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Ceci n'est pas qu'une Banane:
French Underdevelopment and Green Imperialism in the "Island of Beautiful Waters"

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Submitted to the LSU Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College in partial fulfillment of the Upper Division Honors Program.

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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1. Introduction

Environmentalism and postcolonialism are two deeply interconnected subjects, forming some of the most dynamic areas in literary studies (Nixon 2005). By bridging both, the emergent field of ecocriticism seeks to contextualize our most dire environmental crises within systems of economic domination experienced through the modalities of race, gender, etc. which define our social lives. Green imperialism, a topic frequently explored within ecocriticism, describes how imperial powers advance their economic interests under the guise of environmental and humanitarian concern. However, “green imperialists” have tried to distance themselves from the legacies of colonialism, resource exploitation, and labor appropriation, all of which are historically and inextricably bound with white supremacist ideology. According to historian Walter Rodney, one cannot try to solve racism without looking at its economic purpose. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* he writes: “It can be affirmed without reservations that the white racism which came to pervade the world was an integral part of the capitalist mode of production” (Rodney 1972). Likewise, the increasingly severe deterioration of the Earth’s natural resources cannot be fully explained without first acknowledging the presence of global colonizing powers and their destructive racial capitalist interests.

Green imperialism is not the dominant system of exploitation itself, but rather one ideological state apparatus at the disposal of capitalist imperialist regimes (Althusser 1971). The primary function of green imperialism is ideological, since it attempts to delineate acceptable boundaries of discourse and action regarding the amelioration of environmental issues. Green imperialist powers impose Western capitalist environmentalist policy and ideology on

underdeveloped countries.[1] Crucially, green imperialists propagandize to reduce responsibility for those issues to the level of the individual rather than the system. In his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Mark Fisher describes exactly this ideological phenomenon in the context of Campbell Jones' paper titled "The Subject Supposed to Recycle." Fisher writes:

> "In posing the question, 'who is the subject supposed to recycle?' Jones denaturalizes an imperative that is now so taken for granted that resisting it seems senseless, never mind unethical. Everyone is supposed to recycle; no-one, whatever their political persuasion, ought to resist this injunction. The demand that we recycle is precisely posited as a pre- or post-ideological imperative; in other words, it is positioned in precisely the space where ideology always does its work. But the subject supposed to recycle, Jones argued, presupposed the structure not supposed to recycle: in making recycling the responsibility of 'everyone', structure contracts out its responsibility to consumers, by itself receding into invisibility… The cause of eco-catastrophe is an impersonal structure which, even though it is capable of

[1] While the word "developing" is often used to refer to poor countries, I believe that the paradigm of "development studies" is inadequate for understanding human progress and regress in social and environmental relations for two reasons. First, the notion that poor countries are developing suggests that they are experiencing ongoing advancement rather than underdevelopment, or continuous exploitation and deterioration caused by already developed countries. Second, while the term "underdevelopment" expresses the lesser or stagnant patterns of development in exploited countries when compared to exploiter countries (Rodney 1972), it neglects to address the implicit normative assumption within the paradigm of development that human progress ought to be measured in degrees of capitalist economic growth. This assumption neglects the agency of poorer countries in setting and pursuing their own goals. Though I will continue to use the language of development throughout this thesis, I will focus on development as a measure of state agency and social and environmental sustainability, all essential components of a flourishing sovereignty.

> producing all manner of effects, is precisely not a subject capable of exercising responsibility" (Fisher 2009).

For example, despite 100 companies contributing 71% of all global emissions (Griffin 2017), these major corporations refuse to acknowledge their contributions to environmental devastation; instead, capitalist imperialist powers blame exploited countries and individuals for climate crisis, pointing to wasteful production and consumption patterns. Under the guise of environmental protection, paternalistic imperialist powers take control of land and resources within the Global South. In 1968, Paul Erlich's "The Population Bomb" mainstreamed the population control movement, justifying the use of eugenics to prevent global resource depletion (Tran 2014). Ideological narratives such as this falsify, ignore, deflect, or disguise empirical evidence of capitalism's role in ecological collapse, allowing imperialist powers to assume the contradicting role of protective humanitarians.

While resource-rich countries in the Global South remain the most underdeveloped by imperialist powers, *green imperialism creates and maintains the false ideological perception that the former hold greater responsibility for destroying the environment than the latter*. This severe overestimation of the role of underdeveloped countries in global resource depletion is no coincidence, but rather the deliberate self-justification for further capitalist imperialist pillaging. According to Dennis Martinez:

> "The problem with [neoliberal capitalism's] so-called solutions to environmental degradation, especially climate destabilization and global warming via "green" capital investments and innovative technology, is that it runs head-on into a

> significant conundrum: The framing of their solutions to sustainability problems involves the very economic forces and belief systems that have caused the problems in the first place" (Martinez 2018).

Green imperialism pervades every aspect of society within underdeveloped countries. In the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, an overseas territory of France, the neocolonial French government criticizes locals for producing enormous amounts of trash. Each year, the island's 390,000 inhabitants throw away a total of 222 million plastic and glass bottles (Dancale 2020). Metropolitan France is quick to blame Guadeloupeans for being wasteful and unwilling to recycle. However, large-scale water bottle consumption in Guadeloupe is the direct result of France's refusal to update the island's rapidly deteriorating water supply network as well as the latter's interest in maintaining a profitable market for bottled water.

Today, only 40% of the water collected from rivers and groundwater sources successfully makes it to homes. Due to this inefficiency, the French government has imposed rotating water cut-offs which regularly leave people water-less for multiple days of the week. Families are forced to stock up on water bottles because they lack a steady supply of water to cook, bathe, or even flush toilets (Auffret 2020). Casting blame on exploited Guadeloupeans while insisting on corporate-sponsored beach cleanup days exemplifies the chauvinism inherent to green imperialism. In order to truly reduce the waste generated by Guadeloupe, the French government must first address its contradicting role in destroying the Guadeloupean environment via unsustainable resource extraction and pollution, making clean, fresh water a scarce resource on the so-called "Island of Beautiful Waters." Additionally, environmental waste cannot be meaningfully

reduced without major infrastructure investments in Guadeloupe predicated on the needs of locals, not the profits of major importing and tourist companies.

Access to clean, usable water is but one example of ongoing contradictions and inequalities created and maintained by green imperialism in Guadeloupe. At the University of Antilles in Guadeloupe, ecology classes inevitably begin with discussions about the disastrous ecological effects of the pesticide chlordecone. Chlordecone is so harmful that France banned its use in the metropole in 1990 yet encouraged its use on banana plantations in Guadeloupe to produce greater yields until 1993. Known by its original inhabitants as "Karukera," meaning the "Island of Beautiful Waters," Guadeloupe possesses ideal ecological conditions for a self-sustaining fishing economy (Loichot 2002). However, virtually all highway billboards advertise McDonald's Filet-ô-Fish or Burger King's Big Fish Sandwich. Likewise, seafood imports from Southeast Asia fill the frozen sections in every grocery store. Finally, Guadeloupe's local economy relies heavily on the influx of French tourists. Luxury resorts with names like Arawak Beach Resort and La Créole Hôtel & Spa appropriate an idealized image of Guadeloupean life and culture, with easy access to beaches, food, and water. Mere kilometers from these hotels, locals live in tin-roofed shacks on small, unproductive plots of land.

Inequalities regarding land use, agricultural practices, and food and water access are all essential to French capitalist exploitation in Guadeloupe, which produces and reproduces social and economic stratification between the ruling class French and *békés* and the African-descended Guadeloupeans. Aided by green imperialism, the ruling class constantly subsumes efforts to make Guadeloupe more suitable for sustaining life back into the very structures which are killing it.

In this thesis, I will first attempt to provide a historical narrative of Guadeloupean settlement and underdevelopment by France by analyzing the island's pre-colonial, colonial, and

neocolonial agricultural conditions and labor relations. Taking a historical materialist approach, I will focus specifically on its consequences for the island's food production and distribution patterns. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how Guadeloupe's once diverse, self-sustaining food production system has been replaced by the exportation-focused monoculture of bananas and sugarcane, thereby creating the conditions for continued labor exploitation and ecological deterioration. From this evidence, I will argue that Guadeloupean underdevelopment by France, which began as settler colonialism, has not dissipated but rather evolved into a hybrid neocolonial and capitalist imperialist form dominated by the local *békés* and metropolitan France, respectively.

