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Entangled Standardizing Networks: The Case of GLOBALGAP and Fairtrade in St Vincent's Banana Industry

HAAKON AASPRONG

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Abstract. The governance of international agribusiness has changed dramatically over the past two decades, and an important aspect of that change has been the increasing use of certification systems that cover a wide range of product and production attributes. While certification is often represented by its advocates as a depoliticized and scientific means of governing, some argue that governing by standards is better understood as an ongoing and never-ending process summed up by the term 'standardizing work'. Expanding on this, I suggest that the twin concept of 'standardizing network' may be used to refer to actors and intermediaries engaged in standardizing work with reference to a particular standard. Empirically grounded in the banana industry of the eastern Caribbean island St Vincent – an industry having adopted both GLOBALGAP and Fairtrade certification – the article examines the role of interpretation as standardizing work. Discussing the GLOBALGAP certification process, I suggest that a chain of interpretive authority is at work, which, particularly in the wake of a standard revision, encourages a stricter than necessary operationalization of requirements. Furthermore, I argue that the space opened by the absence of authoritative interpretations may invite an entanglement of standardizing networks and that an appreciation of this sometimes entangled nature of standardizing networks is necessary if we are to attain a fuller understanding of agri-food certification processes in the sphere of production. This is demonstrated empirically through an account of the influence of the Vincentian Fairtrade national farmers' organization on the GLOBALGAP certification process.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, a rapidly growing body of research has been increasingly occupied with understanding the evolving roles of private actors and market-driven approaches in agri-food governance since the 1990s. An important concern has been

Haakon Aasprong is a Ph.D. Research Fellow at the Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway; email: <haakon.aasprong@svt.ntnu.no>. This publication has been generated as part of the author's PhD research and is funded by the NTNU Globalization Research Programme. The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers as well as the editors for valuable comments and suggestions which have helped improve the article.

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to understand the developing role of private governance initiatives such as certification systems addressing a wide range of product and production attributes.[1] Some writers have sought answers in the relationship between public and private regulation pointing to the importance of changing public strategies in dealing with food safety (Marsden et al., 2000), the failure to agree on intergovernmental standards for the agri-food industry (Friedmann, 2005) or, with regard to maximum residue levels and traceability requirements, a strengthening of intergovernmental regulation (Hoffman and Vossenaar, 2007; Henson and Humphrey, 2009). The passage of the UK Food Safety Act 1990 has been cited as a watershed event, which effectively placed responsibility upon food retailers, and ultimately the courts, to decide what would be reasonable checks of food safety in the supply chain (Hobbs and Kerr, 1992). A due diligence requirement has also found its way into EU food law and was a significant driver behind the multiple retailers' development of supply-chain management schemes. The shift to supply-chain management, however, is arguably more than a response to new food safety legislation, representing a new way of performing the economy, whereby businesses utilize standards as one of several means to shape the playing field (Busch, 2007). Private standards, suggest Henson and Humphrey (2010, p. 1629), 'appear to be simultaneously a substitute for inadequate public regulation, a response to increasingly stringent regulation, and a means of 'going beyond' public regulations to provide credible bases for product differentiation'.

Henson and Humphrey (2009) argue that private standards 'go beyond' public regulation in two distinct ways: on the one hand, by allowing for differentiation according to qualities not covered by public regulation and, on the other, by specifying *how* outcomes required by public regulation, mainly with regard to food safety, should be reached. For retailers the former standards are means of realizing *opportunities* inherent in an increased consumer demand for sustainability, including social equity, whereas the latter standards are oriented towards *threats* such as liability and loss of brand capital associated with failure to control risks (see also Henson and Northen, 1998). The latter kind of certification is most often not communicated to consumers, as retailers have found it beneficial to make food safety and baseline environmental and worker health and safety standards collaborative and non-competitive issues (Homer, 2009). Retailer collaboration can lower the costs of standard setting and broaden the base of potential suppliers (International Trade Centre, 2011), it can confer legitimacy upon initiatives, and it can be a way of pre-empting more comprehensive public regulation (McCluskey and Winfree, 2009). Product differentiation standards, meanwhile, have come to play an important role in retailers' competitive strategies. Labels that communicate certification ostensibly have the ability of transforming credence attributes to search attributes, allowing for a broadening of the range of qualities on which competition can centre (Caswell, 1998). Certification labels essentially ask consumers to place their trust in a standard and its accompanying enforcement structures rather than in producer or retailer claims (Homer, 2010).

