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Cultivating ‘New’ Gendered Food-Producers: Intersections of Power and Identity in the Post-Colonial Nation of Trinidad

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Cultivating ‘New’ Gendered Food-Producers: Intersections of Power and Identity in the Post-Colonial Nation of Trinidad

This paper advances a critical gendered analysis of the ways in which food-producing identities are constructed and mobilised in Trinidad. Utilising a historical and intersectional feminist lens, it shows how gendered identities and subjectivities both shape and are shaped by the political economy, and are intimately intertwined with race, class and nation. The research draws on fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2016. Through historical analysis of secondary literature and visual analysis of a billboard campaign that attempted to cultivate ‘new’ images of farmers and agriculture, it shows how traditional Caribbean identities – informed by distinctive colonial legacies – are both reproduced and reformulated in the contemporary neoliberal era. The paper argues that the construction of food-producing identities is a complex combination of colonial history, positionality, self-making and aspiration, and how actors encounter, experience and engender these has implications for how we understand relations between the state, capital and food producers. It makes three key contributions. Firstly, it enriches Feminist IPE scholarship with an intersectional analysis of situated gendered identities and their relationship to political-economic processes beyond class. Secondly, it highlights the importance of studying peripheralised regions in the global South and applying the insights of their feminist scholars for understanding broader power relations in the Global Political Economy (GPE). Finally, it demonstrates how an intersectional framework can shed light on why local food and agricultural policy plays out in distinct ways.

Keywords: gender; food; agriculture; intersectionality; power; post-colonialism; neoliberalism; identity; feminist international political economy; Caribbean.

Introduction

Situated at a global crossroads of capitalist exploitation, cultural hybridity and ecological transformation, Caribbean food producers face a range of challenges related to low levels of production, declining preferences, competition from cheap and nutritionally-poor imports, vulnerability to climate change, unstable international markets and natural disasters. Food and agricultural research in the Caribbean tends to be technical and economic in nature, focused on increasing efficiency and productivity, rather than addressing the social dynamics of policy implementation (see: Lovendal, Jakobsen, & Jacque, 2007; Singh, Rankine, & Seepersad, 2005). More *critical* political economy work that focuses on inequalities and power, such as that of the ‘plantation school’ (see: Best & Levitt, 2009) and IPE of Food scholarship on colonial commodities reveals the structural constraints faced by the Caribbean (see: Payne, 2006; Richardson, 2009), but predominantly focuses on class to the exclusion of gender. There is a strong body of critical feminist scholarship in the region, yet little of it considers the gendered nature of food production specifically, and how relations between food producers, the state and capital are gendered. Feminist IPE scholarship more broadly has relatively few analyses of food, and with a dominant focus on gender and class often overlooks intersections of race and other aspects of identity. However, the ways in which food producers are constructed and construct meaning in their day-to-day lives, and their relations with the state and capital, are mediated in myriad ways by gender and class, as well as race *and* nation.¹ This points to the substantive need for a more sustained intersectional analysis of food producers, both in the Caribbean and in general.

A key contention of this paper is that gender structures and is structured by the global political economy (GPE) (Marchand and Runyan, 2010). We need to pay more attention to relations between situated intersectional identities and broader processes in the political economy to understand: why some positionalities continue to be peripheralised more than others; how actors negotiate these processes; and how power is mobilised and dispersed in particular contexts. The paper presents a case study of the post-colonial nation of Trinidad and Tobago, a

¹ Other aspects of identity – ethnicity, religion, sexuality and disability – are, of course, important too. However, due to the paucity of data disaggregated by these categories in relation to farming, and the scope of this paper, it is unfortunately not possible to draw conclusions about them in this instance.

twin-island nation in the Caribbean, located 7 miles from Venezuela.² Gaining independence from Britain in 1962, Trinidad has a long history of colonial conquest, settlement, slavery and indentureship. Once dominated by the colonial production and export of monocultural food crops for profit, today its economy is dominated by the oil and gas sector and it imports 80 percent of its food. This history, along with neoliberalising tendencies in the contemporary GPE, intersects in complex ways with the everyday experiences of food producers, and how they construct meaning and value.

Trinidad offers a particularly interesting case study for Feminist IPE. Distinctive gendered, raced and classed systems of power lie at the very heart of the history of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean (Barriteau, 1998). It is therefore impossible to analyse gender relations without reference to other aspects of identity such as race, class and nation. Moreover, due to the region's emergence out of global hybridity, Caribbean feminist scholarship is particularly sensitive to the interplay between these dimensions. Consequently, a Trinidad case study can enrich Feminist IPE with the insights of these scholars and help to demonstrate the usefulness of intersectional understandings of gender in the GPE more broadly. By challenging feminists to think about intersectional relations from the vantage point of more peripheralised places in the Global South, the paper argues that we need to widen the purview of Feminist IPE beyond areas that are well integrated into contemporary global production networks to those that are less vertically integrated, and pay greater attention to marginalised geographies and positionalities. This is crucial, both because the 'plantation' as an exploitative, racialised and environmentally destructive production system arguably continues to reproduce itself in the GPE today (Manjapra, 2018), and because of enduring legacies of inequitable power relations.

To grasp why local food and agricultural policy plays out as it does, this analysis utilises a historical and intersectional feminist political economy lens as a methodological tool to examine the material and discursive construction of gendered social dynamics and their interplay with broader social structures of power. The paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2012 to 2016 and combines findings from historical analysis of secondary literature, census data and photographs, with contemporary visual analysis of a billboard

² The contemporary economy of Trinidad (4,768 km²), the larger of the two islands, is dominated by the energy sector, while Tobago's (300 km²) is primarily focused on tourism. Due to their distinctive histories of colonialism, this paper focuses on Trinidad.

campaign produced by the Ministry of Food Production in 2012.³ Due to the challenges of locating both historical and contemporary data, this multi-method approach was necessary in order to build a richer understanding of the multiple layers of experience that influence how meaning and identity are constructed by both the state and food producers, the challenges they face, and the complexity of relations between them. Analysing colonial and post-colonial state discourses reveals how different identities are imagined in the national psyche and how they are shaped in relation to the political economy. Identity construction here is understood as a constantly on-going process. Historical analysis is particularly important for contextualising the production and construction of contemporary identities (Hall, 1997b; Peake & Trotz, 1999). Moreover, augmenting analysis of written sources with that of visual images offers, as Mohammed (2007, p.3) argues, ‘new ways of seeing how gender might be understood’. Although decoding photographs and Ministry campaign images is an interpretive exercise, we can read them in relation to both the actual practice of farming in Trinidad and cultural meaning and power (Hall, 1997a; Rose, 2001), as well as particularly in this case, the construction and positioning of gendered identities – both feminine and masculine – in relation to systems of power.

The discussion unfolds in three parts. The first makes the case for an analysis of the political economy of food production that brings together both historical and contemporary gender relations and utilises an ‘intersectional’ lens to understand the interaction of context-specific subject positions with changing global processes. The second explores two distinctive periods in the intersectional history of gendered, raced and classed food-producing identities in Trinidad: colonialism and independence. It examines the power relations inherent in these positionalities, and the legacies that shape relations today. The third examines contemporary constructions of gendered food-producing identities in the neoliberal era, with a focus on the post-2007-08 food crisis period. Through the visual analysis of the 2012 government billboard campaign that sought to frame new images of farmers, it highlights the tensions between local

³ This research is also informed by the author living, working and studying in Trinidad between 2009 and 2016 while studying for a doctorate at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) at The University of the West Indies (UWI), St Augustine, Trinidad. Ethnographic data collection included over 50 interviews with food producers and Ministry officials, analysis of policy documents, reports and newspaper articles, and on-going informal conversations and observations of day-to-day life. Archival material was obtained from: the ‘West Indiana Collection’ and the ‘Michael Goldberg Collection’ (Figure 6) at UWI’s Alma Jordan Library; the DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, ‘Photographs of Jamaica, Trinidad, and Venezuela Collection’ (Figure 3); Patrick Montgomery’s Caribbean Photo Archive (Figures 1 and 4); The British Library Caribbean ‘Caribbean Views: The Full Collection’ (Figure 2).

and global modes of meaning, and the material and ideological construction of gendered and intersectional identities. The key contentions are that the modern construction of food-producing identities is a complex combination of colonial history, positionality, self-making and aspiration, and that mobilising intersectionality as a methodological tool helps us to grasp implications of identity construction beyond class. In essence, this paper shows how enduring historical legacies come together with new neoliberal subjectivities to construct feminised self-reliant, worker-boss identities that are autonomous from the state.

