

Mirror for the Other: Marijuana, Multivocality and the Media in an Eastern Caribbean Country

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Abstract: Cultural anthropology's "Mirror for Man" has always been a mirror mainly by and for the West. A corollary of the preoccupation with writing to ourselves about the Other in the specialized jargon and prose of the discipline is that little effort is made by First World anthropologists to write for and to the Third World Other in a manner that is accessible to them.

My aim is to illustrate how the discipline's mandate of cultural critique can be extended to incorporate and engage that Other by referring to my experience of anthropology as journalism in the Eastern Caribbean country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines where my critique consisted of a long series of newspaper articles questioning elite and middle-class societal beliefs about the causes and consequences of marijuana production, sale and consumption.

Résumé: «Le Miroir pour l'Homme» dans l'anthropologie culturelle a toujours été un miroir provenant de l'occident et destiné à l'occident. Un corollaire de la préoccupation que nous avons d'écrire à propos de l'autre, dans le jargon spécialisé ou la prose de la discipline, c'est que les anthropologues du monde Occidental font peu d'effort pour écrire pour et au Tiers Monde d'une manière qui leur est accessible. Le but de mon article est de montrer comment le mandat de critique culturelle au sein de notre discipline, peut être étendu afin d'incorporer et de faire participer l'Autre. Je fais référence à mon expérience en anthropologie, en tant que journaliste à St-Vincent, un petit pays des Caraïbes orientales et dans les îles Grenadines où ma critique consistait en une longue série d'articles remettant en question les croyances de l'élite et de la classe moyenne en ce qui concerne la production, la vente et la consommation de la marijuana.

[A] fundamental change is required in the perception of the world in which and for which critical projects of ethnography are undertaken. This necessitates, in turn, transformations both in the way ethnography is written, and in the ethnographer's awareness of for whom it is written.

— George E. Marcus and Michael J. Fischer,
Anthropology as Cultural Critique

Cultural anthropology has always been an academic exchange mainly with and for the West about the Rest.¹ The observation that Western anthropologists write almost exclusively *to themselves about the Other* is as trite as it is axiomatic. Though it reflects the fact that our priority has always been to communicate to other anthropologists (Kuper 1994:551; cf. Scheper-Hughes 1995: 438), it also means that our *Mirror for Man* (Kluckhohn 1949) has also been one of First World academic self-reflection, self-criticism and self-narrative. Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1923), the most popular anthropological book ever written, was meant to teach Americans about their own society through the study of another way of life (Freeman 1983; Marcus and Fischer 1986). The second most widely read work in anthropology, Clyde Kluckhohn's *Mirror for Man*, was a mirror only for the West: "Studying primitives enables us to see ourselves better. . . . *Anthropology holds up a great mirror to [Western] man and lets him look at himself in his infinite variety*" (1949:11, emphasis in original). The crack in Jay Ruby's (1982:1) mirror is a fracture in ethnographic epistemology—"consciousness about being conscious"—in and for First World anthropology; so are the reflections in DeVita and Armstrong's *Distant Mirrors* (1993). Such academic "Westerncentrism" has an obvious corollary that has received little critical attention: hardly any effort is ever made by Western scholars to write *for and to the Other about themselves* using simple prose and popular local outlets.²

According to Marcus and Fischer: "Writing *single texts* with multiple voices exposed within them, as well as with multiple readerships explicitly in mind, is perhaps the sharpest spur to the contemporary experimental impulse in anthropological writing, both as ethnography and cultural critique" (1986:163, my emphasis). But this uncritically constrains such experimentation by ignoring the possibility of also writing *different texts* for different readerships when the single academic work is either unavailable or incomprehensible. Marcus and Fischer (1986:138) also argue from a traditional Westerncentric position when they claim, like Kluckhohn and many others before them, that "The challenge of serious cultural criticism is to bring the insights gained on the periphery back to the center to raise havoc with our settled ways of thinking and conceptualization." A truly global anthropology would also argue that insights from either domain should be employed to raise havoc in the

periphery, too, when the settled ways of thinking and conceptualization there are as intolerant or uncritical as their counterparts at the centre. Failure to accept this implication of cultural critique—to argue that the Other is either too backward to sustain such a critique (from the West or from within itself) or that the public questioning of belief and behaviour may threaten future field work (don't insult your hosts or they won't invite you back to feast on their culture)—would be as paternalistic as it is careerist.

For all its interest in the relation between text and reader, postmodern/reflexive/textualist/experimental ethnography (Atkinson 1990; Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Keesing 1989; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Marcus 1992) also has surprisingly little to say about who writes the texts, why they write them and who they write them for (cf. Kuper 1994). This may be because it is assumed that the texts are written by professionally trained field workers (even though most researchers have had little or no formal training in doing or writing ethnography), that they are written to further the goals of the discipline (even though these goals are now being vigorously contested) and that, except for the minor subfield of "media anthropology" (Allen 1994), the intended readers are mainly other anthropologists (even though topical and theoretical overspecialization and journal proliferation have produced a fragmented and dwindling readership).

There are several obvious reasons why Western anthropologists have never paid much attention to writing for and to the *remote* Other about themselves, using straightforward discourse and accessible local outlets. Career advancement lies in the First World, not the Third. Moreover, as academics—members of an esoteric and privileged scholarly community—most anthropologists have little motivation to or interest in writing non-technical pieces for general audiences even in their own societies. This, of course, reflects a strong measure of intellectual conceit, an aversion to what is disdainfully dismissed as "popularization" (Allen 1994:xv). First World academic constraints are reinforced by barriers to Third World publication. Since the analysis and writing up of field material may take months or years and since the first priority is always with First World scholarly communication, the anthropologist who fails to keep up long-term contact with the Other society may find it difficult to get material published there. This is exacerbated by the one-shot nature of most ethnographic field work for, unless they intend to do long-term research there, many anthropologists turn their back on the Other after their single period of field work has been completed.³ But even materials—journal articles, reports and monographs—remitted to those who have helped with the study do not reach the public since these are never widely distributed. Donating publications to local libraries or arranging for their sale in local bookstores does not solve this problem, because the specialized jargon of most such works makes them inaccessible even to college-trained people, a category that makes up a

tiny proportion of most Third World societies. Moreover, few members of the public buy or read such works in the First World, even when the subject matter bears on their own communities, and there is no reason to expect more readers or sales of comparable works in poor Third World countries where books are routinely sold for two or three times their developed-country price. More important still is the fact that the kinds of issues that would attract local attention are precisely those that most foreign anthropologists, especially those who want to return to conduct additional research, would avoid like the plague. For Third World newsrooms no less than First World ones, bad news is good news. Reports of misconduct by public figures, accusations of political corruption or police brutality and commentaries on criminal activity, especially if these are narrated by apparently knowledgeable and seemingly impartial outside experts, would be given prominent treatment in countries where the press is more or less free to print what it likes. Though they often given prominence to various kinds of exploitation in their scholarly First World publications (e.g., Scheper-Hughes 1992; Smith 1991; Trouillot 1988), most anthropologists—if they wish to keep their research permits or get new ones—would be loath to give them much treatment in popular Third World publications. Conversely, the kinds of issues that anthropologists might be keen to write about in public—the structural analysis of myth or the symbolism of national ritual—would attract as much media interest in the Third World as they do in the First.

But the interests of scientific anthropology and the interests of the Other are not always irreconcilable. There are many Third World countries where the obstacles to popular publication can be overcome if the researcher wants to reciprocate for the career and other personal rewards of the field experience with more than the token handful of journal offprints or couple of copies of monographs and/or do more than whine that her/his writings have been misread or sensationalized by an unscrupulous press (Brettell 1993). Indeed, the Other may also have reason to complain about the unprincipled appropriation, misinterpretation and transfer of ethnographic material from its natural milieu to some alien one (Brettell 1993). Both grievances can be answered partially by placing some priority on writing to and for the study population in an accessible local medium.

My cultural critique of and for the Other consisted of challenging the taken-for-granted position about the causes and consequences of marijuana production, sale and consumption in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (hereafter identified by its local acronym, SVG), a small (388 square km, 110 000 people), mountainous country located in the southeastern part of the Caribbean Sea.⁴ A former sugar colony that gained its political independence from Great Britain only in 1989, the country is still economically dependent on the former motherland for the sale of all its bananas, the country's chief (legal) cash crop and main (legal) export. Though it has experienced some superficial economic

growth in recent years, SVG has long been one of the poorest countries with one of the highest un(der)employment rates in the region (Potter 1992; Rubenstein 1987). Together with its rugged terrain, poor road network, vast expanse of unsupervised Crown lands and inadequately patrolled coastal waters, this has helped propel SVG to the position of second highest marijuana producer in the entire Caribbean after Jamaica, a country where *ganja* (the common name given to the *Cannabis sativa* plant in the English-speaking Caribbean) has been produced and consumed for nearly 150 years (Rubin and Comitas 1975). Since SVG's land mass is one thirtieth of Jamaica's, the former may even be a much more intensive marijuana producer than the latter, a striking feature since large-scale cultivation there began no earlier than the mid-1970s (Rubenstein 1988).

