became thought of as “poor people's food.” He feels that local people do not see the value in traditional foods unless foreigners show interest. To illustrate his point, Ira noted that breadfruit, cassava, and arrowroot are slowly gaining popularity again because tourists and
expats want to experience local foods. International organizations are also trying to increase interest in local products to cut down on waste and importations through programs such as the cassava bread making workshop, which the Food and Agriculture Organization ran in 2017.

I once asked Evelyn how the market was changing over the years. “We are in the fast life generation,” she said, remarking on how young people do not come to the market. When local food is available, convenient, or competitively priced, however, it is an option. People in their thirties frequent local snacketts and other informal eateries as often as they go to the Chinese food shops or KFC. Meeting friends on their lunch breaks during the weekday, we are equally likely to drive to their favorite local shop in the country as we are to go to the food court in the cruise ship port, depending on their cravings for the day. The women in my social group hardly go to the market for their produce but it was common for me to receive requests for items when they knew I would be there.

During another visit to Pam’s stand on a Saturday morning, I was listening to two middle-aged women talk about their purchases and what they were making with them. One woman makes and sells food out of her home in Basseterre on Fridays and Saturdays. I jumped into the conversation to ask what she cooked. That day, she was making goat water, a popular soup made with goat meat and vegetables. She mentioned that she does it the “old school way” by browning the flour first and then adding it to the soup as a thickener. I asked why people skip the step of browning the flour now. She felt that young people today are always looking for shortcuts and easy ways of doing things. While she talked, Pam exclaimed, “Long time me don't me hear no one talking about browning flour!” The woman said it’s the same thing with cook-up, the Caribbean version of stir-fried rice. Most people nowadays throw everything in a big pot and cook it together but she takes the time to cook everything separately and then sauté it all together. She said an older woman came in the day before and actually scraped the bottom of her pot clean. As we talked about the “old school” ways of cooking, Pam reminisced “Just now when you are talking, I see my grandmother in the kitchen.” Their conversation alluded to their views on contemporary diets being inferior in terms of quality and the lack of effort put forth by the younger generation regarding their food preparation but people spend less time in the kitchen out of necessity.

The contemporary lifestyle puts people in office jobs or service work with long hours in town or the tourist side of the island. Sometimes, convenience foods are the best and only
options. Snacketts and informal eateries close early, and the market is only open two days a week. Weeknights and the weekends, rushing home from work or from activity to activity, the most practical options are convenience foods for a quick meal and grocery shopping at the formal store where they can get all their shopping done at once.

Not everyone would agree that food preferences in St Kitts are steered by an internalization of historic processes and westernization. When asked why they do not eat local foods, my friends would usually answer with something along the lines of “I just ate it too much when I was coming up.” I attribute the food preferences in St Kitts to a combination of all these factors: an unconscious association between local foods and poverty, the contemporary and historic westernized “modern” ideals that encourage people to seek perceived or real upward mobility, the “fast life” described by Evelyn, personal preferences and desire for variety, and increased access to supermarket and cash-economy food.

Becoming or remaining part of the mainstream food system is a challenge for my participants because of the disconnection between their operation and the needs and desires of the modern day “fast-life.” My participants feel that with stronger distribution channels and a more stable market they would have an easier time becoming part of the mainstream food system, which I will discuss in the next section.

Competition for the Limited Markets

One day during my fieldwork, I went to a farm to help a farmer prep for the market. We began the day picking the standard produce the farmer’s wife sells at their stand, thyme, rosemary, mint, papaya, and bananas. In the middle of the morning, the farmer received a call from someone who needed 250 pounds of seasoning peppers by that afternoon. Seasoning peppers are red, yellow, or orange and grow on hip-height bushes. They are about the size and weight of a ping pong ball so 250 pounds of them was unimaginable. The farmer pulled his four employees and me to the pepper field and we began plucking them off waist high bushes and dropping them into buckets. Then we dumped our full buckets into large canvas bags that had “East Caribbean Feeds” printed on them in faded orange and blue block letters. It took a few hours of taxing work but eventually the six of us were able to fill enough bags to reach the desired poundage. While harvesting, the conversation was not about the lower back pain from bending over or crouching, the finger blisters from carrying buckets or maneuvering prickly
bushes, or how the finish line never seemed closer no matter how long we were picking. No one even mentioned the scorching sun on this particularly bright day, except of course when teasing me about my sunburn that I was trying to pass off as a tan. The conversation, even when I asked about how their bodies handle this all day every day, was about gratitude that there was a place to sell a large amount of their produce. Agriculture requires long days of physically demanding labor in the hot sun but when farmers discuss their challenges, that is never on the list. What I hear most often is the lack of stable and reliable markets and distribution channels, which many attribute to the lack of governmental support in terms of international trade and creating domestic markets.

Ford and Dorodnykh (2016: 31) observed that the “tourism industry mainly relies on food imports as opposed to accessing the local market. Despite numerous efforts over many years there has been little success in sustainably supplying tourism demand from domestic production and value-chains.” Even when grocery stores or restaurants want regional produce, imports from St Vincent, Dominica, and recently St Lucia that are brought in by small-scale produce traffickers, are often their first choice. Dion noted that local producers have a hard time competing with imported goods in terms of price, “I won't say we got more than the market can take. We got more than the market want to take because, for example, all the supermarkets, they have a local area. It's just small.” “We farmers are willing to produce” he continued “we have crops producing and you cannot get it sold on the local market because they're bringing in the same crops. Tomatoes, peppers, that kind of stuff. They're bringing them in, and they're cheaper.” Indeed, Ford and Dorodnykh (2016: 31) observed that “the main challenges for Caribbean farmers in meeting food supply required by the tourism industry relate to their inability to compete with imported crops in terms of quality, price and adequate volume.” Vibration echoed Dion saying that local producers have a hard time competing with imported regional goods “Because of the volume that these guys bring, you get the food a little cheaper than normal. Basically. And the variety is much more than we have. Because those countries, their main economy is agriculture, where ours is tourism now.” Mrs. Nisbet said that St Kitts’ farmers are a “small economy of scale,” meaning it costs them more to produce goods than the larger producers and the market does not have room for both local and imported. Evelyn also feels that local producers are unable to compete with imports despite having superior products because of consistency and price. Kevin also pointed out that local prices are not competitive
with the imported goods, which he attributes to St. Kitts’ membership in CARICOM, the Caribbean Common Market which required participation in their Single Market Agreement. That means they are not able to ban produce from other CARICOM islands. The Single Market Agreement “seeks to implement provisions for the removal of trade and professional restrictions,” according to their website. This was intended to improve market access, but that in turn means the regional produce can flow into the food system, competing with local producers.

Additionally, food producers and sellers are at the mercy of drastic fluctuations in the service industries. One danger with passive economies is that “when resources are depleted or external demand changes, the economy regresses” as we see when external demand for tourism changes (Best and Levitt 2009). The various governments since independence have always been pro-tourism but, during the slow tourist season, the whole island slows down financially. Walwyn, whose family owned a plantation and was bought out during the nationalization of the sugar industry, argued that the government replaced one mono-economy for another. Walwyn (2018:53) warned “Even [Robert Bradshaw] who referred to US greenbacks as ‘dirty dollars’, knew tourism was part of the future. Part of the future it should be, but not all of it because we know from the past that monoculture does not work, and that applied whether one is talking of sugar cane or tourism.” In line with Walwyn’s cautionary statements, my participants notice a change in their business during the seasonal fluctuations of the service industry, even in their non-tourism related businesses. A produce trafficker from St Vincent noted that while his clients are local, many rely on the tourism industry for their income so they have less money to spend. Some vendors try to navigate this by focusing on niche local markets, selling yams and other ground provisions which are considered staples even during lean times. Still, vendors and producers make less money overall during the slow season.

Most of my participants cautioned against large scale export-oriented production as it is just as precarious as relying on tourism. However, they acknowledge some small-scale export channels would help provide income and an avenue to unload surplus goods in the cases of over production. They also argue that having a more self-sufficient food system would create internal markets for local goods.

While customer bases are shrinking, my participants feel that the number of produce farmers is higher now than during sugar production. While the number of agriculturalists has dropped from 15 percent of the labor force to only .2 percent, most of those were sugar workers
that have now moved to produce production. Tine, who sells produce retail at a street stand across from the market, attributes her struggling business directly to the closing of the sugar industry and the subsequent influx of former sugar workers into produce farming. Tine is one of several women whose husbands work the land while they sell in town. Her husband drops her off at 5 a.m. every day, returns to their farm in the countryside, and picks her up around 5 p.m. She used to leave around 1 p.m. because her produce would sell out early, but now, she often leaves with unsold produce in the evening. One farmer at the market attributes the rise in the number of agriculturalists to the fact that sugar workers had an easier time transitioning to produce farming rather than to tourism, particularly if they have heavy accents or lack experience working with foreigners. It is easier to “pick up land and start planting.” He recalled that when he started selling at the market 32 years ago, most agriculturalists worked in sugar so he had little competition for produce farming. He was able to sell two or three bags of tomatoes in a morning at the Saturday market. Now he says he cannot sell half of a bag during an entire day.

Delvin, a 37-year-old farmer, noted that the problem of competition is exacerbated by the fact that farmers tend to grow the same produce at the same time. Delvin attributes it to flawed business strategies on the island stating that if one farmer sees someone making money on a certain crop, they try to compete by producing the same product instead of something else. Teaching agricultural business in schools would be beneficial to long-term success but other factors also influence production decisions, such as the weather. During mango season, a producer will have a very hard time selling their mangos because almost everyone, including non-agriculturalists, has access to at least one mango tree. Although, this issue could be solved, as participants often remark, if the island put more effort into agro-processing, making juices, jams, hot sauce, marinades, and fruit jerky.

Although grocery stores and restaurants sometimes buy local produce directly from producers, it is often an unpredictable and unreliable outlet. Grocery store and restaurant managers feel that they do not buy local produce more often because local farmers are inconsistent, having large amounts of an item one week and none the next. From the farmers’ point of view, unreliable production is a result of unreliable markets. If they produce tomatoes, for example, and cannot sell them to the grocery store because the store already purchased from another farmer, that farmer will assume there is no market and stop producing tomatoes until there is a shortage. Then, there is another tomato boom. Grocery stores argue that they must fill
the void by creating regular and consistent importation channels. An employee at the school farm mentioned that if restaurants and grocery stores were committed to buying local produce, they would tell farmers what they need each week and farmers would produce for a guaranteed market.

To remedy this, farmers argue that there needs to be clear communication between them and their potential customers, especially during the slow season, which could be brokered by an institution like CEMACO. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the Central Marketing Corporation (CEMACO), was open from 1973 to 2009 but was most efficiently utilized in the 1980s, an era often discussed as the glory days for produce agriculture on the island. CEMACO provided price stabilization, a guaranteed market, and a reliable distribution network for produce. The absence of CEMACO or another stable marketing and distribution network leads to problems with production. Farmers are hesitant to take risks on growing different produce or producing large or consistent qualities of one item.

Taking risks without a guaranteed market is a risk, even when done at the direction of the Department of Agriculture. During my fieldwork, the Department encouraged farmers to grow sun melons, small, yellow fruits similar to cantaloupe. Bobo was one of the farmers who took up the department’s suggestion. One day on the way to the market, we dropped by a grocery store to sell sun melons and watermelons. We rolled the melons in shopping carts to the backroom where the produce manager weighed and priced them. The produce manager was happy to take the watermelon but did not want the sun melons because she had never heard of them and was unsure if they would sell. Bobo eventually sold his sun melons at the market after convincing people to try them. With an organization like CEMACO, farmers would not have to worry about producing and not selling. The exact reason why CEMACO closed is unknown but plenty theories exist that range from bad management to indifference towards agriculture in the government, to political corruption, to active sabotage of agriculturalists. My participants see the creation of an institution like CEMACO as a way for agriculture to move forward but no plan for a CEMACO-like institution exists.

Others note that the problems of overproduction and market competition could be eased with teamwork and communication between farmers but the competition among them breeds a potentially aggressive environment where farmers are unwilling or hesitant to work together. Aside from three co-ops and small associations, there is very little communication between
farmers. Even within co-ops, there is often discord, disagreements, unequal work distribution, and unclear goals. This often does more harm than good, as highlighted by Delvin’s comments that farmers grow the same products as a way to cut in on other farmers’ profits instead of creating an environment where they are all prosperous. Delvin also mentioned that their lack of teamwork also means they do not have the ability to organize when needed. If they need something from the government or have a problem or have an idea, they have no strong base to fight for it from. In St Kitts, there is “a deeply ingrained culture of individualism and mistrust” which Clarke (2016:63) says leads to “the inevitable failure of partnerships in farming.”

Vibration, when describing the formation of and recruitment of members for the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative, noted that it is not always easy to get people to work together. “I think it's the mindset of our people where I feel like they don't want anybody in charge of them so to speak. We feel like probably we could do it on our own. There was a few persons that after coming to one or two meetings, say they don't want to be in another man’s co-op or something to that effect but teamwork is always best.” Karen, a backyard gardener who recently returned from 20 years of living in the United States, also commented on the lack of teamwork among farmers. I asked Karen what she noticed about agriculture in St Kitts after living abroad for so many years, she responded “I find that farmers from what I’m seeing, everybody wants to do their own thing. No one wants to work as a team. Instead of everybody growing onions, why not have someone grow a different type of onion. Everybody grows the same thing so there’s no diversity. If they worked as a team, together like form a co-op and say ok I’m going to grow lettuce and I’m going to grow this. So, they aren’t competing against each other. And you could grow some onions if you want but not on mass production because the other person down the street has all of that because it’s a small island.”

Chapter Conclusion: Reclaiming and Creating within Agricultural Spaces

“Farming ain’t no easy thing” as Bobo put it. In addition to the physicality of their jobs, agriculturalists must endure a critical lack of government support which manifests into limited resources, negative stereotypes of farmers and agricultural labor, competition and lack of cooperation between or coordinating mechanisms for farmers, availability of fast and convenience foods, unreliable, unstable, and limited markets and distribution channels,
landlessness and placelessness, unyielding agricultural pests, and limited to no access to water which is exacerbated by climate change.

So why, then, are agriculturalists deeply dedicated to their work? Garvin (xxii: 2009) cautioned that passive incorporation into the world economy “cannot lead to sustained and sustainable development.” Accordingly, there are many practical reasons to increase agriculture on the island, such as decreasing reliance on foreign food and reducing the food import bill, decreasing vulnerability to global economic shifts, providing income for local agriculturalists, and increasing national security in times of crisis, notably hurricanes and now pandemics.

For my participants, their commitment to agriculture is deeper than solely the above-mentioned advocacy for agricultural development. Whether through active resistance or “simply making a life” (Reese 2019:2), agricultural spaces, for my participants, are spaces of social networks and community building, reclaiming former sugar industry spaces and forging placeness within placelessness, cultivating environmental and cultural sustainability, and fostering food and economic autonomy and health and wellness for individuals and communities.

The following chapters explore how agriculturalists navigate their food system and how they have created, reclaimed, re-imagined, maintained, and given meaning to agricultural spaces and the emotional, cultural, and economic opportunities that my participants create through their agricultural production. In the next chapter, I focus on the role, formation and maintenance of social networks in agricultural spaces by an examination of the public market in the capital city.
CHAPTER 5: Social Relationships, Agriculture, and Space: Cultural Values in the Town

Market

While waiting to board the plane to St Kitts to start my fieldwork, I struck up a conversation with a middle-aged woman named Joyce. The native New Yorker, who relocated to St Kitts ten years ago to be with her husband, became vital to my fieldwork and life on the island. My first Saturday there, she and her husband took me to the public market in town where farmers and vendors sell produce, meat, and fish. She took me by the arm and introduced me to as many vendors as she knew including a man in his thirties known as Bobo the Jelly Man. Everyone in St. Kitts has at least one nickname. They can be based on a resemblance to a celebrity, a favorite pastime, a distinguishable trait, or even a bad habit. Often, nicknames are based on their professions and affiliations, as in the case of Bobo the Jelly Man. “Bobo” is a reference to his former affiliation with an order of Rastafari called Bobo Shanti and “Jelly Man” because of his current profession selling jellies, the local term for young water coconuts.

I first spotted him standing on the sidewalk across from the market building, next to a pile of jellies, so called because their immature flesh has a jelly-like quality. It has not yet hardened into the flesh of an adult coconut used to make flakes, shredded coconut, or coconut milk. When Joyce and I approached, he was holding a machete in one hand and a jelly in the other. He gave the top of the jelly a few whacks with the machete and poured the clear, sweet coconut water into plastic bottles. When the bottle was full, another man switched the full bottle out for an empty one, capped and wiped down the full bottle before handing it off to a customer in exchange for 20 EC or about 8 USD. It was six in the morning and he was already surrounded by customers not-so-patiently waiting for their bottle. As he chopped, his pile of jellies got smaller and the pile of empty shells grew. Bobo is loud, energetic, and magnetic. I think he was the inspiration for the expression “work hard, play hard.” Our first interaction was brief because Joyce had a long list of people to introduce me to on our whirlwind
tour of the market, but Bobo became one of my key participants. He took me under his wing as an unofficial apprentice, teaching me the agricultural ropes, putting me to work on his farms, selling at the market, and in his jelly water business. “You need to learn how to do this” became a repeated order.

Most of the coconut, young and mature, sold in St. Kitts comes from St. Vincent. Anyone older than thirty will almost always mention the disease that killed most of St Kitts’ tall coconut palms. Some people and organizations, notably the Taiwanese government, have invested in Caribbean agriculture and attempted to introduce more robust varieties, but these new plants have yet to gain popularity with farmers. In order to sell local jelly at the market on Saturdays, Bobo must forage, or as it’s called in St Kitts, “looking jelly,” in the only two places where coconut palms are plentiful, high in the jungle and in the flat, lowland, tourist area known as Frigate Bay. Bobo does frequent the mountain, but looking jelly in Frigate Bay takes the hike out of the already physically challenging activity of climbing trees. Bobo has a social network and reputation that allows him access to Frigate Bay as he has made deals with several property managers at condominium complexes to clear the dead leaves off their trees in exchange for the jellies.

Looking jelly on a commercial scale would be almost impossible alone so Bobo relies on a network of friends and family to help. Sometimes, I was lucky enough to be invited along. One very hot day in May, he and two of his friends picked me up in a modified Land Rover Defender pickup truck with a brightly painted jungle and ocean scene down the sides and across the hood. Bobo bought the old, rusted truck secondhand from a local eco-tour company. I climbed into the cab of the truck and yelled hello over the rumbling engine and the soca music pouring from the speakers, and we clattered our way from my village towards Frigate Bay.

We arrived at a condominium complex, I opened the door, and poured myself out of the truck after bouncing around the cabin of the truck on the way. The property manager was already waiting for us and began to heckle Bobo for being late and yell at him which trees needed to be cleaned. His tone, while sounding harsh, was typical of Caribbean communication between friends.

Climbing coconut palms was a pastime for people growing up in St Kitts. It requires a tremendous amount of core strength as the climber has to wrap their arms around the trunk of the tree and use their legs to essentially bunny hop up the trunk. Because Bobo has “nothing to
prove” and needs to prioritize efficiency over showing off his abilities to climb trees using sheer body strength, he wears spikes on his boots. The spikes allow him to walk up 20 to 30-foot coconut palms. Once at the top, he twists the jellies off their steams and tosses them onto the ground. Trying to catch one descending from thirty feet in the air will result in a broken hand, as one of Bobo’s helpers found out the hard way. He tries to find the softest grass, bush, or flower garden (much to the dismay of the property manager) to toss them in but occasionally, especially when there has not been enough rain, the coconuts crack when they hit the ground. His helpers, including me, who are usually goofing off waiting for him to finish clearing a tree, all rush to grab the cracked jelly before someone else does. Drinking fresh jelly water is made sweeter by the victory of outrunning your opponents, although I suspect they let me win on more than one occasion.

After Bobo clears a tree, he moves on to the next one, and his helpers collect the jellies from the ground in a wheelbarrow and wheel them to the truck. One person stands next to the wheelbarrow and tosses the jellies to another person standing in the bed of the truck who places them in the pile, making sure to throw out any cracked ones that slipped past our greedy eyes. When the bed of the truck was full and the trees were empty, we climbed back into the truck and headed off, but not before stopping for saltfish pizza, the official pizza of St Kitts according to the sign in front of the shop. Bobo and the guys dropped me off at home on their way back to the countryside for more farm work before evening. At the market a few days later, Bobo is back to chopping jelly open and pouring the water into plastic bottles. There, he is just as reliant on his social network to sell his goods as he is to harvest. In addition to selling jelly water, he sells produce off his farms. While he chops jelly, one of his friends sells produce and takes money for him.
Bobo is not alone in his reliance on a group of hardworking, trustworthy people with whom he has strong familial or social bonds. The way anthropologists become enmeshed in and depend on relationships and networks to collect data, agriculturalists depend on deep social networks of friends and family to sow, harvest, and sell their goods.