By establishing (neo)colonialism and capitalist imperialism as the real source of social and environmental antagonisms in Guadeloupe, I hope to combat the ideological narratives of French green imperialism which blame Guadeloupeans for their suffering. Subsequently, I will discuss concrete examples of how green imperialism shapes current social and environmental conditions in Guadeloupe. While identifying social and environmental antagonisms in Guadeloupe is relatively simple (lack of clean and fresh water, affordable and nutritious food, crop diversity and sustainable agricultural practices, etc.), it is much more difficult to identify their source and effective solutions. Examining the social and environmental antagonisms of contemporary Guadeloupe through a critical lens will hopefully enable us to see beyond the ideological narratives of green imperialism and address the contradictions of capitalist imperialism at their root.

2. The "Island of Beautiful Waters": Taíno and Caribs in Karukera

During the pre-colonial period, the indigenous groups who inhabited Guadeloupe (the Taíno and Carib peoples) had advanced social structures and horticultural villages. Their food production and distribution based on the *Conuco* farming system employed agricultural practices

corresponding with natural cycles in the ecosystem. Despite the development of some social hierarchies, both the Taíno and Carib peoples formed mostly communal societies. Their emphasis on egalitarianism and sustainability in social and environmental relations created entirely different conditions for life and development in Guadeloupe compared to the subsequent colonial and neocolonial periods.

2.1 Taíno Agricultural and Social Organization

Guadeloupe, or Karukera, was originally inhabited by the indigenous Taíno people, a subgroup of the Arawaks of South America and the Caribbean.[2] The Taíno people in Guadeloupe had three main sources of subsistence: hunting, gathering, and an agricultural system called *Conuco.* They were heavily dependent on agricultural production which comprised approximately 67% of their caloric intake. Caloric yields from hunting and gathering were 28% and 5%, respectively (Watts 1987).

Conuco was a sustainable shifting cultivation system that was well-suited to the Caribbean's generally humid climate as well as its periodic drought phases. *Conuco* centered around crop species, particularly starchy tubers like the manioc (*Manihot esculenta*), that reproduced from cuttings, not seeds. Crops were harvested intermittently, and food production was steady year-round; the Taíno would regularly dig out tubers to eat but leave the roots of the plants to continue growing. Additionally, the Taíno grew a variety of local fruit trees in their kitchen gardens like the sweet sop and the sour sop (*Annona spp.*), the guava (*Psidium guajava*), and the pineapple (*Ananas comusus*) (Watts 1987).

[2] There are few historical records of the agricultural systems and social structure of the Taíno people specifically in Guadeloupe, so much of the following information is inferred from texts on the Taíno (Arawaks) of the Antilles in general.

The Taíno people prioritized maintaining high soil quality, low harvesting maintenance, and crop diversity. They cleared farmland by ringbarking (complete removal of the bark to kill the trees), felling the trees, and then leaving the stumps to rot. Tree trunks and branches were left to dry until they were burnt at the end of the dry season (April to May). This process provided an influx of nutrients into the soil and increased friability (crumbly structure), leading to ideal conditions for easy planting and high crop growth rates. The Taíno also built soil mounds to facilitate the drainage of the soil. On each mound, they planted a variety of intermixing crops which either grew tall, climbed other tall crops, or formed ground cover. The intermixing crops created a diversified landscape and ensured the equal production of different nutrients for the Taíno to eat. Taíno agricultural techniques hindered erosion, preserved soil fertility, and maximized their use of space. Once planted, little human effort was required for *conuco* crops to grow well (Watts 1987).

The social organization of Taíno peoples in the Greater Antilles constituted of chiefdoms with clear social hierarchies and hereditary transmission of social status (Watts 1987). However, the archaeological records of Taíno peoples in the Lesser Antilles are much harder to characterize. Taíno people in the Lesser Antilles likely formed either multi-island chiefdoms or "complex tribes" (Watts 1987). Multi-island chiefdoms describe a network of settlements of varying size extending over multiple islands, the largest being the regional seat of power, which enjoys prime geographical location and rich maritime resources. Conversely, the term "complex tribes" is more general and "describes those archaeological cases where material evidence of 'communal architecture, long-distance trade, specialized crafts, and a degree of social differentiation' appears in the absence of evidence for centralized authority or individual chiefs." (Curet 1996). The Taíno people in Guadeloupe could have belonged to either form of organization or bridged the two, given

the presence of nearby small islands, a chief-based hierarchy, communal architecture, and reciprocal labor relations.

Taíno culture emphasized cooperation in the production and distribution of natural resources, in particular food. While Taíno society was structured hierarchically, egalitarianism and reciprocity still defined labor relations. Everyone in the society had a food or other goods-producing task, including the *caziques*, or chieftains, and the *behiques*, or medicine people (Barreiro 1998). Both men and women helped harvest and transport crops back to villages. Occasionally, multiple families or villages formed reciprocal harvesting arrangements. The abundance of local food resources made such cooperation possible since families and villages did not need to compete to survive.

The village structure also reflected the communal labor and exchange relations within Taíno culture. Most settlement was in agricultural villages (Watts 1987). Houses were built around a central square, while *conucos* were usually located near the villages on land with good drainage and light soils. Individual families selected their own *conucos*, or cultivation plots, at the end of the rainy season in January or February. Families frequently owned multiple *conucos* clustered together, which helped facilitate reciprocal work patterns across *conucos*. Each family relied on about 0.2 to 0.5 hectares of land per person to produce subsistence over the course of each year (Watts 1987). The social organization of Taíno peoples ensured that communities were easily supported by local food resources.

The secondary means of food production among the Taíno was hunting, which provided them with fats and proteins. Hunting expeditions concentrated during the wet season, since the Taíno began preparing *conucos* during the dry season. The most common land animals hunted by the Taíno were pigeons, doves, parrots, and iguanas. The main hunting catch was the green turtle

(*Chelonia mydas*) which could grow to a very large size of over 0.75 metric tons, yielding a significant amount of food (Watts 1987). However, the caloric yield per hourly input of *conuco* agriculture labor remained much higher than that of hunting labor, making it the more efficient and preferred means of food production.

In addition to their agricultural mastery, the Taíno were sophisticated manufacturers. They became experts in pottery-making, canoe construction, utilizing fibers, and manufacturing gold ornaments. The Taíno's agricultural aptitude, skilled crafting, and burgeoning artistry demonstrate their progression from merely a hunter-gatherer society into a higher form of development. Using Rodney's (1972) analysis of the levels of development common across societies, the Taíno peoples would likely belong to early communalism. Labor was divided among family units, and natural resources produced by each family were shared amongst the entire village. Burgeoning hierarchies and social status differentiations had not yet developed Taíno society into feudalism.

As late as the 15th century, the Taíno continued to inhabit Guadeloupe. However, for reasons that remain somewhat ambiguous, their society would not continue much longer thereafter. Two other groups, early European explorers and the Caribs, converged upon the Greater and Lesser Antilles in 1493; the former brought disease and slaving while the latter offered assimilation to form a greater native resistance. Using information and a rough map provided by the Taíno, Christopher Columbus arrived in Guadeloupe on his second voyage of 1493. According to Columbian documents, the Taíno in the Greater Antilles talked to European explorers about warlike Caribs in the Lesser Antilles. Historical evidence suggests that by 1493 the Caribs had occupied islands in the Lesser Antilles as far north as Guadeloupe from which they began raiding the Spanish in the Greater Antilles. Sometime after 1493, the Caribs shifted raids from targeting the Spanish in the Greater Antilles to native wars with the Arawaks on the American mainland (as

far as Venezuela) and in Trinidad. Upon the arrival of French settlers in 1635, the Caribs then mobilized their war power across various islands to fend off the French. From documents produced by Jesuit missionaries in the 1600's, it is clear that by that time the Taíno had long vanished (Allaire 2013).

2.2 Carib Agricultural and Social Organization

Like their Taíno predecessors, the Caribs who occupied Guadeloupe used the *Conuco* agricultural system. To provide sufficient starches, they produced ample manioc as well as another starchy plant, the arrowroot (*Maranta arundinacea*) in gardens surrounding each settlement. They used manioc to make their basic staple food, cassava bread, and to brew beer called *ouicou*. The Caribs consumed *ouicou* at major social events where multiple villages gathered to debate major social issues, including the planning of war expeditions. In addition to staple starches, the Caribs also grew copious cotton for trading and for weaving hammocks, fishnets and lines, and women's garments. Hunting and gathering became more important sources of sustenance for the Caribs as they extended their territory during war expeditions (Allaire 2013).