My cultural critique consisted of writing 46 articles (nearly 53 000 words) that appeared between December 1992 and June 1994 under the heading, "The Drug Dilemma," in the tabloid-sized weekly *The Vincentian* (circulation 4500), the oldest newspaper in SVG (see Figure 1). Four articles over-viewed marijuana production, sale and consumption in SVG; five described its origin and spread; five surveyed 24 years of its treatment in newspaper reports, editorials and letters to the editor; four summarized the results of a national questionnaire on drugs I administered in 1988; 23 detailed marijuana production, sale and consumption in the main study community, Leeward Village;⁵ and five assessed the most recent scientific evidence about the drug's adverse effects.

Where Cannabis Is King

Though cannabis is now king in SVG, it is a crop associated with the most ignoble of Vincentians: young, poor, rural, Black men. It is this feature rather than marijuana's alleged dangers that accounts for much of the societal opposition to it. This is because despite all the upward mobility that has taken place over the past 50 years, the Vincentian populace remains hierarchically stratified by race and colour, income and property, occupation and education, prestige and respectability, and privilege and power (Fraser 1975; Rubenstein 1987). To be sure, SVG is now a sovereign state with a fully enfranchised Black electorate. The government, including elected politicians—except the Prime Minister who is near-White in phenotype and pedigree—and senior civil servants, consists mainly of Black people. Many professionals (lawyers, physicians, accountants, senior civil servants, clergymen and others) come from poor rural backgrounds and many commercial establishments (automobile dealerships, bakeries, clothing and hardware emporia, pharmacies and restaurants) are owned by Black people. But the many examples of Black people rising from near the bottom to near the top of the class hierarchy have blurred rather than obliterated the main social and economic boundaries.

Figure 1
Sample Article from *The Vincentian*

THE VINCENTIAN Wednesday 23rd December 1992

Page 6



How Many Vincentians Are Involved With Illegal Drugs?
Hyacinthe Rubenstein

Part II. Guernizimarez
From *Leward Village*

Last time I argued that it is important to try to discover how many people are involved with illegal drugs. With respect to growing ganja, the evidence from the 1991 SVO Census suggests that at least 1,500 Vincentian males are growing ganja. In turn, this probably represents one third of those who have ever cultivated marijuana. This observation is supported by data from one rural community.

Leward Village is the fictitious name of a large community of 2,300 people on the Caribbean coast of St. Vincent Island. Of the 143

villagers who have at some time tried their hand at marijuana planting, only eight are women. Over 70 percent of the 143 people are no longer growing weed. Most stopped because they either found growing their own weed to be a tiresome task or their crops were repeatedly lost to "ripper men." Indeed, many dead village ganja thieves more than they fear the police.

The 135 former and present ganja growers present six percent of the total village population, over one-quarter of the adult male labour force, and nearly one-half of the total number of village male farmers. Ganja growing is a major business of the 36 men now growing weed, 70 percent are under the age of 30.

The 1991 SVO Census shows that 81,000 people live outside Kingston and its suburbs in Leeward Villages. Leeward Villages resembles other rural communities in its ganja growing, the figure of six percent suggests that about 5,000 rural male residents have at some time been growers. This

figure is not much out of line with my 4,500 estimate from the Soufriere police operations. Many ganja growers are their produce directly to consumers in Leeward Village. The average SVO plot is a small but active player in the international drug trade. Within the Caribbean region, its ganja is shipped principally to Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia, and Martinique. Some weed also ends up in the United States, England, and other European countries. Judging from the amount of Telefunken electronics said to be produced in Leeward Villages, North Germany may be a popular destination. If we could only find as many profitable outlets for our legal crop!

How many people are involved in the weed business? No one can say for sure! I can only make a couple of observations based on mid-to-low-level operations in Leeward Village.

Politeness are the main units of sale and most dealers have to find other ways to support themselves. What should one make of these findings from Leeward Village? If this community is a typical one, and I find no reason to suspect otherwise... there must be several thousand rural and urban Vincentians who are making at least part of their living hawking prohibited narcotics.

NEXT TIME:
"Part III. How Drug Users Are There In SVO?"

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The Drug Dilemma

Leward Village has never been a very big ganja producer. Weed is nearly always said to be "scarce" in the community, and much of the local supply comes from community members generally. Still, it is generally easy to find someone who has some herbs to sell and there are many punters in the community. In fact, some 163 people, mostly male, have been involved in the ganja business at one time in their lives. The number even exceeds the number of active and former growers, underscoring the popularity of ganja in the community. Current ganja sellers number 75 people, most of whom are under 30 years of age. But selling ganja is not a full-time job and my figures on current sellers refer to anyone poddling

any amount of weed over the previous 12 month period. Every week sees several sellers "go out in business" and there are only 6-12 vendors peddling their stock at any given time. Some petty distributors simply peddle their own weed, much of their store and have no money to buy new supplies; others show poor business sense and credit too many "spiffs" to dishonest customers; still others give up because they are not making a profit. There are always replacement salespeople and no shortage of eager customers.

Except for the larger growers, who try to keep their weed as quickly as possible to urban punters, sales tend to be small in scale and intermittent in volume. Two-dollar splits and \$1C/20.00

Many features of the traditional racial hierarchy are still evident and a disproportionate number of the biggest businesses (such as supermarkets and the largest department stores) are in the hands of Whites and Mulattoes. Phenotypical differences are still evaluated as connoting differential inherent worth, and political decisions, overtly made by Blacks for Blacks, still favour long-standing vested (White or near-White) economic interests. Given that there have also been a series of right-of-centre governments (Potter 1992), the inevitable result is continued, restricted access to social and economic opportunities, rewards and honours based on class and colour.

Most Black Vincentians (three quarters of the population according to preliminary reports from the 1990 census) are poor and most poor Vincentians (between two thirds and three quarters of the population) are Black. The lowest ranking and most destitute members of the poor Black population are young rural males, a category often pejoratively labelled by all other status groups as rowdy, uncouth, blasphemous, lazy, thievish, ignorant, illiterate, violent and unkempt. Sometimes feared because of their alleged predilection for lawless or anti-social behaviour, often despised for appearing to scorn societal norms of respectability, it is these youths and young men who are the most conspicuous and unrepentant of marijuana growers, sellers and smokers.⁶ It is also these people, men between their late teens and mid-thirties, whose beliefs, values and behaviour formed the subject of more than half the articles in my newspaper series.

Although ganja is merely the latest in a long series of Vincentian cash crops, unlike these other cultigens (such as coffee, tobacco, sugar cane, cotton, coconuts, a variety of tropical root crops and, most recently, bananas) which have been met by either government support or indifference, *Cannabis sativa* is a prohibited substance in SVG which carries severe juridical sanctions. Concomitantly, its production, sale and consumption have been associated with much internecine conflict and praedial larceny, thousands of police raids and ganja seizures and hundreds of imprisonments and/or costly fines. Between 20 and 25 percent of the prison population is incarcerated for "dangerous drug" offenses (St. Vincent and the Grenadines 1991, 1994) which often consist of possession of a single *spliff* (marijuana cigarillo). For many poor Black men and youths, such deterrents have not been enough to dissuade them from growing marijuana. Confronted by few money-making alternatives and tempted by the potential for very profitable returns (the retail price of ganja is a hundredfold the retail price of its most profitable legal counterparts), these individuals have decided, however reluctantly, to risk imprisonment, personal injury and the destruction or theft of their crops by engaging in the commercial production of ganja.

Who Has the Authority to Speak for the Other?

Given the relative political, economic and scientific powerlessness of the Other, some may term a cultural critique of and for that Other as “scientific neo-colonialism.” This time the alien researcher is no longer content to act as intellectual voyeur peeping at (and then commandeering and profiting from) the lifeways of the Third World Other for the edification of a First World audience (as in the older “scientific colonialism” [Galtung 1967]) but is now also an exhibitionist arrogantly “revealing to” that Other the “true” conditions of its own existence. But as a corollary of the larger question of “Who has the authority to speak for a group’s identity or authenticity?” (Clifford 1988:8), this criticism presupposes that those who might speak on their own behalf are able or willing to do so. Who, for example, has the authority to speak for the Other if that Other cannot (because of illiteracy or low status) or will not (because of indifference or the fear of social or legal retribution) speak for itself? Who is warranted to speak to the Other about *their* Other in societies hierarchically divided by class, race and ethnicity? Who can claim the right to speak when there is no true group to speak for—no enclave culture, no aboriginal people, no closed corporate community—but rather an amorphous category of people marked by variable and flexible involvement with a non-indigenous substance? Who should speak when the forms of behaviour and belief in question no more belong to or form part of self-identity in SVG than they do in Jamaica (see Dreher 1982), Trinidad (see Lieber 1981), England (see Berke and Hernton 1974) or the United States (see Goode 1970)? And what else can a concerned and involved researcher do but speak out when the issue at hand has already received so much spurious local treatment?