Applying a Feminist IPE Lens and a Feminist Methodology of Power

Feminist IPE scholars have long-critiqued the gender-blindness of both mainstream and critical political economy, and have called for the ‘refashioning’ of IPE to take into account how gender relations structure the political economy (Griffin, 2007; p.179; see also Barriteau, 1998; Bedford & Rai, 2010; Elias & Beasley, 2009; Gibson Graham, 2006; Peterson, 2005; Waylen, 2006). They argue that conventional analyses, based on ‘masculinised and ethnocentric models of human activity’, rest on particular assumptions about how we view the world and human worth, the ‘natural facts’ of political economies, and the presumed inevitability of economic globalisation and liberalisation (Griffin, 2010, para.2). They have also argued that structuralist, Marxist and world systems-oriented theories, in their focus on macro core-periphery relations and economic class hierarchies, have tended to marginalize identity, social reproduction and sociocultural transformations (Peterson, 2010).

As Waylen (2006) argues, critical IPE tends to focus on class (particularly the unequal global distribution of wealth and poverty) to the exclusion of gender. Starting at the macro-level, it often conceptualises processes such as globalisation as ‘top-down and abstract’, making it difficult for Feminist IPE, which usually departs from the micro-level, ‘to incorporate gender in any meaningful way’. Furthermore, when gender is added, it is often added as a category, rather than deployed analytically. The challenge is therefore to combine abstract processes, such as changing modes of production, while starting from the *viewpoint of* people who are imbued with complex identities. Or, to put it another way, to develop overarching analyses that ‘examine the interaction of actors, both men and women, with structures that are understood as fundamentally gendered’ (Waylen, 2006, p. 162). As Griffin (2007, p. 727) argues: ‘as long as any IPE research agenda falls short of analysing the complexity of the various processes, discourses and effects of global economic restructuring in explicitly *gendered* terms, its

scholarship remains incomplete'. By ignoring gender, we fail to consider the complexity of the processes and practices of the political economy (Elias & Roberts, 2016).

Increasingly, scholars from both camps – i.e. feminist and critical IPE – have critiqued the focus on large and powerful actors as producing a partial picture and called for including 'more human dimensions of social and economic life', a 'broader range of processes and actors' (Ferguson, 2011, p. 347) and 'the everyday politics of the world economy' (Hobson & Seabrooke, 2007). Poststructuralist feminist scholarship, in particular, has challenged the limits of prevailing analysis by broadening recognition to include identity and informality (Peterson, 2010), while others have challenged IPE to include the domestic (Elson, 1998) and social reproduction (Bakker & Gill, 2004). Thinkers working in this tradition have also called for a reconceptualisation of the local and the global (Freeman, 2001; Sassen, 1998) and for greater recognition of the ways in which gender – and other social relations, such as race and ethnicity along with class – constitute and are constitutive of the structures of the GPE (Marchand & Runyan, 2010). However, as Tilley and Shilliam (2018) have argued, both feminist and critical IPE still fail to take race into account sufficiently.

So, what does this mean for the study of gendered power relations between the state, capital and food producers in Trinidad? What little scholarship there is on food and gender has tended to fall into the realm of what Peterson (2005, p. 499) refers to as 'empirical gender', meaning the 'study of how men and women – gender understood empirically – are differently affected by, and differently affect, political economy'. In food and agrarian studies in general, the emphasis is often the category of 'women' and their role as food providers in particular contexts (Thompson, 2018). This differs markedly to more constructivist (or post-structuralist) feminist approaches that centre 'analytical gender' in order 'to study how masculinity and femininity – gender understood as a meaning system – produce, and are produced by, political economy' (Peterson 2005, p.499). Few Caribbean studies of this type exist, and none are about food. One exception is Freeman's (2000, 2014) work on 'pink-collar identities', 'entrepreneurial selves' and 'neoliberal respectability' which shows how transnational capitalist processes become embedded in production, consumption and the making of modern gendered identities in Barbados. Another is Trotz and Peake's (1999, p. 198) ethnography of three communities in Guyana which shows how the identities of Afro- and Indo-Guyanese women are shaped by 'specific, but also interlocking histories and geographies' of place and 'its contemporary insertion into the economy and the national imaginary'. Gender used in this way offers potential

for reading the political economy in terms of how certain identities are privileged over others, how they intersect with race, class and nation, and, crucially, their relation to positions of power.

This matters, because as Yelvington (1995) found in his study of ‘producing power’ in the Trinidadian workplace, actors with certain subordinate (and often feminine) identities may try to redefine themselves and their relationship to changing structures of power, while dominant identities (often masculine) may work to maintain their position. Furthermore, the boundary between identities constructed by the self and society is characterized by a ‘constant struggle both to circumscribe and define and to change these definitions or to keep them as they are, depending on the position of power in a particular circumstance’ (Yelvington, 1995, p. 213). Actors may therefore manipulate both their own identities and those of others in order to move in particular directions. For Barriteau (2003, p.57), understanding ‘the operations of the social relations of gender and gender systems’ is ‘pivotal to assessment and critique of Caribbean society’. Moreover, comprehending these systems of power requires investigating both the ‘material’ (‘how women and men gain access to or are allocated power, status, and material and non-material resources’) and the ideological (‘the ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed to reveal the gender ideologies operating’) dimensions of gender in a given state and society (Barriteau, 1998, p. 191). Gendered identities, structural inequalities and power relations are thus intimately related.

It would be impossible to study these processes in Trinidad without also considering the multiple oppressions of race and class, and their broader intersection with colonial histories and geographies. The methodological tool of intersectionality is thus invaluable for analysing interactions between differently positioned actors or groups and social structures. The term was first penned by Crenshaw (1991) in response to prior scholarship that treated ‘race’ and ‘gender’ as exclusive domains: she rejected their separability, exploring instead how their interaction shaped multiple dimensions of experience. For Crenshaw (1991, pp.1244-5) intersectionality does not represent a ‘totalizing theory of identity’ but instead ‘highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed’. It has since emerged as a critical lens through which to unveil complex power relations and to explore inequality, identity, lived experience and difference. Christensen and Jensen (2012, p.110) suggest that its overall aim is to explore ‘intersecting patterns between different structures of power and how people are simultaneously positioned – and position themselves – in multiple categories, such as gender, class and ethnicity’. Additionally, this aids the investigation of

‘differences and multiple inequalities in contemporary societies at both the macro- and the micro-level’ (Christensen & Jensen, 2012, p. 121). It consequently offers a useful methodological framing for the analysis of the complexity of gendered power relations with other relations, both structural and agential. It also helps to grasp the interplay between macro-level structures and institutions, and identities and lives lived at the micro level.⁴

Developments in this field have been strongly driven by Black feminist scholarship, with both modernist and post-modernist scholars debating how it should be studied. For example, Dill and Zambrana (2009) critique post-structural renderings of intersectionality, arguing that it was generated from the real lived experiences of the marginalised, emerging from both historical and contemporary contexts, rather than from a retreat to theory. Therefore, social justice, transformation of knowledge and individual lives should be central to intersectional work. However, Hill Collins (2009) argues that it is not necessary to choose between modernist and post-modernist methods, and intersectional scholarship should place these approaches in dialogue. By engaging with the structures of power relations, inequalities and social justice, she suggests that the theory is necessarily anchored in the everyday and has praxis at its heart. It is therefore everything but a theory that strives for neutrality and distance from the subject. She consequently sees the critical lens of intersectionality as essential to refocus necessary attention on the social-structural analysis of inequality. To bridge the divide between intersectional and post-structural studies, McCall (2005, p. 1787) advocates the use of ‘inter-categorical’ and multi-method approaches which, rather than starting from one central position, analyse ‘one or two between-group relationships at a time’ and end as a ‘synthetic and holistic process that brings various pieces of analysis together’.