The social organization of the Caribs also resembled that of the Taíno, with a few key exceptions. Despite the emergence of wartime chiefs to rule over individual or multiple islands, Carib society was fairly egalitarian in nature and did not have entrenched, hereditary chiefdoms. Villages were headed by *caciques* and structured around *taboui*, or large central houses for men, with nearby individual huts for women and children. Though Carib housing was segregated by sex (Allaire 2013), women participated in the debates and meetings about major social issues, including war (de Silva 29). *Ubutus* were war leaders that planned raids, chose captains, and distributed prizes. *Tuibutuli hauthe* enforced laws during times of peace and supervised fishing

and farming. Elders and retired warriors were respected and played important roles in decision-making (Sweeney 2007). Men went to war and built canoes while women tended to the gardens at home. Compared to Taíno manufacturing, the Caribs had better canoe manufacturing, cloth weaving, and war weapons. The latter were also expert basket weavers and pottery makers, for which the French praised them profusely. Additionally, they crafted bows and poison arrows for use in war, while the Taíno preferred spears (Allaire 2013).

Beyond occasional raids, 16th century contact between the Caribs and Europeans in the Lesser Antilles was minimal. The Spanish, seeking gold, were largely uninterested in Guadeloupe, a gold-less island occupied by aggressive Caribs. Although Spain authorized Antonio Serrano, its Governor of the Lesser Antilles, to colonize the islands in 1521, the Spanish did not attempt to do so. Given the import of African slave trade to the Caribbean beginning in 1513, the Caribs were targeted more for displacement than enslavement. At various points later in the 16th century, Europeans relied on the Caribs for trade in tobacco and fresh produce. Across the Antilles, Carib population size and location in the post-European period became highly unstable. Though the Caribs in Guadeloupe and Martinique initially resisted European expansion, they were gradually exterminated through slave raiding and disease and pushed onto the southeast corner of Martinique, where in 1555 André Theuvet observed only about 100 Lesser Antilles Caribs on the island (Allaire 2013). The Caribs persevered despite increasing European expansion but no longer represented the dominant society in the Antilles at the brink of French settler colonialism. With both the Taíno and Caribs ceding control to incoming Europeans, the period of communal egalitarianism and sustainable *Conuco* agriculture in Guadeloupe came to a prolonged end.

3. *Génocide, Esclavage, et Colonnage*: Racial Capitalism in Colonial Guadeloupe

The history of French settler colonialism in Guadeloupe is defined by genocide, slavery, and *colonnage* (sharecropping). In order to establish the conditions for a profitable plantation economy, French settlers eradicated all competing interests in Guadeloupe, beginning with their extermination of the indigenous Caribs. They subsequently enslaved and imported African people to operate plantation farms and used violence to repress popular resistance to their domination. As Guadeloupe's colonial economy grew, major corporations consolidated farms and replaced the shackles of chattel slavery with the coercive poverty of *colonnage*. Throughout the colonial period, the ruling class interests of plantation owners and metropolitan France maintained the hierarchical and oppressive system of racial capitalism which pillaged Guadeloupe's natural resources at unsustainable rates. The events of the colonial period are not self-contained but rather fundamental to the conditions of the neocolonial period, including present-day Guadeloupe. Understanding the material conditions created by French settler colonialism will hopefully provide insight into how those subsequent conditions have developed.

3.1 Early Settler Colonialism

Although French missionaries began arriving in Guadeloupe as early as 1523, it was not until June 1635 that the *Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique* took possession of the island and brought in 400 farmers to colonize the land (Blérald 1986). To rid themselves of competition over the land, the colonists declared war on the Caribs and began a campaign of systematic extermination. Indigenous women were raped as part of a policy of ethnic cleansing (Rey 2005). In 1638, the Governor Jean Aubert deported all surviving Caribs to the neighboring island of Dominica (Swigart and Schudak 2021).

The first French colonists had small farms and lived in Basse-Terre, the Western half of Guadeloupe. Colonists were given 10 to 20 hectares each by the charter company and cultivated only as much land as they could clear and maintain themselves. Initially, they followed the Caribs' example and primarily cultivated provisions gardens for family subsistence. However, they also planted tobacco, ginger, annatto, cotton, bananas, and sugarcane to sell for profit. Provisions gardens quickly expanded into large tobacco fields and by 1642, agricultural production in Guadeloupe had become primarily (and permanently) export-oriented (Hoy 1961).

The *Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique* went bankrupt in 1643 and was sold to Guadeloupe's French Governor Charles Houël, who happened to be its former director. The concentration of both administrative and economic power in Houël's hands played an important role in the colonization of Guadeloupe. In place of the failed *Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique*, Houël founded the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* and began sugarcane plantation agriculture in Guadeloupe. The *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* was granted a monopoly on trade with America and began importing slaves from Africa to meet the labor needs of plantation capitalism (Schnakenbourg 1968). On a visit to Guadeloupe in 1647, Father Breton, a Dominican missionary, wrote:

> "This is the real country of tobacco that is our biggest traffic. The sugar comes in very strong and excellent. And the canes are good to cut at eight or ten months old, fat and succulent. It would be much more profitable to make this merchandise than

tobacco, but it takes great expense to set up a mill and skillful men" (Schnakenbourg 1968).[3]

Houël's *Compagnie* continued to clear land, build the necessary infrastructure, and import slaves and cattle to maximize sugar cane production. In addition to its monopoly on American trade, it secured a monopoly over *sucreries* (small sugar mills) by prohibiting planters from building their own. Instead, planters had to pay fees to get their sugar cane processed. Houël had few obligations as the head of the *Compagnie*, yet he successfully leveraged his ownership power to receive a sizable 10% cut off the total profits, even three years after leaving the island (Schnakenbourg 1968).

Between 1655 and 1665, France began to benefit immensely from slave labor on sugar cane plantations. Large plots of lands of 100 to 300 hectares, previously unoccupied by the French, were granted to lesser members of French nobility and Dutch immigrants. By 1670, sugar cane had become the dominant crop and tobacco and cotton cultivation were abandoned. Although each agricultural unit contained some land still dedicated to provisions gardens, plantation agriculture was totally export-oriented and neglected to maintain crop diversity (Hoy 1961).

Metropolitan France imposed its *Pacte Colonial* at the beginning of its colonization of Guadeloupe. The *Pacte Colonial* was a system of laws, ordinances, and decrees which rigidly controlled the island and subordinated it to the French economy. Metropolitan France reserved the exclusive right to supply its colonies with necessary commodities and to forbid its colonies from

[3] This is my own translation from French. The original writing reads: "C'est icy le vray payis au pétun ou tabac qui est notre plus grand traffic. Le sucre y vient fort bon et excellent. Et les cannes sont bonnes à couper à huiet ou dix moix, grosses et succulents. On auroit bien plus de proffit à faire de cette merchandise que du tabac, mais il faut de grands frais pour monter un moulin et des hommes adroits."

selling products to other countries.[4] The five major provisions of the *Pacte Colonial* were as follows (Hoy 1961):

1. Guadeloupe must produce export commodities suitable for the French market and not already produced in France.
2. Guadeloupe must act as a market for French products.
3. Guadeloupe must not produce commodities which could be supplied by France.
4. Guadeloupe must not develop any industry which could create competition with French industries.
5. Transportation of products between France and Guadeloupe must be accomplished by French nationals.

Though the *Pacte Colonial* was officially renounced in 1861, the patterns of relations it created between metropolitan France and Guadeloupe have persisted through the neocolonial period. I will discuss this continued dynamic in the subsection titled "3.3 *Colonnage*" and the section "4. The 'Last Masters of Martinique': Neocolonial Guadeloupe as *Béké* Banana Republic."

3.2 Slavery

The history of all European colonial presence in Guadeloupe is that of enslavement and domination. Under both the French and English regimes, enslaved people were forced to work on

[4] Ironically, the *Pacte Colonial* cannot even be considered a true "pact." A pact is a formal agreement between parties in which all parties are given equal freedom to consent. The *Pacte Colonial* was fully conceived by the metropole and did not consult the colony governments (Normand 1900).

plantations under brutal conditions to produce the greatest short-term crop yields. Crop production shifted from the prior need-based, long-term approach of *conuco* farming to an export-based plantation economy that prioritized profit over sustainability. In effect, Guadeloupe became a resource pump for European power during the colonial period.

After roughly four decades of settler colonialism, Guadeloupe officially became a possession of the French crown in 1674. Additionally, King Louis XIV passed the *Code Noir* in 1685, which re-affirmed his authority over overseas colonies and declared enslaved people were *meubles* (objects) rightfully possessed by their masters (Le Code Noir 1685). By depriving imported Africans of any natural rights granted to French persons, the French crown ensured that the conditions for African enslavement and labor exploitation were as efficient and inhumane as possible. By this time, the majority of the population of France's overseas colonies were slaves. Furthermore, agriculture had expanded across Guadeloupe to Grande-Terre (the island's eastern half). By 1730, all of coastal Basse-Terre and most of Grande-Terre had been parceled up into agricultural units for the production of sugar cane. Small farms were only prevalent in southeastern Grande-Terre (Hoy 1961).