There have been several voices and perspectives on what Vincentians call “the drug problem,” only one of which—my own—has regularly, systematically and publicly echoed the voices and perspectives of those who are smeared by *ad hominem* attacks whenever they try to question established knowledge and policies. If I were “revealing the truth,” it was not to the *ganja man*, as those involved with marijuana are called. Since most such people are only barely literate, few of them even knew that I had written for and about them.⁷ But illiteracy hardly matters since I would be repeating, often in their own words, what they had already told me. Rather I wrote to those literate Vincentians—people with three or more years of successful secondary schooling—who form the middle class and élite of the society for and about *their* Other.

Though there were several other considerations (discussed below), the main stimulus for the column, then, was a combined moral-intellectual aversion to the way marijuana was being treated in the local print media and by the local (para-)medical community. Taking the lead from an anthropological study of marijuana in Costa Rica (Carter 1980:31-40, Table 10), I perused and classi-

fied all articles dealing with drugs (marijuana, alcohol and cocaine, but not tobacco) in *The Vincentian* newspaper from 1969 through 1992. Paralleling its treatment in Costa Rica, all but five of the 367 news reports, editorials and letters to the editor dealing directly or indirectly with marijuana were negative in tone, substance or intent.

There was the odd discordant voice in *The Vincentian*, but these were always silenced or drowned out by the dominant tune. When, for example, one anonymous writer called "Peter" disputed the assertions that "of all three drugs (Alcohol, Cigarettes and Marijuana) the latter is considered to be the most dangerous . . . and where there is an increase in the smoking of marijuana one can anticipate the increase in the crime rate" (*The Vincentian*, March 26, 1982), quoted from a radio interview of Dr. Cecil Cyrus, the most respected member of the Vincentian medical establishment, a personal attack from another anonymous writer, "Frank," quickly followed:

[W]e know Dr. Cyrus: we know his qualifications and we know his right to express himself on a subject such as drug abuse; since "Peter" has chosen to hide under a pseudonym, we are unable to assess his qualifications or his right to express himself on a technical subject; however, the tendentious tone of his letter leads me to speculate either that he is an addict attempting to justify his own behaviour in his own eyes or that he is a pusher protesting vigorously against any attempt to interfere with his livelihood. (*The Vincentian*, April 2, 1982).⁸

Many articles in my column quoted from and critically evaluated such letters, news stories and editorials. I include extracts from many of these, marking them **HR**, to facilitate their contextual assessment, distinguish them from the other newspaper submissions and to emphasize the primacy of my voice.

HR: Ironically, "Frank" fails to recognize the contradiction in his own choice "to hide under a pseudonym": how can we assess *his* qualifications to assess anyone else's qualifications? Though he may have felt that a nom de plume gave him leave to vilify "Peter" without fear of retribution, pen names talking to other pen names has an Alice in Wonderland quality which makes them hard to take seriously. (*The Vincentian*, February 26, 1993).

Parnell Campbell, then in private legal practice and until recently the country's Attorney General and Deputy Prime Minister, also took issue with "Peter's" position:

On the evidence of my own observations over the span of some thirteen years . . . I have formed the unshakable opinion that the use of Marijuana is harmful to the individual user as well as society.

I base my conclusion on the intimate knowledge and observation of people who use and have used the drug. . . . And no amount of so called scientific research is going to erase memories I have of several close friends and acquaint-

ances who have become addicted—yes, ADDICTED—to the drug, whose contributions to their own sustenance, let alone the well-being of society, have become negligible. (*The Vincentian*, April 2, 1982)

HR: An “unshakable opinion” is one meaning of “intolerance” as is the disdainful dismissal of “so called scientific research.” Mr. Campbell also fails to document what sort of “intimate knowledge” he has about marijuana: what “observations” he has made or how systematically he has made them. To paraphrase “Frank,” we are unable to assess Mr. Campbell’s qualifications or his right to express himself on such a technical subject as addiction. (*The Vincentian*, February 26, 1993)

Conventional wisdom was also once questioned by the publisher of *The Vincentian*, Edgerton Richards, who criticized American-sponsored eradication efforts in the northwestern part of the mainland which resulted in the destruction of millions of ganja plants:

A helicopter is seen day and night in the Leeward area intimidating old and young who are trying to make a living in the mountains of their area. . . . [W]hat must these youngsters do when this Government does not even provide road work for the unemployed? In the meanwhile, the Grenadines which is the main trans-shipment point for drugs is feeding this young Nation with harder drugs [i.e., cocaine] than the mild herbal plant grown here. (*The Vincentian*, November 8, 1991)

Richards was a vocal government critic and opposition-party supporter, and political rather than economic considerations governed his editorial. Politics also governed the stinging reply from Marcus De Freitas, a former government Minister of Agriculture, who even used scriptural injunction to heap scorn on Richards:

The Good Book makes it clear that there is no room for luke-warm Christians and indeed, this analogy holds good regarding the drug menace that is afflicting societies everywhere. I am really surprised and disturbed by what is written in the weekend papers where supposedly responsible people set out to make light of the efforts of the government and police at eradicating the marijuana plantations in this country. . . . [W]hen police and government are taking positive steps in the area of drug interdiction, we as citizens have the moral duty to support them. (*The Vincentian*, November 22, 1991)

This attack had its intended effect for Richards immediately remembered his “moral duty” by noting that “I am all for helicopter patrols as I am, as everyone knows, anti-drug” (*The Vincentian*, November 22, 1991)

Homophony and *The Vincentian*

Readers of *The Vincentian* had been supplied with a steady, nearly homophonic stream of information about ganja (Table 1): reports of major eradication efforts in remote forested regions; synopses of the trial of a local policeman charged with bribery; news of big seizures at the airport; excerpts from anti-drug speeches by the Prime Minister; stories about adverse findings in overseas marijuana medical research; reports of the large number of "marijuana addicts" admitted to the mental hospital; charges that SVG is the largest ganja producer in the Eastern Caribbean; summaries of drug seminars held in the region; and highlights from local drug abuse rallies. This varied and extensive negative coverage—more than one item per month for the entire 24-year period, 1969-92, and nearly one per week between 1987-92 alone—served to both reflect and create public opinion against ganja (cf. Carter 1980:37).

Fixation on the actual or assumed deleterious features of cannabis was itself not surprising since the local media get most of its international material from like-minded First World news services (Elwood 1994). Nor was the increased attention paid to marijuana during the late 1980s and early 1990s difficult to account for since this paralleled increased recognition of and reaction to the extent of its local production. What was surprising (and what seemed to surprise anonymous writer "Peter" as well) was how superficial, obsolete, unscientific and vituperative the newspaper and other accounts were. One recent editorial called "addiction"⁹ to marijuana "the new slavery" (*The Vincentian*, May 6, 1992), and several others tried to link the substance to violent criminal behaviour and pornography. For example, in his August 16, 1985, piece influential weekly columnist, political scientist and lawyer Dr. Kenneth John argued that

it does seem to me that the drug [marijuana] has led to many blighted lives, a waste in human resources and a spiralling growth in crime. A casual walk around town and a peep into the prison and mental hospital will produce the evidence. Clearly there is an upsurge in drug-related crime if only because the stakes are so high.

HR: What Dr. John means by "blighted lives" or a "waste of human resources" is not clear. Nor does he present any evidence that, whatever their meaning, they are, along with mental illness, caused by marijuana consumption. To be sure, the prison is full of marijuana users, growers, and pushers. But this is less a product of the "blight" and "waste" marijuana produces than a consequence of the elementary fact that using, growing or pushing the drug are punishable by imprisonment. (*The Vincentian*, February 19, 1993)

John's views were not just those of a concerned citizen, albeit a high-ranking one. They also paralleled the official police position as articulated by the Commissioner of Police himself who argued that "The relationship be-

Table 1
Articles in *The Vincentian* Dealing with Drugs, 1966-92

	1966-68	69-71	72-74	75-77	78-80	81-83	84-86	87-89	90-92	Total
Destruction/seizure of ganja	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	3	3	11
Arrests/trials/fines for ganja use/sale	0	7	6	2	6	0	4	9	22	56
Arrests for ganja possession in other countries	1	1	2	0	0	2	5	8	3	22
Other police/state drug (ganja) control efforts	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	5	7	15
Caribbean region drug control efforts	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	8	9	21
Overseas drug control efforts	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	11	16
Editorials about ganja	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	3	1	8
Letters condemning ganja	1	1	0	0	3	5	2	1	2	15
Letters defending ganja	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	3
Letters, editorials, addresses, and seminars on alcohol abuse	0	3	0	3	0	1	6	1	5	19
Other letters about drug abuse/trafficking	0	0	1	0	0	0	10	10	8	29
Editorials and news reports on drug use/abuse/trafficking	0	0	2	0	0	0	5	18	9	34
Scientific studies of drug (ganja) abuse	5	2	0	0	0	4	1	13	2	27
Scientific reports of benefits of ganja or alcohol	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	3
Speeches, seminars, rallies, and campaigns against drug abuse	0	1	2	0	0	0	11	24	11	49
Caribbean region lectures, reports, and seminars on drugs	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	10	3	19
Police corruption/abuse of authority	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	19	23
Other reports on drugs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	13	22
Total	7	17	14	6	12	14	62	131	129	392

tween drugs and crime is clear. . . . Drug abuse breeds both serious crimes and gangland revenge" (*The Vincentian*, April 21, 1989).