**Agriculture and the Future of Community Networks**

Through an examination of the use of agricultural spaces, this chapter analyzes how agriculture conserves the cultural value of extended, deep, meaningful social networks including and beyond the nuclear family. Through “practices of everyday life that are neither loud nor attention-seeking” (Reese 2019:2), My participants are taking control of the future of their livelihoods, community, and culture through a passive resistance to the individualistic and production-focused nature of capitalism, wage-labor in the service sector, the global food system. I am not arguing that my participants or other vendors in the market intend to be anti-capitalistic in any way. I am arguing, rather, that small-scale agriculture allows my participants to take part in the capitalist system without abandoning their cultural values of teamwork, community, and family. Most farmers rely on a network of family, friends, and neighbors, many who do not have competing agricultural businesses, to complete their agricultural work. Intense competition between farmers and the lack of people willing to perform agricultural labor makes the task of building a trustworthy network a challenging but necessary feat.

The main space of analysis for this chapter is the town market where I met Bobo. The market is not solely an economic space and the economic activities that take place there are embedded within social relationships. Vendors, customers, and community members often form social relationships through *liming*, the Caribbean term for hanging out. In this space, the social relationships from farms, gardens, and foraging spots are enacted, demonstrated, and displayed. The town market is the space where conflicts and cliques come to a head and where social relationships are formed, broken, and mended. I mainly focus on the ways social ties play out in the market in addition to the relationships formed within and because of the market space. I also explore the meaning of the market and how actors use the space. I did not conduct a formal social network analysis but instead relied on information from conversations, interviews, and my own observations and experiences spending two days a week for thirteen months interacting with agriculturalists in St Kitts. This method allows me to highlight the organic and more nuanced
nature of social ties within this group. Before focusing on the market space, I first examine how agricultural production is inherently reliant on and actively forms social and community networks.

**Communal Labor in Small-Scale Production**

During plantation agriculture, field workers spent their limited personal time working on provision plots together. Today, with most of the working force in tourism and other non-agricultural businesses and communal provision plots no longer in use, the social relationships formed by agricultural labor are also faded.

Plantation sugar harvesting also cultivated social relationships because it required cane workers to work in groups called gangs. When the industry was mechanized in the early 1950s and cane loaders replaced human labor, workers no longer worked in gangs in the field, which “individualizes the cutting process, reducing co-operation and creating competition among workers from which only the planters gained” (Frucht 1978: 95). Without communal labor in the field, the factory functioned as the primary source of worker collaboration. This collaboration between workers in the central factory led to the formation of labor unions and eventually expanded to the creation of a political party devoted to workers' rights. Carl, a Kittitian-born real estate agent, noted while discussing political platforms prior to the 2020 election, once the factory closed in 2005 and workers scattered, the political leg came out from the Labour Party. Fifteen years later, the party is still trying to regain its footing.

Farming and even foraging is not a profession for individuals, as we see with Bobo’s hunt for jellies. Agriculturalists in St. Kitts rely on teamwork in every level of their agricultural businesses from prepping land, planting, growing, reaping, and selling. Working with other farmers is often necessary to make up for the shortcomings of the formal institution in charge of agriculture, in this case the Department of Agriculture, in pest control, water management, access to resources, education, and information. They are able to borrow and trade labor and resources.

Without a formal island-wide agricultural industry to unite workers, agriculturalists must find and create their own agricultural networks. Finding reliable labor proves challenging for many agriculturalists in St Kitts, leading my participants to draw on their social, village, and family networks for labor. For my participants, the reliance on an already existing social network boils down to trust. My participants rely on their workers to show up and put in work, even when
the work seems fruitless, and to not steal produce or equipment. Employees need to be emotionally invested in the progress of the farm. Contemporary ideologies around food and labor often mean that people are less interested in agricultural labor, increasing the difficulty of finding help.

The Sandy Point Co-op is made up of cousins and childhood friends despite being open to all village residents. Glenn, a 30-year-old farmer from the Atlantic side of the island has several paid employees but relies on three of his brothers to work and manage his farm while he recovers from an unexpected health issue. Pedro, a farmer from St Vincent who moved to St Kitts to farm several years ago, brought three childhood friends over to work for him instead of finding local labor. Delvin and his neighbor take turns working on each other’s farms during time of preparing land, planting, and reaping and often share equipment costs such as tractor rentals. Bobo explained the benefits of hiring friends and family instead of paid workers outside of his social network in a conversation about an injury his friend sustained while trying to catch a jelly.

Bobo: Randy’s hand still healing but I have a good partner with me. He willing to go every day
Dana: Is this new guy a friend?
Bobo: Know him for a while now
Dana: You always use friends or family on the farm and going for jelly?
Bobo: They work good. Workers just wanna go as we reach [the foraging locations]
Dana: Do you trust them more? I'm asking because I notice most people in the market and on farms use family or friends rather than employees.
Bobo: Yes. And it's because someone close will wanna stay and see everything looking good rather than someone who just wants the money. And you know farming requires faith. It's hard to find people that you can trust

Farming, as Bobo says, requires faith. It can be lucrative but it requires a lot of patience and hard work. It is not quick money. Farmers have to plant and wait for things to grow. Sometimes the hard work and long hours do not pay off if they do not find an outlet to sell their produce or the crops are destroyed by animals, weather, or people. Work days are long and exhausting. Bobo’s statement that “Workers just wanna go as we reach,” highlights his belief that workers outside of his social network are ready to be done for the day just as it starts. While he does pay or barter labor with his friends and family, Bobo makes a clear distinction between those who work for the paycheck only and those who are emotionally invested in the farm.
Without a commitment to the success of the farm, workers are unwilling to put in the long hours required. People motivated by money with no emotional investment in the success of the farm often do not want to sustain a career in farming. It is easy to get frustrated and give up. Working with friends and family ensures people will be invested deeper than money. Also, working with friends and family allows avenues for bartering goods and labor if multiple parties are involved in agriculture. Social ties outside of the farm, integrated family and social networks, also add a layer of worker accountability in addition to the investment in the farm.

While much of the existing social ties are demonstrated or mobilized on farms, the work of building and strengthening relationships can be done at a central location, the town market. The town market also is a theater for the already existing social ties as family and friends are enlisted to help buy and sell goods.

**The Town Market**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the town market is located at the very edge of Basseterre. The original market space was in Independent Square but according to the St Kitts National Archives’ archivist Victoria O'Flaherty, sometime prior to 1870, the market was moved to what is now a parking lot for a medical practice and then to another space in the same area. The street still maintains the moniker Market Street. It was then moved to another space which was later converted to the now closed Central Marketing Corporation (CEMACO). The market was relocated several times before settling on its current location at the edge of town, in a multipurpose building under the management of the Department of Agriculture, in the 1920s or 1930s. The particulars around the building of the current building were not well documented. According to Inniss (1995), it was built sometime in the 1930s. That is still up for debate as, based on the building’s style, O'Flaherty believes it was designed by Surveyor of Public Works, C. G. Thibou who was active in the 1920s. When researching the market space, I realized that tracing the history of this space was not easy. To learn the little I have, I had to call on and cross reference information from Victoria O'Flaherty who had been the keeper of the national archives for twenty years, a friend’s Facebook post in a Kittitian group page asking for people’s best recollection, and several biographies. Much information was vague and contradictory. Recently, there has been talk of finding another site for the market but nothing has materialized yet. The fact that it is so poorly documented, and the market space was moved, built, and rebuilt many
times without clear records, and the current location far from the center of activity, demonstrates that the importance of the sale of agricultural goods on the local level is missed by society as a whole. Still, the market remained an important social and economic space for those who sell and shop there despite its many moves over the years.

The market is far from the center of town and any parking areas, making it inconvenient. Buyers and sellers must attend the market intentionally. Low (2017:66) uses her concept of social production of space to link macro and micro processes and argues that “the social and political goals of one group…local and transnational elites are implicated in the production of a material environment that restricts resources and access to public goods for the majority of the poor and working-class residents.” In that way, we can see the location of the market as a deliberate act, a result of prioritizing other commercial enterprises. Today, the center of town is dominated by Americanized stores and cafes, international chains, and tourist-aimed establishments like gift shops, restaurants, and museums.

The spatial marginalization of the market on the outskirts of town and the social marginalization of agriculturalists has created a tight knit subculture of people that utilize the market space. While Mondays and Saturdays at the market function differently in terms of hours of operation and economic activity—afternoon and evening wholesale vending of imported regional goods by foreign hucksters and big local producers to local vendors on Mondays versus early morning to afternoon retail sale by local vendors and producers to local consumers on Saturdays—the market functions similarly on both days in terms of the social relations. Vendors spend hours in the market together. This is the primary meeting place for most agriculturalists and where they spend the greatest time interacting, socially or economically, with each other.

In contrast to the Sandy Point Market discussed in the next chapter that focuses on food insecurities and sustainability, the town market valorizes entrepreneurialism, small businesses, and small producers. In the following sections, I demonstrate how different actors transform the market into a meaningful space through their interactions with each other and, in turn, how economic activities in this space preserve social and cultural values.

**Markets as Social Spaces**

In line with Corsín Jiménez’s (2003:139) observation that it is through social relationships that “places' are activated as they are practiced and brought to life,” Spaces,
including public space such as the market, are imbued with shared and individual meanings and understandings (Low 2017, Cattell et al 2008). The town market space itself is not on any meaningful ground in its own right. In fact, the market was moved from its historically meaningful place in the center of town to its current location with little thought or consideration for cultural importance. Low (2017:69) points out that spaces “are built and constructed for hegemonic purposes but the same processes of social construction, however, are equally available to those who are resisting spatial control and change.” The actors that utilize this space make it meaningful in spite of and because of the hegemonic forces that created it.

Simultaneously, the activities that make the market space meaningful preserve cultural values of social ties and community labor. Storr (2008) asserts that a complete conceptualization of public markets “requires that we appreciate that the market is a social space where both economic and extra-economic relationships are developed and maintained. Markets are not only embedded in community but can also promote and sustain community.” Similarly, Cattell et al (2008:553) argue casual social interactions in public spaces are key elements in people’s attachment to place, stating that “routine and regular social encounters often helped to maintain loose ties between neighbors and familiar strangers but could also provide the first step towards friendships.” As such, socializing and social ties transform this space from a sterile building of neutral economic transactions to a vibrant space for social networking.

Most vendors and customers come to the market once or twice a week, making them familiar with each other, the routines of the market, and the market space. Their “familiarity with spaces, regular use, positive perceptions of the area, feeling comfortable with fellow users, and the endurance of a space over time” (Cattell et al 2008:553) facilitates meaningful social exchanges in this public space. While relationships and interactions run from quick interactions to all day hang out sessions, in this chapter, I focus on sustained interactions and relationships between vendors and themselves and regular customers and vendors. Vendors, as I use the word in this chapter, refers to producers selling their own goods, vendors reselling goods, agro-processors selling homemade products, and hucksters selling goods from other islands.

In Storr’s (2008) study, he notes that a variety of meaningful social relationships are buttressed by markets and would not exist if markets did not exist. Whether these relationships are economic, friendships, or a combination, the relationships within the town market are similar in the sense that most are formed because of the actors’ shared use of the market space. The
market space creates social relationships and a sense of community beyond villages and even islands, connecting people from Dominica, St Kitts, St Vincent, and Nevis based on shared interests and issues rather than living spaces.

In her study of markets as social spaces in the UK, sociologist Sophie Watson (2009) found that most markets consist of “rubbing along encounters,” which she defines as “a form of limited encounter between social subjects where recognition of different others through a glance or gaze, seeing and being seen, sharing embodied spaces, in talk or silence.” She argues that markets provide opportunities for people of different ethnicities or socioeconomic statuses who might never meet outside of the market to interact, although briefly, in neutral public spaces. The town market provides a space for deeper interactions than the rubbing along in the urban centers Watson studies. Similar to Watson’s study, however, the town market allows for people who might not have the opportunity to socialize otherwise a space to network. The market space facilitates socializing, sharing goods and seeds, eating together, buying on credit and bartering, and cultural and historic knowledge exchange. The market space is also a theater for already existing social relationships as family members and friends often sell in the market together. In the next section, I focus on liming, the Caribbean concept of hanging out. This activity is imbued with cultural values and meaning and also forms and strengthens agricultural business and economic relationships.

“Relax man! Have a beer and stay for a lime”: Hanging out in the market

Many scholars have analyzed liming, each focusing on different meanings and characteristics of importance (see Eriksen 1990, Tidwell 2001, Henke 2004, Maharajh and Ali 2004, Clarke and Charles 2012, McClish 2016) but all agree that a lime is a scheduled or unscheduled informal gathering among friends, coworkers, or acquaintances that include conversation, joking, and storytelling. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1990) notes there is “no exact linguistic or cultural equivalent to liming” outside of the Caribbean.

Eriksen (1990) calls liming, the art of doing nothing in which he describes it as “idling” that has “no explicit purpose beyond itself.” In contrast, McClish (2016: 2) argues that “Eriksen’s notion of liming as doing nothing is based in the assumption that an ‘activity’ is only ‘productive’ if it exemplifies the Western ideals of work and production.” She continues to say that the “dichotomy of privileging work over play is based in both a history of Judeo Christianity
and capitalist ideals of work and consumption. Having a good work ethic remains an important part of the capitalist ideals of individualism.”

While Clarke and Charles (2012:305) observe liming may or may not be actively "seeking to network or to build relationships that will lead to a performance outcome,” “an individual who contributes positively to a good lime is likely to be perceived as someone who can also be a positive contributor in general both in the workplace and the political realm.” They note that liming has the potential to build networks, trust, information and communication exchange, social cohesion, political empowerment, and collective action.

Liming was not initially a point of analysis in my research or an intended research method but instead was an activity in which I participated. During the slow times in the market and after the workday is done, the market becomes a liming space for the vendors. Even when the market is slow, it is still loud, as loose and improvised conversations characteristic of a lime (Eriksen 1990: 28) fill the market. “People always find something to talk about” as Bobo said. These informal conversations took place sitting and standing around on the concrete stalls, on the beach across the street, sitting in the back of someone’s pickup truck parked inside, sitting on the curb outside and across the street, or sprawled out across the fisherman’s massive coolers.

Regardless of the time of day, eating and drinking are an option, if not a requirement, for a lime, and the market is no exception. Giacoman (2016: 461) argues that the “most important function ascribed to shared meals is that of creating and strengthening the relationships that individuals establish among themselves (i.e., social ties).” Vendors have their loud and lively conversations between mouthfuls of food purchased from the local shops around and in the market. Inside the market, there are two built-in stands where agro-processors sell local juice, local homemade snacks and soups, and dried fruit, among other things. There is a small restaurant called National Food Eatery that sells local dishes like cornmeal, fried fish, dumplings, and saltfish. Stands along the ferry dock less than a block away sell local food like patties, johnny cakes, and other finger foods. Most people, men and women included, liming at the market have a drink in their hand—the classic amber Carib beer bottle with the gold and blue label or tiny plastic cups filled with brandy or rum mixed with sea moss, a type of seaweed that is processed into a thick, tasteless drink. Clarke and Charles (2012:308) note “the inclusion of alcohol, ‘an integral part of the lime’, gives rise to a relaxed state, where the parties can feel more inclined to put forth ideas and forge relationships.”
Many of my participants would struggle to define the purpose of a lime in the market because it is so commonplace. I asked a friend her opinion on Eriksen’s and McClish’s articles. She stated in a WhatsApp message,

> It's so strange to see people go into depths of something u do so easily and regularly without giving it much thought, well explained for over 15 pages. I can’t imagine someone coming up to me to ask me questions cuz they doing research on liming. I would assume they have the best job ever cuz they can lime everyday lol

My friend’s comments point to the everyday nature of liming in the Caribbean that makes it hard to define an exact purpose or benefit other than having a good time with people who are your friends, family, acquaintances, or co-workers. My initial impression of liming was similar to Eriksen’s analysis. As an American always on the go, and as a researcher there on a mission, sitting around for hours after your produce “sells off” or getting to the market hours before the busy time to lime with other vendors just feels like fun. Any attempt to leave the market when people were still enjoying their time would be met with protests. “Relax man! Have a beer and stay for a lime” was always Bobo’s response. Within a few weeks, I began to see the value of liming in agricultural spaces for my participants both for their agricultural businesses and beyond.

Individuals and groups socially construct space and give it meaning in a multiplicity of ways (Low 2017). Despite their ambiguity about liming in the market, vendors are able to give the benign, government assigned space of the market meaning through activities such as liming that build and build on social ties. There is a cyclical relationship between liming in the market giving meaning to the space and the space encouraging liming. The market is the space that facilitates liming and, consequently, social relationship building. Liming in agricultural spaces is imbued with cultural meaning including and beyond the Western ideals of productivity and that liming is a mechanism for resisting the individualistic nature of capitalism by creating deep, meaningful social relationships and networks that intertwine with and sometimes supersede economic activity. Liming is also a way to build and strengthen social relationships, which my participants mobilize at appropriate times to facilitate economic activities. This is the focus of the next section.
The Sociality of Economic Transactions

Caribbean cultural values of communal labor and social networking are demonstrated in agriculture, and are visible within the economic activities of the market. The market allows new and existing social ties to be mobilized in economic activities. These social ties facilitate economic relationships and reoccurring economic transactions, such as purchasing goods from specific vendors, vendors purchasing from specific producers, and trading or bartering produce, seeds, or labor. In turn, these economic transactions strengthen existing and develop social relationships and widening networks.

Little teamwork exists among farmers and vendors in St Kitts due to the competitive food market and substandard working and growing conditions. The market as a physical and social space encourages agriculturalists to work together in ways they do not outside of the market. Radil and Walther (2019:6) highlight that social relationships have the possibility to facilitate the flow of resources. In the market, money and goods flow between people who have long established social relationships either as a result of the market or from their social life outside of the market. Producers from all over the federation and other islands participate in economic transactions founded on social ties, such as exchanging agricultural information, sharing resources like equipment or information on where to find resources, and trading or bartering produce, seeds, or labor. To use myself as an example, I became the go-between farmers and vendors—conveying information, delivering seeds and products, and looking after stands. Because of my previous work in Nevis, I often was asked to broker deals between farmers both in St Kitts and Nevis. Frequently, Bobo and the Sandy Point Co-op would use my social ties with both as a channel to relay information regarding price and availability of produce and seeds and to set up meeting and exchange times.

Social relationships between vendors also facilitate trust that is needed for the market’s economic sector to function. Producers often give goods to vendors on credit with the promise of repayment when they make sales. Vendors set aside goods for loyal customers, purchasing goods from specific vendors, and vendors purchasing from specific producers. Additionally, the vendors who have been working next to each other for many years have developed deep trusting relationships, despite the competition between them. They often watch each other’s stalls and handle each other’s money when one needs to step away. On Mondays, Tine and her stall neighbor Ms. Peets set up across the street from the market and take turns shopping with the
vendors from the regional islands. While one is inside the market buying produce “off the boat” the other takes charge of both stalls.

Through many years of close contact with regional vendors in the physical market space, the farmers and vendors are able to forge social and economic relationships built on mutual trust and respect. Kittitian vendors cultivate and mobilize connections with regional vendors to ensure they get the best produce. In other cases, vendors in St Kitts have familial ties and social ties in other islands that facilitate these economic relations. Elvis, a 34-year-old vendor, is from St. Vincent where his mother is a farmer. He relies on his previous connections and his mother’s connections with hucksters to secure good produce.

The connections between regional vendors and local vendors and producers also benefit the regional vendors as they use their social ties to ensure sales of their produce. The vendors from St Vincent and Dominica face similar issues in their profession as local vendors, leading to a sense of comradery and personability among them. While their produce is imported, it is introduced directly into the local market by other small island producers creating that connection that is missing from the industrial agricultural products in the grocery stores.

For customers, the market is a space for potential and actual contact between them and the producers. The social ties created in the market between sellers and customers leads to trusting and loyal economic relationships. Most customers have favorite vendors, ones they trust to give them honest answers in terms of how things were grown or fair prices for the goods.

Customers and sellers also mobilize relationships outside of the market in their economic transactions. Two of my participants, a backyard gardener named Karen and a farmer and vendor named Tine were childhood friends and schoolmates. Karen is cautious of chemicals and GMO products so she only buys from producers she trusts to give her correct information. “I buy from this girl I went to school with. Her name is Earnestine. I will ask her if she grows them because sometimes she buys from other farmers. I say ‘did you grow this? I need to know because if my eyes swell up I am coming looking for you!’” Karen said laughing. Other vendors, she feels, tell her what she wants to hear and seem annoyed at her questioning their product. “When I came back, I would ask questions, I would get the eye roll” she continued. Karen relies on her relationship with Earnestine to feel comfortable asking the questions she feels is necessary and to trust their answers.
Social ties help facilitate economic relationships in some cases and create new relationships in others. Either way, these social ties are necessary for the market to be an economically functional space. In the next section, I focus on informational exchanges and flows through social networks in the market space.