A certain governance architecture, what Loconto and Busch (2010) have dubbed the 'tripartite standards regime', has evolved as the gold standard for ensuring the integrity of certification systems, involving a separation of powers between standard setters, certification bodies and accreditation bodies. The use of an accredited and purportedly independent third party to certify producers increases scheme credibility while allowing retailers to offset certification expenses to the certified party (Henson and Northen, 1998; Hatanaka et al., 2005; Busch, 2007). Moreover, the prac-

tice is typically depicted in a techno-scientific language that bolsters its status (Bain et al., 2010) and may create an impression of the tripartite standards regime as a depoliticized means of governance. This belies the considerable performative power of standard setters, certifiers, and others involved in standardizing work (Higgins and Larner, 2010). In principle, anyone can develop standards for third-party certification and a tremendous proliferation of such standards has occurred over the past two decades. National and international standards organizations, individual retailers, industry consortia, and NGOs all set standards and sometimes in an overlapping or competing manner. Riisgaard (2009, p. 8) notes how the 'diverging interests of different actors and the role that standards play in how lead-firms are governing value chains make standards highly contested arenas'. The many potential functions of standards for various actors in agricultural value chains (cost-cutting, risk-mitigating, brand-making, door-opening, awareness-raising, etc.) contribute to the flourishing of a market for standards. Several studies have examined the effects of competition in this market place, arguing that parallel initiatives may spur a 'race towards the lowest standards' (Riisgaard, 2009, p. 9) or seeing rivalry as inherently positive in encouraging innovation and an 'ends-over-means' approach (Smith and Fischlein, 2010, p. 520).

When looking at upstream actors in the value chain, the competition perspective may not be as relevant. In buyer-driven commodity chains (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994), producers tend to be far more restricted in choosing standards. While producers may be able to use standards to differentiate their products or to proactively ensure buyers of their commitment to certain practices, certifications are in many cases market entry requirements, turning de jure voluntary standards into de facto mandatory ones (Henson and Reardon, 2005; Busch, 2011). The combination of a risk mitigation standard, now required by several leading European retailers, with a product differentiation standard is increasingly seen as necessary for maintaining access to the most attractive export markets (Homer, 2010). However, to date not much research has explicitly explored, from a producer perspective, the kind of effects that may occur when producers are simultaneously subjected to two or more sets of rules and governance structures. This is not to say that challenges or opportunities associated with multiple certifications have gone entirely unnoticed. A review of research on Fairtrade certification mentions a number of studies suggesting that Fairtrade price premiums and/or organizational structures can enable a transition from conventional to organic farming (Nelson and Pound, 2009). Bain (2010) has documented how the Chilean fresh fruit sector was able to avoid multiple audits by devising its own ChileGAP standard, thereby satisfying the requirements of both the European and US markets. Also relevant is Ouma's (2010) discussion of the friction emanating from attempts to keep in play 'multiple principles of evaluation' in the Kenyan horticulture industry. Ouma (2010, p. 205) notes that the embeddedness of standard implementers in 'specific institutional and environmental contexts and particular business cultures' renders implementation practices less than straightforward. While it is not his main concern, the notion of multiple evaluative principles may well be used to investigate the interrelations of co-implemented standard systems. Such an approach seems well suited for studying how standards, understood as differing conceptualizations of quality and legitimate action, may 'clash'. However, it may also risk leading attention away from how the many requirements of standards can be understood and operationalized differently by variously situated actors and how the co-implementation of standards may compound this matter. A

crucial part, therefore, of any in-depth exploration of the entanglement of certification systems in the sphere of production is an investigation of how the many actors involved in implementation processes *collectively* make sense of standards.