Other editorials have employed hyperbolic language to make equally unsubstantiated sociological and psychological assertions that a drug lifestyle among the youth threaten "to choke out any former semblances of Vincentian life and untainted mores" (*The Vincentian*, May 20, 1988), and that in rural areas the youth smoke ganja "to ease their frustration, and fill an empty void created by the loss of hope" (*The Vincentian*, October 14, 1988). Two signed columns even argued that drug abusers are guilty of what many Vincentians would consider among the worst personal iniquities in their tropical country: they do not bathe.

As the letter from De Freitas suggests, Christian theological precepts have often been employed to reinforce such assertions. In one drug abuse rally Pastor Fabien

alluded to the Bible's charge that we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, Holy, Acceptable, unto God. But instead we give God an abused stomach, a burnt out pair of lungs, jagged nerves and an unfunctional brain. We are part of a war between the two opposing forces, the Prince of Darkness, the Devil, and the Prince of Peace, JESUS CHRIST. (*The Vincentian*, December 28, 1986).

Even the country's Prime Minister, Sir James F. Mitchell, one of the region's most respected leaders, has used theological rhetoric and fiery medical metaphors to argue the drug problem (which at the time consisted only of the "marijuana problem") "is another cancer that is eating into our human society very rapidly," is "more serious than AIDS" and that

[H]e with drugs has a lot of problems. He laughs when he should be solemn, he does everything the wrong way, because while he is still a human being in terms of the soul, put into him by God, the body is no longer his own. He dies a slow and painful death. (*The Vincentian*, September 2, 1988)

HR: While he may not have actually meant that using illegal drugs like marijuana is worse than being afflicted with the killer virus, the Prime Minister tells us that the ultimate result is the same, "a slow and painful death." (*The Vincentian*, February 19, 1993)

The views of such influential individuals were rooted in and helped reinforce the position of ordinary educated Vincentians. In dozens of letters to the editor there has been talk of "hundreds of failures," "of hopeless failures," of "hideous drug addictions," of "frustration, depression and a sense of hopelessness among users" and of people being "mentally destroyed" or "enslaved by their addiction to marijuana." It has been claimed that marijuana use "inevitably destroys, maims, and permanently distorts the intellect, the bodies and the morality of its participants," that "The amount of vagrants on our streets today [because of marijuana addiction] are numberless," that "A large

number of gruesome crimes committed are drug-linked in some way," that "The crime rate is on the increase, 93% of which is drug related" and that "the illicit use of drugs is causing our homes, society, states, nations and the world on the whole to crumble."

My preliminary reply to these assertions (trying to debunk them by referring to the latest scientific literature involved several articles at the end of the series) was to point out:

(1) the dogmatic and inflammatory way establishment positions on drugs are expressed, (2) the paucity of tangible evidence upon which these views are based, and, most important, (3) the propensity to tar-and-feather anyone who dares challenge orthodox positions, smearing them as socially irresponsible, immoral, Godless, addicted to drugs themselves, or even living off the avails of the drug trade. It seems that many Vincentians are absolutely convinced about . . . ganja. Like Parnell Campbell, they "have formed the unshakable opinion that the use of Marijuana is harmful to the individual user as well as society" or like the Prime Minister they believe that the "drug problem" is worse than the AIDS problem and that using illegal drugs will bring "a slow and painful death." Even to question such assertions is viewed as absurd since [as Kenneth John says] "everybody already knows that ganja smoking is harmful to one's health" . . . and "A casual walk around town and a peep into the prison and mental hospital will produce the evidence." (*The Vincentian*, February 26, 1993)

Many of the accepted beliefs about marijuana were based on material published by Dr. Cecil Cyrus, a general surgeon and ophthalmologist, in four articles in *The Vincentian* (written in response to "Peter's" critique) and in a specially commissioned Lions Club booklet (Cyrus 1986). *The Vincentian* reported excerpts (February 21, 1986) from Dr. Cyrus' address, launching the booklet:

You accept the authority of doctors, of the entire medical profession, on all matters of medical illness. . . . Yet there is a vulgar reluctance to accept the unequivocal, categorical, and incontrovertible evidence attesting to the destructive effects of certain drugs, especially marijuana. In fact, there are those criminally irresponsible drug traffickers who strongly deny that marijuana causes any ill effects.

HR: Nothing could be further from the truth. On the one hand, most Vincentians have bought hook, line, and sinker the negative pronouncements on marijuana by the local medical community; on the other, our understanding of "certain drugs, especially marijuana," at the time Dr. Cyrus wrote these words could not have been more equivocal, qualified, and disputable. Time and again the scientific literature uses terms like "inconclusive," "unresolved," "additional work is necessary," "discrepancy in experimental findings," "far from definitive," "much remains to be learned," and "the quality of studies leaves much to be desired" to describe what is known (and not known) about the drug.

As Kleiman (1989:3) argues in a review of the literature that postdates Dr. Cyrus' own review: "No consensus exists . . . on the extent of harm caused by marijuana." (*The Vincentian*, June 10, 1994)

The effects attributed to marijuana smoking by Dr. Cyrus, some based on his own medical practice, may be divided into those that are physical and those that are social or psychological. The former included: bronchitis; asthmatic attacks; increased risks of cancer; male sterility; weakening of the body's immune system; chromosomal damage; chronic brain damage; liver damage; increased risks of fits in epileptics; the development of female breast tissue in males; sexual impotence; and priapism (persistent erection of the penis). The latter included: an amotivational syndrome; acute psychosis; schizophrenia; disinhibition causing criminal behaviour; addiction; permanent loss of mental ability; long-term memory loss; and mutism.¹⁰

The views of authorities like Cyrus were not lost on the general public:

They [marijuana and cocaine] can lead to hallucinations, weight loss, personality change, excitability, paranoia, along with the committing of criminal acts— theft, robbery and murder. (*The Vincentian*, February 7, 1986)

On the individual this drug [marijuana] affects the lungs and may cause lung cancer. It also affects the brain which is known as "the human computer." I believe the reason why many users are not aware of the dangers of marijuana is because their brain cells have been destroyed by it. (*The Vincentian*, March 4, 1988)

One prize-winning student essay reprinted in the paper said that

These harmful drugs [marijuana and cocaine] destroy your brain cells among other things. . . . The user is not able to make sensible judgments, he or she develops a short memory, becomes lazy, restless and self certain and cannot function properly on the job or at school. Users of drugs especially marijuana become paranoid.

Once addicted to a drug, and this happens without us realizing it, it is also impossible to live without it. As a result the victim has to spend large sums of money to keep up the habit. If he is not working he does unlawful things such as stealing, in order to get the money. A woman often prostitutes herself. (*The Vincentian*, January 20, 1989)

Partly to test whether these negative views about marijuana reflected a national consensus or represented the position of a handful of medical people, politicians, newspaper columnists and vociferous letter-to-the-editor writers, I administered a drug questionnaire to 269 students in four of the nation's secondary schools in 1988. The negative views of the students—which I also reported in the column—echoed the negative views reported in *The Vincentian* newspaper. This did not necessarily mean that Vincentian high school students were avid newspaper readers; what it did suggest is that both the accounts in

the paper and the views of the young people reflected the same widespread misunderstanding of and resultant aversion to marijuana.¹¹

Multivocality and “The Drug Dilemma”

I spoke with or about several voices in the column: the voice of the local health care community; ordinary literate Vincentians who had written to the paper; the senior high school students I had interviewed; the international drug research community; and those directly involved with ganja growing/selling/smoking. Since I selected, represented and interpreted the other voices, the overarching and omniscient voice was my own. Because my aim was to challenge extant Vincentian beliefs and practices and because I was writing to a literate but non-specialist audience in a popular medium, I tried to be direct, factual, provocative and authoritative (Fillmore 1994:49). I also tried to temper—and hence strengthen—my position as authority by pointing out how contested many of the findings of marijuana research actually were. Such an appeal to research ambiguity was intended to show how intolerant and anti-scientific the mainstream Vincentian position was, to subvert the authority of the Other while promoting my own. Any appearance of self-doubt, any self-questioning of my status as an international drug authority, as much as it might have addressed the sometimes well-founded postmodern criticisms of the traditional positivist ethnographic text, would have been self-defeating.