**The Market and Cultural Knowledge Exchange**

Social theorists discuss the ways in which social relationships ease information flow and allow access to information (Burt 1992, Uzzi 1997, Radil and Walther 2019). In addition to forging and strengthening social ties that encourage and facilitate economic transactions, working and liming in the market create a space for exchange of social and economic information. Strong personal ties between actors mean strong and reliable flows of information. Actors who are centrally located within a social network are usually more knowledgeable. The market provides a space for farmers all over the island to build networks through which information flows. The physical space of the market where agriculturalists meet once or twice a week, allows information to flow more efficiently and through wider social networks.

Socially, the market is a space to discuss topics like social and love lives of the people present, religion, family structures, politics, and general gossip. Early on in my fieldwork, Bobo introduced me to Valma, a middle-aged farmer who sells her produce in the market on Saturday. The first time we met, Valma and I talked for a long time, but when I asked questions about her farm and agriculture in St Kitts, she would give a very brief answer and direct the conversation to other things—gossip, weekend plans, politics, and her favorite topic—my love life. Our subsequent chats in the market were similarly oriented towards the non-agriculture part of her life. For Valma and many others, “farmer” or “vendor” was only a part of her identity. The market is the place to display all parts of herself: the farmer, the businesswoman, the matchmaker, the mother, and the social butterfly. I also suspect her drive to lime with me was a sort of interview process in which I was applying for access to the market.

In addition to the causal information that flows through social networks during work and informal liming sessions, agricultural and cultural knowledge flows through the same channels. Quoting Spielman et al (2011), Rockenbauch et al (2019: 686) noted that the knowledge required for introducing and maintaining agricultural innovations (technological or non-technological changes) “can be acquired through “learning by doing” (a function of one’s own innovative
capacities) or through learning “from others” (a function of one’s social network).” The market is a physical space in which knowledge flows through learning from others.

I learned many things about St Kitts and agriculture and met most of my participants at the market. Through the casual conversations during the liming sessions and during work, I learned most of what I know about agriculture in St Kitts—prices of produce, planting schedules and seasonal produce, cooking techniques and family recipes, the health benefits of different plants, climate change as it impacts agriculture, changes in the market and agriculture over the years, gender roles within agriculture, and what types of soil are the best for different kinds of produce.

In much the same way I learned about agriculture in the market, intergenerational knowledge exchange happens in the market as vendors bring their children and grandchildren to work with them, either as caretakers for children when formal childcare is not available or they bring their teenage and adult children and grandchildren along as assistant workers. Kendal, a middle-aged man, and the only man in my study who works solely as a turnhand, learned to sell produce through helping his grandmother as a child. Florence similarly began to sell at the market with her mother and eventually took over as her mother aged. Tine brings her daughter with special needs to the market daily but once a week has another daughter sell at her stand for her. On Mondays, Armstrong brings produce to the market and has his wife and three of her friends help set up his stall. His wife stays to sell while Armstrong is back and forth between the market and his farm. I was often asked which farmer was my husband or which vendor was my mother-in-law since it is unusual to have a non-family member working. At one point, Tine introduced me as her albino child.

Social ties also help informational flows when formal institutions are lacking. My participants discuss their dissatisfaction with the knowledge and educational sharing by the Department of Agriculture. Many rely on self-education and knowledge exchange with other agriculturalists for their information and education. Personal relationships with extension officers and other people within the Department of Agriculture impact quality and consistency and help facilitate informational flows as well.

Liming and working together in the market are also times when people discuss their participation in upcoming agricultural events like World Food Day and Agricultural Open day. They also organize and advertise social events, birthday parties, carnival plans, and the like.
It is where locals can come for help. Karen, a backyard gardener, frequently comes to the market not only to shop, but to ask farmers for their advice on her garden. Farmers and vendors use the market space to exchange and brainstorm ideas about how to improve agricultural business and make it more exciting, profitable, and appealing to the wider Kittitian society. Information regarding the weather, prices, resource availability, and agricultural knowledge flow through social networks.

As mentioned previously, the market hosts regional vendors from Dominica or St Vincent on most Mondays and occasionally other days of the week. When I first started my fieldwork, I often wondered how people found out which boat was coming since they seem to come irregularly. This unpredictability was made worse by Hurricane Maria in 2017, which severely disrupted Dominica’s agriculture and food export systems. The relationships between Kittitian and regional vendors allow for the flow of information between them, regarding dates and times of arrival and goods available. Bobo’s big personality, and reputation as a productive farmer, and someone who always pays on time means that he is able to forge economic and social relationships easily. He struck up a close friendship with a Dominican vendor named Pierre who facilitates the flow of information. One Monday, Bobo called me and told me that the boat was delayed due to mechanical issues and were planning on arriving by Thursday. I asked how he knew that and he told me about his friendships with the vendors who funnel him real time information. Once one or two point people with connections on the boats receive their information, they funnel it to the rest of the market community through their social networks.

Informational exchange goes deeper than social bonding and the direct benefits to agricultural business. The market space also allows for practicing and exchanging information related to cultural heritage. For example, a popular drink during Christmas is made from a red fruit related to hibiscus called sorrel. During the Christmas season, vendors bring the drinks pre-made and bags of the fruit for others to make them. In their sales pitches, the vendors give informal demonstrations of how to deseed the fruit and secrets for why their drink is the best to potential customers and other vendors. They also share *bush medicine*, the island’s system of herbal medicine. For example, Tine battles with sore knees after years of farm labor. One day in the market, I came in to find her rubbing a mix of turmeric and ginger on her knees. Turmeric is great for inflammation and another vendor suggested putting a paste on her sore spots. I headed to the market women any time I had an ailment, which resulted in quite the collection of herbs in
my studio apartment and a canon of knowledge for future reference. Boil green beans and drink the water for diabetes, eat a lime for a headache, Spanish needle and turmeric for prostate health, drink lime, turmeric, and ginger for blood pressure, and plenty of other home remedies. The market space is made important by practicing cultural heritage and affirming cultural values of community and social relationships.

Social ties in the market are not always built on positive interactions. The next section focuses on discord within the social network of St Kitts agriculturalists as they are displayed in the market.

**Disputes and Disagreements in the Market Space**

Social interactions in the market are sometimes pleasant and friendly but often the closer and deeper social relationships are indicated by arguing, teasing, and banter. The Trinidadian term Picong is defined as teasing or satirical banter used in the Caribbean. It originated out of Calypso, a style of music performed in a competition setting where singers make jokes at their opponent’s expense, knowing how to be funny without crossing any lines. The term picong is not used in St Kitts and my participants were not aware of any synonyms but the concept still applies here. The air is usually filled with the sound of people arguing, loudly haggling prices, and hurling insults at each other. Arguments break out between sellers and their customers or between customers over wait times or service orders, who has the right to sell where and when, customer poaching, price gouging, and general levels of respect given. These contentions play out in public arguments in the market, sometimes with each arguer on opposite sides of the building so that everyone in the market is aware of the particulars of the disagreement, allowing them to take sides. To the outside observer, it looks and sounds like a nightmare a retail employee would have the night before Black Friday but in reality, these interactions are between people with long and deep personal and business relationships. These disagreements typically last only as long as that particular interaction and the participants are back to liming together by the end of the workday.

Sometimes disagreements are deeper and lead to a general hostile relationship. My second Saturday at the market, Bobo introduced me to the then market manager, employed by the Department of Agriculture. She walked me around and introduced me to some people, but not everyone. She was clear that there are some vendors with whom she refuses to interact so I
was on my own if I wanted to meet them. Even when she needs to collect their stall rental money, she sends her assistant. She said some people refuse to pay the five EC daily booth rental fee and get aggressive when asked, so she just avoids them. One vendor in particular is the self-appointed matriarch of the market and takes pride in resisting the administrative hierarchy. Tensions rose when the manager attempted to assert her control as official manager of the market. The vendor had been so steadfast in her that the manager eventually stopped asking and now avoids that vendor at all costs.

The management and the vendors are also in constant contention over the proper use of the space. Bobo is notorious for not following the rules, such as “no sitting on the stalls.” One Saturday after the morning rush, Bobo decided to ignore the rules of the market and take a nap on an empty concrete stall meant for displaying produce. After a few minutes of arguing and Bobo’s clear defiance of the rules, the manager had him escorted from the market by police. He was allowed back in the market the following week with the clear understanding that the manager did not care about making friends and was willing to enforce the rules no matter how harshly. Why the market manager is set on enforcing the rules with some people and not others probably depends on the actors’ social standings. The matriarch of the market is well connected politically and is a respected member of the community. This is speculation though.

There are periods of discord between vendors and the management followed by periods of complacency. The manager had the Department of Agriculture print the market rules on a plastic sign for the wall of the market, hoping this would encourage people to follow the rules without her intervention. The vendors feel that the market is their space and management should not be allowed to limit the terms of their use.

The next chapter will show that, in contrast to the town market, the Sandy Point Market has only one vendor, the cooperative. They are also in charge of the physical market space. There is no competition between vendors or discord between the vendors and the managers of the space. The group is also committed to protecting and respecting the physical market because of its cultural significance. The building that holds the town market, however, is not considered with the same nostalgia or shown the same respect.
Chapter Conclusion

The market demonstrates that a space that values entrepreneurialism, small businesses, and small producers is also a factory and theater for complex and complicated social networks. In many cases, the social ties between people in the market are based in or include distrust, competition, and power struggles. While many of the relationships and social ties are built on trust and respect, they are still subject to the same complexities as most other human interactions. Relationships, even when not always positive, are an important part of the social and economic network within Kittitian agriculture. Social networks in agriculture are important for helping agriculturalists complete their work. Social ties are also formed through agricultural labor. Following Corsín Jiménez (2003:144), I posit that agricultural spaces are “not settings or places where social life takes place, but paths to possible value forms and value situations.” In this way, the social networks created in the market preserve cultural values and knowledge of community, shared labor and leisure. The market facilitates interactions longer than the time it takes to complete the transaction. Of course, selling to grocery stores and shop owners builds personal and professional relationships, but the market creates deep social and economic relationships.

This chapter focused on how social ties, exchanges of social and agricultural information, cultural heritage production and knowledge transmission within the market infuse the sterile economic space assigned by the Department of Agriculture with meaning. The next chapter explores a cultural space with deep ties to cultural heritage in itself, the Sandy Point Market. I will explore how a local cooperative reclaimed and used this space to strive towards their explicit goals of changing the local food system to make it healthier and more sustainable for future generations of Kittitians.
CHAPTER 6: *Reclaiming the Sandy Point Market: Cultural heritage, the Future, and Changing Forms of Values in Agricultural Spaces*

After a speedy 30-minute drive from town along windy, narrow, cliffside roads, I reached Sandy Point, a rural village on the Caribbean side of the island. I stepped off the bus on the main road right out front of the Sandy Point Market where the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative Society (SPACS) sells their produce five days a week and prepared food on Saturdays. I collected myself and stepped through the gates. It was around 9am on Saturday morning and the place was already in full swing. Saturdays are always busy but today was a particularly special day, World Food Day. As part of their efforts to improve the public perception of local food and agriculture, the co-op hosts several events in the semi-recently refurbished market. Every October since 2010, the co-op has held a food fair and exhibition event as part of the UN’s World Food Day celebrations. The fair featured vendors selling agro-processed goods, food, and produce and display booths from the Department of Marine Resources, seed sellers, local bands, and speakers from the Department of Agriculture.

I approached the roadside stand to the left of the gate, pulled back the red, green, and yellow striped Rastafari flag that hung as a curtain on the doorway. Unlike the town market where a diverse mix of vendors from all over the federation and region gather to sell their goods, all of the current members of SPACS are followers of the Rastafari faith and the entire market is decorated to reflect that. I poked my head into the booth to say hello to Cardesha, a thirty-year-old woman, assigned to work for the co-op by a government-run worker placement program. While she sells fruits and veggies grown by the cooperative members in the roadside booth, the co-op members spend the morning preparing lunch in the kitchen in the back of the market. She was standing in the booth making note of the produce she was selling. Above her was a sign on the wall of the booth that read “Certified Safe Local Agro-Product. Product certified by the Vegetable, Fruit, and Upland Crop Quality and Safety Improvement Project in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture.” She was quick to tell me I was late and that the guys were already looking for my help in the kitchen with preparing lunch which will be sold to event goers. I made my way through the grassy outdoor market. I walked past the event stage where the opening speaker was testing the mic and passed a big round stone water catchment to the kitchen, which is hidden from view from the main road.
Inside the stand-alone building that housed the kitchen, four of the co-op members were listening to the local radio news program. Two were chopping vegetables from their farms—spinach, carrots, and okra on the concrete workbench on the wall opposite the doorway. One was taking coconut out of the shell to make coconut milk on the long wooden table in the middle of the room while the fourth was working by the stove all the way to the right of the doorway. All the members were wearing tee shirts with the Sandy Point Co-op’s tagline on the back: “Striving to achieve food security through the use of historical resources and technology.”

I had been coming to the market on Saturdays for a few months now so they were not shy about putting me to work. I was enlisted to slice and rinse the deshelled coconut pieces in a bin of fresh water and put them in the Vitamix. The high-powered blender quickly turned the pieces of coconut into a pulp, which once strained through a cheesecloth is fresh coconut milk. As we worked, a crowd began to gather on the market grounds as the event started and I listened to the co-op members’ heated discussion on the potential legalization of marijuana, which morphed into a discussion about the marginalization of Rastas and then the marginalization of Black people in general. After a few rounds of rinsing coconuts, I needed fresh water. I attempted to quietly carry the plastic bin outside to dump it and refill it at the water catchment without disrupting the conversation or the day’s events but tripped over something and went flying forward, drenching myself, the floor, and the beige concrete wall with coconuty water. When the group stopped laughing at me, they pointed out that the thing I tripped on was a metal ring built into the floor, which had been there since the building’s construction. I had just never noticed it until it sent me hurtling across the room. The kitchen where this agricultural co-op makes and sells strictly vegan food, was originally a slaughterhouse during the heyday of the Sandy Point Market. The ring was used as part of the pulley system to hang the slaughtered animals from the ceiling.

While the incident was embarrassing, tripping over a piece of metal hundreds of years old was a reminder of the space’s past and how the co-op has adapted this past to fit its contemporary goal— to reinvigorate the community’s local food scene by creating a social gathering space around good, local, healthy food to the end of creating a food system that is economically and culturally sustainable. The Sandy Point Market, the former hub of economic activity for the village, was closed for twenty years before the co-op re-opened it in 2010. While they purchased new equipment through grants (the Vitamix, materials to build the roadside
booth, and the stove, for example), the market maintains the skeleton of its past— the unused stalls to the left of the kitchen where vendors used to sell their produce, the hand cut stone walls surrounding the market, the massive stone water catchment that has been providing the community with clean drinking water, even during droughts, since before any of our lifetimes.

The market represents different, intertwined, and changing forms of value, defined by Harper and Siniscalchi (2019: 1) as the “political, economic, and moral orders, socially and culturally defined,” for the co-op members and community patrons. On one hand is the economic value, the market as an economic space and the selling of food as an economic activity. On the other hand, there are the established values of the community, health and wellness, and local food production and the connection to cultural heritage that emphasizes the deeper meaning of agriculture, feeding work, and eating.

While the values enacted by the Sandy Point Co-op and their community patrons are not new, they are constantly being reshaped and reconfigured to fit contemporary society. Agriculturalists in Sandy Point are connecting to the broader global movement combating food insecurities through the invigoration of local food systems, as demonstrated by the World Food Day. They are attempting to boost the economic value of local agricultural goods and highlight new forms of making money in the contemporary economic system while reclaiming their colonial and exploitative heritage, making this historical agricultural space meaningful and practical in the social contemporary of the lives of co-op members and their communities. In this way, members of the Sandy Point co-op and their patrons are “debating, acting on, and experimenting with the multiple values of food inside new social and economic spaces created through efforts to change the way food is produced, distributed, and consumed” (Harper and Siniscalchi 2019: 1) by intentionally using the consumption and production of local food as rural community development.

The interactions between different forms of value drives the interactions and actions in the market space. In this chapter, I focus on the interplay between different and changing forms of value in the market space that on one hand, are steeped in cultural history and connection to the past and on the other, represent a reframing and reclaiming of the future of the community.
Sandy Point

Sandy Point is a rural agricultural village located on the Caribbean side of the island about a thirty-minute drive from the capital city (See Map 6.1.) It is the second largest village on the island with a population of about three thousand people. Despite the size, Sandy Point is a close-knit and insular community. The village is well-known around the country for their village pride as demonstrated through their unofficial motto often yelled at football games, printed on tee shirts, and chanted in groups—“SP where the best be.” A friend from Basseterre, the capital city, often jokes that Sandy Point residents act as if they want to secede from the federation.

While Sandy Point was most likely home to indigenous settlements before European colonization, no documented history survives today. The village does have a long history as the location of the first major English seaport and the Brimstone Hill Fortress, the island’s only UNESCO World Heritage Site. Other than Brimstone Hill on the very edge of the village, however, Sandy Point has no tourist attractions and the distance of Sandy Point from town and the peninsula means that most of its residents are left out of the island’s new main economy unless they have the means and desire to commute or relocate. While there is one factory that makes electronics for export to the US and the UK in the village, Sandy Point’s main source of economic activity is agriculture, which prior to 2005 meant that they produced sugar for the island’s export market. The closure of the village’s main employer and source of economic activity left an economic void and changed the physical, cultural, and economic landscape. Chapter 4 of this dissertation discussed how the government responded to the disconnection from the global sugar market by reconnection, what Vaccaro, Harper, and Murray define as “identifying and exploiting a new, substitute economy that is currently valued in the global network.” Here, I focus on the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative’s attempt to create an alternative path to sustainability and autonomy as a response to the same process of disconnection. My participants in Sandy Point and other rural communities like it had to construct new place-based realities as globalization shifted the landscape underneath them (Low 2017).

In the next section, I explore the decline of agriculture in Sandy Point, the subsequent closure of the market, and how the co-op reclaimed the market, and how they use cultural heritage to reconfigure established values of community, health and wellness, and local food production for the contemporary village.
The Birth of the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative

Agriculture has been pushed to the periphery in terms of governmental support and has drifted from the public imaginary of what are acceptable careers for young Kittitians. As early as 35 years before the sugar industry officially closed, the island began to transition away from agriculture. Planters slowly abandoned their fields and developers began building hotels on the South East Peninsula. The government began their Citizen by Investment Program. Parents pushed their children into office and professional jobs, primarily in tourism. Local people began to shop in the newly built and rapidly expanding grocery stores which were much more
convenient for their busy lifestyles. As the island as a whole moved away from agriculture, the older generation who were still invested in agriculture began to die out, the younger generation was not interested in working in agriculture, and the demand for local produce declined. The once thriving Sandy Point Market closed sometime in the 1990s.

According to the experiences of my participants in Sandy Point and other parts of the island, the refocus of the island’s economic and social value system to tourism means that governmental financial and educational support for farmers is limited or nonexistent. Although community within rural villages has been an established cultural value, the lack of external support for post-sugar agriculture inspired the founding members of SPACS to reconfigure the meaning of community and the communal within a formal cooperative. Dion, a founding member and elder in the community explained that “All of us have a similar problem and that is why we, in Sandy Point, formed the cooperative. We saw the need to be collective because we were facing basically the same tribulations.” Vibration, another founding member of the co-op added that farmers are not recognized for the work they do and so they lean on the co-op members for support. “Essentially without the farmers, the world will die. Because everybody needs to eat. You know, don't matter, lawyer, doctor, politicians, children. Everybody needs to eat. So, farmers should get some sort of recognition. And farmers should know that what they do is a very important job. So, we need to come together collectively to make sure that we have a say within the community in our country.”

In addition, cooperatives are more competitive than individuals for the few grants available to farmers. “Getting a grant or funding here, generally, they would have groups more than they would have individuals so being in a group would put us in a better position to get grant funding from overseas and locally as well,” said Vibration. International non-governmental granting agencies like The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and organizations like the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organization have funds earmarked for groups and community projects. Funding is just another way in which the cooperative members found that working together is advantageous to working individually. He continued to say that he and the other founding members “decided that we were going to go through the process, the training and everything to become a cooperative so we were officially registered on the 1st of November 2010 as a co-op.”

During the process of their formation, they held meetings and promoted their idea to build community interest. Today, there are fifteen members all together but the five founding members
are the most active. All members started farming individually around 2009, except for Dion who started in 2006 because he was working as an estate manager for the sugar industry and picked up his father’s farm when the industry closed.