During the Seven Years War (1756-1763), a struggle for global dominance ensued between Britain and France with the British briefly occupying Guadeloupe. During this time (1759 and 1762), Guadeloupe imported 40,000 slaves (Nesbitt 2006). However, the Treaty of Paris (1763) restored French control. Before signing the treaty, Britain debated between returning Canada (with annual exports worth £14,000) or Guadeloupe (with annual exports worth £6,000,000, more than all of the British West Indies combined) to France. Since Britain and France had competed over territorial control in North America, British pamphleteer John Douglas argued: "You must keep *Canada*, otherways you lay the Foundation of another War… If we do not exclude [the French],

absolutely and *entirely* from that Country; we shall soon find we have done nothing" (Douglas 1760). By returning Guadeloupe back to France, the British empire prioritized long-term North American security over short-term massive Caribbean profits (Calloway 2006).

After the French regained control over Guadeloupe, the amount of agricultural land area as well as the production of coffee and cotton increased. This delayed Guadeloupe's transition to a total sugar cane monoculture. By 1790, Guadeloupe's population consisted of about 73,000 enslaved Africans and 14,000 European settlers (Swigart and Schudak 2021). In terms of land distribution, 21,000 hectares were devoted to sugar cane, 8,800 to provisions, 6,800 to coffee, 5,500 to cotton, and 160 to cacao. Crop production on the island became the most diverse it had ever been since the beginning of colonization (Hoy 1961).

During the French Revolution (1789-1799), the French faced British invasion in Saint Domingue. To maintain their control over the colony, metropolitan France offered freedom and citizenship to enslaved Africans in the Lesser Antilles willing to enlist and fight the British. On February 4th, 1794, the French Convention abolished chattel slavery (Dubois 1999). Soon after, the British successfully attacked Guadeloupe in April 1794. The French planters, rather than fighting back, aligned themselves with the British Crown. French civil commissioner Victor Hugues arrived in Guadeloupe on June 2nd, 1794 with a fleet of nine ships carrying 1,100 men and issued the French Convention's decree on June 7th. He built a guillotine in the main square of Pointe-à-Pitre, which was renamed "Place de La Victoire." In total, 865 British Royalists were shot and 27 were guillotined. By December 1794, Victor Hugues had successfully reconquered Guadeloupe for the French with the help of newly freed Africans (Swigart and Schudak 2021).

In post-slavery Guadeloupe, a new flag was erected depicting three armed men on top of the French tricolor: one white, one black, and one mulatto. Despite the French embrace of

abolition, Caribbean history and culture specialist Lauren Dubois argues that Hugues practiced the ideas of gradualist abolitionists, since Guadeloupe needed to maintain the productivity of its export-based plantation economy for metropolitan France:

> "The regimes of emancipation, notably that of Victor Hugues in Guadeloupe, developed new forms of governance that combined an antiracist and emancipatory agenda with forms of labor coercion and racial exclusion. These regimes helped shape a form of Republican racism that was central to the functioning of the French empire of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which the promise of political assimilation was routinely deferred because the colonized were incapable of exercising the rights of citizens" (Dubois 1999).

Hughes's regime was full of contradictions. Although he abolished chattel slavery, he maintained an unpaid forced labor system in Guadeloupe. He forced French planters to emancipate enslaved Africans but refused to implement parts of the constitution he considered too favorable to formerly enslaved people. He believed in the ideals of Republicanism, an equal and just society, and requested thousands of *cocardes* (small tricolored pins for Republicans) to be sent to Guadeloupe. Yet, he admitted repeatedly that formerly enslaved people would not be given the same rights as French colonists. In a report a month after declaring the emancipation of slavery, he writes, "having spent twenty years in the colonies and having always owned negroes, I had always feared what would happen if they were to be set free." Hughes was recalled back to Paris in 1798, but his regime established the contradictory conditions of liberal neocolonialism which continue to oppress Black Guadeloupeans (Dubois 1999).

On July 17th, 1802, Napoléon I's government revoked the French Convention's abolition decree of 1794. At the time, Napoléon was married to Joséphine de Beauharnais, who grew up in Martinique where her family owned a large sugar plantation. According to La Chaîne Info, she allegedly strongly encouraged Napoleon to reestablish slavery in the Lesser Antilles.[5] As a result, Napoléon I officially reestablished the old colonial regime and the *Code Noir*.

The events of the French Revolution of 1848 were very similar to those of the first phase of the French Revolution. Enslaved and free people of color began protesting in Martinique, which eventually lead to a slave insurrection on May 20th, 1848. Martinique's interim Governor, Claude Rostoland, caved to abolitionist pressures and declared total emancipation; Guadeloupe soon followed (Dusenbury 2016). In the words of Jonathan Dusenbury, "By the time that the metropolitan government's emancipation decree arrived in the Caribbean on June 3, 1848, freedom from slavery was a fait accompli. In this revolution, as in the first, the enslaved had taken it upon themselves to claim the freedom that their government promised them" (Dusenbury 2016).

After emancipation, the French government again faced the dilemma of maintaining its system of racial capitalism without chattel slavery. To continue the pace of production, metropolitan France established the *Crédit Foncier Colonial* to give out loans to owners of large farms. Because many farms were not able to pay back their loans, a significant portion of land in Guadeloupe came under the control of the bank. The bank sold this land to French sugar companies which then evolved into large corporations. Only undesirable land was parceled and given to formerly enslaved people (Hoy 1961). This process of greater consolidation of productive

[5] In 1859, a large statue of Joséphine de Beauharnais was erected in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique. Activists decapitated the statue in 1992 and it was never repaired. The statue was totally destroyed in 2020. Macron released a statement, vowing that France would not take down any racist monuments out of concern for "erasing" history (La Chaîne Info 2020).

resources created the conditions for the next and final stage of French settler colonialism in Guadeloupe: *colonnage*.

3.3 *Colonnage*

Colonnage describes a form of sharecropping which emerged in emancipated Guadeloupe under the conditions of increasing corporate ownership of farms. After slavery was abolished, plantations were parceled up and small plots of lands were allotted to individual families of formerly enslaved Africans. These families received a share of the crops at the end of the season. Although sharecropping decentralized plantation agriculture, the transition from slaver to tenant plantations was not very progressive. Plantation owners still owned all the land, so formerly enslaved people had no choice but to continue working for them (Hoy 1961). The plantation owners split their lands into two parts: land cultivated by the companies themselves, and land cultivated under *colonnage*. Formerly enslaved Black laborers lacked land and capital of their own, so they resorted to working on small plots of land aggregated by the small class of sharecroppers which controlled the major crop-export companies. The class hierarchy produced by slavery continued to dominate French Guadeloupe social relations, with Black Guadeloupeans now comprising the exploited peasantry in a system of perpetual poverty and dependence (Hoy 1961).

As compensation for economic losses experienced by slavers because of emancipation, Napoléon III gave each approximately 1/3rd of the value of their former slaves in 1861 (Swigart and Schudak 2021). In Guadeloupe, only plantation owners were awarded monetary compensation to make up for economic losses. This influx of capital allowed them to maintain economic control over the island and created a large class of landless laborers. Formerly enslaved people were forced to serve as cheap labor without any legal protections. Despite widespread practice of

sharecropping, neither the plantation owners nor laborers supported its adoption. The former group did not want to lose their total control over the labor process and work schedule, while the latter group wanted to become independent farmers (Royce 1993).

By 1850, tobacco cultivation in Guadeloupe was discontinued and replaced by a sugarcane monoculture. Since many formerly enslaved people refused to continue working on farms, France imported 45,000 laborers from India to Guadeloupe in 1861 (Swigart and Schudak 2021). These laborers joined the new class of *colonnage* farmers working on sugarcane farms. Sugar companies began to merge their sugarcane farms into even larger units, thereby intensifying production. These companies built big, modern factories for which nearly every unit had its own *sucrerie*. In 1883, consolidation of sugarcane farms had reduced the number of sugar companies in Guadeloupe down to sixteen, each holding from 600 to 3,500 hectares (Hoy 1961).