Though my voice dominated in the presentation of the most current scientific literature, I switched styles when dealing with informant-supplied data by allowing the ganja man to speak for himself (albeit through transcribed interviews I selected and edited) when his utterances gave folk support for positivist First World drug research findings. Ambiguity was not confined to the First World scientific literature but occasionally marked the beliefs and experiences of the ganja man himself. These were also described to forestall the claim that my perspective was incomplete or biased. I called the beliefs, values and practices of those who grew/sold/smoked marijuana part of a “ganja contra-culture”:

HR: There are thousands of members of this opposition pro-ganja culture. Though their actions are constantly scrutinized and negatively evaluated, their voices are rarely heard or taken seriously. My mandate as an anthropologist requires that I give voice to these voiceless people. (*The Vincentian*, April 8, 1993)

Three of the 23 pieces that dealt with the ganja contra-culture in Leeward Village introduced the community and some aspects (related via anecdotes) of my field work there. The remaining articles described the demographic, social, economic and ideological variability in local drug use. I described the kinds of people involved in growing, selling and smoking marijuana; how, when and

why they first got involved with the substance; how they grew, shared, sold and smoked cannabis; what they thought about marijuana both in itself and in relation to alcohol and cocaine (a drug that became popular in SVG beginning in the mid- to late 1980s); what attitudes and beliefs they held about the mainstream societal opposition to the substance; and their experience with and assessment of the actual physical, medical, psychological, behavioural and economic causes and effects of involvement with smoking, selling and growing marijuana. One column questioned the widespread middle class and elite idea that marijuana farmers are lazy people looking for a quick and easy dollar and five treated the “*tribulation* context,” the fact that involvement with ganja produces *cut down* (the destruction of ganja crops by the police or community adversaries), *rip-off* (the theft of growing, harvested or processed ganja), *unfairness* and *robbery* (being taken advantage of, exploited or fooled in some ganja transaction or arrangement, sometimes accompanied by a fear or threat of physical violence) and *fight down* (actual physical violence sometimes accompanied by the use of weapons). These five columns¹² served to balance the other material—to show that there were many negative features (albeit products of interdiction rather than consumption) that accompanied marijuana—and to suggest that though I was critical of dominant societal beliefs about and actions against cannabis, I was no advocate for marijuana use.

I only made my own moderate position known in the last column though I deliberately veiled it with the more liberal views of others:

HR: [S]ince it is possible to become a psychologically [as opposed to physiologically] addicted “ganjaholic,” since acute long-term use results in a high tolerance reaction, and since we are still unsure about its long-term dangers, the use of marijuana should be treated with caution. If you have never used marijuana, I would not recommend that you start; if you are a heavy user, I would suggest that you cut down.

... [M]any scientists would say that I am being too cautious. They would argue that since hardly any other substance, natural or artificial, has ever been studied as much with such inconclusive or contradictory results and since millions of people have been using marijuana for thousands of years in all parts of the world with little or no apparent ill effect, then this is proof enough that marijuana is relatively innocuous. If it were the “killer weed” that some say it is, there would have been proof of this long ago. The call for yet more research, they would argue, has nothing to do with medicine and everything to do with morality. (Grinspoon and Bakalar 1993)

The views and experiences of the ganja men were presented in their own words. A tiny sample from a variety of domains is given, using a modified orthography from the one employed in the column (to make the men’s Creole English voices more understandable to standard English users), to illustrate how antithetical these were to mainstream assertions.

On addiction:

IO: I have been smoking for a while [16 years] and I have never got hook on the habit. I could do without it. (*The Vincentian*, July 30, 1993)

On physical damage:

XQ: A man could smoke but you have to know how you smoking. The smoke not go up there for touch your lung. It not touch there. Doctor does tell too much a whole heap of lie. Doctor does print a whole heap of thing and show you ass. (*The Vincentian*, July 30, 1993)

On criminality:

IO: It's not a habit where you have to kill a man or you have to break [into] somebody's house to get money to buy it. Herb [ganja] is not leading you into other habits so as to break people house to get money to buy it, or to break a bank or something. (*The Vincentian*, August 6, 1993)

On government opposition:

CC: Because money in there and them can't get it, so them going to say all thing. I-man a say the government can't get out no tax out of the ganja, no income tax. If them could of get income tax, they would of say them for it. (*The Vincentian*, August 6, 1993)

On social interaction:

KE: The first night I ever smoke that thing is the first night I am going to hold conversation like a real man. I lime [date] a girl that same night. Me not know how for talk to woman. The first time I burn [smoke] this thing I see what I never see before. Me reason what me never reason before. That is the first night me ever pick up a woman. (*The Vincentian*, August 13, 1993)

On sexuality:

XB: To me, ganja make you stronger. Ganja don't humbug no sex life. More ganja you burn, the more woman you want to want. Because I make three kids in one year with three different woman. Three powerful youth too, healthy youth. Ganja make you powerful, man. (*The Vincentian*, August 13, 1993)

On the work ethic:

CP: Them say when you smoke weed that you lazy. But other people [non-smokers] who lazy [too]. Because when I wake up this morning I smoke a weed up a bush and do real work. Weed does make you work plenty. You not want stop. You get different feelings in a you. (*The Vincentian*, August 20, 1993)

On medicinal uses:

XB: My man [friend] used to say since he start to drink that ganja tea he start to shit pretty, pretty, pretty like gold. He used to shit black shit, ugly shit. It clean him out. From the time he start to just drink ganja tea, that man just get clean out. Ganja is a good medicine. Is the healing of the nation. That is a herb that we should take care of. (*The Vincentian*, August 27, 1993)

On ganja vs. tobacco:

IO: Who feel like smoking [ganja], smoke it because cigarette kill you and it's still being sold by the pack. (*The Vincentian*, September 3, 1993)

On ganja vs. alcohol:

KE: Me is a ganja smoker and me and my old man and my old queen [mother] get down well. I never curse them. I never lash them, raise me hand to lash them. And then I have a brother and when you hear he drink and he come in, he tell my old man, "Who the fuck is you? You drinking like me too. Nobody can't put me out of this house." Rum! My old man put he out the house for that. The next day he say he not been a say them thing there. And right now he there beg-ging back that if my old man can take him back. (*The Vincentian*, September 3, 1993)

On cognition:

CC: It make I think plenty wise. The first time I burn weed, it start to make I-man think plenty thing about life. Thinking I wonder what my future going to be. Think plenty, real meditation. (*The Vincentian*, August 13, 1993)

On memory:

PT: They say this ganja does make you forget but I prove time and time again that people who don't smoke just normally forgetting things. So I can't see how you going to tell me the smoking make you forget. (*The Vincentian*, July 30, 1993)

On mental illness:

XB: If you check the majority of people in the mental hospital, this madness have to come from them roots. It were there from creation. (*The Vincentian*, July 30, 1993)

These ganja contra-culture views and experiences could hardly differ more from their mainstream counterparts. The most striking and most often discussed of these was the relation between marijuana and mental health and psychological well-being. Presumably because "proof" for them is easier to come by—"A casual walk around town and a peep into the prison and mental hospital will produce the evidence"—allegations of harmful mental and be-

havioural sequelae from smoking marijuana, together with the “chronic brain damage” sometimes thought to cause them, have received much attention in the press. Several articles, for example, have given precise figures for the number of admissions to the Mental Health Centre because of the (ab)use of marijuana. The presence of such “hard evidence” prompted me to devote a whole piece to the relation between mental health and marijuana (see Appendix A).

The last of my five pieces, subtitled “The Case For and Against Marijuana” (June 24, 1994), confronted what I considered the most pernicious feature of the societal treatment of marijuana, the Vincentian self-righteous opposition to it, and was deliberately meant to provoke some response from readers (see Appendix B).

What Does Silence Mean?

Clifford (1988:7) argues that “The time is past when privileged authorities could routinely ‘give voice’ . . . to others without fear of contradiction,” paralleling Rosaldo’s (1989:21) claim that “Social analysis must now grapple with the realization that its objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects who critically interrogate ethnographers—their writings, their ethics, and their politics.” Though their observation has been shown to apply to many research situations (see Brettell 1993), it hardly applied to my experience of newspaper writing in SVG. This may be partly because the “others/objects” I gave voice to were *their* “other/objects,” a constituency that did not have the resources to act as “analyzing subjects.” Still, I thought that I had offered sufficient criticism of mainstream belief and behaviour, including denunciations of the views of many well-known and respected public figures, to warrant more rebuttal than I received. But the only challenge I got was a single response in another local newspaper criticizing allegations I had made about the possible use of ganja by a local Black-power group during the late 1960s. When I asked him what he thought silence meant, the publisher of *The Vincentian* asserted that I had said “everything there is to say on the subject.” But I knew better than to assume that silence meant assent, that I had merely confirmed what many people had suspected or believed all along, or that I was so persuasive that I had effected a massive turnaround in public opinion.¹³ The possibility that the column had a small readership that declined as time went on was more plausible. With only about 4500 copies printed every week, with other newspapers and the government-owned television station increasing their following at the expense of *The Vincentian*, with a single-topic column that seemed to go on forever because of two long interregnum periods (not of my own making), and with many pieces that went well beyond the 700- to 800-word limit good editorials are supposed to observe, the number of readers may have fallen off drastically by the time I presented the most critical material in the last several pieces. Still, the number of strangers who stopped me in

Kingstown, even when the column was not appearing, to say that they were following it means that I did have some readers.