Each member farms their own property, which is about 60 acres all together. “Everybody still is actually farming their own piece of land but we pool all the produce where we sell at one station and the farmers would just pay the competition commission for selling the produce for them. Whereas in some cooperatives, all the members farm on the same piece of land. It's not the same thing for us” said Vibration. While that means that each individual farmer maintains autonomy over their land and leverage in terms of collective decisions within the group, like all farmers on the mainland, the members of the co-op all farm on land that they do not own. Because of the government’s law against private ownership of agricultural land, farmers must lease from the government or they squat. This could lead to potential disruptions if the government decides to use that land as happened in St Paul’s village when 400 acres of farmland was repossessed from farmers and given to the hotel Kittitian Hill. The existence of the co-op and the ability for farmers to work together from a legally recognized entity, provides a sense of protection from land repossession.

The Sandy Point Agricultural Co-op is small in terms of membership but they have a large presence in the community because of the close-knit nature of the island and the villages more specifically. The co-op is active politically and in the food movement, making local food easily accessible in their community. For over twenty years, the Sandy Point Market sat decaying until the newly formed Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative realized reclaiming the market space as part of their mission to demonstrate that agriculture is a sustainable and culturally important practice would be the best option. In 2010, the co-op began to clean and refurbish the market space.

At the time of my fieldwork, the market ran more like a consignment shop. Members bring goods to the market and receive a percentage of what is sold. In an interview in late 2019, Vibration noted that the co-op hopes to reconfigure so that the cooperative could act as a retailer, purchasing goods from members wholesale and reselling. In addition to providing local food to their communities, selling in the market also demonstrates the ways in which agriculture can be an economically productive profession.
Through their occupation of the market, they garnered a lot of visibility and gained a sort of local celebrity, even drawing public praise from government officials. According to a news article about the 2018 International Cooperative Society for International Cooperative Day, the Minister of Agriculture publicly praised the co-op stating, “They, to me, are a great example of what the Ministry of Agriculture desires, people engaged in farming. Those people who produce are those persons who feed us and continue to employ people.” He also stated that the co-op and others like it on the island help the country achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations stating, “Cooperatives continue to lead the way. Cooperatives have a unique contribution to make to delivering all the SDGs and the associated targets. Cooperatives demand input from members. Members must put in to get out.”

Choosing to produce and sell food in Sandy Point was a strategic move by the co-op members motivated by nostalgia for their childhoods growing up in Sandy Point and its cultural heritage as an agricultural village. The next section explores the history of the market itself and the meaning of reclaiming it.

**The Market Space as Cultural Heritage**

Selling food in communal market spaces holds cultural and economic importance contemporarily and historically. In her description of the Moore Street Market in Brooklyn, Low (2017:187) notes that despite changes a place goes through, it “retains its meaning and memories through the nostalgia it elicits and through the embodiment of the past that can still be experienced today.” The co-op members explicitly reference the town’s agricultural past as one of the driving forces for their decision to sell in Sandy Point rather than the main market in town. For the co-op, refurbishing the market was a way to revive the village’s history as an agricultural hub while working towards their contemporary goals for the local food system. “All of us are from the Sandy Point area so we actually know what the market was before it was closed. We would have gone and saw the vegetables being sold, saw the animals being slaughtered.” “We know that the water dam was there and anytime water goes out in the community, that's a place where anybody can come and get water at any time because it always has water. It may not be filled to capacity but it always contains water to some point. So that gave us the drive to go and get [the market] cleaned” said Vibration during a formal interview.
Low (2017:211) echoes Massey (2005), stating “space and place are always under construction, produced by local and global interactions and constituted by multiple bodies, collectives, and trajectories.” When speaking about the market, co-op members and the community patrons speak of it in three phases: 1) What it was as a space in which enslaved Africans and later free black plantation workers were able to carve out some food, economic, and cultural autonomy in an oppressive system, 2) what is it as a work in progress and an important gathering space for the community, which allows community members to connect to their heritage and reconfigure ideas around food and agriculture, and 3) what it is going to be as an instrument of a sustainable future for the community and a safeguard against the unsafe, exploitative global food system. In Klumbyte’s work (2010:32) on ‘Soviet’ sausages in Lithuania, she cites Lupton (1996), Boym (2001), and Stern (1992) who note that nostalgia requires a reshaping and romanticizing the past in way that up brings pleasant emotions, even if the past was not a pleasurable experience. In that way, my participants remember times of austerity, colonization, and forced labor not to invoke an exact replica of the past, but to utilize elements from it, such as entrepreneurialism, resistance, and resilience, to craft the future food system. The market, for the co-op members and community patrons, is not just a place in which food is sold. It is a connection to the past at the same time it is a vehicle to the future.

The market is designated agricultural land so it is government owned and under the control of the Department of Agriculture. The co-op requested and received permission to use the market from the Department of Agriculture’s Permanent Secretary. I asked Vibration about the particulars of their agreement with the Department of Agriculture over WhatsApp in the fall of 2020.

Me: Do you pay a lease?
Vibration: No we don't, They tried drafting a lease but the fees was unreasonable
Me: So you just said no?
Vibration: Yeah. They were supposed to bring back something but nothing never came so we just operating as is
Me: How long do you have permission to use the space
Vibration: they didn’t say a specific time period

Vibration and the other members feel that the market space is effectively theirs because it was sitting unused before they cleaned it up. “The market was dormant for almost 20 years before we actually started doing anything. It was like a dumpster” said one farmer and co-op member. After they received permission to use the market from the Department of Agriculture,
the co-op members began the task of cleaning it out and refurbishing it for their use. The market and original stalls for selling are set far back from the road. In fact, they are not visible from the road at all. Eventually, they realized that to catch passersby on foot or driving, they would have to bring their produce closer to the road. In 2012, they received a grant from The Global Environment Facility (GEF), which has a branch that gives small grants to people promoting sustainable livelihoods, which they used to kickstart the building of the roadside stall, making it more convenient for potential customers to buy produce from the street without entering the market, increasing public visibility and business.

Selling food in the market space connects the co-op members and the village more broadly with their agricultural past but simultaneously uses their cultural heritage to create a sustainable future. While the market is a culturally and historically important space, it is also a space for the demonstration of cultural heritage along with new and established values, which is the focus of the next section.

**The Market Space and Cultural Heritage Sustainability**

Agriculture is part of the island’s history and more specifically, the history of Sandy Point. The market gives community and co-op members a physical space to enact their cultural values and heritages while reconfiguring them to fit into contemporary Kittitian life.

“*Farming is in my blood*”: Growing and Selling food as personal heritage

Importation of some foodstuffs during plantation agriculture was an important part of the food system but many people who grew sugar also grew for subsistence and local markets. As far back as the enslavement period of plantation agriculture, people in the Caribbean produced food in addition to their work in the sugar fields. Enslaved Africans were forced to grow their own food to cut the cost of food for their captors. This also “discouraged runaways by providing an opportunity to cultivate a link to the soil and community” (DeLoughrey 2011:63). This connection to the land continued throughout the generations and as such, many of the farmers in Sandy Point grew up exposed to agriculture through their parents and grandparents. Most have family members who work the land and so farm labor was part of their daily chores and activities. During an interview with an agricultural science teacher at the school farm in town, he made note that the children from the countryside, including Sandy Point, were typically more
interested in agriculture because of their early exposure. “Farming is in my blood. I’ve been in the field since small” one co-op member noted while discussing his decision to pursue agriculture full time despite having other opportunities. “My father, my grandfather, the one before that, used to do farming so I continue with that” Dion similarly noted during an interview. Some have taken over the plots worked by their family while some have joined their parents on their farm and thus producing for the market becomes a family activity.

In addition to land their families have worked for generations, the co-op members have also expanded their farms to include reclaimed sugar lands. Sugar fields were left vacant so those who wanted to continue to farm or those who were not qualified to work in tourism or another sector were able to occupy fields and plant produce. In the next section, I focus on the ways in which economic and cultural values intertwine and are reshaped in the market space as the co-op attempts to demonstrate the ways in which food sale is both an important cultural practice and an economically viable profession in contemporary St. Kitts.

Growing and selling food as a cultural value

Agriculture, while valued as cultural heritage, is also deeply intertwined with enslavement and forced labor of the plantation economy within which Sandy Point was built. This complicated history has created stigmas that continue today, attaching agriculture as “dirty work” or “slave” work but through the food work of the co-op and reclaiming of the market space, the co-op hopes to change these stigmas.

On their provision plots and former sugar fields, the co-op members combine conventional contemporary farming methods, historical knowledge of the land, the moon phases in relation to planting, the weather, herbal pesticides, and innovative technologies such as hydroponics. They took the skeletons of the past agricultural structure built on production of a global commodity by forced and later underpaid labor to create a system where they are producing for local consumption and their own economic benefit. In this way, the cooperative reconfigured the values around growing food to demonstrate that food production can be both economically and culturally empowering and part of a sustainable contemporary life.

Through re-opening the market, making fresh local food readily available and hosting events that demonstrate the global appreciation for local food and agriculture like World Food Day, the co-op demonstrates the ways in which food production can and should be integrated
into contemporary life in St Kitts. They discuss the sustainability of future generations as contingent on preserving and learning from the past. The group’s slogan “Striving to achieve food security through the use of historical resources” highlights how the co-op repurposes the island’s agricultural cash crop heritage to prompt a local producer driven solution to food insecurity. They promote the importance of the availability of and access to local produce, the ability of St. Kitts to be mostly self-sufficient, and a producer/consumer driven market.

Klumbyte (2010: 24) analyses her participants’ nostalgia and longing for a period of time usually associated with hardship and domination. She notes that her participants do not desire a return to socialism but rather they mobilize their nostalgia for the Soviet products in order to participate in the market in a way that expresses their discontent with the low-quality goods currently available thus they are able to “resist economic and social marginalization without resisting democracy” (Klumbyte 2010: 33). Similarly, my participants do not wish to return to a system of mono-crop plantation agriculture. Instead, they draw inspiration from the past and reconfigure their established cultural values of local food production and connection with the land as a bridge to a sustainable future while providing a critique of the nation’s contemporary import-based food system.

*Heritage Crops*

My first workday on a farm in Sandy Point was with Vibration and Fyre King, two co-op members and cousins who jointly work 15 acres of land. That morning, I met Vibration at the market and he directed me across the street and we made our way on foot along a road that leads through the village to the mountain. A few minutes into our walk, we deviated from the concrete road onto a dirt road. As we walked, the trees gave way to farmland. I recognized the farm from my visit with Dion, another farmer and co-op member. Vibration explained that Dion’s farm sat right below their farm. When we reached Vibration and Fyre’s land, Vibration gave me a short tour of the former sugar field turned produce farm. He brought me up to a cement structure that resembled more of a house than the other farm sheds I had seen. Off the large, covered porch were two doorways that led to a makeshift kitchen and a storage room. He brought me up to a cement structure that resembled more of a house than the other farm sheds I had seen. Off the large, covered porch were two doorways that led to a makeshift kitchen and a storage room. The building is slightly raised so there is a small ramp leading to the porch. To the left of the ramp, sat a collection of coconuts, which botanically speaking, is not a nut but a seed. Out of the coconuts grew shoots. I asked Vibration what they were doing with the little coconut sprouts. He explained that they
were part of the co-op’s effort to regenerate the crops they lost over the years to a disease called Lethal Yellowing that wiped out almost all of the island’s coconut palms. Due to the government’s lack of action in replanting, the co-op recently decided to devote sections of each of their farms to tall coconut palms that once covered the island.

We walked onto the porch and there were two metal folding chairs, several empty buckets, and produce boxes and garbage bags overflowing with dried okra. Vibration explained that they left a few rows of okra to dry on the plant and our task for the day would be to break open the dried okra to release the seeds. We spent the day cracking open the dried seed pods, shaking the seeds into a bucket, and then tossing the husks into a wheel barrel. Fyre King, who was mostly working to clear a piece of the land that had become overrun with tall grasses, would come over periodically to empty the wheel barrel into a pile in a clearing. They share the seeds among the group and sell the leftovers to other farmers. They use the husks for fire. Nothing is wasted and with a little work, productive and culturally significant plants can be preserved for future use.

As intimated by the co-op saving and preserving coconuts and okra seeds, certain crops are entangled in the complicated agricultural history of St Kitts that is simultaneously a story of enslavement and empowerment. As Sidney Mintz notes,

> Any casual visitor to a Caribbean marketplace can see for him/herself that the products produced in the country sides of these societies constitute a kind of historical record of interchange and synthesis. In Caribbean marketplaces one finds mangoes and breadfruit from Oceania; okra, watermelon, and ackee from Africa; green vegetables from Europe; guinea hens, sugar and eggplants, whose origins are in the Middle East; and manioc, maize, and a wide array of fruits and vegetables from the New World. These productions attest to the entangled histories of Caribbean populations: and the reconstituted cultures and cuisines of their peoples (1983:114)

Some of these important crops have become scarce or non-existent in the local foodscape for various reasons within the forty years since Sidney Mintz made his observation of the typical Caribbean marketplace. The Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative is attempting to refocus those ideologies towards cultural heritage and ancestral knowledge. Writing of farmers in Latvia and Costa Rica, Aistara (2018:135) notes land and seeds are “cultural symbols that anchored farmers’ practices in histories of meaning and the axes around which farmers engage with local ecological diversity.” Like Aistara’s participants, mine often participate in the sharing of culturally important seeds. Many of the co-op members also grow okra, coconut, cassava, breadfruit, and
peanuts, all which have historic value in the Kittitian foodscape but have fallen out of popularity for various reasons, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

Sugar is one of the crops my participants designated as a heritage crop or even an exotic plant. For over 350 years sugar was the primary commodity produced in St Kitts. St. Kitts’ capitalist economy was built on the sugar industry production, earning the island the nickname Sugar City. Sugar’s new designation as a heritage crop is ironic because few, if any, Kittitians owned the means of production and directly benefited from the sugar industry in any meaningful way. Still, sugar production is ingrained into the cultural heritage of the island and the people who call it home. Sugar as a heritage crop also demonstrates how deindustrialization impacts cultural and physical landscapes. Sugar used to cover all the arable land on the island. People often reminisce of the times of sugar when the island was green from the fields, the bush fires, the smell of the factory when they were processing cane, and hopping the sugar train as children to get from country to town. Fifteen years after the closure of the industry, it is rare to see farmers grow sugarcane on any scale. It is hidden in little pockets in the fields of deliberate farmers. “Sugar City might got no cane” said Dion one day during a conversation about certain crops falling out of production and how that impacts what he chooses to grow on his farm. He continued to tell me that he has a few plots on his farm devoted to sugar cane. Other co-op members also grow it. Collectively, they sell fresh pieces in bags at the market, which are usually eaten as a snack.

In her ethnography on the political struggles and ecological missions of organic farmers in Latvia and Costa Rica, Aistara’s (2018:105) participants “care for seeds of their ancestors as ways to both re-create landscapes of abundance of the past and invest in the future of their children.” My participants consciously participate in seed sharing and cultivating heritage crops to preserve their cultural heritage for the co-op, the community, and other farmers around the island and, for them, traditional ways of knowing the land, growing food, cooking, and eating, are precisely the skills that will ensure their sustainability for the future.

The Sandy Point Market is key to allowing the co-op members an economic outlet for their produce which in turn allows them to continue their mission of cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability. These culturally significant products also form the basis of the co-op’s Saturday lunches which they cook and sell to the community. In these ways, they are able to participate in heritage preservation and sustainability by providing culturally significant foods.
and healthy meals to their community. The next section focuses on the market as a communal space where people can connect with each other over food and shared meals in a way that can be challenging in today’s highly individualized capitalist economy. I explore commensality as integral to the sustainability of the community.

**Building Community Through Cooking and Eating in the Market**

Community, while heavily critiqued as a romantic notion, is useful to understand how people in St Kitts feel towards social networks with family, neighbors, and co-workers. As discussed in chapter 5, social networks within agriculture production, markets, and in the village are vital to everyday social and economic life. The co-op’s food work within the market space, gives the village a communal meeting space allowing people to negotiate values of community and social networking. Writing about a community garden, Reese states that:

Self-reliance is neither simply cultural nor simply spatial. Residents’ understanding of self-reliance was grounded in historic and spatial contexts, addressing structural inequalities while building community, using the garden as the central site through which to work. In this context, “feeding the community” took on greater meanings than providing fruits and vegetables. “Feeding meant youth development, visions for entrepreneurship, and potentials for strengthening relations with parents and caregivers (2019:129-130).

In much the same way, the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative works within and with their community to address structural inequities embedded in the food system and work towards community development through food production and consumption in the market space. As far as we're concerned, we are doing community service,” Vibration said in an informal conversation about refurbishing the dilapidated market and turning it into the communal space it is today. “We not only sell products but we also offer a space for events and gatherings,” he continued. With the efforts of the co-op, the Sandy Point Market is once again a focal point of the village and serves as an event space and produce market. The interaction between economic and cultural values that are present in the food practices of the market space create new economic and social relationships. On Saturdays, when the co-op members cook and sell food, the market turns into a local hang out where many community members come together to share a meal and chat. Community patrons filter in and out of the market all day. The extended family, parents, partners, and siblings of the co-op members spend the day eating, drinking, and talking while the children run around playing.
The market is much more than just a place to grab a meal. Communal eating, commensality, is a “practice that fulfills the role of strengthening cohesion among the members of a group, both in serving as an interactive space and in symbolizing a sense of belonging and respect for shared norms” (Giacoman 2016). Customers and co-op members eat together in the kitchen or sit outside on the event stage/patio directly behind the roadside booth. Unlike a formal restaurant, the line between staff member and customer blur as the co-op members are born and raised Sandy Point residents with wide friend and family networks within the community. Eating together in this space reestablishes the value of commensality and family mealtime which was potentially lost with the cultural and economic changes that occurred when the island switched from sugar to tourism and people began to commute or relocate for work. Towards that goal, the co-op decided to sell cooked food on Saturdays because “that's the day most people are home. It's a traditional thing.”

When asked about the importance of cooking and eating together, a co-op member told me that “eating together creates togetherness and family vibes.” In fact, some of these farmers are relatives, but they are equally as close to those who are not. The co-op member went on to add that, “ideas are shared around the dinner table.” They use mealtimes to discuss ideas about farming, local and global politics, current events, the co-op, and upcoming events. While for some, the market offers a quick healthy meal on the go, many stay after their meals for continued socialization and conservation. It is not just consuming food together that opens the space for social networking and bonding. Preparing food as a group in a communal space allows the co-op members to establish or reestablish, strengthen, and sometimes test social bonds while participating in a food activity together. The Saturday morning market opens around 6 in the morning and the members begin preparing lunch together. Everyone has a task that contributes to the main meal of the day. During the prep time, the conversation flows between the group. They are not shy about having loud, heated conversations about religion, politics, or social inequalities.

The ideologies shared by the co-op members encourage communal living and contribute to the market’s functionality as a community space. In the next section, I discuss the religious and social identities of the co-op members and how that guides the running of the market.
Sociopolitics and Spirituality in the Sandy Point Market

The co-op members’ religious identity differs from that of mainstream Kittitians making this space unique from the other markets in St Kitts. While the majority of the population ascribe to some denomination of Christianity, all of the active members of the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative identify as followers of the Rastafari spiritual movement. Thanks in part to reggae music, their integration of marijuana, anti-colonialism philosophies, and unique style and lifestyles, some in the community revere and idolize Rastas as cultural trailblazers and political and social activists.

In other ways, the discrimination that Rastas experienced since the spiritual movement was founded persists. Rastafari is a social, political, religious movement formed in Jamaica in the 1930s as a way to decolonize and empower Caribbean peoples of African descent. Rastafari is most often an elected identity: most Rastafari are not born to Rastafari but rather find it on their own during their young adulthood (Price 2009). Today, there are Rastafari adherents worldwide because of their relatable and empowering beliefs and goals, including the repatriation of Africans within the diaspora, race consciousness, Pan-Africanism, and social justice. This path, ironically, led to additional marginalization even by other Africans and African descendants as many people in the English-speaking Caribbean are strict Christians. In the past, this discrimination took the form of physical violence. It was common to hear stories of Rastafari being harassed or physically beaten, sometimes to death, with seemingly no cause or repercussion. Scholars such as Ennis Barrington Edmonds (2003) noted that the group has made great strides in social equality since the 1930s but, in some ways, Rastas in St Kitts still feel the reverberations of that stigma. This typically comes in the form of exclusion from public education and employment because of Rastas’ belief that one should not cut their hair. In an interview about the start of the co-op, Vibration wondered if the identity of the founding members in combination with the individualistic mindset of the people kept some from joining the group:

“When we started the drive to become a cooperative, we had about almost 20 persons come into first set of meetings and then over time they just dwindled,” Vibration stated.

*Why do you think people don't want to join or don't see the value in having a community or a co-op?* I asked

“I think it's the mindset of our people where I feel like they don't want anybody in charge
of them so to speak. We feel like probably we could do it on our own. We have a weird mindset. We're not really, we're not accustomed to be collective. We weren't taught that in school or growing up so to speak.”

_Why not?_

“I won't speculate. That's just how it is. There were a few persons that after coming to one or two meeting, say they don't want to be in another man co-op or something to that effect but teamwork is always best. We still work with the farmers who are not members of the co-op. If they have an abundance of food and we don't have the food, we will buy from them.”