In the early 20th century, Guadeloupe began to develop its present-day land use patterns in almost all areas. During World War I (1914-1918), France mobilized 11,021 Guadeloupeans to fight on the front lines. Of the 11,021, a total of 1,470 were killed in action and their bodies never repatriated (Jennings 1998). Evidently, the disposability of Black laborers was not confined to agricultural production. Meanwhile, rum production reached record levels and pushed sugar workers to continuously strike (Swigart and Schudak 2021). By 1920, consolidation reduced the number of sugar companies from sixteen to nine, each holding from 2,000 to over 10,000 hectares. The rapid growth of the sugar industry effectively ended the remaining cotton industry in Guadeloupe. Basse-Terre had small farms producing coffee, cacao, and provisions. Finally, the 1920s brought increased demand for banana exports, which soon overtook all other export crops as the primary product of Guadeloupe (Hoy 1961).

Until 1928, most French banana imports originated in the Canary Islands. However, France's import duty from non-dependent areas increased in 1928. In turn, France became reliant on bananas grown within its territories, including and especially Guadeloupe. France established a quota system for banana imports in 1931 and prohibited banana imports from foreign areas. To meet these quotas, the French government offered high subsidies for its banana industry, which it discontinued after the industry proved sufficiently profitable (Hoy 1961). The strict exchange between France and Guadeloupe calls to mind the *Pacte Colonial*, which mandated complete metropolitan control over colonial production, exportation, and consumption before 1861.

By 1938, metropolitan France bought 97% of Guadeloupean exports and supplied 63% of Guadeloupean imports (Swigart and Schudak 2021). These extreme numbers characterize one of the greatest contradictions within Guadeloupean agriculture: despite capably producing enough food to sustainably feed the island's inhabitants, Guadeloupeans consume practically none of the "fruits of their labor." In recognition of this contradiction, Guadeloupe's Governor issued a decree prohibiting the cutting down of fruit trees in July 1940. However, this act to promote food sovereignty in Guadeloupe had little effect on its colonial relationship to metropolitan France. From then on, the Guadeloupean economy has become entirely reliant on the export of sugar and bananas (Swigart and Schudak 2021).

Guadeloupe became an Overseas Department of France (DOM) on March 19th, 1946. On one hand, the white planters wanted Guadeloupean independence to facilitate relations with the United States and escape France's strict trading laws. On the other hand, Martinican poet intellectual Aimé Césaire was one advocate for *départmentalisation* (integration), which would extend French social laws and welfare benefits to Guadeloupe (Terral 2014). However, Césaire's expressed aim was not to achieve Antillean assimilation into the French white capitalist power

structure by “[socializing] Antilleans within metropolitan French communal and behavioral norms.” Rather, Césaire saw *départmentalisation* as an opportunity to “democratize colonial power structures” (Nesbitt 2007). The proponents of *départmentalisation* won, but as Guadeloupe entered its neocolonial period, drastic contradictions and inequalities in its relationship to metropolitan France persisted against the local’s desires.

4. The “Last Masters of Martinique”: Neocolonial Guadeloupe as *Béké* Banana Republic

Developing from the colonial period, the neocolonial period brought new conditions of exploitation to departmental Guadeloupe. Rather than direct occupation by a colonial military and oppressive slavers, French domination in Guadeloupe manifested in more indirect legal, cultural, and economic forms. No less insidious, these new forms of domination represent the current obstacles to Guadeloupean development as sovereign rather than subject.

Far from representing the vestigial legacy of colonialism, descendants of white plantation owners called *békés* ruthlessly dominate neocolonial Guadeloupe and Martinique. This new ruling class exclusively controls the local economy through food imports and exports; the lack of public control over food-producing land coupled with an increasingly damaged island ecosystem have forced Antilleans to rely on expensive food imports from metropolitan France. As a result, the interests of the majority of Antilleans go unrepresented despite France’s pretense of democracy. The vicious neocolonial situation in present-day Guadeloupe and Martinique manifests as a two-tiered society containing the white *béké* ruling class and the majority-Black working class, in which the latter experience poverty and starvation while producing all agricultural exports for the profit of the former.

4.1 *Départmentalisation*

After becoming an Overseas Department of France (DOM) in 1946, Guadeloupe underwent a major process of political and cultural assimilation. During this time, the French Republic integrated local political institutions into its own, including mandating Guadeloupean schools to adopt the French national education curriculum. Furthermore, French culture increasingly dominated Guadeloupean life through the "deployment of a larger cultural program, which included…the devalorization of the local Creole language, the imposition of French cultural norms, foods and practices, and the celebration of the French national past at the expense of the preservation of local histories" (Bonilla 2011).

The attitude of the French government towards economic activity in Guadeloupe has remained a pervading influence on agricultural land use. For instance, France developed favorable trade between the island and metropole by passing preferential legislation to encourage banana production (via subsidies, low tariffs, bounties, crop quotas) at the expense of diverse crop production (virtually prohibited by high tariffs). After 1950, banana cultivation expanded from Saint Claude to Basse-Terre and along the fertile crescent into Grande-Terre. Additionally, the number of medium-sized agricultural units decreased because they were too large to compete with non-wage-paying family farms and too small to compete with large corporations. Consequently, large amounts of agricultural land were consolidated into the hands of a wealthy few (Hoy 1961).

Much like their relations under the *Pacte Colonial*, Guadeloupe's departmental economy was rigidly controlled and subordinated to France's metropolitan economy. To illustrate the rigidity of French-Guadeloupean trade relations, a combined 94% of Guadeloupean exports went to France (82% to the metropole and 12% to other territories) while 71% of Guadeloupean imports came from France (63% from the metropole and 8% from other territories) in 1958 (Hoy 1961).

These percentages are eerily similar to aforementioned percentages from 1938, with 97% of Guadeloupean exports going to France and 63% of imports coming from France (Swigart and Schudak 2021). By contrast, Guadeloupe conducted relatively little business with other countries in 1958. 5% of its exports went to the United States while 16% of its imports came from Trinidad and 13% from Belgium-Luxembourg, the Dutch West Indies, and the United States (Hoy 1961).

4.2 UGPBAN and *La Banane Française*

At various points in the history of Western capitalism, various states have formed politically and economically expedient trade partnerships to increase their individual and collective capital. One such agreement between 27 European states became the European Single Market in 1993. The European Single Market attempted to secure "four freedoms" for its member states, including the free movement of goods, capital, services, and labor between them. However, the integration of a single European market faced complications from the differences in banana production systems across member states. Before 1993, Spain employed a strict quota system and only imported bananas from the Canary Islands when internal production failed to meet demand. Likewise, France prioritized internal banana production from its departments of Martinique and Guadeloupe. France, Italy, Portugal, Greece, and Britain maintained preferential access systems which prioritized internal production; as a last resort, these five states also opened their markets to external countries (mainly in Latin America) despite incurring a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) tariff of 20%. Finally, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, and Ireland primarily imported bananas from external countries under the 20% CAP tariff (Wiley 1996).

After the European Single Market was established, France intervened and heavily subsidized banana production in Guadeloupe and Martinique to prevent member states from

importing cheaper bananas from Latin America. Additionally, the Council of European Communities quickly approved Council Regulation No. 404/93, which introduced yearly subsidies for internal banana production, duty free entry of bananas from member countries, an annual tariff quota of bananas imported from external countries, and a system of license requirements for banana importation from external countries (Wiley 1996). However, by the early 2000s, the banana sector of the Lesser Antilles was on the verge of bankruptcy due to increased foreign competition and fragmentation among producer groups (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019).

The French refused to cede ground in the hypercompetitive global banana market. In 2003, *l'Union des Groupements de Producteurs de Bananes de Guadeloupe et de Martinique* (UGPBAN) formed alongside its brand, *Bananes de Guadeloupe & Martinique.* In 2008, UGPBAN acquired the ripening room network, *Fruidor*, which secured its control over the entire production process (Fruidor 2017). Consequently, UGPBAN monopolized the harvesting, ripening, marketing, and distribution of French bananas. In order to appeal to metropolitan consumers, UGPBAN began selling bunches wrapped in patriotic tri-colored packaging and marketed its product as *la banane française* (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019). Today, metropolitans continue to choose *la banane française* over other brands, falsely assuming that domestic bananas are produced more ethically than foreign ones. In an August 2020 news report, French supermarket shoppers righteously declared their preferences for *la banane française,* explaining that they "privilege France over Spain," "want to put France to work," or simply think "*la banane française* is the best!" (L'Union 2020). However, the banana production process in Guadeloupe and Martinique is anything but ethical. Setting aside the typical charges of labor and resource exploitation, the following sections should demonstrate that *béké* Eric de Lucy's role as CEO of both *Fruidor* and UGPBAN is sufficient evidence of its corruption.