But silence may also have meant dissent: many of those who viewed me as an apologist for illegal drug use may either quickly have stopped reading the column or were unwilling to dignify my apparently eccentric position with a response; others who disagreed with me, like their counterparts in any society, may have been unable to articulate their complaints or were not moved enough to put them in writing; still others might have been willing to reply but did not have the means to critique my field-work findings or counter my interpretation of the extant scientific literature.

Silence may also have reflected a widespread misinterpretation of the material in the column. This is as likely as any possibility and strikes at the heart of the difficulty in communicating to a heterogeneous Other about their heterogeneous Other on such a contested area as illegal drug use. Several people presented me with widely different interpretations of the column's overall thrust. One said she hoped that what I had written would finally prompt people to stop smoking marijuana. Another asked if I did not fear being assassinated by drug dealers for allegedly exposing their mode of operation. A third expressed concern that my discussion of marijuana cultivation techniques might encourage more people to take up the practice. A fourth showed surprise that I was able to convince *The Vincentian* to publish material so sympathetic to the ganja contra-culture. In a letter to the editor two weeks after the last column appeared, the writer acknowledged my authority while misinterpreting the thrust of my position:

Who is the best person to ask about St. Vincent? Is that person Prime Minister Mitchell, [newspaper columnist] Dr Kenneth John, Dr Adrian Fraser [the extramural tutor at the local branch of the University of the West Indies and a columnist in a rival newspaper], Dr Vivian Child [a medical doctor and local newspaper columnist], or Dr H. Rubenstein?

If one wants to find out about the illegal drug traffic in St. Vincent Dr Rubenstein might be the man to ask. His weekly articles in *The Vincentian* leave one in no doubt that we have a major problem on our hands. (*The Vincentian*, July 8, 1994)

To be sure, multiple interpretations of the same text partly reflect not what I actually wrote but its reception by a readership that differed so much in background, education and class. Combined with the fact that so many Vincentians have "unshakable opinions" about illegal drugs and that jeopardizing one's reputation by appearing to support ganja is more important than empathy with the lifeways of one's Other shows how difficult it is to effect a dialogue of this sort.

Going Public to Shatter the Other's Mirror

Though there are scores of books about doing and writing ethnography, little of this literature deals with the ethnographic audience: who is being addressed and by what means (Allen 1994). There is even less treatment of Other readers, the people whose lifeways the ethnography describes and almost nothing about Third World native readers. In *When They Read What We Write* (Brettell 1993:3), "what we write" is nearly always a specialized monograph that few native readers can understand and "when" is almost always after an accidental discovery that yet another foreign "expert" has produced yet another esoteric misrepresentation of local lifeways. The authors in the collection are said to "consider systematically the relationship between anthropological writers and readers, particularly readers who are informants or who are members of our informants' society and have vested interest in the anthropological text that has been or will be produced" (Brettell 1993:3). The "relationship between anthropological writers and readers" turns out to be remote, passive, narrow and unidirectional. First, it is decidedly Westerncentric with only one paper about readers outside the First World. Secondly, with one exception, a single "weekly regional magazine" article by Jaffe (1993:57), the insignificance of which (at least to Jaffe) is shown by its omission from the volume's bibliography, none of the research described actually was written for "readers who are informants or who are members of our informants' society." Thirdly, all of the encounters are reactive or hesitant: there are no forward-looking or forceful attempts at cultural critique, save in the original published studies, all of which were written mainly for non-native or academic audiences. Fourthly, nearly all of the papers treat the single narrow issue of "when the natives talk back" Brettell (1993:9)—react negatively to what has been written about them—leaving untouched the possibility of a direct and active interchange with the Other in their own surroundings and on their own terms. Likewise, Allen's recent primer on the praxis of "media anthropology," a variable field "that synthesizes aspects of journalism and anthropology for the explicit purpose of sensitizing as many of the Earth's citizens as possible to anthropological or holistic perspectives," is directed only to a First World citizenry (1994:xx).

My "experiment" with ethnography as journalism tried to answer each of these criticisms. Several long-standing considerations, apart from the already mentioned scholarly and moral revulsion to the way ganja was being treated by the Vincentian print media and by the local health care community, prompted me to offer to write the column. First, I had long been frustrated by the lack of knowledge of or access to my published academic writings by Vincentians. This was not for a lack of effort. Like other anthropologists, I had always sent copies of my work to the country's tiny national library, and, when my rural ethnography (Rubenstein 1987) was still in press, I convinced my

publisher to offer a special discount to Vincentian booksellers, hoping that this would make the book more marketable in such a poor country. I was in SVG when the book appeared and, armed with publisher's order forms, visited all of its book retailers to urge them to stock at least a few copies. A single bookstore reluctantly ordered 10 copies. Though the book was advertised in a television interview arranged by the Government Information Service, its high local cost—roughly equivalent to a day's pay for a mid- to senior-level civil servant—meant that these were the only books sold in SVG. I tried to make up for this by donating eight copies to the public library and various government agencies.

My frustration with the book's low circulation was exacerbated when I returned to SVG in 1989 and was told that "some" Leeward Village school teachers were saying that there were "bad things" about the community in the book. All I could find out was that there was some concern about what I had written about sexual behaviour in the village (see Rubenstein 1987:257-272). One of these teachers, who had borrowed the copy I had given to one of his colleagues, told me that he disagreed with some of what I had written but would not (or could not) elaborate on his objections. I was not really surprised by this response since it replicated the experience of other anthropologists (see Brettell 1993) and paralleled other features of my own field experience. Since 1969 there have been vague rumours that I am a CIA agent (despite my Canadian birth, citizenship and residence) sent by Uncle Sam to spy on the people of Leeward Village. Anthropologists have often been accused of spying for their actual or alleged sponsors (see Brettell 1993) and most villagers did not seem to either believe or be affected by such rumours. Some villagers simply retorted "Spy on *what?*" when we sometimes discussed this allegation, expressing their incredulity that there might be anything happening in the community that might remotely interest the American government.

Two years later I participated at an international conference on Vincentian "environmental institutions" by reading a paper describing the history of export crops from the first European settlement of the country in 1719 to the present. Nearly all civic-minded members of the Vincentian élite and many members of the educated upper-middle class were invited to attend. Active participants included the Governor-General, who gave the opening address, the Prime Minister, who delivered a thoughtful keynote presentation, and some of the leading members of the cultural, pedagogical and civil service élites. Though less than one third of my talk dealt with the latest of these cash crops, marijuana, my remarks created a storm. I seem to have touched a raw nerve by mentioning such an unseemly issue (the adaptive role of marijuana production by the most feared and despised segment of Vincentian society—poor, young, uneducated Black men) in such polite company (a wealthy and well-educated, mainly middle-aged and disproportionately female audience of

about 200 people). Indeed, my paper probably did look like an open sore against the backdrop of the many genteel presentations dealing with botanic gardens and forest reserves. I was criticized for wandering from the conference theme and for both “romanticizing” and “exaggerating” the role of marijuana in the country’s economy. None of these assertions struck me as having any validity. The theme of the interdisciplinary conference—“Environmental Institutions”—was so broad that it would have been nearly impossible to stray from it (though several papers tried as hard as they could to do so by making no mention of SVG). “Romanticizing” marijuana consisted of traditional ethnographic description in which ganja was treated as a farm crop, albeit a peculiar one. “Exaggeration” involved surmising that marijuana might be the second most important national export crop following bananas, a suggestion that was based partly on material provided to me by the Special Services Unit, the branch of the Royal SVG Police Force responsible for illegal drug control. Though a couple of Vincentians came to my defence, the differential levels of audience applause made it clear that I had more critics than supporters.

My position was soon vindicated. “[T]he three-part US [Drug Enforcement Agency]-assisted eradication effort in October 1991 and January and February 1992 which destroyed over 2 million plants” (Bureau of International Narcotics Matters 1994:213) in the remote northeastern forested interior of the mainland not only confirmed that my speculations about marijuana production were far too conservative—ganja, not bananas, was the main cash crop in the country—but represented a Rubicon in Vincentian eradication efforts.

My experience at the conference, the ongoing accusations of spying and my frustration about not being able to reach a large Vincentian readership forced me to re-examine the moral implications of my field work. It was time to “go public,” to try to shatter the media’s grotesquely distorted mirror, and act on Hymes’ (1974:50) admonition “to work toward ways in which the knowledge one obtains can be helpful to those from whom it comes. Not to do so is to be ‘neutral’ on the side of the existing structure of domination.”

If they address the public at all, most anthropologists do so only after their academic work has been criticized (Brettell 1993). Together with the all-too-common hiatus of a decade or more between field work and monograph publication, the research in question may have little but historical interest for the society studied. There is some irony here since part of our discipline’s uniqueness is that we have always given so much voice—even when this voice has been muted or reinterpreted by the imperious voice of the researcher—to habitually voiceless and often oppressed Others in Third World societies. But this voice, even when it has been brought from off to centre stage, as in some postmodern ethnography (e.g., Hajj and Rouse 1993; Price 1990), has rarely been allowed to resonate at its source. Appropriated by and reserved for a tiny

First World academic constituency, the Other is forced to eavesdrop on its own way of life.

