

Raising Cane - Recycling Sweetness and Power in Modern Jamaica © *SRAD/SALISES 2012*

Background brief for VIDEO-DOCUMENTARY

The history of sugar cultivation in Jamaica, on a large export oriented scale, dates back to the 17th Century under the British Empire; when sugar cane cultivation became the main agricultural produce of the island. Historically linked to slavery and dispossession, the sugar industry carries strong cultural memories, especially among rural workers, which have significantly impacted narratives of progress, not only those in Jamaica, but also for development within the entire Caribbean region

In the past 400 years, but especially in the last century the sugar industry has undergone many changes- with the post independence sugar cooperative project being just one of the landmark shifts attempted within the industry. The Sugar Cooperative experiment in Jamaica with its emphasis on the transformation of ownership and the redefinition of the sugar workers role in the industry provides a concrete example of decolonization- that is an attempt to move beyond a the typical form of ownership based on hierarchical principles of management. However, this stunning initiative floundered on the rocks of historical path dependency and political ambivalences.

In seeking to tell the story of “raising cane”, we wish to therefore structure the narrative for this documentary around the epic struggles seeking to reconfigure the history of sweetness and power in the quest for rights, freedom and development. Flash points in this history will be used to explore the intersections of issues articulated by the geo-politics and economics of the sugar industry which were important in the making of modern Jamaica. We will begin the narrative with the flashpoint of 1938, and the role of the labour struggles emanating from Frome, and explore the story of recycling sweetness and power from the vantage point of that epic moment. Given that moment we will then explore, (a) the history of sugar in the context of global spaces and transformations, (b) the struggles for rights, freedom and justice and the emergence of the modern political system and (c) the post independence struggles for refashioning governance and sustainable enterprise development, which will take us to the present business model and its economic and technological opportunity sets in the midst of turbulent global and neo-liberal environment, as well as its social and political potential for refashioning futures.

This project therefore, aims to examine this theme of *recycling sweetness and power* through a visual documentary, developed as a 4 part TV series, (30 minutes per episode), which will highlight the critical flash points and experiences that emerged in “Raising Cane in Modern Jamaica.”

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