4.3 *Békés*

Békés are the direct biological and economic descendants of the plantation owner class which trace their ancestry back to a single shared ancestor, Jean Assier. Assier arrived in the Caribbean at the beginning of European settler colonialism in the 17th century. As a unified (familial) class, *békés* maintain an ideology of white supremacy and racial purity. In "The Last Masters of Martinique," a 2009 documentary by Romain Bolzinger which aired on Canal +, Alain Huyghues-Despointes, a prominent *béké,* proudly shows off his self-contained, inbred family tree. He states, "When I look at mixed families between whites and blacks, the children were born with different colors. There is no harmony." He goes on to add, "Historians exaggerate the problems a little bit. They mostly talk about the bad sides of slavery, but there were good sides too. Some planters were very humane with their slaves" (Bolzinger 2009). Huyghues-Despointes is not alone among the *békés* in his ideology, which itself reflects the social relations entrenched over centuries during the period of settler colonialism, enslavement, and racial capitalism.

Currently, the *békés* control both the means of production and the massive import-export industry of Guadeloupe and Martinique. While *béké* ancestors in Guadeloupe were guillotined by Hugues' troops during the French Revolution, *béké* ancestors in Martinique were successfully protected by the British. However, Martinican *békés* have gradually resettled in Guadeloupe, maintaining close ties with their families throughout their separation. In 1946, when Guadeloupe and Martinique became Overseas Departments of France (DOMs), *béké* control increased. According to anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla:

> "The local economy collapsed, unemployment skyrocketed, residents left in massive numbers for mainland France in search of employment opportunities, and

> dependence on the French state deepened- while the economic dominance of the *békés* class only increased. These economic elites have proven remarkably resilient, quickly adapting to global economic tides and changing economic patterns in the Caribbean. They were able to shift from a production-based plantation model to a consumption-driven import, tourist, and service dominated economy. As a result, the *békés* continue to be synonymous with the "owning class"- they have successfully morphed from planters into businessmen by continuing to control the shifting means of production in the French Antilles" (Bonilla 2013).

Today in Martinique, *békés* make up less than 1% of the population yet own 52% of agricultural land, control 40% of distribution, and control over 50% of banana production. Though statistics are not available for Guadeloupe, the extent of *béké* control in Guadeloupe appears comparable (Bolzinger 2009). Despite their stranglehold over Antillean life, however, the *békés* do not rule without controversy. Nearly a month after the release of "The Last Masters of Martinique" made Huyghues-Despointes' white supremacist beliefs public, his right-hand man Bernard Hayot issued an apology on the behalf of *békés* everywhere:

> "If since the Canal + program aired I have remained silent, it is not by chance. It just took me this long to absorb the shock and turmoil created in me… The words of Alain Huygues-Despointes are unacceptable and I totally condemn them. Since the 1960s, with many fellow travelers from Martinique of all origins, in different instances, I have engaged with enthusiasm and conviction in actions which aimed

to bring the different communities of Martinican society closer together" (Rédac Creoleways 2009).

As president of the *Groupe Bernard Hayot* (GBH), a simplified joint-stock company that controls the markets for products ranging from cars to sports equipment to yogurt, Hayot has no real interest in uniting "different communities of Martinican society" (Groupe Bernard Hayot 2020).[6] In fact, his ruling class interests demand that he mobilize for continued class stratification, which ensures a cheap, unorganized labor force to exploit. Instead, his apology apparently serves two purposes: to deradicalize Martinican inhabitants and to appease global trading partners and metropolitan liberals. The ideological tenets of liberal multiculturalism suggest that individual racist antagonisms are the greatest threats to freedom and equality. Hayot, like many *békés*, fears the organized resistance of exploited Black Antilleans who identify their oppression in the neocolonial white power structure hidden behind the false ideology of liberal multiculturalism.[7] It is therefore untenable for Hayot to endorse or ignore Huygues-Despointes' vitriol without risking outrage from exploited Black Antilleans or the metropolitan liberals otherwise aligned with the *békés'* neocolonial regime. Ultimately, careful political and economic cooperation with

[6] GBH has 11,000 employees and conducts business in the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, mainland France, Africa, China, and New Caledonia (Groupe Bernard Hayot 2020).

[7] In "The Last Masters of Martinique," Bolzinger raises awareness about *béké* oppression by showing striking workers blocking banana exports from the main port in Martinique. Their calls for prominent *békés* to take responsibility echo: "Allez chercher Aubery, Hayot, de Lucy, de Reynal, Vivies." (my translation: Go get Aubery. Hayot, de Lucy, de Reynal, Vies), "L'argent pour manger, c'est ça que nous demander! Nous travaillons samedis, dimanches, jours fériés." (my translation: We are asking for money to eat! We work Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays) (Bolzinger 2009). Ultimately, the Prefect of Martinique takes the side of the *békés,* sending white policemen from metropolitan France to unblock the port so banana trucks can pass.

metropolitan France has enabled the *békés* to stabilize themselves as masters of neocolonial Guadeloupe.

4.4 Monopoly and Poverty

Though Clause L. 430-2 of the *Code de commerce* stipulates that businesses cannot control more than 25% of the total retail area for similarly sized stores, Guadeloupe is a veritable paradise for monopolies. In 2007 Hayot's GBH, which already owned 25% of similarly sized stores, was granted permission to circumvent the legal ceiling and build a hypermarket in Guadeloupe (Numa 2018). By 2009, GBH owned two Carre-fours which represented over 40% of the total retail area (Bolzinger 2009). According to *béké* Eric de Lucy, "In each supermarket we have 30 000 products." The mass distribution sector is controlled by the companies Sogedial (Gérard Huygues-Despointes, relative of Alain) and Sodicar (GBH), which control 20.17% and 13% of the market in Guadeloupe, respectively (Doligé 2009). The monopolization of Guadeloupe is the direct result of *béké* lobbying in Paris for favorable legislation and tax breaks to maximize profits.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the French government has readily enabled the predatory, monopolizing practices of the *békés* by continuously failing to enforce anti-trust laws (Numa 2018). Not only do the *békés* control the importation, distribution, and local production facilities of foods in Guadeloupe and Martinique, but they own all the major supermarkets as well. Their holdings include Carre-four, Champion, 8 à huit, and even the notoriously cheap Leader Price. By controlling the entire food supply for a captive population of consumers, they are able to sell basic necessities for wildly exorbitant prices. To illustrate the obscene profits made in Guadeloupean stores compared to those in metropolitan France, consider these prices for various products found in Carre-four stores published in a 2007 report by *La Commission des Affaires Économiques, de*

l'Environnement et du Territoire: 1kg of flour was €0.99 in Paris yet €2.43 in Guadeloupe (2.5 times more expensive); 900g of Guigoz infant milk was €7.65 in Paris yet €17.58 in Guadeloupe (2.3 times more expensive); six 1.5L bottles of Evian water were €3.42 in Paris yet €7.80 in Guadeloupe (2.3 times more expensive) (La Commission des Affaires Économiques, de l'Environnement et du Territoire 2007). *Béké* monopolies force Antilleans to choose between unreasonably expensive products to meet their basic needs. As a result, the cost of living in the French Antilles is very high, with the overall prices of consumer goods elevated by 12.5% in Guadeloupe compared to metropolitan France (Reif 2020).

While metropolitan France and the *béké* class enjoy their spoils, Guadeloupe had a poverty rate of 34% (compared to 14% in metropolitan France), an unemployment rate of 21% (8% in metropolitan France), and a material and social deprivation rate of 41% (13% in metropolitan France) as recently as 2018.[8] Furthermore, only 17% of Guadeloupe's population does not suffer from any deprivation, compared to 57% in metropolitan France (Reif 2020). Inequalities resulting from the dialectic between low wages and high living costs inevitably produce and reproduce social and economic stratification between the neocolonial French and the African-descended Guadeloupeans. Despite these drastic inequalities between the department and metropole, de Lucy reassured documentarian Bolzinger that regardless of ongoing strikes over the exploitative banana export industry, "the social climate is not tense. It is fine" (Bolzinger 2009).

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[8] According to the 2018 report published by *L'Enquête Statistique sur les Ressources et les Conditions de Vie* (SRCV), material and social deprivation is defined as the lack of at least 5 of the 13 elements considered necessary for a decent life, including internet access, a personal car, at least 2 pairs of good shoes, etc. (Reif 2020). This definition is insufficient for understanding the scope of deprivation, since merely qualitative accounts of consumer goods do not consider equally important differences in quality. For example, a rich person who owns a luxury car and a poor person who owns a car in constant need of repair cannot be considered equal in terms of material wealth. Thus, this qualitative measurement of deprivation within the department and metropole presumably provides a more conservative estimate.