Standardizing Work and Standardizing Networks

Writing with particular reference to private standards initiatives initiated in the South, Tallontire et al. (2011, pp. 429–430, emphasis in original) assert that 'we need new tools to consider *horizontal* governance, i.e. how these new regulatory institutions involve and affect others formally or informally involved in setting, monitoring, improving or implementing such standards at the national level'. I would add that we also need to consider how these actors in turn affect the regulatory institutions. To do so it is necessary to complement what Higgins and Larner (2010, p. 205) describe as 'realist approaches' to standardization with approaches that allow us to see 'standardizing work as an ongoing and never completed process of "making up" objects, subjects and practices of modern governing'. Standardizing work is not the exclusive domain of actors with officially mandated roles, such as standard setters, certifiers and standard implementers, but can include the activities of other stakeholders such as development agencies, state officials, interest groups, businesses and non-certified producers. One significant kind of standardizing work is found in the interpretation of standards. While the professional discourse on certification may play this down, the process of interpreting requirements and adapting them to local conditions is far from straightforward, and this may well have consequences in terms of time and resources invested to ensure compliance.

Expanding on the notion of standardizing work and taking a cue from actor-network theory (Whatmore and Thorne, 2008; Loconto and Busch, 2010; Konefal and Hatanaka, 2011) I find it useful to introduce a twin concept of *standardizing networks*, understood as networks of actors and intermediaries engaged in standardizing work with reference to a particular standard. A standardizing network will include both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of governance (Tallontire et al., 2011), and one may find that standardizing networks overlap, revealing the entanglement of certification systems through actors engaged in standardizing work in two or more networks. Such entanglements are not in and of themselves good or bad but are connections through which standard systems can affect each other and as such are deserving of attention. In the following, I set out to demonstrate the entangled nature of two certification systems – GLOBALGAP and Fairtrade – as they are enacted through their standardizing networks on the island of St Vincent in the Eastern Caribbean. I begin by providing some historical context before describing the two standardizing networks and their key actors. A case is then presented, detailing how the introduction of a revised version of the GLOBALGAP standard in 2008 occasioned a spell of interpretive work in which the national farmers' Fairtrade organization was an influential participant. The subsequent analysis seeks to account for the factors contributing to the entanglement of the two systems.[2]

The Vincentian Banana Industry

St Vincent and the Grenadines is a multi-island state located in the eastern Caribbean, boasting a combined land mass of 389 km^2 and a population of roughly 120 000.

As with Grenada, St Lucia and Dominica – the other Windward Islands of the former British West Indies – export agriculture has been a mainstay of St Vincent's economy since it was colonized in the eighteenth century. The British transformed these islands to sugar colonies, bringing in African slaves and later on indentured servants to cover the plantations' demand for labour. From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, however, bananas quickly rose to prominence as the dominant export crop as the British company Geest committed itself to marketing all export-quality bananas to the UK from the islands. British authorities, while having their doubts about the islands' ability to compete successfully in the banana trade, nonetheless encouraged the development, partly because it was conceived that bananas could afford social and political stability to the islands (Thomson, 1987; Clegg, 2002), but also because Britain's foreign exchange benefited from having a supply of bananas from its own colonies (Grossman, 1994; Welch, 1994). Consequently Windward Island bananas were granted unlimited duty-free access to the UK market (Grossman, 1994; Lake, 1997). In contrast to sugar, the banana readily lent itself to a peasant mode of production, relying heavily on household labour and often confined to small plots on steep slopes in relatively inaccessible areas (Thomson, 1987; Trouillot, 1988). Smallholders embraced this opportunity to the point that the Windward Islands experienced a banana boom in the 1950s, and it has been calculated that in St Vincent the banana share of total exports increased from 5.6% in 1955 to 48.3% in 1959 (Spinelli, 1973). It bears noting that the banana not only represented the prospects of a decent income to the peasantry, but also a sense of autonomy. At a time when many were still relying on employment on plantations, to be a self-sufficient banana farmer signalled a sense of accomplishment that was not reducible to simple economic gain. Farming was an opportunity to be independent and self-made (Grossman, 1998). Indeed, banana farming in the Windward Islands is still valued for the freedom it provides the farmer, despite the many existing regulatory constraints (Slocum, 2006).