He paused and let out an exhale before continuing with his analysis.

“I don't know but most of us who are actually active members are Rastas too so I'm not sure that's a problem for them. Actually, all of us who are active members are Rastas so I'm not sure if that's a deterrent.”

_You think it could be?_

“Maybe and they don't want to say but we are not the ones to get run in with the law. We are peacemakers.”

_Rastas all over the world have been marginalized in a way_, I said, referring to the spiritual movement’s violent treatment during its formation and the subsequent decades of structural marginalization.

“Stigmatized,” he agreed.

_But do you think it is still that way or do you think it's different now?_ I asked

“Yes, there are still shades of it. It's not everyone that accepts Rastas for who they are. You could still see it in some areas. For example, some time last year, I don't know why, but I went job hunting so to speak.”

_What do you mean?_ I asked. Vibration is formally educated and left his job as a schoolteacher to pursue farming full-time. I was surprised he was thinking of working off the farm.

“I wanted to do something else to bring in a little more income at the time because the farm wasn't doing so well. I went by [a department store] to fill out a form. When the lady came to retrieve the form that you fill, the position I was checking for was a sales clerk or something in accounts department and right there and then she tell me ‘If you're looking to the front office, you can't have no [dread]locks or no plaits [braids]’”

Today, dreadlocks are a popular hairstyle among Rastas and non-Rastas but in the beginning, it was a way to publicly display your devotion to the spiritual movement. Still today,
wearing your hair a certain way is a way to mark your identity. Aside from religion, the policing of Black people’s hair and what is considered acceptable or beautiful is a global issue. Educated and intellectual people such as Vibration are turned away from entry-level positions because their aesthetic does not fit the European standard of beauty. Moreover, in a place like St Kitts where 98 percent of the population is Black, hair politics are often upheld by other community members.

Whether or not the identity of the co-op members as Rastas deters farmers from joining the group, the experiences of marginalization elsewhere in Vibration’s life led him to expect discrimination in other parts of his life. I was not able to interview any Sandy Point farmers who did not participate in the co-op except one farmer turned lawyer turned politician. His remarks on the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative were overwhelmingly positive. He echoed much of the Minister of Agriculture’s International Cooperative Society for International Cooperative Day speech mentioned earlier. According to this politician and farmer, local food is the way of the future and the co-op members are the forebearers of the sustainability future. Additionally, farmers who are-not co-op members still benefit from its existence as the co-op members often buy what they do not have from other local farmers to resell at the market.

Whether their identities as Rasta draw people to or away from the market or the co-op, their spiritualities guide their running of the market. In the following sections, I focus on the ways in which the Rastafari lifestyle guides the running of the market. I explore the specific ideals Rastafari adherents have on community, which is particularly important because of the discrimination they face, in the next section.

Rastas and Community Ideologies

As followers of the Rastafari faith, the co-op members have specific ideals of community and commensality. The market space allows them to not only enact and reinforce community and island wide cultural values, but more specific ideologies of their faith. Rastas are well-known for communal living in general. In many places around the world, Rastas live on communes. In Sandy Point, the co-op members do not live together on communes, or even farm the same pieces of land, but they hold the same community ideals. I asked one member why the co-op works so well since St Kitts’ agricultural co-ops are not known for their teamwork skills and he said "Well, we are Rastas, we work together."
While having conversations over cooking and eating are important for any group, Rastas regularly partake in what they refer to as “reasonings” or “groundings,” informal or formal gatherings where Rasta engage in holy sacraments and conversations about current events, events or occurrences impacting them or their communities, and heavier topics such as black liberation, history of African and Africans in the Americas, Rastafari ideology, current marginalization of Rastas and black people in the Caribbean in general, and global and local politics.

Some of these gatherings are formal meetings or parties to celebrate special times of the year such as Halie Salassie’s birthday or Emancipation Day. These gatherings tend to go all night and night and include music, dancing, and food. The informal groundings typically do not have a formal beginning or end but occur with the flow of people in and out of the space (Chevannes 1998). Homiak (1998) describes reasonings as “at once the primary form of ritual encounter, spiritual communion, and sociability shared by the male members of the movement.” These discussions also allow Rastas to “come together to pursue common understanding or to reach consensus on particular issues” (Edmonds 2003).

These meetings or discussions are integral to education within the Rastafari community. Early Rastas would hold street meetings or give open talks in any public space in order to spread their message. Still today, many feel that formal education gives a colonial, white-washed, euro-centered version of history so home education is an important supplement.

Reasonings and groundings are typically closed to the public, women in the movement, and non-Rastas, but using the market space for similar conversations and holding an unofficial day-long celebration of the local food moment every Saturday, the co-op promotes the value of deep discussion of important issues to Rastas, agriculturalists, and the wider Sandy Point community to a more inclusive group. As with family meals and other times in which groups traditionally spend time together, reasonings are an established cultural value for Rastas that is potentially lost through cultural and economic change as people moved from working on the plantations in the village to working in town or on the other side of the island. The market provides a communal space to maintain this practice.

In addition to the encouragement the group gives to the community to gather together and share meals, the co-op also has particular views on health, wellness, and local food production
that they promote in the market. The next section focuses on how the Rastafari movement guides the co-op’s food ideologies.

*Rastas and Health, Wellness, and Food Production*

As with other spiritual movements and religions, Rastas follow dietary and health guidelines, which is demonstrated in their food choices at the market. In their ethnography of Black followers of Sunni Islam in the United States, Carolyn Rouse and Janet Hoskins (2004), highlight the ways in which foodways are imbedded in cultural, racial, and religious identities and heritages. They note that “food was found to be a central medium for expressing religious commitment, and for positioning oneself in relation to a history of slavery and new forms of liberation” (2004: 229). Their participants use food as “affirming their heritage within a much wider heritage” (2004: 246). Similarly, my participants use food to connect to their religious identity as Rastas which is deeply intertwined with African heritages. Rastas refer to their diet as ital and live by the mantra “ital is vital”. What it means to eat and live ital and what one has to do to be considered an italist varies by religious order, location, and community but it typically refers to the avoidance of meat, salt, alcohol, pesticides, and processed food products in favor of local, fresh, and organic produce. Rastafari’s ital ideologies also promote farming and living off the land. For the Sandy Point Market, ital means that they also avoid fish and dairy products. The market space allows the co-op to showcase their ways of eating and their ideals of health and wellness to the community. They push back on diets that are increasingly based on processed imported food by attempting to capitalize on the global push towards healthy, organic, fresh, food. In this way, they are blending contemporary and long-established ways of eating and food ideologies to create new food values that focus on health and wellness.

A typical lunch for the co-op members and community would be brown rice, sautéed vegetables, and stewed red beans in a yabba pot, a clay coal fired pot usually placed on stove tops or open flames. Lunch is served in bowls made out of dried calabash, a round gourd, popular for Rastas to eat out of as part of their natural living. During an interview later in my year in St Kitts, I asked Vibration why the group decided to sell cooked food at the market in addition to produce. He responded that the group was trying to “ensure people get good quality food.” “Being in the Rastafari faith I understand that diet plays an important part in your health,”
he continued, “I see that we can actually make a difference in how people live, their lifestyle, and the way they eat.”

Here I return to the concept of commensality in what Giacoman calls the normative dimension, “the staging of norms carried out by diners and the control over those norms” (2016: 463). The normative dimension of commensality allows the co-op to demonstrate their food values to the community and allow them to participate, or not. While strict foodways within a group often lead to judgement over purity, signal differences, or cause rifts when one does not adhere to the rules, these foodways also signify solidarity. These particular ways of eating signify and allow space for group cohesion for the Rastas and non-Rastas, binding together co-op members and community members not involved in the co-op. The co-op reshapes their ideals to bring together people who may not eat ital outside of the market over a meal while exposing them to healthier ways of eating. They prepare food so that it is easier transportable in takeaway containers for those not able to enjoy their meal in the market. In this way, the food prepared by the co-op members is both “traditional” and “modern,” healthy and convenient, local and delicious, carefully crafted over hours of preparation but easy for the consumer.

**Chapter Conclusion**

The rural agricultural village of Sandy Point experienced major changes after the economic industry that shaped the country for 400 years ended. People spend more time working outside of the village in the service sector as agricultural jobs become less desirable and less supported by the local government. Produce and livestock began to be imported at a high rate as grocery stores and takeaway shops became the primary source of food, and much fewer people engage in subsistence farming, all of which compromises family mealtimes, community networks, and overall physical health.

The founding members formed the Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative Society and revived the market specifically to navigate these changes. They recognized the need for teamwork among farmers to combat the lack of external support, the need for a communal meal time as more and more people work outside of the village, the need for revived love for local and healthy produce as people are shopping for imported, often processed food in grocery stores and takeaway shops. Through repurposing and employing the island’s agricultural heritage by the use of sugar fields and the original, abandoned market, SPACS establishes and reconfigures
economic and cultural food values around eating healthy, locally, and together. The co-op members aim to reconfigure values around what is good food, focusing on local foods as more beneficial and desirable than imported foods. They also hope to provide the community with a communal gathering space to encourage social networks while demonstrating that food production can be a profitable profession in contemporary St Kitts. In the next chapter, I focus on agriculturalists’ mission towards sustainability in the food and economic systems.
CHAPTER 7: Fields, Gardens, and Provision Plots: Food and Economic Sustainability in Agricultural Spaces

While working at the town market early on in my fieldwork, I met CJ, a 35-year-old former sugar worker and current farmer. CJ is what they would call in St Kitts a *bush man*, someone who works, forages, and lives on and around the mountain. Since he was a child, his everyday life has been intertwined with Mount Liamuiga and its unnamed daughter mountains that rise from the center of the oval-shaped mainland of St Kitts. He lives at the base of the mountains, farms on the flat lands, regularly hikes to the fresh mountain streams near the peak to collect water, and forages in the ghauts.

At the market, in addition to his farm produce, he sells things he forages in the mountain, mostly roots and leaves used in bush medicine, fruits, and yams. Some of the foraged flora is wild, some planted generations ago by enslaved Africans and the pockets of the legendary maroon communities who briefly used the mountain as shelter from their captors. After a few months, CJ invited me along on a hike so he could show me where he collects these plants. We picked a day and time, and I invited another anthropologist named Kerry to join us on the journey.

On the morning of our hike, Kerry and I picked CJ up at his house in a village on the Caribbean side of the island. He came out in camouflage pants, a tank top, and rubber boots. His long dreadlocked hair was pulled back in a loose ponytail. Aside from the machete he carried in his hand to clear overgrowth from the path and chop open coconuts, there was nothing about his appearance that said he was about to climb a mountain. In fact, he was dressed the same as when he sits in the market. It was a stark comparison to Kerry and I who were decked in hiking gear, carrying water bottles and backpacks filled with snacks, band aids, tissues, bug spray, extra socks, and sunscreen. It was clear he was going for a relaxing stroll, and we were going on a journey into the wilderness.

He hopped in the car and directed Kerry to drive up a dirt road and park in a grassy area. We started our hike on a wide dirt road originally built as a way for plantation owners to move between sugar fields, but is now used as an access road to the water intake under the control of the Water Department. The steep road took us through grasslands of abandoned sugar fields. After years sitting unused, the grass was taller than us and bent in on the road, creating a canopy. CJ stopped us at a clear spot on the road to point out his farm on the hillside which we could see.
from our position, thanks to the curvy shape of the mountain. He pointed out his limes, pepper, ginger, banana, coconut palms, breadfruit, papaya, and livestock. He chatted about his farm just long enough so Kerry and I could catch our breath and we moved on.

When the road curved into a ghaut, the grassland gave way to a dense forest. The wide road narrowed to a footpath striped with windy, knotted moss-covered tree roots running along the ground. The flora went from light green and dull yellow grasses to a thick assemblage of vibrant deep greens. The air temperature dropped and clouds of beautiful yellow and black butterflies released into the air and flew around us as we walked.

As we walked, CJ discussed the things he collects on the mountain. He stopped and reached down to wrap his hands around the base of a plant. To me, the plant blended in with all the other tropical bushes, but to CJ it stood out as special, one he collects for subsistence and sale at the market on Saturdays. He gave the base of the plant a yank and pulled up the root. He shook off the loose dirt and presented the roots to Kerry and me like an upside-down bouquet. “This is kakanga root,” he explained. I had heard of this root consistently through my previous research on bush medicine, as it is said to be good for overall health, specifically blood pressure and blood flow. I had also seen this root many times in bundles on CJ’s stall, and in drinks but I never imagined what the rest of the plant would look like. CJ explained that it takes him about two hours of foraging to fill the duffle bag he uses to collect the root. He typically parses out handful-sized bundles, which he sells between 5 and 10 EC or about 2 to 4 US dollars. Other times he sells it by the duffle bag wholesale to agro-processors for 100 EC or about 40 US dollars.

We came to a clearing with a water pipe and a tool shed, both under the control of the Water Department. As we talked and filled up our now depleted water bottles from the pipe which ran fresh mountain water, CJ pointed out the soursop, sour orange, gooseberry, coconut, mauby, and avocado trees that lined the clearing. His father, who worked for the Water Department and so spent much time around this clearing, had planted them when CJ was a child. CJ comes up to this clearing to collect fruits periodically for his family and adds the surplus to the produce off his farm for sale. We continued higher in the mountain along a fairly clear narrow path. Running parallel to the path is a moss-covered metal water pipe that carries water from the mountain to the towns below.
During a brief break, CJ picked up a big broad leaf. It must have fallen recently because it was still bright green. He explained that it was from a chanibush. When he and his friends stay in the mountains for longer periods of time, they make fires and cook. They carry as little as possible up the mountain so they make utensils out of the things they can find. When folded correctly, these leaves make suitable bowls. He demonstrated by curling the leaf by the base, making a cone shape. He stuck a small stick through the overlapping base of the leaf as a fastener and proudly presented it to us. We collected a few of these leaves so Kerry and I could practice our bowl-making skills as we continued our walk.

Eventually we came to the water intake, one of the six mountain water aquifers located around the island which supply the villages with water. As we approached, we reached a gate with a sign that read “Property of the St Kitts Water Services Department. No unauthorized entry beyond this point. Trespassers will be prosecuted.” Without batting an eye, CJ pushed open the gate and we followed him through. Kerry asked him why he wasn’t worried about going into the restricted area, and he said it was because his father worked for the water department and he has been coming up here since he was a child. He feels like he has the right to be anywhere in the mountain he would like to be.

As we walked, we slowly started to hear the waterfall. The dirt footpath gave way to a concrete path. The area is clearly modified by and for human use but simultaneously had the feeling of being somewhere untouched and organic. We continued to walk until we rounded a corner to see the waterfall. The path led to a concrete wall that was about as high as my chest. We climbed up and saw that the waterfall ran into several holding tanks where the water collected before going into the pipe then down to the town.

CJ uses his knowledge of the mountain to work as a part-time tour guide, if he is asked by a tour company. Kerry asked CJ if he had thought about bringing tourists on this hike. Because this is an access road to a protected water source and not an official trial, CJ noted that he has thought about it because so few people are able to see this part of St Kitts. He envisions himself taking tourists up and teaching them about bush medicine in the future.

As we sat there listening to the waterfall, I was consumed with thoughts of the mountain as a place of self-sufficiency, economic gain, and cultural heritage for enslaved Africans and their ancestors living in contemporary St Kitts. The mountains also provided short periods of refuge for maroon communities. CJ’s interaction with the mountain is not unusual. Besides the
recreational hiking in which locals and tourists happily participate, the mountains are and always have been sources of life and sustainability for Kittitians. During plantation agriculture, the mountain was a space for subsistence crops grown in provision plots. These plots are still in use by many agriculturalists. Most former sugar fields and current farms are located on the side of the mountains. Wild mountain plants have been and are still utilized as food, health supplements, materials to make tools and utensils. It is an agricultural space as much as the low-land farms and backyard gardens. This is a communal space, not owned by locals but part of many of their livelihoods. After daydreaming for a while, we began our slow and careful descent back to the car.

In this chapter, I explore how people use agricultural activities and spaces to become or work towards autonomy and sustainability in the food and economic system. Many of my participants noted the precarity of depending on food imports, external markets, or support from their government. They argue that they need to strive for autonomy in order to have sustainable economic and food systems. Autonomy can be experienced in multiple levels from individual, to community, to island, to federation, to regional, to global. For the purposes of this chapter, I will emphasize individual and community level autonomy and sustainability through a focus on agriculturalists who produce for profit and those who produce for self-sufficiency.

I begin with the story of my hike with CJ because he demonstrates the multiple ways local agriculturalists use the land and their heritage to make a living and become food secure. I explore three types of agricultural spaces: 1) formal farmers like CJ’s, which are primarily sources of income 2) backyard gardens, which people use primarily for subsistence, and 3) the mountain which is a communal space used for foraging and small farming. In the next section, I review the food insecurity literature. I argue that sovereignty, autonomy, and sustainability frameworks are more appropriate for discussing and navigating food and economic inequalities in St. Kitts than the classic “food security” framework. Then, I discuss how agriculturalists in St Kitts are putting those frameworks into practice.

**The Insecurity of “Security” - Food Sovereignty vs Food Security**

To understand the ways in which agriculturalists in St Kitts interact with and use their landscapes to work towards autonomy and, consequently, a sustainable food system, I begin by contextualizing the food system that my participants are working within. This section revisits
food importation and food insecurity and argues that food sovereignty is a more appropriate framework for reaching and understanding economic and food sustainability for my participants and the island more broadly.

As defined by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, “Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Food security has been heavily critiqued by scholars and food activists because it leaves out the local producer and makes consumers reliant on imports. This is evident in St Kitts as eighty percent of food is imported from the US, Mexico, and a few other regional locations. As discussed at length in Chapter 3, the food geographies of the island are unequal with grocery stores geographically and economically restricted to the wealthy upper class, usually expatriates, students, and tourists. There is also a Subway, a KFC, two Dominos, and a Burger King on the island. Patel (2009) noted that “Critically, the definition of food security avoided discussing the social control of the food system.” Food security frameworks keep governments, big businesses, and international corporations in control of the food system.

Conversely, food sovereignty provides a framework to study and hopefully implement a self-sufficient system by highlighting the cultural and economic importance of the access to land and food production. Most importantly, it highlights people, not transnational corporations, having control over the food system. Meeting food needs for local populations has never been about security alone. It is not enough to have food available. The food system also needs to be culturally appropriate and controlled by the general population. Food production, as mentioned throughout this dissertation, has been a key tactic for enslaved Africans, later freed Black people, and today’s local population to gain some semblance of an autonomous and culturally sustainable community. In an unequal system, self-sufficiency and autonomy become intertwined with sustainability at the community level. Reese (2019: 9) cites DuBois stating that "DuBois viewed the question of self-sufficiency as a necessity for building healthy self-sustainable Black communities and as a fundamental blow to the exploitive economic system under which black intellectual and physical labor were undervalued.” The unequal system and subsequent importance of self-sufficiency and autonomy continues today. The closure of the sugar industry meant less people were involved in agriculture and food importation remained
important but simultaneously, food production became something individuals could take ownership of in a way they had not been able to before. Sugar fields were left vacant so those who wanted to continue to farm or those who were not qualified to work in tourism or another sector were able to occupy fields and plant produce.

My participants argue that local food producers should be given the task of feeding the nation first, supplemented by imports, not the other way around because of the fluctuations in the market and vulnerabilities in the food system due to outside influences, tourists, hurricanes, and now pandemics. When I asked a farmer from Sandy Point about the co-op’s motivations for pushing local food into the community, he stated that if they did not “it will just be imported all the way.” He went on to highlight their distrust in the quality of imported foods and the economic toll the food import bill takes on the island. He argued, like many of my participants, that local produce is better quality, is better for the environment, and economically more sustainable for the country long term.

Reese’s participants in Washington DC “recognize both the uneven spatial development of their food landscape compared to other neighborhoods and their own agency in transforming that landscape” (Reese 2019: 11). Similarly, my participants act as transformers of their own food system, using food production either for sale or subsistence as a way to be self-sufficient and in turn create a sustainable future for themselves and their communities.

Access to and control over land is paramount to the concept of food sovereignty, which I will discuss in the following sections, however, all agricultural land in St Kitts is under the control of the government meaning that true autonomy and sovereignty is not possible without formal legal protection for small producers. Despite this potentially fragile situation, food sovereignty is still a useful concept because of the historic and contemporary cultural value of land.