The concept of intersectionality also requires rethinking from the Caribbean perspective. As Belle Antoine (2018) argues, Crenshaw’s conceptualisation stems from the specific minority standpoint of Afro-American women in the US and therefore requires a different translation in a region where black women are the majority and women’s experiences of domination and oppression stem from a distinctive history of hybridity. Intersectionality in the Caribbean

⁴ An excessive focus on ‘identity’ has been deplored by some critical feminists, such as Fraser (2000) who argues that post-structuralist and cultural analyses of power overemphasise symbolism and identity to the neglect of material dimensions, favouring a political programme of recognition over redistribution. She proposes that cultural and materialist approaches need to be combined in a way that unites recognition with redistribution of power and wealth.

context therefore requires both a broader and more nuanced approach. More broadly, as Kempadoo (2018) has argued, it is not just Crenshaw's legal conception of intersectionality that is important but one that focuses on relations of power in terms of history, conflict and territory, as well as race and class. As Belle Antoine (2018, p.91) argues, intersectionality is valuable 'for understanding how enduring colonial legacies have entrenched inequality and discrimination in the Commonwealth Caribbean'. These legacies are both pervasive and multi-faceted, impacting on the everyday experience of people in complex ways. In sum, intersectionality is useful as a conceptual and analytical tool for revealing how power relations of domination and subordination are produced (Cooper, 2016). The approach adopted in this paper therefore combines an inter-categorical and multi-method approach with a sensitivity to Caribbean difference and hybridity.

The Historical Construction of Gendered Food Producers in Trinidad

If we are to grasp how gender produces and is produced by the GPE, historical analysis is crucial for elucidating the changing nature of gender relations reflective of socio-economic transformations in specific contexts (Elias & Roberts, 2016). This section analyses the constitution of gendered, raced and classed food-producing identities in Trinidad in the colonial and post-independence period. It is obviously not possible to do this full justice within the scope of one article. However, gaining a broad understanding of these dynamics lays the foundation for understanding the material and ideological relations of contemporary food-producing identities and their relations to changing global socio-economic processes in the subsequent section.

Colonial Legacies of Slavery and Indentureship

The multi-ethnic makeup of T&T's 1.3 million inhabitants and patterns of land settlement reflect its colonial history. The two largest ethnic groups descend from enslaved Africans and Indian indentured labourers, each making up roughly 35 percent of the population (CSO, 2011). A large and growing segment of the population, around 23 percent, identifies as 'mixed' (of which 15 percent identify explicitly as 'mixed' and nearly 8 percent as 'dougla') and the remaining 8 percent is composed mainly of a mix of European, Chinese, indigenous

Amerindian, Arab (mainly Syrian and Lebanese), Portuguese and undeclared (*ibid*).⁵ The first people to inhabit Trinidad were the Caribs and the Arawaks, whose labour was exploited by the Spanish when they arrived in 1498. Swapping hands several times between Spain, France and Britain, Trinidad ‘entered the West Indian “family”’ at a comparatively late date when it was ceded to Britain in 1802 (Lewis 2004, p. 202). Unlike other Caribbean territories, T&T had a relatively short history of slavery. Nonetheless, between 1777 and 1807, 44,002 enslaved Africans were forcibly taken to the two islands to work on sugar, cocoa and cotton plantations. After the end of slavery, around 144,000 indentured Indian labourers arrived in Trinidad to work on the sugar plantations between 1845 and 1917. They took over much of the agricultural work as many formerly-enslaved Africans fled to marginal lands, the coast or urban areas. Consequently, agriculture has come to be seen to be largely, though not exclusively, the preserve of Indo-Trinidadians.

These histories continued to inform contemporary social arrangements at the beginning of the 20th century. According to Brereton (1981), society was divided into four major groups hierarchically organised along ethnic, racial and class lines.⁶ Firstly, there was the ‘white upper class’, the landowning and ruling elite that consisted of British officials, merchants, planters and professionals, and the white Creoles who mostly comprised the descendants of French settlers from the 18th century, but also some Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German and Irish.⁷ Secondly, there was the ‘black and coloured middle class’, who were educated and worked white-collar jobs (Brereton, 1981. P. 116).⁸ Thirdly, there was the ‘mainly African Creole working class’ who were skilled artisans and petty traders that largely resided in urban areas. Finally, there was the predominantly rural Indian agricultural class, who at that point in time had not been fully integrated into Creole society (*ibid*). These groupings have broken down and blurred considerably since this time, but many of the patterns remain to inform contemporary arrangements and power relations (Yelvington, 1995).

⁵ The term ‘dougl’a’ is used in T&T and Guyana to refer to persons of mixed African and Indian descent. ‘Amerindian’ is used in the 2011 census, however, this is undeniably a problematic term, as it is used to collectively refer to the ‘Caribs’ and ‘Arawaks’ – Trinidad’s ‘first peoples’.

⁶ As Brereton (1981, p. 116) notes, although risking oversimplification, generally speaking, at this point in time, most groups perceived both themselves and others in this way.

⁷ The lineage and names of the pre-eminent white families continue to dominate the circles of the modern-day elite (Lewis, 2004).

⁸ The term ‘coloured’ is now outdated and considered offensive. However, this quote is taken from a historical text and the ‘free coloured population’ has a particular meaning in the context of colonial, slave and planter relations.

Indeed, as Reddock (2007) argues, ‘difference’ in the Caribbean has always been historically defined in opposition to the ‘other’. Indigenous populations were defined as inferior in opposition to the colonisers; Africans were defined as inferior to Europeans; and Indian and African populations were later defined in opposition to each other. Women, in particular, have long been ‘othered’: for example, Afro-Caribbean women were constructed as ‘loose, immoral, loud, independent and sexually available’ while Indo-Caribbean women were constructed as ‘chaste, pure, controlled and sexually unavailable’ (Reddock 2007, pp.4–5). Gender systems thus form a pivotal (and often ignored) part of the social relations inherited by the post-colonial state which have been heavily influenced by Enlightenment discourses of liberalism (Barriteau 1998). Gender also informed organisational hierarchies in food production. In the cane fields, females worked under the same harsh conditions as men, constituting up to 50 percent of field gangs (Mathurin-Mair, 1998; Bush-Slimani, 1993). Women also often did the most menial and arduous work while men were employed in the more ‘skilled’ jobs (Higman, 1984). This placed males higher in the slave hierarchy. The gendered assumption of the time – that women were not strong enough to do physically challenging work – was therefore dispelled by racist ideology, while the notion that women were insufficiently clever to do skilled work was maintained (Mathurin-Mair, 1998).

The *types* of food produced have also historically been shaped by gender, race and class. So, while white/European colonists managed the production of cocoa, coconut and sugar (Figure 1), Africans cut sugar cane, but also developed provision grounds (Figure 2), and Indians cut cane and also brought new animal husbandry skills which contributed to the production of meat and milk (Figure 3).⁹ Each of these images depicts different subject-positions in relation to the political economy and power. Figure 1 shows plantation owners with their children posing among banana trees wearing formal and pristine Victorian clothing, signifying wealth and status, and also separation from the actual labour of producing food. Figure 2 depicts male *and* female Africans labouring in the cane fields, under the watchful eye of a male overseer, and with the care of an infant taking place alongside sugar production. Figure 3 shows a group of indentured labourers dressed in traditional Indian wear, posing with children and therefore perhaps presented as families, in stark contrast to the slave hierarchy where African familial structures were decimated by colonial power.

⁹ ‘Provisions’ are staple crops commonly grown in the West Indies, such as yams, dasheen, eddoes and cassava.