Quality Issues and Controls

This is not the place for an account of the changing fortunes of Windward Island bananas or the many challenges faced by the industry and the farmers, but it is worth noting that after the initial boom of the 1950s it became clear that efforts would have to be made to improve the quality of the exported produce. Quality scores were inconsistent and often far below those of 'dollar bananas',[3] causing the British government to threaten to withdraw preferential treatment (Grossman, 1994). Writing of St Vincent, Spinelli (1973, p. 189) notes that 'the heady venture into bananas inevitably brought ill-equipped farmers into the industry'. The lands these farmers had access to were often second-rate and small farm sizes and rugged terrain prevented any significant mechanization. In the early days, farmers hardly used pesticides or inorganic fertilizers and when such inputs were promoted by industry officials in the 1970s, farmers would often be unable to follow recommended application rates (Hubbard et al., 2000). Still, it was believed that research and development along with efforts to educate farmers could render the industry more viable. From the mid-1970s onwards the islands' statutory banana growers' associations (BGAs) to which the farmers were obliged to sell required them on several occasions to make significant changes in harvesting and packing procedures intended to optimize fruit quality (Grossman, 1998). It was not until the early 1990s, when European integration threatened to erode the industry's trade preferences in the UK market, that the

industry began to consider radical steps to improve its competitive standing. This was to be achieved by weeding out the farmers who were unable to deliver a constant supply of top-quality fruit. A programme for restructuring was agreed upon, involving the creation in 1994 of a new company – the Windward Islands Banana Development Company (WIBDECO)[4] – co-owned by the island governments and the BGAs. WIBDECO, in a joint venture with the Ireland-based multinational fruit company Fyffes, was able to acquire Geest's banana division the following year, thereby expanding its operations into shipping and marketing (Lewis, 1998). The company then set about to penetrate the retail sector where the best prices were to be attained. To do so required some wooing of the multiples who were reluctant to source bananas from the Windward Islands precisely because of the quality issues. In 1996, WIBDECO launched its own certification system, the Certified Growers' Programme (CGP), tailored to meet the multiples' requirements (St. Lucia Online, 2000). Certified farmers would receive premium prices in return for adherence to specified agronomic and hygiene practices, the construction of an adequate packing shed and the availability of an access road to the farm (Lewis, 1998; Clissold, 2001). The level of investment required, however, made it difficult for the smallest growers to attain certification (Addy, 1999). Indeed, it was an expressed objective of the restructuring enterprise to create the conditions whereby only a core of progressive and productive growers would remain, and it was believed that these growers could be assisted in increasing their production to the point where they could make up for the reduced total number of active growers (Lewis, 1998; Aasprong, 2012). EU funding, which provided the backbone of the restructuring enterprise, was to be strategically directed at farmers who were certified or who had the potential to become so (Hubbard et al., 2000). For a while it seemed that the CGP was successful in turning things around, but more trouble loomed ahead. The new millennium brought with it reduced banana prices, a series of hurricanes, and continued uncertainty with regard to the future of trade preferences, all contributing to a continued decline in the number of active growers, taking the Windward Islands banana industry to the brink of collapse.

Survival by Certification?