After emancipation, the rise of village settlements was due to the “desire, on the part of slaves, for personal liberty and for land of their own” (Farley 1964:52). Besson (1995:300) argues that family land in the Caribbean is not a cultural survival from Africa or Europe but represents culture-building by Caribbean peasants in response to and resistance to the plantation system and other land monopolies such as mining and tourism. Besson (2002) explains that access to and use of land allowed enslaved Africans to create and maintain autonomy and community. Chapter 2 discussed how the use of land has historically been dictated by the
plantocracy. Frucht (1978: 92) notes that “the right to rent and the privilege of using estate lands for provision-ground and pasture depended on regular employment on particular estates. The power of eviction was often used as were the various contract laws, preventing workers from seeking the most favorable wage rates among competing plantations.” With the closure of the sugar industry and the government’s subsequent takeover of all agricultural land, land was intended to be more of a public right. While some argue that the government subsumed the role of “landlord,” not having a single person in total control of land use, allows more autonomy in terms of access to and use of land and takes away the pettiness that comes with personal relationships with private landlords.

In the next section, I focus on the ways in which my participants use their land to produce sellable goods to become food and economically sustainable and autonomous. I then move on to the more subtle, or what Ashanté Reese would call “quiet” form of food production, the backyard gardens as spaces for subsistence, which my participants use to become autonomous in different ways. I finish with a discussion of the mountain plots, which are spaces used for both profit and subsistence.

“I’m an entrepreneur”: Farms, Markets, and Producing Food for Sale

In this section, I discuss the meaning of self-employment and entrepreneurialism for my participants. I then move on to how self-employment, autonomy, sovereignty, and sustainability play out on farms and in the market. Self-employment on the island is directly linked to expansion of the tourism sector and the closure of the sugar industry. When people left sugar, many did not want to or could not work for a resort so they became self-employed. Some worked on the periphery of the tourism industry as taxi drivers and tour guides. Others remain firmly planted in the fields as independent agriculturalists.

As opposed to wage work, self-employment allows people to achieve a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency within the larger economic system. When I asked Otis, a thirty-four-year-old farmer, to describe how he sees himself and his farming business, he summed it up with the short and seemingly simple statement “I’m an entrepreneur!” Carla Freeman (2014) writes on entrepreneurialism in the contemporary Caribbean, demonstrating the ways in which global neoliberalism takes root locally by appealing to and forming to fit deeply ingrained cultural values. She notes that entrepreneurialism in the globalizing culture of neoliberalism is
just as much about economic gain as it is about negotiating new ways of being in terms of family and private life. She states, “the entrepreneurial enterprise constitutes a primary site and central practice of neoliberal self-creation and labor in today’s global economy, a dual project in which economic livelihoods and new subjectivities are being forged in tandem” (Freeman 2014:2).

Economic ventures are intertwined with ideals of the self, culture, and autonomy. My participants use agriculture as a way of being self-employed, that is to be simultaneously a part of the neoliberal economic landscape seemingly autonomously.

Self-employment and agriculture have gone hand in hand since St Kitts was colonized and the plantation economy was formed and has historically been the only way for the ancestors of my participants to be economically autonomous in any way. For enslaved Africans and later freed Black people, this was in the form of an internal market system in which they grew for subsistence and were able to sell the surplus. Mintz describes how this production created a complex system that resisted the oppression of the plantation system.

The internal market system which typified Caribbean colonies was not representative of the slave mode of production, but constituted instead a flagrant violation of that mode, ideally conceived. That slaves acted like capitalist producers might seem like burlesque, were it not that they did so as a form of resistance, and sometimes with great success, in spite of repression, the contempt of their owners, and inhuman living conditions (Mintz 1983:116).

Mintz makes the point that, although they were working within the capitalist plantation system, they were able to create a form of resistance. Today, the heritage of autonomy, food production, and resistance manifests through my participants' drive to be self-employed. My participants, like Mintz’, are not trying to create a food and economic system outside of the hegemonic capitalist system but rather they are fighting for their seat at the table with broader goals of achieving economic and food autonomy for themselves and the federation.

Self-employment, autonomy, self-sufficiency, resistance, and entrepreneurialism were brought up countless times when I would ask my participants why they wanted to work in agriculture. Ana, an agro-processor in her mid-thirties, always knew she wanted to work for herself. In fact, her parents told her to never work for anyone for longer than a year. Her goal was to own her own business by 30 and she now has three agro-processing brands, two beauty brands and one food brand. She also pointed out that most people in the market are self-employed turnhands and farmers. The others are selling for family members (parents or
husbands, for example). A vendor at the market who specializes in growing and selling lettuce, who describes himself as a “drifter with an anchor” because he moves around a lot but he always comes back to St Kitts, told me that he came to agriculture because he does not want to work for someone who bosses him around. One member of the Sandy Point co-op is a skilled builder and carpenter. According to his cousin, people in the family think he is wasting his talents in farming but “in the farming, you get to choose what you do. You don't have somebody telling you what to do. When you go on somebody job, they telling you what to do. Working for yourself, you choose, you do what you want to you and how you want to do it.”

Former sugar fields which have been taken over by farmers are the primary spaces of food production in St Kitts. In the next section, I explore farms as spaces of autonomy where farmers seek to carve out sovereignty for themselves and sustainability in the island’s food and economic system.

Farms

Food sovereignty hinges on access to and control over land, however, the Kittitian government holds ownership of all agricultural land and farmers must lease or squat on land in order to work it. Consequently, autonomy and sovereignty must be negotiated through different avenues. Some semblance of autonomy is achieved because the farmers are self-employed and control what happens on that land for the most part, even without ownership. As they are self-employed farmers, they have the freedom to produce what they want, how they want, and when they want. In the past, the agricultural lands were controlled by international companies interested in monocropping. Today’s agriculturalists are able to produce diverse crops for internal markets. For example, Armstrong has found his niche in herbs and long crops such as pineapples, fruit trees, and perennials which take years to bear. His huge farm is laid out in perfectly neat and manicured rows of produce and always under construction. Other farmers have small plots of land where they grow quick crops, like cucumbers and tomatoes, which typically are ready to harvest in less than two months. Mr. Liburd, a middle-aged farmer who sells in the town market on Saturdays, noted that the farmers in St Kitts that rely on the Department of Agriculture for their seeds grow the same thing at the same time. He tries to grow things that are less common to decrease his competition. As a demonstration, he showed me a few vegetables I had never seen in St Kitts before. He picked up a bulbous vegetable called
Kohlrabi. He said he read online that it is good for breast cancer so ordered the seeds off Amazon. It took some convincing, but his loyal customers were willing to give the new vegetable a try and now it is selling well.

McCutcheon (2019) notes that land for Black people has been a source of oppression and autonomy simultaneously. Agricultural land in St Kitts is no exception. Former sugar fields, where enslaved Africans and later freed Black people were once forced into labor, have since been parsed out into small farms, most of which sit on the mountainside. These former sugar fields are the most common places for agriculturalists to produce their goods for sale and, as such, have become entrepreneurial spaces in which local producers are able to enact their autonomy, sovereignty, and strive for sustainability.

Having autonomy over a space, especially one of production, is even more important in the Black community who have been historically and contemporarily marginalized and restricted from land control. The plantation land, a site which has been historically a site for Black exploitation, enslavement, and forced labor, has created what Katherine McKittrick would call a “Black sense of place.”

This is a sense of place wherein the violence of displacement and bondage, produced within a plantation economy, extends and is given a geographic future. Practical activities, specifically resistance to persistent anti-black violence and negotiating uneven power geometries of white supremacy, lend a depth to these ongoing geographies of difference. In this context, racial violence is not unchanging; rather, the plantation serves as one (not the only) meaningful geographic locus through which race is made known (and bodies are therefore differently disciplined) across time and space. (McKittrick 2011: 949)

Like the plantations McKittrick speaks of, the former sugar fields are both a place of trauma and a place for local producers to construct the future. Similarly, Aistara notes that her participants’ farms are also historic spaces but that history motivated them to use the land in a way that will sustain the farm for the future stating that “Farmers make their farms into places by imbuing the landscape with meanings of the past, present, and future” (Aistara 2018:85). For my participants, the history of oppression on the plantation lands directly motivates them to use these spaces to become food and economically autonomous in the contemporary but also symbolically overcoming historic marginalization. My participants often talk about their connection to the land and how they need to try to use it correctly for the future generations, making sure they and their families are healthy, and not relying on or trusting the mainstream
food system. To ensure sustainability on multiple levels and systems, my participants experiment with new technologies and pull from new information, such as “climate smart” farming, planting pollinator-friendly flowers, hydroponic farming, and composting, to make sure their farms are sustainable. Oftentimes, this blends with cultural heritage as they draw on ancestral knowledge, such as planting according to the moon phases, ways of crop rotation, keeping rabbits for fertilizer, and collecting rainwater to work towards a sustainable future.

Producing food in itself is a source of autonomy for farmers and allows farmers to ensure their families and communities remain food secure. Karla Slocum cites Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1988) observations of a banana growing community in his book, Peasants and Capital. Despite being vulnerable to market fluctuations and being under the control of a British company, banana producers, they are still able to find meaning and autonomy within their work. “Trouillot makes clear that they organize farming and derive meaning from it in the spaces they can find within the confines of the work. “I can always eat my fig,” he quotes a villager as saying to announce how banana cultivation has value in the community even if the crop cannot be sold to external markets.” She continues on to note that Trouillot’s work highlights “the value of cultivating with a self-defined purpose and satisfying one’s sustenance in an Afro-Caribbean village to which one has ties over generations, even when economic autonomy as a producer in that village is unattainable” (2017:430). In her own work on banana farmers in St. Lucia, Slocum “found that a community of producers who had acquired former plantation lands and extracted themselves from wage work believed that banana farming on their own acquired lands was a source of freedom. They were ‘feeling free,’ as one farmer put it, to work as they pleased when they pleased (Slocum 2006, 94)—even though the scheduling of production as well as the marketing and pricing of ‘their’ product were nonnegotiable and determined by a foreign transnational company in concert with the St. Lucian state.”

Like Trouillot and Slocum’s participants, agriculturalists in St Kitts see farming as a way to gain financial and food independence despite competing with foreign producers and being at the whim of global agricultural markets. Vibration, a key participant in this research, began his adult working life as a teacher but decided to pick up farming in 2007 because farming provides him self-reliance. “I can be a teacher and be an accountant if I want to do that for nine to five. I still have to go into the supermarket to buy food. Most times you don't know where it's coming from but if I'm on the farm, I know exactly how it's grown, when, and why,” he continued.
In her book on the resistance and navigation of unequal food access in a Black neighborhood in Washington DC, Ashanté Reese (2019) writes on the concept of self-reliance in communities that were and continue to be marginalized. She states:

Transitions from mass enslavement, migration from the South to the North and West, and integration (albeit limited) into consumer spheres from which they were once barred prompted questions about how best to meet Black people's needs in a nation in which the rights of full citizenship have yet to be granted. These questions were as fundamentally about space and place as they were about accessing goods. Black residents, many of them living in segregated neighborhoods in urban centers, navigated white supremacy daily, using their segregated neighborhoods as places to build as much institutional capacity to meet their daily needs as possible. Self-reliance became strategy, a manifesto for building communities that were not wholly reliant on white philanthropy or support (2019:9).

While Reese has conceptualized self-reliance in the US context and thus her participants have experienced marginalization and segregation in a different way than St. Kitts, which is 98 percent Black, I am using her concept here to highlight how my participants' experience of being chronically under-resourced leads to the drive towards self-reliance. As mentioned in previous chapters, agriculturalists feel that they are especially marginalized. The government aid and agricultural programs are unreliable and inconsistent, leading many participants to feel that autonomy in their production practices is the best option for them. Dion, a founding member of the Sandy Point Co-op and elder in the community once said, “if you want to do something then you have to do something for yourself” instead of relying on or waiting for the government’s support or encouragement.

The farms are spaces of food production but the sale of produce happens off the farm. In the next section, I revisit the Basseterre and Sandy Point markets discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Here, I will re-examine them not only as social and heritage spaces but also as economic spaces where my participants are able to use their autonomy as being self-employed to make a living.

**Selling in Local markets**

This section explores the markets as spaces where agriculturalists can enact and strive for economic and food autonomy in a system that does not prioritize local food production. While few have formal business or economics training, the vendors have keen insights into market fluctuation, customer needs and wants, pricing, and marketing. In Mintz’s (1983:115) study in Jamaica, he notes:
These traders have no difficulty with such concepts as opportunity costs, arbitrage, long-term supply costs, or marginal utility. In fact, nothing in the world but the stock markets may come so close to representing the economist’s “perfect market” as the Caribbean marketplaces I have studied. But the contemporary renderings of economic activities, impressive as they are, serve best to reveal the remarkable past of a region nailed to the scaffold of slave-based capitalist growth, whose peoples struggled against their subjection by being more capitalistic in ideology than their masters had intended.

My participants are well attuned with global market fluctuations and business strategies but little marketing or advertising is done outside of the market spaces. Vendors set up outside the market on the street. Since they are on the main road, they are able to call out to cars passing by “Mahi! Swordfish! Shark! Tuna! Marlin!” Most people don’t even get out of their cars, responding with questions about price or requesting the amount they want. The fisherman cuts the fish, weighs it, and has a helper, usually a family member or friend, run the fish to the car in exchange for the cost. The whole transaction takes place in seconds so as to not disrupt traffic. Sometimes, fishermen or their helpers will hold fish up as if they were in a fishing competition to display their product to passersby. Produce vendors will employ similar tactics when trying to attract customers. Passersby often stick their heads out their car windows as they drive past to ask questions like “you got okra?” or “what are you selling the mint for?”

Unlike the vendors on the street who can solicit business from people driving or walking by on the main road, the vendors in the market rely on people who are there specifically to buy produce. This can be tricky because the market is not as popular as it has been in the past. Some vendors utilize social media like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to advertise, posting pictures of their products and what times they will be set up at the market. Typically, this is done by the younger family members of the vendors who are more in touch with social media marketing strategies, but older vendors have also come around to new ways to market themselves. Armstrong, for instance, had his daughter create an Instagram account where she posts events, available produce, and times Armstrong will be at the market.

Self-employment allows vendors in the market the freedom to quickly change business practices or offerings to fit customer desires as needed. Tine started making and selling juices for five EC each because produce “ain’t selling like it used to.” She said is not able to make a living in the way she used to because, as discussed in depth in Chapter 4, people are shopping less in
the market and the monkeys are eating much of what she produces. Tine hopes that expanding her business to include agro-processed goods will increase her profits.

The markets also provide a version of food sovereignty for the customers of the market. They are able to come into contact with food producers, ask questions, and learn how their food was grown. The transparency also comes with control over the food market. Customers frequently request farmers to grow certain crops.

Selling retail can be particularly challenging if you rely on imported food, even regionally. Monday markets are very slow on days the regional produce boats from St Vincent or Dominica do not make it. One particularly slow Monday, Bobo and I were lounging on the concrete stalls after the turnhands picked his produce over. I made a comment about how the turnhands must struggle when the boats do not come because they rely on the regional vendors for their merchandise. “I don’t depend pon them. Other people depend pon them. The turnhand depend pon them. You know so. I different to them,” Bobo said, highlighting the benefits of being an autonomous producer.

The customers and vendors at both the town and Sandy Point markets are mostly locals and the occasional tourist, missionary, or student, however, most people in St Kitts shop at formal grocery stores and other retail establishments. The public market spaces provide some business for local producers but in order to make a living, it is important for them to find other venues. Many agriculturalists sell their products to formal grocery stores, corner stores, restaurants, and gift shops, hoping to integrate into the mainstream food system and capitalize on the economic opportunities that tourism and the universities provide. In the next section, I explore ways in which my participants create economic opportunities for themselves within the mainstream food system.

Creating space in the Mainstream Foodscape

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I rented a car and took the opportunity to grocery shop in an affluent area of the island for some American goods I could not find in town. As I reached the checkout, I realized that, hanging on the wall, were newly printed and framed pictures and short biographies of nine local farmers that sell their produce to the store. The “local produce” section of this store is small and almost indistinguishable from the imported produce in terms of signage. I hardly saw advertisements for local produce in the grocery store promotions or even
on their social media accounts. This display of farmers behind the cashiers would tell a different story where the store and their customers value local produce. At that moment, I wondered if the pictures on the wall were an indication that local produce was becoming a valued part of the food system or if it was one of those “just for show” instances that my participants highlight in almost every conversation about agriculture in St Kitts.

Despite the popularity of green and local food movements, it remains that the mainstream food outlets such as grocery stores and restaurants allow only limited space for local produce. Producers must compete amongst each other and with the high volume of cheap imports from South and Central America, other Caribbean islands, and the United States. Some of my participants, like Armstrong, have cultivated relationships with grocery stores and restaurants over the years. Others show up unannounced with produce hoping for a sale, underselling the competition, calling restaurants and grocery stores daily to see what they need.

Still others take a different path towards creating a space for themselves in the mainstream food system by adjusting their practices, demonstrating the aspect of entrepreneurialism that Freeman (2014:2) explains is an “ongoing process of envisioning and becoming.” Driven by the shifting economy that is causing a steady increase in competition, agro-processing has transformed from a popular domestic activity to an economic activity in recent years. Agro-processed goods have a much higher profit margin than raw goods so many of my participants use local agricultural goods to make products from it such as jams, hot sauce, dried fruit snacks, even beauty products like soap.

To help people transition to new economic activities after sugar production ended, the government created the agro-processing unit, a space where agro-processors could come to transform their raw ingredients into products. With help from the Taiwanese government, the government of St Kitts converted a former sugar industry building into an agro-processing unit, with a kitchen, dehydrator, and packaging and storage facilities. These facilities are free for any agro-processor in St Kitts to use, but the Department of Agriculture produces and sells agro-processed goods on their own behalf, essentially competing with local agro-processors. Ira, a middle-aged agro-processor who sells in the market on Saturdays, started agro-processing in 2005 when sugar ended. The government ran training programs to learn trades. He used to work in construction so he was not involved in sugar but took advantage of the opportunity to learn agro-processing techniques. Ira loves being an agro processor because it allows him to use his
creativity. He told me that he was one of the first people to use gooseberries in drinks. He makes jam, dried gooseberries, and gooseberry wine. He also showed me some other things he has been experimenting with, such as livestock feed with dried orange and cassava peel, which will make the milk taste sweeter. He argues that, while livestock farmers need to import most of their animal feed, it is possible to make at least some if not all of your own.

Most agro-processors, though, work independently from the government-run agro-processing unit. Throughout my fieldwork, many of my participants noted that it has only been within the last ten years or so that they are beginning to see local agro-processed goods, branded with official labels, in grocery stores, at festivals and other events, and in tourist gift shops, as opposed to just made for home consumption. While mentioning the increase in agro-processed goods on the market, Vibration noted:

If you could farm the thing, why not make something out of it? Agro-processing wasn't a big thing back then. It just start coming on people start catching on now. Back then it was just farm the food and try to sell it as it is but to add value to it, like most- some people do now. It wasn't that it wasn't around but only lately, you find more person get involved in that.

Vibration continued, using mangos as an example. Instead of letting the inevitable surplus of mangos rot on the ground during the height of mango season, it would be more profitable to make juice, jelly, chutney, hot sauce, and jerky. In a casual conversation with a farmer and agro-processor, I brought up Vibration’s comments and asked if that would create too much competition among agro-processors. She responded by saying that everyone has a niche. She makes chips, her neighbor makes wine, and another specializes in herbal teas. They also try not to sell in the same locations, she stated. Some agro-processors market their goods directly to tourists. Two vendors regularly set up on the road across from the cruise ship port. One sells jams, honey, coconut water, and juice while the other sells beauty products made from local herbs and fruits. Other processors are set up on the main road that brings visitors to the Marriott and the Park Hyatt. One agro-processor sells her agro-processed goods— cassava bread, juice, sweet potato chips, and guava cheese— at a farmer’s market on the Ross Veterinarian School’s campus where she sells to mostly American students. The Sandy Point Agricultural Cooperative found ways to support agro-processors while making money for themselves. For example, they grow produce, like hot peppers, which they sell to agro-processors, who make goods like hot
sauces. They also have local agro-processors to sell their goods, local juices being by far the most popular at their market.

Ana echoed many other producers saying that people in St Kitts started pushing their children into professions other than agriculture about 45 years ago and, as a result, people do not see agriculture as a viable career. She sees her agro-processing business as a way to change that viewpoint. She identifies education as key to changing negative perceptions of agriculture. She says that agriculturalists such as herself have to reteach people how to view agriculture, demonstrating that it is more than just “old school farming.” Her beauty brands, which Ana notes are not recognized as agricultural work by some, are a way to teach people to see how broad agriculture can be and the ways in which it can be a profitable business.

Many of these products invoke images of cultural heritage as a marketing strategy. Mother Becky, for example, a brand that sells small burlap bags of dehydrated herbs used for traditional medicinal tea, is named after the grandmother of the brand owner. The name alone suggests that the tea has been passed down for generations. The story on the back of the tag, neatly attached by a piece of traditional brown, red, and yellow Madras cloth, tells the story of the owner’s grandmother, living in a small village, making bush tea, the inspiration of the commercial version. It touts its locally sourced ingredients. A recent magazine feature referred to the tea as “authentic” and “indigenous.” “The tea, sold in burlap bags, tied off with the madras, brings this local tradition into your home and allows you to make the perfect cup of tea just like Mother Becky,” the spread continues. The owners of Mother Becky’s Bush Tea intentionally invoke images of “traditional” home remedies to mobilize the island’s heritage in order to become or work towards financial autonomy and sustainability.