Figure 1. Plantation Owners, Trinidad, 1893



Figure 2. Cutting Sugar Cane, Trinidad, 1836



Figure 3. Indentured Indian Labourers, Trinidad, c.1890-1896

After emancipation, many women remained in the fields and were particularly valued as hard workers. A letter published in a Trinidadian newspaper in 1839 that suggested that the ‘best’ and ‘most continuous’ workers on the plantations were females (and young boys), and women often accomplished two tasks per day in comparison to men who rarely did (Brereton, 1999, p.85).¹⁰ In another case, a manager giving evidence to a local enquiry in 1841 commented: ‘I have two women on the estate who do three tasks per day with ease’ (cited in: Brereton 1999, pp.85–86). These statements suggest that, as far back as two hundred years ago, women were being constructed discursively as ‘hard workers’. Accompanying the introduction of wage labour was the differentiation of wages based on sex and seniority, with women paid half as much as men and relegated to more menial field tasks. The ways in which workers have been constructed, therefore, is intimately linked to gender, race and class.

Indian women, like their African counterparts before them, were initially brought into Trinidad

¹⁰ The most common tasks on sugar estates were digging holes for canes, hoeing and weeding, often considered ‘women’s work’ in Africa (Bush-Slimani, 2014).

as ‘workers and not wives’ and the majority laboured in agriculture (Reddock 1998, p.31). An interview with three ex-indentured women, published in the *All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Trade Union* journal in 1978, illustrates their key role in sugar production:

In the cultivation, you will find women dominated the gangs. They were out early in the fields performing hazardous duties like dropping lime and phosphate of ammonia, planting foods on the estates, that is vegetable crops and ground provisions, heading [sic] manures, cutlassing, wedding, cutting cane, loading them on carts and most of the time carrying the cane on their heads (Harry 1993, p.207).

A clear (although not always consistent) sexual division of labour existed among indentured labourers, with almost all highly-skilled jobs undertaken by men. Moreover, throughout the indentureship period, the interests of the colonial state and Indian men colluded to increasingly define Indian women as wives and mothers, providing the state with cheaper labour through the ‘family wage’ and Indian men with greater status and control over their female relatives (Reddock, 1998). Therefore, while slave society abolished the sexual division of labour, ex-slave society attempted to redevelop it by encouraging the nuclear family to serve new capitalist needs (Reddock 1985). Just as Williams (1944) showed that the abolition of slavery was linked to the changing needs of British capitalists, Reddock (1998; 1985) has demonstrated that the productive and reproductive capacity of women was manipulated, regulated and controlled by the planter class in accordance with their economic and political interests. Therefore, conflicting ideological constructions of marriage, family and motherhood mediated the physical and material realities of their day-to-day lives (*ibid*). This is important because, as we will see, the construction of different femininities and masculinities continues to collide with the changing needs of capital.

Women in the Caribbean also had a strong tradition of self-employment, market gardening and petty trading (see Figures 4, 5 and 6). After abolition, African women in particular played a key role in the development and cultivation of provision grounds, which represented a crucial site for both resistance and the roots of independence by providing a source of self-sufficiency and potential profit away from the plantation (Reddock, 1985). In 1891, nearly half of market gardeners were female (see Table 1). Another common job carried out by women was working as hucksters or higglers (known in Trinidad, St Lucia and Dominica as *marchandes*). In 1891, 85 percent of hucksters or peddlers were female (see Table 1). They would visit markets, towns and plantations to sell an assortment of goods, such as fruits, vegetables, salt-fish, rice and cornmeal, and some even had tiny shops. In comparison, men often worked in ‘skilled’ or

artisan trades such as fishing, seafaring, boatbuilding, forestry and timber cutting (Higman, 1984). Similarly, Indian women developed a range of distinctive economic activities, such as the production and sale of milk, which also provided an important and alternative means of independent income (Hussain, 2012) (see Figure 6). In 1891, 68 of 71 milk sellers were Indian, and 44 were women (Census of Trinidad, 1891). The Caribbean tradition of women's independent economic activity has thus influenced the construction of their work identities, both historically and today.



Figure 4. A Market, Port of Spain, 1910



Figure 5. Fruit Seller, Trinidad, c. 1910s



Figure 6. East Indian Milk Seller, Port of Spain, 1890

At the end of the 19th century, women continued to make up a high proportion of the workforce, constituting nearly a third (32 percent) of those engaged in agricultural work and 44 percent of working adults. However, the highest proportion of women was found in the lowest-paid and lowest-status jobs. The most common job was 'agricultural labourer', of which they constituted 34 percent. They also made up 25 percent of estate proprietors, 23 percent of farmers, 20 percent of peasant proprietors, 8 percent of contractors and 3 percent of planters. However, high-status jobs such as 'manager' or 'overseer' were entirely male (see Table 1). A substantial proportion of those working in agriculture were also Indian. Despite only comprising around a third of the

population, 62 percent of those who worked in agriculture were Indian, and overall, 78 percent of the adult Indian population were employed in agriculture (Ramesar, 1976). The elite – planters – were both predominantly male (see Table 1) and of European descent.¹¹

Table 1: 1891 Census (Food Production-Related) Occupations by Sex

Occupation	Total	Male	Female
Total Adult Listed in Occupations¹²	135,494	76,079	59,415
IV Agricultural	65592	44473	21119
Contractor	913	839	74
Farmer	13	10	3
Labourer – agricultural	58,534	38,476	20,058
Manager, Sub-Manager	257	257	
Market gardener ¹³	338	178	160
Overseer, Overlooker, Driver	1008	1008	-
Proprietor, cocoa and coconut estate, sugar estate ¹⁴	419	313	106
Planter - cocoa, coconut, sugar, undefined ¹⁵	658	637	21
Peasant proprietor	3452	2755	697
V Industrial¹⁶			
Fisherman, fisher seller	510	470	40
Huckster, pedlar	2404	361	2043
Milk seller	71	27	44

Source: Census of Trinidad (1891)

Towards the end of the colonial period, those engaged in agricultural employment declined from 46 percent of the population in 1891 to 35 percent by 1931 (Reddock, 1994). This was in line with the diminishing importance placed upon the role of agriculture in the economy and by society. Late colonialism had witnessed the movement of Afro-Trinidadians towards the urban areas, while the countryside remained more densely populated by Indo-Trinidadians. In sum, the political economy, with its orientation towards producing cash crops for export produced a range of distinctive gendered, raced and classed food-producing identities in Trinidad that were frequently manipulated by the colonial administration in order to support its capitalistic needs.

¹¹ Due to the way the census data is presented, it is unfortunately difficult to undertake any further disaggregation of the above statistics.

¹² Figures are calculated from the Alphabetical List of Occupations (Trinidad Census, 1891 p.27).

¹³ Small-scale fruits, vegetables and flowers.

¹⁴ A ‘proprietor’ would most likely be classified as a business owner.

¹⁵ A ‘planter’ would most likely be classified as a landowner.

¹⁶ Here only food related occupations are listed.

New Modes of Meaning: Independence and Modernisation

By the 1970s, the developmental trajectory of Trinidad had changed markedly. With the declaration of independence in 1962, Dr Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister, advanced a vision of an independent nation ‘drawing on its oil wealth to build a modern industrial state’ (Payne & Sutton, 2001, p. 30). Under his leadership, the People’s National Movement (PNM) instituted a series of economic development plans which shifted from the pursuit of agricultural to industrial development, foreign direct investment and import substitution (Palmer, 2006).¹⁷ This included the expansion of the petrochemical sector and the state-sponsored arrival of food and beverage processing plants, such as Nestlé and Coca-Cola. Buttressed by the rise of oil and petrochemicals, which had become the main foreign exchange earner by the 1960s, Trinidad went from being a net food exporter to a net importer. This only deepened the enduring colonial legacy of neglect and disinterest in domestic agriculture, and suppressed its diversification (Ahmed & Afroz, 1996). As Lewis (2004, p. 233) succinctly put it: ‘Slavery has gone. But capitalism remains’. The status of farm work, therefore, remained low. Historically, the extractive interests of the British economy and the sugar estates had long taken preference over those of the local agro-economy, which manifested itself in terms of ‘indifference, even hostility towards the small farmer’ (Lewis, 2004, p.204). A similar tension emerged that still exists today, albeit with oil and gas, rather than sugar crowding out meaningful domestic agricultural development.