Since the restructuring exercise of the 1990s and the introduction of the CGP in 1996, the fortunes of the Windward Islands banana industry have been tied to its ability to supply the UK multiples with what they want. This was the decade that the UK multiples began in earnest to develop their own food safety codes, responding to the Food Safety Act 1990, which extended their liability for food safety upstream (Hobbs and Kerr, 1992; Henson and Northen, 1998). Shortly after the introduction of the CGP, several UK multiples, along with counterparts on the European continent, began work on what would become the GLOBALGAP standard – a harmonized set of production standards that would render proprietary codes such as the CGP redundant.

The GLOBALGAP Network

GLOBALGAP, short for Global Good Agricultural Practice, is a sector-specific, pre-farm gate standard with an emphasis on food safety, also covering areas such as

environmental protection, traceability, and worker health and safety. The initiative grew out of a retailer consortium established in 1997 under the name EUREP (Euro-Retailer Produce Working Group). While the secretariat was hosted by a German retail institute, the chairman was Nigel Garbutt of the UK food retailer giant Safeway, a man who had previously played a key part in bringing to fruition the Assured Produce Scheme – an industry-wide certification system for domestic producers in the UK (van der Grijp, 2007). The first EUREP protocol, with a scope covering fruits and vegetables, was ready in 1999 and named EUREPGAP (Möller, 1999). The standard was devised as a generic HACCP approach to farming and was comprehensive in scope, covering farm activity from the seed stage to the dispatch of the final product (Campbell, 2005). It has since been revised three times (in 2004, 2007 and 2010) and with the third edition the name of the standard, as well as the organization in charge of it, was changed to GLOBALGAP (the name used hereafter), reflecting the initiative's global ambitions and expanding reach.

Several of the UK multiples sourcing Windward Islands bananas were actively involved in creating GLOBALGAP. Inevitably they must have wanted WIBDECO to adopt the system, and in 2003 WIBDECO began sensitizing farmers about the standard (Government of Saint Lucia, 2003). It was decided that WIBDECO, as a producer group, should apply for what is referred to under GLOBALGAP as an Option 2 certification, designed to make certification feasible for smallholders. With Option 2, the producer group is required to run a quality management system (QMS), carrying out annual internal inspections of all growers covered by the certification. The QMS itself is subject to an annual external audit by an accredited certification body, chosen by the producer group. Producer group certification allows for the centralization of certain tasks, such as generic paper work, easing the burden somewhat on the individual producer. Nonetheless, EUREPGAP represented an even more formidable challenge to the small farmers than what had been the case with the CGP. During a farm inspection, which could be expected to last around four hours, the inspector would verify compliance with more than 250 control points. These were, and still are, divided into three categories: 'major musts' (requiring total compliance), 'minor musts' (95% compliance rate), and 'recommendations' (compliance is not required but recommended) (EUREPGAP, 2001; WIBDECO, 2004). In St Vincent the first grower to obtain GLOBALGAP certification did so in late 2004 but here, as on the other Windward Islands, the process of having farmers certified progressed slowly and by 2010 less than half of approximately 1,000 active banana farmers were GLOBALGAP certified (Daniel, 2010). In my conversations with growers and extension officers, requirements frequently mentioned as troublesome pertained to mandatory training, record keeping, mandatory equipment and infrastructure, and, to a lesser degree, knowledge of 'good agricultural practice'. At the time of fieldwork the team of extension officers under the direction of the St. Vincent Banana Growers' Association spent a significant portion of their time assisting farmers with the certification issues on an individual basis.

The Fairtrade Network

In contrast to GLOBALGAP's market and consumer orientation, Fairtrade certification grew out of a broader fair trade movement concerned with the reduction of poverty and the empowerment of producers in developing countries. More specifically, the initiative aimed to assist smallholders in collectively lifting themselves out of

exploitative and unsustainable trade relationships by creating links with concerned importers and consumers in the North. Early formalized fair trade[5] initiatives were developed by charities, Oxfam being a notable example, in the years following the Second World War (Dankers, 2003). From the late 1980s onwards, several national fair trade labelling schemes began to appear in Europe and, in 1997, these were mainstreamed under Fairtrade International, the umbrella organization formally in charge of the Fairtrade standards[6] (Raynolds, 2000).