Agro-processors’ cooperation with each other stands in contrast to the almost refusal to work together among the famers. This could be because agro-processing has traditionally been a domestic activity. My participants note that only within the last 10 years or so have agro-processed goods become available in stores with official brand names and labels. This could mean that there is more room on the market and less players on the field so the competition among the processors is less than with farmers. Moreover, the central location of the agro-processing unit allows processors to have time together, sharing machines and the spaces. This may breed more diplomatic working relationships.
While the agriculturalists discussed in this section sell produce and agro-processed goods to consumers, the next section explores how other agriculturalists are selling the experience of agriculture through eco-and agro-tours.

Agro- and Eco-tourism

Aistara (2018:10) notes that “it is precisely rural areas that are the principal sites of contestation between international development trends and local histories. As farmers stay put, national and global development trends come and go, leaving their traces on the landscape, communities, and the practices of the farmers.” As such, agriculturalists in St Kitts have to adapt to changing economic landscapes through mixed method approaches, some of which includes agro and ecotourism as a way to capitalize on tourism’s takeover of the island’s economic system. Armstrong’s farm sits within the St. Mary’s Biosphere Reserve, a designated area of biodiversity conservation and sustainable economic and community development by the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Programme. While I was conducting fieldwork, he was beginning to make his farm agro-tour ready. He was working with a tourist company on the island with contracts with the cruise lines to be added as an excursion. He was in the process of having bathrooms put in and building small café style buildings for tourists to sit.

Armstrong’s farm has fields of perfectly even rows of beautiful produce. Basil, mint, lemongrass, oregano, thyme, sage, tarragon, and a Caribbean herb called Shado Beni, similar in taste and smell to cilantro, fill almost all the empty space besides the walk and driveways. He plans on organizing a tea tour where customers pick their own herbs and make tea at a café. He also considered offering an “experience a day in the life of a farmer” option for those who would like to see how a working farm operates. He is hopeful to have regular driving tours through the farm and the ability to offer lunch to visitors.

I asked Armstrong the motivations for adding the tourism element to his already busy schedule on the farm. He said a lot more people are getting into produce farming now. When he started farming 30 years ago, there wasn’t as much competition because most people involved in agriculture were working in sugar, including him. He jumped at the chance to get his own land when the plantation his farm is on stopped producing sugar. When sugar closed, those who did not want to or could not work in tourism, became produce farmers. Additionally, Armstrong notes, some people began small farms and backyard gardens as a way to supplement their
income from non-agricultural jobs, which will be discussed in a later section. Small scale producers are able to undersell their produce because it is not their primary source of income. Even though they offer obviously smaller quantities, they are still making a difference in the amount and prices he can sell because his clients are buying what they can from the part-time farmers.

Otis has a ten-acre farm that sits just below Armstrong’s and is also one of several in the St. Mary’s Biosphere Reserve. Otis prides himself on his entrepreneurialism, agricultural innovation, and active participation in the UNESCO Biosphere Programme, participating in many of their workshops and meetings, and has plans to start agro-tourism. He embodies Freeman’s (2014: 2) description of an entrepreneur “often highlights a restless personality and capacity to anticipate and embrace change, whether technological or social, and, as one of my informants suggested to me ‘the tendency towards self-sufficiency; in other words (the entrepreneur) is stubborn and rebellious.’” In some ways, these characteristics have pushed Otis into the spotlight as the public face of agriculture in St Kitts and particularly the Biosphere, running events and appearing in press releases and other promotions. He also sees agrotourism as the way forward for agriculture in a tourist-centered economy. During my fieldwork, he and a friend were in the process of developing an agro-tour company, using their knowledge of the mountain and connections with farmers to lead tours of different sections of the area. Otis and Armstrong, despite having very different personalities and attitudes towards business, frequently work together on agrotourism projects such as farm to table dinners and u-pick-it events. They also have plans to work on some tours together when they are able.

Vibration, a farmer from Sandy Point, felt that the co-op would also benefit from participation in the tourism industry, despite not having any concrete plans yet.

I'm thinking of getting a taxi certificate so I can bring people to the farm in Sandy Point because as much history as we have, there isn't any major generator of tourist dollars in Sandy Point. The tourists just pass through mystically. There ain't going to no stops besides Brimstone Hill and that's way out of the community. There is definitely a need and a place for agriculture within tourism.

Vibration’s comments highlight that many in the countryside are often left out of the tourist industry and the reoccurring theme of “if you want something done, do it yourself” is sparked by feelings of exclusion in the mainstream economies. Other participants, like CJ in the opening vignette, are already leading tours in addition to their agricultural work.
Unfortunately, as I write this dissertation in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these tourism projects have been put on hold. The Caribbean tourism business has been decimated for the time being as travel in and out of the region ground to a halt for the majority of 2020. In November 2020, St Kitts and Nevis opened their borders to tourists, but understandably, tourism is very limited and strictly monitored. Tourists are not allowed to travel around the island which means agro and ecotourism will have to wait for now. Because St Kitts and Nevis shut their borders very early in the pandemic and have been extremely strict with enforcing quarantines and testing for the limited travel allowed, they were able to bring their COVID numbers to zero and allow citizens to move around freely. This allowed my participants to keep up their agro and eco tours with locals. Ounce, a backyard gardener and tour guide, noticed a large uptick in the number of locals who were interested in mountain hikes. Armstrong’s 35 year old daughter Mimi is the only one of Armstrong’s seven children that have taken an interest in the farm. Her main interest and responsibility now is to organize events on the farms. During the pandemic, she organized several u-pick-it events on her father’s farm which have been overwhelmingly popular with locals.

Agriculturalists in St Kitts are not motivated by getting through or getting by. Instead, they are aiming to participate in the food and economic system in ways that are sustainable for future generations. Many of my participants use agricultural spaces to become financially and food secure through the sale of agricultural products. A smaller group of participants, though, create agricultural spaces in their private home spaces to produce for subsistence, which will be discussed in the next section.

“You should be able to feed yourself”: Subsistence Production, Autonomy, and Sustainability

Backyard gardeners have created agricultural spaces in their homes in which they produce for themselves and their families. These participants rarely sell their produce for a profit yet see this effort as part of creating food and economic autonomy. Like Reese’s participants who are not formal activists, striving to change the food system through an institution but instead use food production as a means of gaining control of their own lives, my participants who participate in backyard gardening are “simply making a life” (Reese 2019:2). Backyard
gardening is a means towards a sustainable and autonomous life in terms of autonomy over land, autonomy over their health, and self-reliance in times of crisis or economic hardships.

Autonomy in relation to ownership of land and food production is a key concept applied to the Caribbean because of the history of externally controlled economies operating land monopolies (Mintz 1974, Trouillot 1988, Mintz and Price 1992, Besson 2002). Although individuals cannot own agricultural land in St Kitts, backyard gardens are often on private property and hence owned by their curators. A key facet of food sovereignty is that it allows people, not just transnational corporations, control over their food system in order to create cultural specificity and sustainability within that system. Growing their own food for subsistence is a form of self-reliance that allows gardeners to resist the global capitalist food system and the system in which their ancestors were not allowed or able to open lands of production.

With backyard gardening, my participants have more freedom over design and what to grow in comparison to farmers, as they are their own customers. These gardens range from neat flower beds, laid out in deliberate patterns to ones that look as if the jungle crept down from the mountain and covered the yard. For example, Ounce, a 38-year-old backyard gardener had a vision of a “food jungle” for his yard. In addition to flower beds full of vegetables and herbs, he has fruit trees and vine fruit like passionfruit growing wherever they want with seemingly no rhyme or reason. Conversely, Malachi, a 40-year-old backyard gardener, has raised beds and trees in perfect alignment. Even when food production dips because of weather or monkey damage, this control over the ways in which land is used is fundamental to the experiences of autonomy.

In addition to autonomy over the land, backyard gardening allows people autonomy over what goes into their body. Karen, a middle-aged backyard gardener, was born and raised in St Kitts but spent 33 years of her adulthood in New York City. After she retired from her work as a theater and film hair stylist, she moved back to St Kitts with the goal of starting her backyard garden. During an interview, she stressed the importance of knowing where your food comes from and the better quality of locally grown produce, which was instilled in her as a child.

My father always grew everything and my mother cooked everything you know, I didn’t grow up in the city. I grew up in the country where the soil and the temperature is totally different than the city. Everything I ate, I knew where it came from and my mom baked her own bread. We had chickens so we had eggs. The neighbor down the street had goats. Another family member had cows and my uncle had pigs. When something is
butchered on a weekend, the whole family receives it. We knew where it came from.

Moving from the countryside into the capital city was a turning point for Karen’s awareness of the food system.

That was up until I was a teenager and then we moved to the city and they had to buy everything and I realized it was different because everything we bought from the store apart from the ground provisions that came from locals or from Nevis. The meats and everything else came from overseas. For a long time- I didn't eat a lot of animal products growing up. Everything we needed, we had to purchase.

When Karen was twenty-two, she left St Kitts to work in Canada and then the United States, further disconnecting her from food production.

Then when I moved away and I went to New York, I really needed to buy everything and I didn’t know where anything came from. And the bread was totally different. Everything tasted so different. The eggs didn't look like eggs. They were pale and I was accustomed to eggs looking like sunshine.

For Karen, locally grown foods represented quality over imported or mass-produced foods. Sabor, a concept used by Harper and Afonso in their work on urban gardens in Portugal, refers to the flavor possessed by locally grown foods. Sabor, noted by Harper and Afonso (2019: 22), “refers in part to the sensory value of garden produce and its quality relative to supermarket produce.” For Karen and other backyard gardeners, quality and taste are linked with health, something she values highly, especially after her time in the US. While on tour with a musical, Karen was able to attend a panel at an agricultural school in Michigan, which introduced her to the industrial agricultural system in the US.

I learned about how food is grown, how animals are being taken care of, and how they are raised. I know the cows at home eat grass and I thought the cows in the US ate grass until I learned they eat feed. I realized now that the chickens aren’t really roaming free, picking up worms, grass, and scrabbling. Their living conditions are terrible. Living in the US, they don’t really see how food is grown but I know how things are grown and how it's harvested. It just didn’t sit right with my system.

After living and working in New York City and then some time traveling around the United States, Karen was becoming increasingly tired of her busy lifestyle and the industrial food
I always said when I move back home, I am going to grow what I’m going to eat. So that’s my whole thing about food. When I was living in the US, I used to say to my co-workers ‘I don’t need this crap! I’m going home to raise goats and chickens and dig in the dirt!’

Encouraged by the 2016 election, her research into industrial agriculture and pesticides, and her growing desire to retire, Karen moved home in 2017 and started a garden.

I just came home and I had [a farmer] build raised beds for me. He helped me set up and I just started planting because I knew what I wanted but I said I have no clue what I’m doing but things are growing! I enjoy that I can go out and pick an okra and eat it right there. I can pick a piece of lettuce and just eat it. I’m just right there without having to worry about anything because I know where my food is coming from and it’s important for us to know where our food is coming from.

Like Harper and Afonso’s participants who describe “the sense of trust derived from growing food free of chemicals themselves-the shortest of all food chains” (201923), Karen grows most of what she needs in order to ensure the quality of the food she is putting into her body. When she has to buy produce, she only buys from producers she knows and trusts to avoid imported or chemically treated food. Her feelings about the quality of local produce and the importance of knowing where your food comes from are recurring themes among my participants. There is an overarching distrust of the mainstream food system where non-local foods are thought to be less nutritious and the mainstream diet causing a rise in obesity, high blood pressure, cancer, and diabetes. To maintain a healthy community, self-sufficiency in the food system is paramount.

As with agriculturalists who produce for profit, subsistence farmers also note feelings of vulnerability when relying on imported food and store-bought food. During my research, it was common for subsistence farmers and produce vendors alike to wonder out loud, “what happens when the boat doesn’t come?” referring to the produce boats from Dominica and St Vincent and highlighting the need to be self-sufficient as an island but also as an individual in order to be truly food secure. A participant mentioned in passing once that, “you should be able to feed yourself. Agriculture is feeding yourself, even if it’s a backyard garden.” Karen’s main motivation for growing food is quality and health. In the same interview, she also discussed planting as a way to protect yourself from food shortages.
If everyone would plant what they like in their backyard, we wouldn’t have to import-
It’s the importing of food- that’s another thing I have a problem with because there was a
time when boats didn’t stop in the Caribbean because there was a shortage of food. That
time might come again and if we don’t have anything- we have to learn to feed ourselves.
We can’t depend on outside sources and that’s how I’m thinking. It might not happen in
my lifetime but if you teach your children how to grow their own food, then they won’t
starve.

At the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown, there were island-wide anxieties over
disruptions to food importation and people were becoming increasingly worried about a shortage
of food. Karen told me she was not worried because she had her garden to take care of her and
her sisters.

Farms, which are agricultural spaces used to generate a profit, stand in contrast to the
backyard gardens that are typically spaces of self-sufficiency. In the next section, I explore a
space that is both a space for profit and subsistence, steeped in cultural heritage and also used as
a vehicle to a sustainable and autonomous future— the mountain.

**Places in Between: Provision plots and the mountain for profit and subsistence**

Agricultural spaces have been both sites of trauma and empowerment since enslaved
Africans were brought to the island in the 1600s. The sugar fields, while they have been recently
reclaimed, have been historically owned by foreign elites. In contrast, the mountain ghauts are
unique agricultural spaces that have been communal spaces of shelter, reprieve, and autonomy.
During the long history of plantation agriculture, the mountain ghauts were spaces where field
workers, first as enslaved Africans and later as free Black people, were able to enact some
autonomy through growing food in provision plots. Provision grounds were spaces of
subsistence and cultural sustainability as “Africans were able to maintain agricultural traditions
with crops they imported across the Middle Passage, such as yams, ackee, gourds, and other
staples” (DeLoughrey 2011:62). DeLoughrey (2011:59) notes that the “provision grounds reflect
the historical plot of cultural sustainability amid the terrors of plantation capitalism, vital ground
for the post-emancipation period.”

The mountains have maintained their significance in the cultural and agricultural
landscape throughout the years. My hike with CJ, described in the opening vignette, was only
one of the many occasions I have had the opportunity to accompany a participant into the
mountain. Many of my participants and friends spend considerable amounts of time in and around Mount Liamuiga. The mountain is also prominent in countless conversations about agriculture and land in St Kitts because, not only because Mount Liamuiga and her daughter mountains stand in the center of the oval islands making themselves visible no matter where you are standing, but also because of their cultural heritage and abundant resources that my participants use to become economically and food secure and autonomous in order to a safeguard a sustainable future. Unlike the farms and backyard gardens that tend to be used for profit or subsistence but rarely both, the mountain straddles the line offering a space of self-sufficiency both with sellable and subsistence products. People will still plant on active plots but others forage on abandoned plots or forage wild fruits and roots.

Contemporary producers’ use of the provision plots parallels their ancestors but the relationship between agriculturalists and the mountain has changed from one of necessity during plantation agriculture to one of opportunity, preference, and cultural heritage of today. Plots are much smaller than the sugar fields and are used for the production of small amounts of diverse crops for subsistence and sale. The mountain is also a prime spot for foraging. CJ and other agriculturalists like him forage for roots and herbs, fruit, and vegetables.

Wild or cultivated, these crops are sold in the market, agro-processed, or used for subsistence. “Bush men” typically grow and forage for heritage crops such as breadfruit and yams. As discussed in Chapter 6, these crops have deep histories in the Caribbean. Yams are an important staple in the Afro-Caribbean diet, but they are also a symbolic bridge to the past and the ancestors who established these foodways. Yams that were planted in the ghauts by plantation workers still grow wild, and people are still finding them and foraging for them. Because they are not picked often, the yams often grow to large sizes, some as big as a human leg. The people who forage in the mountain often sell the yams and other goods at the market to sell. Stories of the enslaved Africans who farmed the ghauts and worked the fields and how that tradition has been kept alive come with every purchase.

The mountain is also a source of raw material which is used for making tools. For example, the calabash tree sprouts gourds that are hollowed out, dried, and used as bowls and cookware. On a hike with a guide towards the end of my fieldwork, we entered the ghaut and were met with the unmistakable scent of blooming jasmine trees. As I reached up to smell a flower, my guide told me that locals collect the strong and bendable branches to make fish pots.
Mikey, a fisherman and friend from my village, also mentioned that he uses these branches, but he pays someone to collect them.

No matter the growing strategy or what they do with the goods after they are harvested or collected, my participants use the provisions plots and the mountainscape to connect with their past while becoming food and economically autonomous, feeding the current and future generations.

**Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates the strategies and agricultural spaces small scale-producers use agriculture as a means to create autonomy and sustainability in the food and economic system. I argue that focusing on food sovereignty over security is a more valuable way to combat food insecurities as it puts the emphasis on small-scale production and gives power to the local people instead of international corporations. This chapter explores the spaces of production—farms, backyard gardens, and plots (foraging for wild things, cultivating on plots, and/or collecting planted things that have been abandoned); spaces of consumer consumption—grocery stores, local markets and street stands, restaurants, and the ways small-scale producers are turning places of production into places of consumption through eco and agro tourism.

Lands designated as agricultural lands, which are government owned and thus have an unconventional relationship with sovereignty, are spaces where entrepreneurial farmers can enact their autonomy over their economic activities and reap the benefits directly. Markets, which are also government owned spaces, allow producers a space to conduct their business and customers are able to buy local, healthy food that is often cheaper than the grocery store. As such, the markets become spaces of economic and food autonomy for both buyers and sellers. Entrepreneurial agriculturalists are able to adjust business practices as they see fit, as we see with my participants that have begun to formalize their agro-processing businesses to create an economic space for themselves in the mainstream food market. In private backyards, gardeners can turn their homes into spaces of food production, cutting down on the money spent on purchasing food and allowing them to control what goes in their bodies, acts of resistance against the mainstream systems. Mountain plots are unique spaces as they are communal property and steeped in a history of resistance to the unequal and often violent system of power.
For my participants, being economically autonomous is more important than just earning money for the sake of economic gain. Self-sufficiency, to use Ashanté Reese’s meaning of the term, means not having to rely on imported food and the mainstream food system. It means not having to answer directly to international business owners of the hotel industry. It means having more personal freedom and ownership over the goods they produce. Overall, self-sufficiency means building a sustainable community for themselves and future generations of Kittitians. In the next chapter, I conclude this dissertation by discussing how agriculture in St. Kitts relates to the global issues of water, food, and energy. I will also examine how the agricultural project has changed since my fieldwork concluded in late 2019, the impact of COVID-19 on the island, and the future for my participants and the food system.
CHAPTER 8: Autonomy and Sustainably for Small-Scale producers in a Post-Sugar Economy

Sugarcane, no longer the export cash crop it once was, is a popular snack today. On the busy roundabout in the center of the city, you will almost always find a young man selling neatly cut sugarcane in clear plastic bags. As the cars slowly creep through traffic, he pops into their windows to ask if they would like to buy a bag of this sweet, fibrous treat for 5 EC. Peeled stalks of sugarcane are sold in a few other locations throughout the island as well—roadside stands, markets, and festivals. A store in the cruise ship port sells freshly squeezed cane juice flavored with ginger. Despite its visibility as a cultural confection, it is rare to see sugarcane produced on a medium or large scale in St Kitts since the industry closed. My first and only experience with the production side of sugarcane came in the form of transporting cane on Armstrong’s farm. Armstrong also supplies many of the sugarcane vendors, including the man in the roundabout.

Sugar production may have started as early as 1643 but it was not until tobacco profits plummeted due to overproduction in the 1650s that the colonists turned to sugar production as their main export crop (Hubbard 2002, Gordon 2005). By 1680, sugar was the principal plantation product throughout the Caribbean (Meniketti 2006). Sugar was very expensive in Europe at the time, making the sugar-producing Caribbean islands some of the most lucrative British colonies and sugar planters some of the richest men in Europe. St. Kitts and Nevis was at the forefront of sugar production (Hubbard 2002) until production declined as early as the 18th century because of soil exhaustion, cheaper cane sugar markets elsewhere, and the mass production of beet sugar (Williams 1944, Mintz 1985, Ahmed and Afroz 1996, Hubbard 2002).

The sugar industry was entirely supported by slave labor until August 1, 1834, when the British parliament abolished slavery in its colonies after a mandated four to six-year apprentice period (Gordon 2005). After emancipation, which meant that plantation owners now had to pay their workers a wage, sugar production in the Caribbean was no longer financially competitive. Sugar production fell by half after Emancipation and continued to fall through the nineteenth century. The demand for Caribbean sugar rose slightly during World War II but planters were never able to regain their control over the global market. By the 1970s, the government began to focus on other economies, such as service. They officially closed the sugar industry in 2005.