The immediate pre- and post-independence period also comprised a substantial process of national identity-building. As much as the independence movement was a clash of class and race (predominantly between the colonial authorities and the African and Indian populations), it was also a battle of different classed and raced masculinities. As Mohammed (1999, 15) suggests, ‘in the class and colour hierarchy which defined Trinidad colonial society at the time, masculinities were being pitted, one against the other’. Williams’ recognition as ‘Father of the Nation’, and his nicknames ‘The Doc’ and ‘Williams the Conqueror’ allude to the strong relationship between masculinity, manhood, power and nationhood in this period. Despite the continued role of women in food production – constituting 25 per cent of the agricultural workforce (see Table 2) – farmers also tended to be constructed and naturalised as masculine in national discourse.

¹⁷ This was based on the Puerto Rican model of import substitution and growth of the industrial and manufacturing export sectors.

As Williams (1961, p.729) claimed in his infamous *Massa Day Done* speech at the ‘University of Woodford Square’ – one of Port of Spain’s busiest public squares that was a hive of political activity around independence – the ‘small farmer growing cane’ is in a better position than ever ‘pitting *his* puny weight against the large plantation’, ‘receiving a recognition that *he* never anticipated’ and ‘coming into *his* own, a man with a stake in *his* country’ [emphases added]. A distinction between the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian farmer also persisted in the national psyche:

Massa’s economic programme was to grow sugar and nothing but sugar... it was the African slave who kept alive the real traditions of agriculture in the West Indies and concentrated on the production of food for his own subsistence. The Indian contract worker went even further..., and it was he who brought West Indian society to its present level in terms of the production of such essential commodities as rice, milk and meat (Williams, 1961, p.726).

The speech reifies differences between race and class, and also reinforces masculinized assumptions of farmers as male, and males as the providers of food, development, and agricultural knowledge. Identity, therefore, is connected to ideas around *who* (in terms of race, class and gender) contributed *what* to development, and in this discourse women played no part. However, despite the oratory, substantive agricultural support continued to decline. Working the soil was increasingly seen as an undesirable job in this rapidly modernising nation, where the energy sector offered more lucrative returns (Ahmed & Afroz, 1996).

Table 2: Number of Persons Engaged in Agricultural Employment (1970-2016)

Year	Females employed in agriculture	Males employed in agriculture	Total employed in agriculture	% of working population engaged in agriculture
1971	19,000	53,000	72,000	22.3%
1980	10,000	30,000	40,000	10.2%
1981	11,000	27,000	38,000	9.8%
1990	8,000	39,000	46,000	12.3%
1991	9,000	38,000	47,000	11.7%
2000	5,000	31,000	36,000	7.2%
2001	6,000	34,000	40,000	7.8%
2011	5,000	18,000	23,000	3.7%
2016	4,000	16,000	20,000	3.2%

Source: ILOSTAT (2018).

The second half of the 1970s, amid high oil prices, were economic boom years. The country became one of the wealthiest in the Caribbean, and the ability of Trinidadians to purchase consumer goods increased significantly. This so-called ‘carnival of consumption’ purportedly gained them the nickname ‘Arabs of the Caribbean’ (Meditz & Hanratty, 1987) and Williams famously proclaimed that ‘Money is not the problem’ (Wilson, 2013). The response to the ‘consumption period’ is often painted in a negative light – as ‘a hedonistic and undisciplined population galloping wildly from one modern supermarket to the next, oblivious of tomorrow’ (Premdas, 1993, p. 104). However, viewed differently, the arrival of mass consumption also represented a new shift from ‘categories of people’ as a means of making sense of value and order – and based on colonial stereotypes of race, class, ethnicity and gender – to ‘categories of things’ (Miller, 1994, 2001). For example, Coca-Cola came to signify ethnic difference, with a local ‘red sweet’ version denoting Indian-ness, and a ‘black sweet’ version and Coke itself associated with urbanism and Afro- and White Creole populations, expatriates and visitors (Miller, 1998).

Thereby, for better or for worse, capitalist expansion introduced new lenses through which value and status could be judged and attained. This is significant, because of the weight granted to particular forms of ‘status’ in Trinidadian society. In his study of masculinities, Sampath (1997, pp. 49-50) found that accord is granted to ‘reputation’ which emphasises ‘personal “freedom” deemed important in the post-slavery, post-plantation, post-colonial environment’ where ‘the perceived perks of the colonial elite, heightened consumerism and fashion are recognised as socially-constructed patterns’ to attain this freedom. In this sense, pursuit of reputation represents resistance to moral codes of ‘respectability’ influenced by European colonial standards and structured by class and colour, and often more commonly associated with femininity (*ibid*). Freeman (2007) argues that, in the contemporary era, the emergence of the new neoliberal figure of the entrepreneur elucidates new powerful cultural meanings when it converges with the Caribbean logic of reputation, and, as will be shortly argued, also ‘self-reliance’. She understands this as two oppositional understandings of ‘reputation’ converging: one that stems from the cultural values of the Caribbean subaltern that opposes bureaucracy, hierarchy and (neo-)colonial domination; and one that evokes the globalising neoliberal desire for flexibility, self-invention and self-mastery (*ibid*). Understanding the historical contingency of gendered subjectivities and identities thus illustrates the complexity and contradictions of

how actors navigate and make meaning of changing socio-economic processes in the contemporary political economy.¹⁸

Constructing Food-Producing Identities in the Post-Food Crisis Period

This section analyses contemporary relations between the state, capital and food producers. It focuses on the visual analysis of a 2012 government billboard campaign that attempted to frame new images of farmers and farming, and demonstrates how the old framings discussed above interact with them. Similarly to Freeman's (2014) work on the emergent entrepreneurial middle class in Barbados – but in this case in farming – it finds that the construction of modern identities taps into both old and new constructions of femininities and masculinities that are not only distinctive to the Caribbean experience, but also intersect with wider changes in the GPE. Specifically, it shows how discourses of 'status' and 'empowerment' have emerged in relation to both traditional Caribbean understandings of 'self-reliance' and in relation to new neoliberal subjectivities. The analysis focuses on the period from 2010-2015, when the administration of Kamla-Persad-Bissessar's People's Partnership (PP) was in power.

The PP in Power: Transforming the Agricultural Landscape?

The incumbency of the PP brought with it a tide of new hope for agriculture, and also Trinidad's first female prime Minister. It was seen to represent a new, more progressive party, and the return of a 'more Indo-Trinidadian' government to power, which is traditionally associated with being more supportive of farmers (see: Bishop, 2011). It replaced the 'more Afro-Trinidadian' PNM, which had been in power since 2002, and which is traditionally associated with the black urban working classes.¹⁹ On entering office, the new Minister of Food Production, Vasant Bharath, declared a greater emphasis on food security and production, and set a bold target to increase agriculture's contribution to GDP from less than 0.6 percent in 2010 to 3 percent in 2015.²⁰ However, as with previous initiatives, the PP's agricultural plan failed to make a significant impact on production. On leaving office, Bharath himself put this down to lack of political will, as 'Ministers felt that agriculture was not the most important item on the agenda' (cited in: La Rose, 2016). However, in addition, the location of power and politics in complex

¹⁸ Both Sampath (1007) and Freeman (2007; 2014) draw on Wilson's (1969) model of 'reputation' and 'respectability'.

¹⁹ It is important not to overstate these general patterns: while each party's core support can be viewed in this way, both have complex constituencies that cut across race and class boundaries.

²⁰ Unfortunately, in 2014, it remained at 0.6 percent.

systems of gendered, race and classed identities, and their intersections with changing aspirations of new generations of young farmers, also played a critical role.