5. Discussion

In my introduction, I offered the concept of green imperialism as a beneficial framework from which to understand how Western capitalist imperialist powers disguise their environmentally destruction using the false ideological narratives of sustainable eco-capitalism, fair-trade, organic farming, conscious consumerism (or individual responsibility), and more. These narratives are ideologically false because they represent contradictions in terms; for example, the same capitalist resource extraction and consumption which threatens global environmental collapse cannot simultaneously regenerate healthy global environmental conditions. The historical narrative of Guadeloupean development I presented in the second through fourth sections was necessary to establish the fact of racial capitalism's rampant exploitation, extraction, and expansion which has ravaged island life for centuries. In that sense, the historical materialist narrative I offer is designed to prove green imperialism false by confronting it with its own contradictions; only in the proper historical context can I begin to demonstrate how France mobilizes the ideology of green imperialism to suppress liberatory change.

This discussion is my attempt to reckon with green imperialism through concrete examples of contemporary life in Guadeloupe. It is by no means exhaustive of all of metropolitan France's efforts to preserve capitalist imperialism at all costs (and even despite impending environmental collapse). Rather, I will specifically focus on three cardinal examples of green imperialism: UGPBAN's "Sustainable Banana Plan," chlordecone pollution on banana farms, and the French response to COVID-19. I hope that these examples speak to the island's present exploitative conditions, which concentrate primarily on the banana farms upholding Guadeloupe's largest export industry.

5.1 The Sustainable Banana Plan

Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique's Sustainable Banana Plan is a prime example of French green imperialism. The plan was signed in 2008 by the Guadeloupe & Martinique Banana Producers' Group, the French Ministry of Agriculture, and local authorities to "reassert (their) commitment to sustainable agriculture." (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019). The Sustainable Banana Plan appeals to metropolitan consumers eager to support domestic industry and "fair-trade" products. However, its proposed solutions do not acknowledge the severe environmental degradation caused by years of crop monoculture and pesticide use or offer any reparations for workers who have been systematically exploited and harmed in dangerous working conditions.

In the Sustainable Banana Plan, *Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique* pledges "to build the most ethical banana production system, which strictly adheres to European standards" (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019). The corporate language belies a significant point: far from being the "most ethical," the histories of European genocide, enslavement, and corruption in Guadeloupe have demonstrated that "European standards" mean nothing but violence and exploitation. Whereas the indigenous peoples in pre-colonial Karukera used sustainable Conuco farming practices to produce diverse crops, the Europeans dismissed environmental concerns when prioritizing high short-term yields for maximally profitable exports. Additionally, the notion that European standards must be applied in Guadeloupe invokes the tired, paternalistic trope that European settlers are more knowledgeable and capable of addressing the material needs of Guadeloupeans than Guadeloupeans themselves. Locals are often bound to the island by economic necessity, yet Europeans benefit from its environmental destruction from the comfort of their metropolitan homes. Likewise, Europeans in Guadeloupe have the privilege of abandoning

Guadeloupe when conditions become too unsafe for continued life. The environmental destruction of Guadeloupe is increasingly becoming a death sentence for poor locals. By virtue of their precarity, poor and Black Guadeloupeans have the greatest vested interest in maintaining a healthy and sustainable island and should have the power to impose their own Guadeloupean standards instead.

Similarly, *Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique* advertises "social responsibility" as one of its core values on its website. Ironically, its "social responsibility" page focuses solely on training its workers to be as efficient as possible; the company highlights "vocational training programs to promote career development" and the use of automatic palletizer machines in ripening rooms (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019). *Banane de Guadeloupe* tries to construe this as improving working conditions, but their ultimate motive is to optimize worker *productivity*. Nowhere under "social responsibility" do they mention paying workers fair wages, providing benefits, or improving worker safety. Additionally, the company proudly states that despite Guadeloupe and Martinique having some of the highest unemployment rates in Europe, the banana industry plays an active role in the economy by generating over 10,000 jobs. They excitedly announce that "around 1 in 20 workers in the West Indies works for the Banana sector!" (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019). The *békés* of *Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique* posture as benevolent job creators, when in fact they are little more than modern slavers to poor Black wage workers.

As proof of their tacit admiration for the conditions of a bygone colonial era, *Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique* even creates a glossy fantasy of historical *colonnage* which conceals its ongoing legacy. According to their website, "United within a cooperative, the 650 family farms are ensuring cultural practices at the cutting edge of agricultural sciences" (Banane de Guadeloupe

& Martinique 2019). In their praise, the company neglects to address the pressing questions of how and why those family farms became consolidated within its cooperative. To do so would mean self-incrimination for their role in the horrors of capitalist imperialism.

Today, *Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique* offers a variety of *Banane Française* specialty products. For example, *La Banane Française Enfant* is a smaller version of the standard *Banane Française* catered to children. In partnership with the global capitalist empire of Walt Disney Company France, it even offers attractive Pixar animation-related packaging! Another product dubbed *La Banane Française Équitable* is advertised as "the only fair-trade banana cultivated in France" (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019). Consumers can identify these bananas by the addition of an appealing, earthy green background to its tricolored plastic packaging. This particular product comes from family farms with an average size of 3 hectares and a +25% revenue cut. Again, *Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique* disregards the fact that fair-trade farms originated as *colonnage* farms, and that this so-called "equitable" banana has never been produced without immense labor exploitation. Since 2013, the company even sells "La Banane Bio de Guadeloupe & Martinique" which represents an extraordinary yet ironic feat. A mere 25 years after France banned the use of toxic pesticide chlordecone on banana farms, *Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique* has begun to capitalize on bananas not grown with carcinogenic, ecosystem-killing pesticides as if it were a virtue and not a basic expectation for human dignity and health (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019). Evidently, the "sustainable values" which adorn their product packaging are just that: packaging.

The Sustainable Banana Plan is all about "[acting] on all fronts: energy, transport, waste processing, production and consumption patterns." (Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique 2019). Nonetheless, banana monoculture farming in Guadeloupe will never be sustainable especially

since chlordecone has already caused permanent environmental damage. Despite their green imperialist marketing, *Banane de Guadeloupe & Martinique* is responsible for many of the continued social and environmental antagonisms in Guadeloupe which cannot go long ignored.

5.2 Chlordecone

Chlordecone is an extremely toxic organochlorine pesticide in the same family as the notoriously harmful DDT. First commercialized as Kepone in the United States in 1958, chlordecone was banned in 1976 after its harmful effects were observed on factory workers in Virginia. Despite warning signs and data from the United States prompting the French Toxics Commission to declare it unsafe in 1968 and 1969, the French government authorized its use in 1972. Chlordecone was introduced to Guadeloupe and Martinique in the same year to kill the banana weevil (*Cosmopolites sordidus*) (Joly 2010). Notably, France encouraged chlordecone use in the French Antilles even after banning its sale in metropolitan France in 1990 (Le Monde 2021).

At the time, *béké* Yves Hayot owned the company that distributed chlordecone to the banana producers in French Antilles. He was also the president of the Martinique Banana Producers Group (UGPBAN's predecessor). Hayot lobbied French Minister of Agriculture Jean-Pierre Soisson repeatedly to grant extensions for chlordecone use, claiming that bananas could not be cultivated without it (Le Monde 2021). The French government granted two waivers to Antillean banana producers which enabled *békés* to line their pockets at the expense of worker and environmental health and safety. Chlordecone use continued in the Lesser Antilles until 1993 (Edmond-Mariette, et al. 2005).

Chlordecone is a reproductive and developmental toxicant, neurotoxin, and carcinogen. Its three main characteristics (it is carcinogenic, disperses easily, and does not degrade) make it

extremely dangerous to human life. The vast majority of workers on banana farms in the Lesser Antilles were severely exposed to chlordecone during its widespread use (77% in 1989). Workers distributed the white powder at the bottoms of banana trees without adequate protection; in place of masks, they used gloves and buckets. Marie-Anne Georges, a longtime banana plantation worker in Guadeloupe, said in a 2018 interview with *basta!* that she would experience a full body change when walking past freshly dusted fields, including headaches, dizziness, weakness. Additionally, she claimed that when workers expressed safety concerns, bosses would answer "if you do not want to do it, go home because there are other people who want to work" (Archimède 2018).