The food and agricultural landscapes have changed many times over the years since the Europeans first colonized the island in the 1600s. Chapter 2 gave a historical political economic
analysis of agricultural production and food importation. It chronicled the slow transition from plantation agriculture to diverse agricultural production for internal markets and service industries. I argue that service economies, including stay-over tourism, cruise ships, Citizen by Investment properties, and educational tourism, is a new form of the plantation economy with foreign-owned and export-oriented economies, set up as “overseas operations of an integrated enterprise whose ultimate control was located in the metropole” (Best 2009:11). A plantation economy has a passive incorporation into the international economy, meaning one that relies “on metropolitan initiative and entrepreneurship and on exogenously determined external demand. When resources are depleted or external demand changes, the economy regresses” (Girvan 2009: xxi). While the tourism industry is not exporting goods, it conforms to the plantation legacy in that hotels are most often foreign owned and rely almost completely on metropoles like the US and the UK for their income. Without any real change to the economic structure, any industry that comes into St Kitts will likely follow this model. Best and Levitt suggest that the plantation legacy “embodies patterns of income generation and disposal that discriminate against economic transformation. Notwithstanding real change in the economy and significant growth over time, the essential characteristics of the original plantation economy persist” (Best 2009:13). Because there has been little change to the actual structure of the economy, just switching out sugar for tourism, St Kitts is unofficially yet clearly segregated by socioeconomic classes, which, because of the history of colonialism and the new form of colonialism, are clearly linked to race. Chapter 3 demonstrates how the spatial layout of St Kitts today is linked to the patterns of unequal political economic development raised in Chapter 2.

Agriculture is one of the ways in which my participants resist this unequal system, not without its challenges though. Chapter 4 presented the challenges faced by agriculturalists in St Kitts. That my participants are willing to forge through these challenges and continue their agricultural work points to the importance of the practice. While it is no longer a source of external revenue production for the island as a whole, agriculture maintains and fosters sustainability and autonomy in terms of community networks and social relationships, cultural heritage, the food system, and the economy for those involved. Chapters 5, 6, and 7, displayed how my participants reclaim, repurpose, and create agricultural spaces in which they forge sustainability and autonomy— sugar fields and farms, backyard gardens, the mountain, provision plots, and the market.
Chapter 5 focuses on agriculture as social network sustainability by way of an analysis of the town market. Here, I argue that participation in agricultural activities such as growing and selling food help maintain social networks that have been vital to Kittitian society historically. The town market is unique in the sense that, while the growing and selling of food has historically been an important part of the Kittitian economy and culture and the market has always been a meeting space for people, the market has relocated several times and now sits in a government-owned building. Today the town market is the main meeting spot for most agriculturalists, a space where social networks are enacted, demonstrated, displayed, formed, broken, and mended. My participants use and give meaning to this otherwise meaningless space through their agricultural activities to hold on to the cultural value of extended, deep, meaningful social networks including and beyond the nuclear family and resist the individualistic nature of capitalism.

Chapter 6 focuses on how agriculture is used to connect to and revive cultural heritage through an analysis of the Sandy Point Market. This market differs from the town market in several important ways. The town market is the main market in the capital where many vendors from all over the island sell their goods. The Sandy Point Market, however, is run by one co-op. The lack of competition gives the Sandy Point Market a calmer atmosphere than the hectic town market. In terms of the space and purpose, the market is still held in the historic meeting space, unlike the town market which has changed locations several times. The co-op who runs the market requested to lease the land from the government in 2010 and has since reclaimed the space, cleaned it up after 20 years of vacancy, and sells there five days a week with the explicit goal of preserving and learning from the past for the future generations. The co-op sees their work reclaiming agricultural spaces like the market and growing heritage crops on reclaimed sugar lands as cultural sustainability, highlighting the ingenuity and resilience of their enslaved ancestors.

Chapter 7 examines how agriculturalists use their work to become food and economically autonomous. My participants grow food for subsistence and for profit on reclaimed former sugar plantations, backyard gardens, and historic provision plots in the mountain. They are able to make a profit and meet current food needs instead of relying on the mainstream food system only. In this way, they are taking control of what goes into their bodies while becoming financially independent and upholding the cultural value of entrepreneurialism.
While I discuss these spaces separately, they are all interconnected links in the local foodscape. Food produced on farms is sold in the markets. Farms and mountain plots share a complex interwoven history of sugar production, violence, trauma, and resistance. Mountain plots and backyard gardens differ in terms of land ownership and use—privately owned vs communal—but they stem from the same complex history of food production as an activity forced upon them by plantation agriculture and simultaneously a path towards autonomy and resistance.

**Individual and Community Autonomy in Theory and Practice**

My focus with this dissertation is to highlight the ways in which small-scale producers achieve partial autonomy and sustainability within a constricting system and gain an understanding of how global economic transitions impact micro-level economies. Small-scale producers have also identified new strategies to organize work to generate enough income to make a living from agricultural activities. Some of these involve the tourism and service sector as a customer base, but most focus on local consumers.

The government and local people adapt to and change with global economic shifts differently. The government has reacted to the collapse of the sugar industry by reconnecting to the global economy through “identifying and exploiting a new, substitute economy that is currently valued in the global network” (Vaccaro, Harper, and Murray 2016 :12). For St. Kitts, the substitute economies are service industries and foreign investment.

A surface examination of tourism reveals many economic benefits but traditional tourism leaves little room for interaction with life outside of resorts and cruise ship ports. As Whitney Battle-Baptiste notes in her examination of land use and heritage in the Bahamas,

> From the bow of a ship, on a short jaunt to preapproved points of interest, or nestled comfortably beside a pool at an all-inclusive resort hotel with an umbrella drink and the sun shining brightly is how most tourists experience the island paradise. They are far removed from the daily lives of their host communities or the complexities of their cultural or national identities. The business of service is the primary site of interaction. Ports of call become the places one can sample just enough “local” fare, lie on the perfect pink or white sand beaches, and, if one is extra adventurous, take a preapproved guided tour on an air-conditioned bus with organized stops that provide a closer look at the beauty and splendor of one’s island destination. (2017: 61)

As such, the benefits of tourism are unequally experienced and have serious damaging
consequences for local people and environments as new mono-economies are superimposed over existing colonial structures, preserving the Plantation Economy (Best and Levitt 2009, Slocum 2003). Instead of exporting sugarcane to consumers abroad, the island is importing consumers of culture and experiences.

Plantation economies, including service industries, are focused on export-oriented production and cause unequal access to job positions and the concentration of wealth by foreign owned business (Williams 1944, Beckford 1972, Sudama 1979, Best and Levitt 2009). The plantation economic model shapes social and economic classes and sets limits on the purchasing power and influence on the consumer market for some groups. The region “has been and continues to be a place from which companies, governments, individuals, and other entities from all over the world purchase or appropriate goods, labor, and other resources” (Garth 2013:7). Tourism increases foreign capital and economic development, changes local ideologies or preferences, and increases local purchasing power as the local labor pool joins the tourist-based service economy (Leatherman and Goodman 2005, Garth 2013).

Slocum and Thomas (2008) note that locally owned guesthouses and small hotels are more frequently outcompeted by foreign owned all-inclusive resorts. Tourism also results in the displacement of local agriculture and other primary production livelihoods (Momsen 1998, Scheyvens and Momsen 2008). Scheyvens and Momsen (2008: 29), citing Telfer (2003: 100), note that SIDS are often unable to fund tourism projects and rely on overseas companies and investors, pooling resources off island and giving foreign investors control over land and economic resources. Scholars have also noted ecological destruction including land erosion, pollution, and reef damage resulting from tourism-based construction and activities. As explored in Chapter 2 specifically and throughout this dissertation, the plantation economy created by colonists and upheld through the mid-2000s created clear racialized categories with enslaved Africans and later freed Black people forced into serving as the labor force that supported the elite class. This project extends the concept of the plantation from sugar fields and great houses to include resort properties and guest houses. Studying the service industry as a plantation highlights how race and class are still under the same system that created them, as foreign elites are often in control while the local masses, who are almost all Black, work the low-income jobs.
My main focus throughout this dissertation has been how my participants use agriculture as a form of resistance to the plantation economy. Unlike the literature on food activism that focuses on alternative food movements in which people are attempting to build food systems outside of the capitalist structure, I explored the work of agriculturalists who are working parallel to and interwoven with the global economy. I argue throughout this dissertation that this is still a meaningful form of resistance. Best (2009:10) notes that the “ultimate source of creative capacity of a people and their capacity for self-sustaining economic activity is not to be found in their economy but in the social, cultural, and political spheres. In that sense, development is, of its essence, a process from ‘within’.”

Agriculture has been a historic means of resistance and autonomy within the dominant system. Enslaved Africans had no autonomy in the broader system but carved out little pockets of resistance and cultural heritage by growing food on provision grounds and selling the surplus. Carrying on that tradition, some agriculturalists attempt to work with the economic structure though food businesses to become economically autonomous.

My participants also attempt to reach economic autonomy by engaging in the mainstream economic system through agro-and eco-tourism projects. Unlike traditional tourism, ecotourism is intended to provide local communities with the deserved benefits from the industry (Torres and Momsen 2004, Timms 2006, Gurung and Seeland 2008, Stronza 2008). In fact, agro and ecotourism seem to answer Momsen’s (1998) call for increased “backwards linkages” between agriculture and tourism. Agro- and ecotourism could be a way forward. In her work on the Bahamian island of Eleuthera, Whitney Battle-Baptiste notes that tourism can be a way for communities to mobilize the colonial history “to create a form of cultural tourism that addressed and respected their heritage and identity, and at the same time left a legacy based on their story through their words” (Battle-Baptiste 2017: 67). However, there needs to be a more specific plan that is grounded and driven by local wants and needs. As we see with the agro-hotel discussed in Chapter 4, foreign and government run projects often do more harm to the local people and landscape than good, functioning the same way as the plantation and other resorts on the island.
Outside of the broader food and economic systems, agriculturalists carve out spaces of resistance and cultural and community preservation through claiming, reclaiming, and taking space. Within the focus on space, this research draws from and adds to the scholarship on Black Geographies and Black Food Geographies, which have traditionally been the focus of scholars working within the United States. As Bledsoe et al. (2018), drawing on Wright (2017) state, “By this point, it should be evident that the future of Black geographies is wherever Black people make place, which is to say, the future is everywhere. Thus, as scholarship grows from and into Black geographies, one thing is for certain, it must be place-based and informed by the lived experiences and knowledges of communities across the Black Diaspora.” This project builds on this scholarship by focusing on Black Geographies outside of the US. Even in a nation that is 98 percent Black, there is strong, deep racialized and classist access to food and economic resources that resulted from 360 years of colonization and many subsequent years of Western imperialism.

The history of land ownership and use is directly tied to race and class creation. McKittrick (2011: 949) notes that the “plantation serves as one (not the only) meaningful geographic locus through which race is made known (and bodies are therefore differently disciplined) across time and space.” Studying agricultural spaces as sites for autonomy and food work was an applied strategy as much as a theoretical lens. The markets, the mountain, the farms, and the private home spaces are vital spaces for agriculturalists to maintain their practices. Agriculturalists have used the land over time to adjust to the shifts in the economy, first starting on provision plots in the mountain and gradually expanding to former sugar fields and backyard gardens. Farmers are also directly impacted by development projects, some in good ways by increasing business but in other very harmful ways such as in the case of the agro-hotel which displaced farmers off 400 acres of land. As hotels are beginning to spread into the mainland, where most of the agricultural activities take place, protecting land is vital. Without protection, farmland and mountain plots are vulnerable to seizure from the government and released to foreign hotels and development companies.

The town market has historically been neglected by the government and moved to increasingly inconvenient locations in town. The abandoned and now reclaimed Sandy Point Market is still under the control of the Department of Agriculture so despite their feeling of autonomy in that space, the co-op is still very much at the whim of the government. The study of space is an important tool for the preservation of culturally important landscapes. Setha Low
notes that focusing on space is “not only a scholarly endeavor but also offers a basis for neighborhood activism such as opposing or modifying architectural, planning, and design interventions that have the ability to destroy the architectural centers of social life, erase cultural meanings from the landscape, and restrict local participation in the built environment” (Low 2017:7).

**Moving Forward: Food Sovereignty for a Sustainable Future**

The contemporary food system in St Kitts relies heavily on imported goods. Self-sufficiency is not a goal of the current system. Instead, it is driven by profits and integration into the global economic market. In line with that paradigm, “food security” has been the primary means of navigating food insecurity in St Kitts and the Caribbean region as a whole. Thompson (2019: 17) notes that “‘food security’ has become synonymous with the increased importation of ‘cheap food’, much of which is highly processed, mass-produced and subsidized in the country of origin.” This creates many problems in the local communities including high food prices, increase in nutritional deficiencies, diet-related diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure, and obesity. Economically, this system leaves St Kitts vulnerable to shocks such as extreme weather and pandemics, which disrupt food importation schedules and tourism.

When I left St Kitts, the Tourism Authority was finishing up a massive 38-million-dollar project to expand the cruise ship port to hold four ships instead of the two it had previously been able to accommodate. They were also in negotiations to begin construction on several new high-end resorts, including the Ritz Carlton. While tourism was on a steady rise, COVID-19 had a devastating impact on the industry, demonstrating what Best and Levitt warned is the pitfall of an economy so highly dependent on one externally supported economic industry. With the borders closed from March through October 2020, the region saw a 65.5 percent drop in visitors compared to 2019, according to the Caribbean Tourism Organization. Even with the borders open, strict Covid regulations and an understandable fear of traveling means less people on the island. Travelers must submit a negative COVID-19 RT-PCR test result “from a CLIA/CDC/UKAS approved lab accredited with ISO/IEO 17025 standard, taken within 72 hours of travel, along with required embarkation form and all other supporting documentation. A form is required regardless of age. Forms must be submitted no later than 24 hours prior to travel” according to the St Kitts Tourism Authority. Once on island, unvaccinated visitors staying less
than 14 days are required to stay on one of the eight approved resorts and they must stay on the hotel premises at all times.

Best and Levitt warned in their 2009 collection of essays on plantation economies that the main danger of a passive economy such as this is that “when resources are depleted or external demand changes, the economy regresses.” During the slow season in tourism, the island slows down financially and this first ever halt to tourism has been no exception. According to a Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security & Livelihoods Impact Survey St. Kitts and Nevis Summary Report conducted by CARICOM, the FAO, and several other international and regional organizations in May of 2020, sixteen percent of respondents resorting to eating less preferred foods and fifteen percent report skipping meals or eating less than usual. Fifty-one percent of respondents reported job loss or reduced salaries.

Shifts in the global economy and disruptions to the tourist industry like this is why my participants argue for the need for a diverse economy that includes food sovereignty—a locally controlled food system and local food production. Thompson (2019: 10) notes that food sovereignty “goes beyond the mainstream food security focus on availability, accessibility, utilization and nutrition to also include consideration of where food comes from and how it is produced, and extends to claim the rights of nations and peoples to define their own agriculture and food policies and systems.” Most importantly, it highlights people, not transnational corporations, having control over the food system.

Implementing true food sovereignty would take a complete restructuring of the food and economic system. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there is an ideological preference for imports and convenience foods fit into contemporary lifestyles. Moreover, government constraints hinder the ability of agriculturalists to reach food sovereignty. St Kitts is technically an independent nation but they are economically dependent on the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Europe. Food and economic policies are outwardly focused on profits over self-sufficiency putting the decision-making power in the hands of the local elite and foreign entities. As Thompson (2019: 27) highlights, even food and agricultural policies that are intended to promote independence in the food system are often determined, implemented, carried out, and funded by international development institutions, such as the EU, FAO and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).
The government support of food sovereignty measures, even in times of crisis, is superficial at best. In the early days of the pandemic, the government briefly pushed agricultural as the way through with newspaper article titles like “[CARICOM]Member States to Boost Food Production to Lessen COVID-19 Impact” and “Agricultural Sector Receives Millions as Part of Government’s COVID-19 Stimulus Package.” In fact, the government did give the Agricultural Department an extra ten million Eastern Caribbean dollars. They also provided some relief directly to farmers like free water for six months and free tractor services. The prime minister stated in a press conference that these initiatives were designed to “boost the production of agriculture and ensure greater food security.” Although these initiatives helped farmers in the short term, they were short-lived as we quickly learned that the importation of food from major commercial employers was uninterrupted. Moreover, the markets were closed for several months during the lockdown which was devastating for agriculturalists who use the markets as their primary economic outlet. Travel around the island was also limited for everyone with strict government-imposed lockdowns. Farmers were only allowed to tend to their farms for two hours in the mornings and another two hours in the afternoons. The initiatives giving free water and tractor services to farmers were also less than helpful as most farmers do not have access to water on their farms in any case and the Department of Agricultural only has two tractors so the opportunity to use it was slim. “We can’t use the tractors even when we paying” lamented Bobo in a conversation about COVID life in St Kitts. In the end, agriculturalists in St Kitts need governmental support and control over the food system needs to be in the hands of local people to reach food sovereignty. McKay and Nehring (2013: 2 in Thompson 2019) argue that the state “remains crucial as a key force to: ‘confront the global food system’; ‘dismantle unequal agrarian structures’; and 'recognize the autonomy of peoples and communities' to define and control their food and agricultural systems.”

While the government lacks the focus on the future sustainability of the island, my participants know that further disruptions to the economy and the service industry are likely to take place in the near future. Environmental sustainability and climate change, for instance, came up in almost every interview. Agriculturalists, no matter their education level or scientific background, notice the changing weather patterns that disrupt their planting and reaping. There is a general lack of water on the island, the weather is becoming more and more unpredictable, dry seasons are lasting longer and becoming more extreme, droughts are becoming more frequent,
and hurricanes are becoming more damaging. These global events that disrupt the food and economic system of the island drives my participants to continue striving for food sovereignty without the assistance or support of the government in the hopes that one day their work will be called upon to buffer the country from economic shocks. Local agriculture can foster bonds and resources that allow communities to recover from disasters more quickly (Roncoli 2006, Mazzeo 2009, Crate and Nutall 2009, Ploeg 2013).

To achieve their goals, agriculturalists recognize the need for changing perceptions of agricultural labor and of local food. Moreover, Thompson notes that farmers in the Caribbean region tend to be individualistic “due to its distinct history, it not only lacks a strong peasant movement, but also struggles against colonial legacies of unequal land distribution and individualism which can work against the forming of cooperatives, thereby perpetuating the problem.” For a food sovereignty movement to take hold in St Kitts, there needs to be an increase in communication and organization among the agriculturalists.

Despite the challenges, there have been some positive developments in the local food scene since I concluded my fieldwork. For example, two of my participants have begun a produce delivery service modeled after American style subscription boxes. Other meal delivery services have opened as well which function like the American brand Blue Apron or Home Chef. Otis, the 34-year-old (at the time of my research) farmer from the Atlantic side of the island has begun composting and bee keeping initiatives to encourage a more environmentally sustainable agricultural system for the island. Ana, the owner of the three agro-processed brands (one food and two beauty), has made strides towards mainstreaming her brand, expanding her product line, and even opening a store in the town center. Mother Becky’s Bush Tea is now available island wide as opposed to just the handful of places when I left the island.

As time progresses, I will continue to track the changes in the Kittitian agriscape and the tourism industry. I will focus on how these recent and future changes impact ideas and experiences of autonomy and sustainability. I will work with farmers in more applied ways through Participant Action Research to formulate productive projects that will help them navigate land and food insecurities without government intervention. In the future, I would like to explore how the changes in agriculture and the food system impact people’s eating habits and how autonomy and sustainability are enacted in home spaces such as kitchens and yards.
Concluding Thoughts

This dissertation explored how transitions in capitalist, neocolonial economies affect local people in terms of land use, labor, food sovereignty, and individual autonomy. This research highlighted the importance of safeguarding these locations for the benefit of the agriculturalists and potentially for the broader Kittitian society. It addressed the ways in which land policy impacts and is impacted by the range of other structural factors such as the current economic climate, imported food prices, and ideologies of modernity, food, food production, and labor. I also sought to highlight the ways in which a theoretical and applied use of food sovereignty could help navigate issues of food insecurities caused by these structural factors. I hope this dissertation will highlight, not only the cultural importance of agriculture, but also the potential for local farmers to feed the population. Social networks among local producers also can be mobilized to improve access to food and food flows around the island. Agriculture is, as it has been and will continue to be, an important part of individual and community sustainability and autonomy.

Industrial sugar was under the control of the Department of Agriculture but since the closing of the industry, small-scale production became the primary agricultural activity in St Kitts. Small-scale production encompasses more than just the act of farming and thus is too broad of an activity to be under just the Department of Agriculture. Agriculturalists’ work has implications to the island’s future food and economic system, cultural heritage, social networks, the environment and climate. Agriculture should be recognized and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Marine Resources, the Ministry of Environment and Cooperatives, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Sustainable Development among others.
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