When the PP came into power in 2010, shortly after the 2007-08 global food crisis, food imports had reached 80 percent of domestic consumption. This reflects the increasing liberalisation of agriculture, decaying conditions and supports, ongoing decline of domestic production, and the aspiration of the population to work indoors, rather than outside in the hot sun. As one farmer said: ‘if I could air-condition the fields, I would be able to find workers’.²¹ In 2012, the Ministry published its *National Food Production Action Plan 2012-2015*, the overarching goal of which was ‘to create a food secure nation’ (MFPLMA, 2012, p. 5). The core priorities were to: reduce the food import bill and the food inflation rate; contribute towards sustainable long-term employment and economic diversification; and achieve greater self-sufficiency in vegetables, legumes and pulses, fruits, livestock, aquaculture and staples (by reducing rice imports and substituting wheat imports for local cassava flour and root crops). However, by 2015 when the PP exited office, many aspects of the plan had achieved little impact. According to some farmers, this was due to the neoliberalising policies of successive governments, and powerful import-distribution networks – reflecting plantocratic structures and interests inherited from colonialism – continuing to dominate the most lucrative parts of food provision systems.²²

PP agriculture policy largely mirrored that of previous governments, embodying rhetoric about local production, livelihoods and consumption, but in reality focusing predominantly on the transformation from agri-*culture* to agri-*business*, with the Commercial Large Farms Programme (CLFP) – or ‘megafarms’ as they are known locally – at the centre of policy.²³ Their purpose is to increase ‘domestic agricultural output through local and foreign entrepreneurship’ and the employment of ‘state of the art food production technologies on leased state lands’ (MFPLMA, 2011).²⁴ In these public-private partnerships, the state provides thirty-year renewable leases, paved road access, potable water and electricity to the farm gate, and the agri-investor is responsible for management, organisation and production (Ministry of Finance, 2012). The main beneficiaries therefore tend to be large investors, and the commercial

²¹ Interviewee: Female Dairy Farmer, Tobago, 2014.

²² Interviewees: Farmer-Activist, 2014; Head of Farm Association, 2014.

²³ The CLFP was originally initiated under the previous PNM government which introduced the first two ‘megafarms’ (Tucker Valley and PCS Nitrogen) in 2008.

²⁴ The aim was to introduce fifteen of these farms, ranging from 50 to 300 acres, across Trinidad on lands formerly used for sugar cane.

agro-processing and service restaurant sectors that the farms were designed to support, rather than the small farmer.²⁵

Faced with the challenge of the drift away from farming and continually rising food imports, the government developed the 'Put T&T on Your Table' campaign. This included a series of 'I'm a Farmer' billboards which attempted to attract young people back to the land, restore status to farming as an occupation, and encourage increased consumption of local food. In 2012, the billboards were mounted along the two main autoroutes – the east-west Churchill-Roosevelt Highway and north-south Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway – and presented bright and polished images of farming life. The advertisements depict it as a business, and farmers as the new entrepreneurs, a stark contrast with traditional stereotypes. Yet there is a clear tension between neoliberal visions of farming versus state interventionism in Trinidad.

Agricultural work has low status, due to its historical connection to slavery and because it is seen to be dirty, hard and un-modern, with limited rewards. As one interviewee commented: 'the whole of Trinidad looks down on agriculture, if you're a farmer, socially it's the bottom line'.²⁶ This has created low self-esteem in farming, an issue that agricultural and Ministry experts see as compounding its broader failings.²⁷ Another interviewee suggested that, 'if you're in agriculture, the assumption is that you are sitting on the white line of the road, with their feet dangling, lower... there's such low self-esteem'.²⁸ The implication is that even successful farmers are not accorded equal status to other types of worker, particularly those in modern air-conditioned offices. Despondency and general malaise are issues that blight the sector, as one government representative relays: 'farmers are a hard sell, they are so despondent, they are almost knocking their heads against a brick wall... the Ministry has supported them, there are a lot of incentives, in fact so much so that sometimes you feel that they are being spoon-fed'.²⁹ This atmosphere of decline, neglect and low status thus sets the scene for the visual analysis of contemporary gendered food-producing identities.

²⁵ Some of the farms had linkages to the local petrochemical industries and agribusiness, such as the PCS Nitrogen Model Farm and Caribbean Chemical Ltd.

²⁶ Interviewee: International Food Corporation Representative, 2014.

²⁷ Interviewees: Government Representative, Chair of Board; Former Ministry Representative (Director Level), 2014.

²⁸ Interviewee: International Food Corporation Representative, 2014.

²⁹ Interviewee: Ministry of Food Production, Senior Official, 2014.

The 'Put T&T on Your Table' Campaign

The campaign messages reveal some deep-seated contradictions about the meanings and realities attached to the government's subjectivities of both farming identities and consumption, and also speak directly to the issue of 'status' and 'empowerment'. Firstly, the images consciously steer away from the stereotype of the ageing, male and Indian farmer, who, as we saw earlier, was seen to have brought rice, milk and meat production skills to the islands (while the African farmer, in Eric Williams' rhetoric, concentrated on *his* own subsistence). The most recent statistics available show that, in 2004, there were 18,169 private agricultural holdings and that 63 percent of holders were of East Indian descent, 24 percent were of African descent, 13 percent were 'mixed' and 1 percent 'other' (CSO, 2004).³⁰ Moreover, 85 percent of private holders were male, and 63 percent were over the age of 45 years, with 34 percent between 25 and 44 years old, and fewer than 3 percent under the age of 25 (*ibid*).

By contrast, the figures on the billboards (see Figures 7, 8, and 9) are instead young, male *and* female, and a mix of (perhaps slightly ambiguous) ethnic identities, with none being overtly Indian, and all having a discernible lightness to their skin. This not only contradicts the reality of somebody who works outside in the hot sun all day, but also taps into colonial legacies of racial stratification where skin lightness is related to class, power and status.³¹ The farmers are also presented as modern, clean and sanitised, wearing white and bright clothes, which could almost be suitable for the office (particularly the attire of the female). In contrast, the traditional image of a farmer would comprise clothes and skin covered with dirt after a day toiling in the soil. The pictures also project a vision of wealth and success, as opposed to traditional notions of impoverishment or subsistence and struggle. Farming is presented as a lucrative and clean business for the young, resplendent with both material and non-material rewards, including vehicles, money, power, and status.

³⁰ 35 percent of holdings were 0-1 hectares, 61 percent were 1-10 hectares, and 4 percent were over 10 hectares. In Trinidad, 74 percent produced crops (CSO, 2004).

³¹ The ethnicities presented are slightly obscured by the fact that their full interpretation depends on the position of the viewer. For example, in a presentation I did in Trinidad, a participant interpreted the male in Figure 7 as clearly depicting a White Creole farmer (i.e. a descendant of the plantocracy), whereas for me his identity would have been considerably more ambiguous. Lightness of skin in Trinidad is often a marker of class and continues to play a role in everyday life.

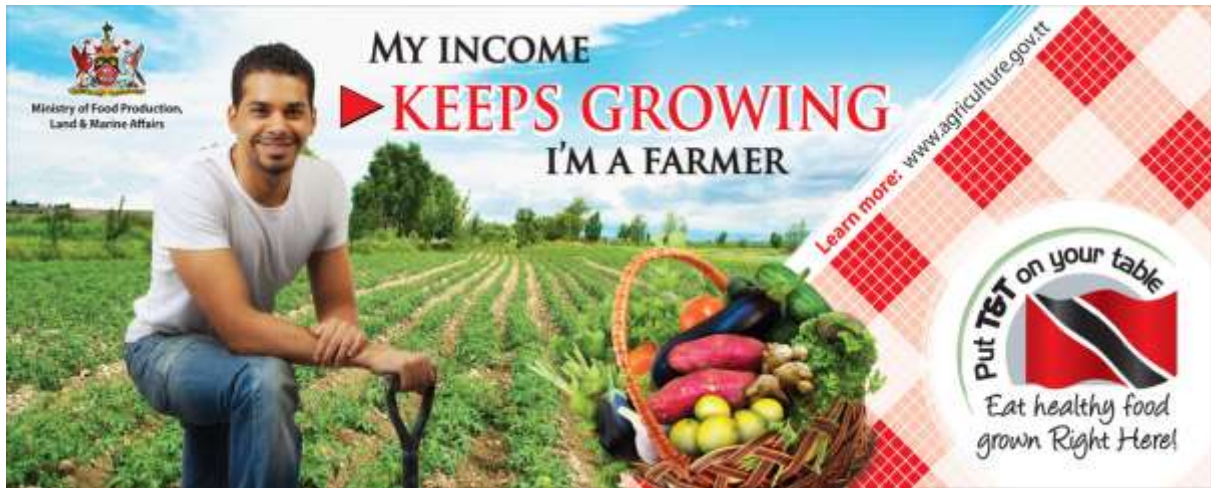


Figure 7. MFPLMA Billboard Campaign, 2012³²

Secondly, the images of farming presented in the background of the billboards are incongruous with the typical reality of farmland in tropical islands like Trinidad. For example, Figure 8 depicts a distinctly European dairy landscape, rather than one of local pastures. Although this could be attributed to the biases of available stock photography, it is interesting that the Ministry chose to put dairy on the billboard at all, given the common understanding that the industry is in ‘decline’ and ‘crisis’ (a situation many blame upon Nestlé, the largest buyer of milk, who helped to develop the local dairy industry in 1962 as part of Williams’ FDI strategy). Of all the forms of agriculture that young people could get into, dairy is one of the most challenging: it requires a large outlay of capital, has minimal support and is not lucrative. Furthermore, European cows are not indigenous to the tropics: they were first imported by colonists for use on the plantations, along with imported subjectivities of dairy consumption (which today includes a dominance of imported, evaporated and UHT milk over local fresh milk, itself a distinct colonial legacy).