Today, the health of nearly every Guadeloupean continues to suffer. A study by the French Public Health Agency and the French Agency for Food, Environmental Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES) detected chlordecone in 90% of the study's participants in 2018. As a direct result of chlordecone usage, Guadeloupe has one of the highest rates of prostate cancer in the world. Between 2010 and 2014, Guadeloupe had 163.6 cases of prostate cancers for every 100,000 inhabitants per year which represents only a marginal decrease from the 182.5 cases per 100,000 inhabitants measured per year from 2005-2009. By contrast, metropolitan France only had 98 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in 2012. (Santé Publique France 2018). Chlordecone has also been found in the umbilical cords of pregnant people, and babies can absorb the pesticide in utero. The pesticide has been found to increase the risk of prematurity and slows the cognitive and motor development of children (Communiqué 2012).

Because the chemical barely degrades in the environment, it has permanently and continuously polluted Guadeloupean people and wildlife since the 1970s (Multigner, et al. 2010). While a quarter of agricultural lands in Martinique and Guadeloupe were originally contaminated,

chlordecone pollution has spread since. It has infiltrated both Guadeloupe's land (absorbed into the organic matter of the soil) and water sources (reaching ground water and streams that flow into the ocean) (Dromard, et al. 2016). Based on the type of soil, its pollution can last anywhere from several decades to 500 years (Cabidoche et al. 2009). In several areas, fishing is either restricted or banned altogether. It is also forbidden to fish certain species notorious for being the most contaminated, such as crustaceans and piscivorous fishes which accumulate it through the food web (Dromard, et al. 2016). Though banana plantation workers continue to be exposed through contact with contaminated soils, nearly all inhabitants of the island are chronically exposed in low doses from food grown in Guadeloupe, especially from tubercules which absorb it deep in the soil.

The colonial and environmental history of Guadeloupe cannot be separated. The harm caused by chlordecone is a result of the colonial legacy of monoculture farming and the crop export industries. The irreversible ecological damage caused by massive contamination is not an accidental catastrophe but rather a direct effect of repeated state failures to care for the needs of locals. In 2018, Georges was suffering from blood cancer. She approached the director of UGPBAN to demand they take responsibility for exposing her to the chemical; they refused, claiming "chlordecone is everywhere" (Archimède 2018). While UGPBAN readily touts their beneficial treatment of workers, they do not compensate workers for health problems caused by chlordecone exposure nor provide sick leave. In Guadeloupe, cancer is still not recognized as an occupational disease, for any acknowledgement of the lasting harm of chlordecone from its former users or the French government would render their eco-friendly capitalist propaganda less effective (Archimède 2018). As UGPBAN deploys green imperialist rhetoric about having the most sustainable and equitable bananas in the world, the French government remains silent about poor Antillean workers suffering prolonged and horrific deaths.

5.3 COVID-19

In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic beginning in late 2019/early 2020, the French government instituted sustainability plans to ostensibly protect Guadeloupe from widespread transmission and effects of the virus. However, the COVID-19 pandemic response showcased yet another example of green imperialism working to maintain the contradictions and inequalities resulting from Western racial capitalist imperialism. In their sustainability plan, the French government recommended frequent handwashing to prevent virus transmission despite tens of thousands of Guadeloupeans quarantining in homes without running water. As a result, a judge on the administrative court of Guadeloupe intervened in May 2020 to “take all measures necessary to end the serious and illegal infringements of the fundamental right to clean water access during the health crisis” (Marcangelo-Leos 2020). Although he provided packs of water bottles to those in need, the judge explicitly stated that he did not consider requests for large water tanks to be justified.

Hypocritical travel conditions to and from Guadeloupe during the COVID-19 pandemic also put the lives of locals in jeopardy. As of January 2021, all travel from Guadeloupe to metropolitan France must be “justified by an overriding personal or family reason, an emergency health reason or a professional reason that cannot be postponed” (Préfet de la Région Guadeloupe 2021). However, travelers from metropolitan France to Guadeloupe must simply present a negative PCR test, a declaration of the absence of symptoms, and a “pledge on honor to self-isolate for 7 days” upon arrival (Préfet de la Région Guadeloupe 2021). It should be abundantly obvious that French tourists have no intentions of self-quarantining for an entire week during their tropical vacations, especially without any enforcement of this requirement. In all aspects, metropolitan France treats Guadeloupe as its personal playground.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic forced local businesses and restaurants to close either temporarily or permanently. In October 2020, 3,600 additional Guadeloupeans registered for *le Revenue de Solidarité active*, which already served 50,000 people on the island. Beneficiaries received €564 per month (Duflo 2020), which represents a very small allowance considering living costs in Guadeloupe are 12.5% higher than in metropolitan France (Le Corre 2016).

6. Conclusion

As we have seen, the fundamental contradiction within Guadeloupean society, and indeed the source of all ecological destruction and human exploitation on the island, is none other than Western racial capitalist imperialism. Save for the period of early settler colonialism, in which the French wiped out nearly all indigenous life on the island, Guadeloupe's racialized population has been majority Black and brown despite constant control by a few European whites since 1635. The majority of Guadeloupe's labor, rather than representing proud, self-sufficient farmers, have been stripped of their dignity first by shackle and whip and later by coercive poverty which binds them to the (stolen) land. Furthermore, on an island once known for its abundant fresh water and eminently fertile soil, a significant portion of the population starves while its historical invaders gorge themselves on the fruits of exploited labor. Finally, the rapacious extraction of capitalist imperialism has laid waste to one of Earth's most beautiful tropical locales, effectively turning it into a polluted resource pump.

In the spirit of ecocriticism, this thesis has taken an interdisciplinary approach to addressing the historical and contemporary inequalities created by Western racial capitalist imperialism and the current ideology of green imperialism which works to maintain them. In order for ecocriticism to be effective, it must not merely criticize but also suggest constructive paths forward. Though I

do not have concrete solutions to the contradictions I have identified, it is important to begin with the recognition that analyses of environmental issues cannot be separated from analyses of neocolonialism and vice versa. According to Martinican philosopher and engineer Malcom Ferdinand:

> “Today, we tend to think of ecology in a depoliticized way, reducing it to its technical dimension. For example, we describe with precision the phenomenon of global warming, the causal links between greenhouse gas emissions and climate, we list the species in the process of disappearing ... But we dwell much less on the relationships between human beings. The calls to "save the climate" are perhaps unifying, but they say nothing about the fact that this ecological crisis is the product of injustices, relations of domination, and the exploitation of nature by a minority of people, and that multinationals have benefited from it” (Archimède 2020).

The question remains: how can and ought Guadeloupe change its relationship with metropolitan France? Evidently, Guadeloupe needs greater autonomy in its political and cultural institutions, control over its land and water resources, and a strong agrarian sector devoted to cultivating food for the local market, not exports. The more significant dilemma for Guadeloupean political organizers is how to produce these advancements *dialectically*, or in other words, from present conditions.

Liyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon (LKP), is a group of approximately fifty different trade unions and social movements in Guadeloupe. Its Creole name translates to the Alliance Against Profiteering. The group lead the 2009 general strike covered in Bolzinger’s documentary “The

Last Masters of Martinique" which forcibly closed the majority of public and private establishments. Based on anti-colonization and anti-capitalist criticism, LPK began demanding increases in low wages and decreases in costs. As part of its platform, LKP opposed local dependence on products imported from metropolitan France. They also opposed "*pwofitasyon*," meaning profiteering, and "*bwa-bwa*," which refers to locally elected officials serving as puppets for the French state as well as the local bourgeois press. Finally, they opposed *demounaj* (meaning depersonification), or the exploitation of workers and their alienation from their land and economy. During the general strike, 100,000 people organized in the streets of Pointe-à-Pitre with their hymn, "La Gwadloup sé tan nou, la Gwadloup sé pa ta yo," or "Guadeloupe is ours, Guadeloupe isn't theirs" (Gordien 2013).

From the earliest armed resistance among Karukera's indigenous inhabitants, to the prohibition of cutting fruit trees in 1940, to LKP's general strike in 2009, there exists precedent for local expressions of political, economic, and agricultural sovereignty which can serve future revolutionary organizers. Though the French colonialists and neocolonialists have demonstrated that the banana is not merely a banana, so too have the workers. In their hands, the banana becomes a weapon of resistance and inevitable triumph.

The poison of capitalist imperialism has infected local bodies and roots, even the very soil from which all life grows, yet green imperialists have proven that neither they nor the oppressive systems they maintain will accept responsibility for centuries of genocide, enslavement, and exploitation. Only by unmasking green imperialism for the reactionary ideology it represents and taking strategic action against oppressive systems can Guadeloupe begin to cure this poison and freely develop into a flourishing society of its own making. The fate of Guadeloupe is in the people's hands.

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