To be sure, my field situation in SVG may not be shared by most other researchers, many of whom may rightly claim that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate my efforts. (But how many have tried?) Yes, my marriage to a Vincentian has given me citizenship in the country and an unconstrained right to do field work. I have been doing long-term research there for 25 years, SVG has a free press and parliamentary democracy, there is a well-established tradition of social criticism, the present government is much more open to foreign academic research than the previous one and illegal drugs—those exemplars of transnationalism—have been hotly debated in public for over 15 years. But these features only made it easier to go public. The decision to do so was rooted in the traditions of our discipline: an aversion to bad science (whether social or physical) and a compassion for unjustly persecuted peoples. Hymes tells us that “People everywhere today, especially (and rightly) third world peoples, increasingly resist being subjects of inquiry, *especially for purposes not their own*; and anthropologists increasingly find the business of inquiring and knowing about others a source of dilemmas . . .” (1974:5, my italics). My response (part catharsis, part confessional and part intellectual engagement) to these dilemmas was to write to and for a Third World people for purposes that were very much their own. If we wish to answer the charges of obsession with Western academic careerism (the only First World “credit” for producing the column is its discussion in learned journals like this one), indifference to the actual (as opposed to “textual”) fate of Third World peoples or even lack of moral courage (partly rooted in a patronizing worry about distressing one’s Third World hosts), we will have to find new ways to bring anthropology’s insights back to their source. According to Marcus and Fischer:

Twentieth-century social and cultural anthropology has promised its still largely Western readership enlightenment on two fronts. The one has been the salvaging of distinct cultural forms from a process of apparent global Westernization. . . . The other promise of anthropology . . . has been to serve as a form of cultural critique for ourselves. In using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways, anthropology disrupts common sense and makes us re-examine our taken-for-granted assumptions. (1986:1)

If cultural anthropology hopes to address (and redress) the long-standing charge that it is a form of scientific colonialism, then Marcus and Fischer’s decidedly Westerncentric second promise has to be extended so that “our” cultural patterns (including the methods and findings of First World science), together with the results of our ethnographic study of the Other (and/or their Other), are communicated to that Other so that they can reflect self-critically

on their own ways, disrupting their common sense and making them re-examine their taken-for-granted assumptions.

Appendix A

Marijuana and Mental Health

HR: Does smoking weed drive people crazy or give them brain damage? In his Lions Club booklet Dr. Cecil Cyrus argues that: "Daily as one walks the street or visits certain regions of Kingstown [SVG's 12,000 population capital], there is striking evidence of the mental or psychotic disturbances that the drug causes: those weird, unkempt creatures that line the side-path, in a state of semi-consciousness, unable to do the simplest job without pain and effort, victims of marijuana; staring into space, lost, pathetic" (p. 11). He further claims that some of these people may end up in the mental hospital: "... in retrospect, I am now able to identify many victims whom I saw over the years, but whom I did not diagnose because of ignorance about the serious nature of marijuana smoking. Now that I have read extensively on the subject, I can readily identify these poor sufferers who are everywhere in our area. A look inside our mental hospital will tell the tale of the number of psychotics, the victims of this heinous indulgence" (pp. 12-13).

But even if these "weird, unkempt creatures" were observed in the very act of smoking ganja and were really suffering from some "psychotic disturbance" (as opposed to being physically ill, mentally retarded because of a non-drug related birth defect, or simply affecting a life-style distasteful to the Doctor), how could he possibly know that ganja had "caused" their affliction? Or may it be that Dr. Cyrus has such an aversion to ganja that he is quick to label its actual or suspected chronic users as "lost" and "pathetic?" In particular, is the reference to "weird, unkempt creatures"—an unfortunate comment from the most illustrious member of the local medical community—a thinly veiled illusion to persons subscribing to the Rastafarian life style? I base this suggestion on the following case-study he gives in the pamphlet:

"A few weeks ago I had a wonderful experience when a smart-looking, tidily dressed young man consulted me. It took me a while to diagnose him as a patient who consulted me regularly before. . . . In those days he was scruffily dressed, with long platted untidy [i.e., Rastafarian-style] hair. So, in happy alarm I asked "why the transformation?" He replied that he had stopped smoking pot and recovered his personal standards and self-respect, and had *cut his hair*, groomed himself and was now feeling much better. . . . He admitted to being much happier as he no longer attracted the gaze, unsavoury comments and disdain of others" (pp. 11-12).

This alleged relation between ganja use and mental illness is the most problematic behavioural symptom of the "drug problem" in SVG. Time and time again we have been told that the mental hospital is packed with patients who have been rendered mentally ill because of their weed smoking. Ms. Patricia Israel, Administrator of the SVG Family Planning Programme, is quoted as attributing 247 of the 358 admissions to the Mental Health Centre in 1986 to marijuana abuse (*The Vincentian*, 15 April 1988). A news report also stated that 169 of the approximately 264 admissions to the Centre in 1987 were a result of marijuana abuse (*The Vincentian*, 11 November 1988). Louise Boman [someone unconnected with the Centre] even compiled some statistics

which showed that 142 of 169 mental patients who abused marijuana were males between 13-30 years old (*The Vincentian*, 14 July 1989) Likewise, Burton Williams, Minister of Health, "stated that 70 percent of all admissions to the Mental Health Centre in 1991 showed signs of drug abuse of cocaine and marijuana, and alcohol abuse" (*The Vincentian*, 5 January 1992)

Benjamin Disraeli once said that: "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." If these assertions linking ganja to mental illness were true, SVG would be unique in the annals of psychiatric illness. To be sure, some actually or potentially psychotic or schizophrenic individuals are probably made worse by smoking grass and there is reference in the literature to what has been called a "cannabis psychosis." But the nature and extent of such a psychosis is much in question and nothing like the local mental hospital "findings" have ever been convincingly reported elsewhere.

A "look inside our mental hospital," as Dr. Cyrus suggests, will simply not do to ascertain how many of its patients are "victims of this heinous indulgence." A "psychotic disturbance" demands a professional assessment by clinically trained medical personnel and while Dr. Cyrus is reputed to be a skilled surgeon, his crude psychiatric pronouncements have little credibility. I questioned Dr. Debnath, the hospital's lone psychiatrist, about the relation between smoking marijuana and psychiatric illness. He said that he was unaware that such links had been made in local "studies" and questioned their validity here or elsewhere.

Diagnosing drug-related psychoses is a tricky business under much better conditions than exist at the ill equipped and under funded mental hospital. They require (1) detailed life-history data, (2) sophisticated laboratory tests, and (3) comprehensive physical examination by trained personnel. Except for the collection of some case-history data, no other testing is done at the mental hospital. Indeed, drug research is so backward in SVG that we still have to send all confiscated ganja to Trinidad for testing!

My own analysis of admission and diagnostic procedures at the hospital supplemented by interviews of several patients suggest that the allegations of marijuana-induced mental illness are false. Records from which the previously mentioned "statistics" are derived come from the hospital's log books. These list only the name, age, address, diagnosed illness, and type of past or present drug use. As a result, persons who have not used marijuana for several years or have always been casual users are still tabulated as "drug abusers" for "statistical" purposes. Furthermore, correlation is not the same as causation (even if it were, it should be noted that most ganja smokers never end up in the mental hospital) and it is naive in the extreme to infer in a *retrospective* manner that any patient with a history of marijuana (or other drug use for that matter) was rendered mentally ill because (s)he used the drug.

Retrospective research is flawed because it cannot reliably factor out the possible effects of poor diet and nutrition, prior exposure to illness and disease, and the use of other drugs, all of which may have caused the emotional damage attributed to marijuana.

Finally, though statements from mental patients must be treated with caution, of the dozen men I interviewed, only one suggested that marijuana might have caused him to behave in the way that led to his confinement. The others—many of them only occa-

sional weed smokers—argued that marijuana smoking had nothing to do with their having been brought to the mental hospital.

What is the relation between marijuana and mental health in other societies? The literature suggests that already psychotic patients may experience a worsening of their condition and those in remission may see a reoccurrence of their schizophrenia if they use ganja. But its effects on those who are free of mental illness is less clear. One Swedish study . . . found an apparent causal link between heavy hashish (a particularly potent form of cannabis) use and a schizophrenic-like illness in people with little evidence of pre-existing psychotic behavior. But this condition was rare and disappeared within weeks or months following cessation of hashish use. Studies of heavy users in Jamaica, Greece, and Costa Rica have shown no evidence of adverse effects on mental functioning.

There is also no good evidence that chronic marijuana use causes physical brain damage. Heath's [1980] research on marijuana-induced brain damage in monkeys referred to by Dr. Greaves [a local general practitioner] (*The Vincentian*, 6 August 1993) had already been contradicted by earlier studies among human subjects when it was published and was later dismissed as "methodologically flawed" by the U.S. Institute of Medicine [Relman et al. 1982] and other bodies.