³² Permission to reproduce content of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries was granted by the Permanent Secretary with the understanding that ‘the information contained therein may have been time and/or politically sensitive in that it may no longer be existent, current nor relevant for the purpose in which it was intended’.

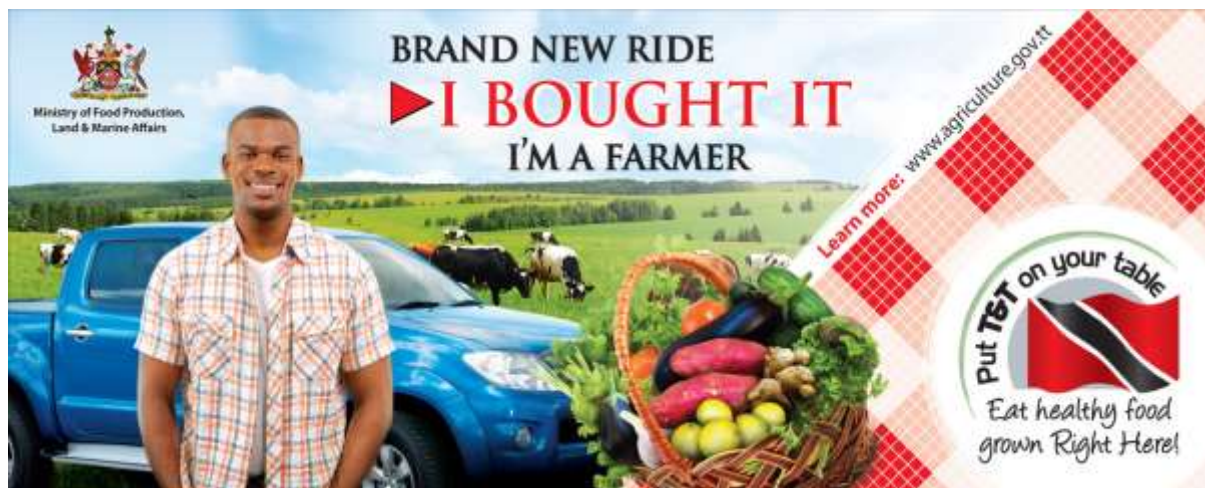


Figure 8. MFPLMA Billboard Campaign, 2012

Thirdly, the messages in the billboards speak directly to questions of ‘status’. Farming is presented as a metaphor for success and power. However, in each instance there is a disconnect between aspirational statements and reality. Figure 8 proclaims: ‘Brand new ride, I bought it, I’m a farmer’. The assemblage of messages and pictures on this billboard makes a connection between successful masculine ideals and the ability to purchase status symbols, and, in particular, a pickup truck, which is highly valued in Trinidadian society. The inclusion of a farmer with a vehicle here also references the Ministry’s Agricultural Incentive Programme (AIP). Yet it is extremely difficult to actually access these incentives. Rather than offering a loan, the programme offers 20 percent of the price of a new or used light goods vehicle, but the subsidy is only paid *after* the purchase, so the farmer is required to find sufficient capital to cover 100 percent of the upfront cost (MFPLMA, 2011). Many dairy farmers cannot afford to buy even a small, very old second-hand vehicle, let alone a brand-new Toyota Hilux pickup truck, which would cost approximately TT\$330,000 (US\$50,000).

Furthermore, the ability to access incentives of all kinds can be impacted by many factors. An analysis of the AIP in 2017 found that, of the 3,826 farmers who accessed it, only 12 percent were women and 90 percent of applicants for agricultural lands from the state were men (cited in Belle Antoine, 2018). Moreover, only 14 percent of private landowners were female (CSO, 2004). Both land ownership and access to support is therefore highly gendered, and also perceived by some to be inhibited by race. As one interviewee commented: ‘one of the things that I encountered at the bank... I came across some amount of race, being of African descent,

I came across the fact that I should have been an East Indian pioneer'.³³ The billboard is, therefore, potentially only an envisioned reality for an already-wealthy farmer, most likely with additional wealth coming from other sources – ‘the gentlemen farmer’ or the ‘retired ex-Ministry official or Minister’.³⁴ Consequently, rather than re-envisioning farming, it could be argued that the Ministry is aspiring to attract a new strata of people towards it.



Figure 9. MFPLMA Billboard Campaign, 2012

Finally, the messages in the billboards speak to the theme of ‘empowerment’, and a feminised understanding of empowerment in particular. Figure 9 constructs an image of a strong, independent working woman – ‘I work on my terms, I’m the boss, I’m a farmer’ – who can make it on her own, be a success, be in control, simply by working hard. In many ways, this billboard represents an appropriation of messages from the women’s rights movement to suggest that farming is another route to empowerment. The contrast between the gendered messages is glaring, with the men shown as having growing income and making enough profit to buy high-end vehicles, while the woman is portrayed as her own boss. Or, to put it another way: men work to acquire possessions and women work to empower themselves. The term ‘boss’ can also be set in a distinctive colonial history of gendered power relations in Trinidad. It was traditionally used to refer to ‘massa’ and in the contemporary period, it is used to convey dominance, both colloquially and in the lyrics of calypso and soca songs. Music is often linked to resistance: carnival songs represent a key site of societal contestation over politics and gendered power relations, and are frequently about reasserting or challenging masculine dominance. For example, in 1988, at a time of rising female empowerment and economic

³³ Interviewee: Agricultural Entrepreneur 1, 2014.

³⁴ Interviewees: Former Ministry Representative, (Director Level), 2014; Agricultural Entrepreneur 2, 2014.

independence, Denyse Plummer released ‘Woman is Boss’ (see: Mohammed, 1991). More recently, in 2015, Machel Montano released his popular ‘Like Ah Boss’, the video of which re-establishes a gendered discourse of masculine domination (Allen-Agostini, 2016). Using ‘boss’ in the billboards, then, conveys a distinct sense of a particular kind of female independence and power.

Different meanings are consequently matched to different gendered aspirations. Figure 9 implicitly harnesses the desire of women to free themselves from patriarchy, offering farming as one possible answer. However, in reality, the local agricultural sector is still made up of many family-owned businesses. In contrast, the billboard individual is presented as a neo-liberalised independent worker-boss making her or his own money. Yet due to prevailing political and economic structures, it is unlikely that any individual could achieve this without the support of some form of family labour, prior capital and/or government links that facilitate access to resources. Success in Trinidad is intimately related to patrimonial relations of gender, race, class and family. The idea that a farmer can be individually successful is in direct opposition to the continuation of state intervention and control, and elides the inequities of both the local and global food system with which they are faced (Thompson, 2019).

Cultivating New ‘Neoliberal’ Farming Identities?

Analysis of the billboards shows the Ministry essentially constructing new farming identities that are laden with particular understandings of gender, race and class that are simultaneously rooted in traditional Caribbean stereotypes and entangled with neoliberal ‘self-making’ worker identities. The raced message, whether intentional or not, conveys at the very least an implicit desire to move away from the traditional image of the male, ageing, Indian farmer, while the combined raced, classed and gendered messages suggest that the Ministry is hoping to attract a new strata of people – younger, higher in class and status, lighter in skin colour, and of both sexes – into farming entirely. Farming is presented as a lucrative entrepreneurial opportunity for the creation of personal wealth and status (which is masculinised) and as the root to empowerment (which is feminised).

The gendered messages clearly reinforce the national perception that associates accumulation of material status symbols, wealth and power with aspirational masculinities, and independence and empowerment with aspirational femininities. This also reinforces the connection of

masculinity with struggles over resources *with* the state, via implicit references to the Ministry's AIP, and femininities with self-reliance and autonomy *from* the state. The state is therefore reproducing traditional Trinidadian gender subject positions, while at the same time challenging the notion that farming is 'men's work'. Constructing women as empowered, however, does not negate the fact that they are still subject to unequal gender relations, and food and agricultural policy must take this into account if diverse groups are to benefit.

Despite the limited vertical integration of domestic agriculture in the contemporary period, the images also indicate the diffusion of neoliberal logics into the state's construction of food-producing identities. Those portrayed fit with what Freeman (2014) describes as key aspects of the neoliberal logic of flexibility: individualised, self-propelled, self-fulfilment seeking, autonomous economic actors. In the case of Barbadian middle-class entrepreneurs, she finds 'entrepreneurial flexibility' to be at the core of 'self-making', which itself is central to the neoliberal project. The billboards clearly demonstrate the absorption of some of these neoliberal messages by local state officials in their cultivation of new gendered farming subjectivities. However, as we have seen in this paper, the logics of 'flexibility' are not the 'sole preserve of neoliberal discourses' but are also rooted in local 'Caribbean cultural tradition' (Freeman, 2014, p.20).

The mobilisation of women's rights discourses of 'empowerment' and 'independence' also chimes with these neoliberal sensibilities. For example, Prügl (2015, p.626) finds in India that the women's empowerment projects of multi-national corporations harness their 'business acumen' and reformulate empowerment as 'entrepreneurship development' to the extent that it 'becomes a matter of shaping responsible selves... internally driven to improve' oneself. This reformulation of empowerment *as* entrepreneurship is clearly visible in the construction of both the masculine and feminine identities in the billboards, although the former focuses on growing 'income' and the ability to purchase a 'brand new ride', while the latter focuses on being the 'boss'. The feminised discourse of 'self-reliance' can simultaneously be read as related to new, modern, neoliberal subjectivities, but also the continuation of traditional resistance and survival strategies mobilised by women when they are peripheralised both from the state and the market economy. As Prentice (2012, p.402) found in the garment industry, Trinidadian femininities are often associated with an 'economic disposition of self-reliance, adaptability, and resourcefulness'. However, as Barriteau (2001, p.122) notes, glorifying myths of Caribbean women's survival strategies also obscures 'how gender relations are constructed to exploit the

capacity of women to cope' and to fill gaps in both social reproduction and production produced by changes in the GPE. In this case, they can also be connected to the historical processes of and fall-outs of globalisation itself. Therefore, as Freeman (2014) argues, familiar signs of neoliberalism are not always what they seem.

It is the contention of this paper, therefore, that gendered food-producing identities and subjectivities are continually reconstructed in relation to the changing logics of global capital, local and historically-informed material and ideological realities, as well as contemporary neoliberal logics. As Freeman (2014, 10) argues, the Caribbean 'is not new to forces of globalization' but was formed 'precisely out of the force and combination of *other* nations and peoples' and 'the penetration of foreign goods, ideologies and modes of economic restructuring'. Critically, this paper also finds that food-producing femininities continue to be constructed as separate from negotiations over power with the state. While struggles over political and economic power, and access to material and non-material resources of wealth, power and status, have historically taken place in the masculinised public sphere, women are often treated as largely insignificant in terms of production despite doing much of the (obscured) work in it (Barriteau, 2001). The widespread perception that Caribbean women only operate in the informal economy means that they often 'escape the attention of policy-makers' (Barriteau, 2001, pp.121-122).³⁵ In this case, the Ministry includes women, but then reinforces old stereotypes by constructing them as autonomous.

Conclusion

Read as a depiction of the currents of contemporary culture, the billboards acutely illustrate both continuations and reformulations of gendered Caribbean food-producing identities, and the incorporation of globalising neoliberal worker identities by this post-colonial Caribbean state. Replete with emblems of modernity – cleanliness and sanitisation, consumption and status symbols, healthy food, and a focus the self-making individual – the Ministry essentially constructs new farming identities that are laden with particular understandings of gender, race, class and nation. However, peeling back the veneer shows that neither the material nor the ideological relations of gender, nor the inequities in the global food system, have fundamentally changed in order to support these aspirational farming identities. In direct opposition to the

³⁵ For example, women's agricultural empowerment projects – such as the Network for Women Rural Producers in Trinidad and Tobago (NWRPTT) – tend to exist in non-governmental rather than the public sphere.

images and identities they reflect, farmers continue to struggle to access state incentive programmes, get their leases renewed, and find the workers necessary for the everyday running of the farm. Furthermore, food and agriculture policy-making has tended to explicitly ignore gender, race and class, while at the same time implicitly reproducing distinctly raced, classed and gendered tropes. What is clear from this analysis, therefore, are the inegalitarian conditions and differing systems of power that diverse food-producing positionalities have to navigate, and the ways in which these are impacted by changes in the wider GPE.

This case study of Trinidad makes two contributions to Feminist IPE, and another to the IPE of Food. Firstly, it demonstrates the importance of intersectional understandings of gendered power relations to analysing the logics of, and processes in, the political economy. While acknowledging that intersectionality does not represent a totalising theory – something Crenshaw (1991) herself recognised – as a feminist methodological tool it nonetheless remains useful for revealing and drawing attention to complex power relations and multiple systems of oppression, especially in contexts where struggles over power cannot be explained solely by material, gendered class dynamics. Due to the Caribbean’s distinctive history and emergence out of global hybridity, it is impossible to analyse gender relations in this context without reference to class *and* race *and* nation. The Trinidad case – where race is especially complex, and imbued with distinctive forms of nationhood – therefore highlights the importance of taking intersectional accounts of gendered power relations and identity into account, not only in this context, but also, by implication, potentially beyond.

Secondly, it also enriches Feminist IPE with the underrepresented work of Caribbean feminist scholars. Their research is particularly sensitive to the interplay between gender, class and race, and demands an understanding of intersectionality that is both broader and more focused on the region’s emergence out of hybridity than Crenshaw’s original conception that addressed the experience of US Black women under the law. Consequently, the paper makes the case for extending the analytical gaze of Feminist IPE beyond the Global North and/or oppression within vertically-integrated global production networks, to even more peripheralised regions and spaces in the GPE, and the localised ideas and frameworks that animate them. The work of domestic food producers in Trinidad is increasingly less integrated into global production networks, yet food-producing femininities and masculinities are intimately connected to changes in the local and global political economy, and experience very different kinds of (post-)colonial relations with the state and capital than elsewhere.

Finally, the paper also demonstrates why a specifically intersectional account of the IPE of Food matters. The challenges facing Caribbean food producers cannot be understood without grasping how gender, race, class and nation both produce and are produced by relations of domination and subordination in the political economy, and additionally how these intersect with enduring, distinctive legacies of colonialism. Indeed, these factors are integral to understanding why food and agricultural policy plays out the way it does. Despite the diverse multicultural and often race-based nature of politics in Trinidad, food and agriculture policy-making has tended to explicitly ignore issues of gender, race and class in an analytical sense. Yet the analysis here shows that the parameters for policy are still implicitly set by historically-informed understandings of identity. The seemingly gender- and race-neutral nature of policy is exposed by the visual interpretation of policy messages conveyed on the billboards. Therefore, it is not just about pointing out that certain groups are structurally oppressed, but also that attempts to reconfigure these social relations, and research on them, must equally attend to the construction of identity. If this is true in the Caribbean, it is likely to be true elsewhere, and therefore has implications for the winners and losers of future agricultural policy, as well as for the scholars that investigate these processes. In sum, a more sustained gendered and intersectional analysis of food producers in other spaces of the GPE may offer a wider array of tools with which we can better understand this than at present.

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