— *The Vincentian*, June 3, 1994

Appendix B

The Case For and Against Marijuana

HR: If marijuana is less harmful than tobacco or alcohol, if its proven deleterious effects are few and far between, and if it has several possible therapeutic functions, then why is there so much opposition to it in this country? First, positive reports about it have been overwhelmed by negative ones: stories about "drug abuse" attract more public attention—and sell more newspapers—than stories about drug therapy. Second, the formal health care system has much more influence and respectability than the informal "bush medicine" system and all medical people who have spoken out about the drug have severely condemned its use. Third, those health care persons who believe that the war against marijuana has been unfair, may be reluctant to speak out for fear that this will produce gluttony among the drug's proponents and scorn from their colleagues.

Fourth, ganja use in SVG, associated as it is with Rastafarianism, is a symbol of rebelliousness and alienation. As such it represents a threat to the existing socio-economic status quo and a repudiation of our mainstream British-derived values and mores. How have "respectable" Vincentians reacted to this threat? I will never forget the late Hudson K. Tannis' [the Deputy Prime Minister] bald assertion to me in July 1980—he was the second most powerful politician in the land at the time—that: "I hate to see Rastas!"

But ganja is not only the Rasta symbol par excellence. It is also associated with the most disadvantaged and despised sector of Vincentian society: the Black, rural, under-educated youth. American drug researcher Dr. Norman Zinberg's [1976] statement that "our [United States] drug policy is based on morals, not on health considerations" applies equally to SVG. Current Vincentian drug attitudes and policies are a product of

elite and middle class morality reinforced by United States diplomatic pressure. Marijuana smoking in SVG is very much a matter of class and respectability. Though there are many secret elite and middle class smokers, they form a much smaller class-segment than their “bad boy” lower-class counterparts, most of whom smoke their ganja openly and unselfconsciously. Not unexpectedly, some of the severest critics of marijuana smoking are those not far removed from their own rural lower-class background. For these people the stigmatization of ganja is more than just the condemnation of a drug. It is also a denigration—the etymology of the word speaks for itself—of a large part of Vincentian society. As such it serves two interrelated functions: (1) it is a scapegoating mechanism in which all sorts of social ills (crime, violence, dropping out of school, prostitution, etc.) are seen as championed by those who used to be called “worthless niggers [niggers]” but are now euphemistically referred to as “drug abusers” and (2) it is a means for the nouveau riche to disassociate themselves from their lower-class roots.

Scientific marijuana research has been as controversial and variable as the views held by the lay public. Indeed, the two reinforce each other: scientists are citizens too and conduct their work and interpret the findings of others on the basis of their personal prejudices. In turn, the views of the general public are watered-down or misinterpreted versions of the various scientific positions. The same holds true, I suggest, for those members of the local medical community who have “interpreted” the extant literature to fit their preconceived biases.

In his Lions Club booklet Dr. Cyrus claims that “There are those in our society who think and state that marijuana causes no harm; one man in a very important position was heard to declare publicly that it only makes people happy, and does no harm. This is irresponsible and dangerous dogma.” Equally irresponsible and dangerous is the dogmatic declaration that marijuana is a “heinous indulgence” engaged in by “weird, unkempt creatures.” . . . No responsible researcher would argue that marijuana has been proven to be a completely harmless substance. But this is surely not the same as saying that marijuana causes relatively little harm, especially if smoked in moderation, a position that scores of drug researchers endorse. For two decades now the Vincentian public has been treated to lies, half truths, and hyperbole about marijuana. This bombardment is irresponsible and dangerous because when actual or potential ganja smokers discover that the medical community has been fooling them about marijuana, they laugh off their pronouncements on other drugs, including alcohol, cocaine and heroin.

— *The Vincentian*, June 24, 1994

Notes

1. My distinction between West(ern)/First World and non-West(ern)/Third World may seem anachronistic. After all, are we not living in a deterritorialized world where such contrasts have all but disappeared and is not the illegal drug marijuana that is the subject of this paper an exemplar of transnationality? Claims about the disappearance of the distinction between the West and the Rest are premature for, as Scheper-Hughes (1995:417) has recently argued, “The idea of an anthropology without borders, although it has a progressive ring to it, ignores the reality of the very borders that confront and oppress ‘our’ anthropological subject and encroach on our liberty as well.” In St. Vincent and the Grenadines these “territorial” obstacles are both structural and physical and include (1) an underdeveloped local economy manifested by widespread poverty and restricted access to valued resources (such as educa-

tion and employment) that might allow large-scale upward mobility, (2) a class-biased legal system, (3) high import duties limiting access to First World goods, services and ideas among ordinary people, and (4) increasing restrictions on short- and long-term emigration to First World countries.

2. Though I am told that Third World anthropologists sometimes write for newspapers and other popular outlets in their countries, good documentation on this is hard to come by.
3. During the course of my own long-term field work in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (1969 to the present) civil servants often have voiced the same complaint to me: overseas academics representing various fields are always coming to the country to do research; they often make heavy demands on limited local resources and personnel; they always promise to remit the results of their studies; and they are never heard from after they leave.
4. The nation is composed of the mainland (St. Vincent Island; 344 square km), which contains over 90 percent of the population, and the 44-square-km Grenadines, a chain of tiny islands which stretch from the main island to neighbouring Grenada to the south. The unwieldy name for the country (the longest of any United Nations country) is a recent affectation meant to satisfy the vanity of the country's Prime Minister, a native of one of the Grenadines islands.
5. Nearly all of my research in SVG has taken place in this coastal community of 2300 people on the Caribbean side of the main island and has focussed on how poor villagers (who form over two thirds of the population) eke out a living by peasant cultivation, small-scale commercial fishing, petty-commodity retailing, semi-skilled and unskilled trades and government manual wage-labour (Rubenstein 1987). The seasonal, irregular or petty nature of most of these activities obliges many people to combine several own account and wage-labour activities in a pattern of work Comitas (1973) has called "occupational multiplicity." Marijuana growing and/or selling was added to the repertoire of occupational strategies in the early 1970s.
6. In my Leeward Village census data and informal research in many other rural communities have any generality, then slightly over 50 percent of poor rural males between 18 and 35 years of age are marijuana smokers.
7. Schooling is not compulsory in SVG and many of the Black men I refer to have no more than the equivalent of a North American grade 4- or 5-level education.
8. After quoting Dr. Cyrus' radio statement "Peter" went on to suggest that "Dr. Cyrus has either not done sufficient research or is making assertions which are not supported by facts." "Peter" based this charge on various medical studies, including an Institute of Medicine report (Relman et al. 1982) and a book on marijuana by noted marijuana researcher, Lester Grinspoon (1977), citing or paraphrasing some of their main findings: "... the harm resulting from the use of marijuana is of far lower magnitude than the harm caused by narcotics, alcohol, and other drugs"; "marijuana is not criminogenic"; marijuana does not lead to the use of dangerous drugs; "there is no convincing evidence that it causes personality deterioration"; marijuana has no organic damage potential or long-term symptoms; and marijuana does not lead to physical or mental dependence. "Peter" was also critical of the "unfair education campaign against marijuana" based on "a large body of alarming exaggerations, distortions, and intellectual dishonesty" (*The Vincentian*, March 26, 1982). My own reading of the extant literature (the late 1970s and early 1980s) is that each of these assertions was generally correct.
9. In SVG "addiction" means any use of an illegal substance, the term "drugs" is restricted to illegal or restricted substances (and does not include tobacco or alcohol products), and "drug abuse" is synonymous with "drug use."
10. I took issue with nearly all of these effects, except those uniquely associated with Dr. Cyrus' own practice such as sexual impotence, priapism and mutism (none of which were reported in the scientific literature), using the most recent medical evidence to show that they had either been disproved or remained unproven.

11. When asked to name "good things" about ganja 38 percent of students said there was nothing good about it and 44 percent said they were unaware of anything good about it. Thirteen percent said it was a medicine or other cure for sickness and 3 percent that it was a source of self-employment or means of earning money. Conversely, when asked to name "bad things" about ganja 31 percent said that it caused brain damage; 20 percent that it caused mental illness; 19 percent that it caused physical illness or damage. Only 14 percent claimed that they did not know what was bad about marijuana. When questioned specifically about the main physical effect of smoking ganja, 23 percent said it caused major bodily damage and 20 percent that it caused brain damage. Others who cited negative effects totalled 25 percent; only 11 percent of respondents claimed that there was no effect on the body. Likewise, when asked to name the main effect on the mind or brain of smoking ganja, 43 percent said it caused brain damage; 15 percent said it led to mental illness; and 12 percent said it made people unable to learn, slow thinking or forgetful. Only 5 percent claimed that it did not affect the mind or brain.
12. I chose not to write a sixth piece on yet another tribulation phenomena, *lock up* (being incarcerated for marijuana involvement) because I feared that the limited number of Leeward Villagers in this category might make them easily identifiable both within and without the village.
13. Though casual discussions with Vincentians since 1986 tell me that there are scores if not hundreds of well-educated non-ganja users who generally supported the position I took in the series, none except "Peter" and a couple of others have ever publicly done so.

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