The adoption of Fairtrade certification in the Windward Islands banana industry was the outcome of a farmer-led initiative dating back to 1992. The year was a peak year in terms of industry revenue but also a time of uncertainty about the continuation of trade preferences as EU members were negotiating a common banana regime to be implemented under the Single European Market. Seeking to take a proactive role in the face of less favourable terms of trade, the Windward Islands Farmers' Association (WINFA) began to explore whether marketing arrangements could be adjusted to the benefit of the producers. As an umbrella organization for farmers' associations in the Windward Islands, WINFA had realized the value of establishing links with other producer organizations and NGOs internationally.[7] Its network included Christian Aid and Oxfam in Britain, NGOs which sponsored and coordinated a WINFA fact-finding mission to the UK and Belgium in 1992. It was here that WINFA delegates learned of pioneer efforts in the marketing of fairly traded bananas in Europe and were encouraged to pursue that path. Still, a number of obstacles had to be cleared before the first Windward Islands Fairtrade bananas were ready to ship. Importantly, British multiples had to be persuaded to put their weight behind Fairtrade certification, but so did banana farmers and industry officials in the Windward Islands. In lobbying the former, WINFA had great help from its NGO allies, including the Fairtrade Foundation. In St Vincent, the leadership of the Banana Growers' Association was sceptical of Fairtrade, perhaps fearing that a national Fairtrade organization would be a challenger vying for authority and control of the industry (Rose, 2009). Despite local controversy the first shipment of Fairtrade bananas from the Windward Islands arrived in the UK on 25 July 2000 (Liddell, 2000), and Fairtrade exports grew significantly over the succeeding years in response to increased demand (Smith, 2010; Fairtrade Foundation, 2011). By 2009, more than 90% of the Windward Islands banana farmers were registered as Fairtrade producers and were organized in national Fairtrade organizations such as the St Vincent and the Grenadines Fairtrade Organization (SVGFTO), coordinated by WINFA. Of the bananas exported to the UK that same year, 90% were sold on Fairtrade terms suggesting that Fairtrade certification had afforded a new lease of life to the industry (Fairtrade Foundation, 2010).

Fairtrade standards apply to the production as well as to the trade relationship. The trade standard requires, inter alia, that producers are guaranteed a minimum price, calculated to cover the cost of sustainable production. On top of the minimum price, the producer group is guaranteed a premium to facilitate democratically elected community development projects. The producer standard covers social, socio-economic and environmental development, as well as labour conditions. For the farmers this entails restrictions on their use of pesticides, and in particular herbicides, but they must also maintain uncultivated, pesticide-free buffer zones next to streams and roads. The producer organization is required to operate in a democratic, transparent, and non-discriminative manner with an overarching aim to 'promote the environmentally-sustainable social and economic development of the

organization and its members' (FLO, 2009, p. 6). In this manner, the Fairtrade standards encourage farmers to make use of their organization to collectively overcome difficulties of all sorts. The following case demonstrates how the St Vincent and the Grenadines Fairtrade Organization actively sought to assist its members in dealing with a GLOBALGAP control point construed as such a problem.

Beyond the Standard: The Case of the Lunch Rooms

As I arrived in St Vincent for a year of fieldwork in July 2008, banana farmers were coming to grips with the latest version of the GLOBALGAP standard. With this new version the certification system had been renamed from EUREPGAP and Vincentian banana farmers, perhaps intimidated by the name change, perceived the revision to be a major one. Moreover, I learned that farmers were failing the internal inspections at an alarming rate and that this was at least in part because they lacked 'lunch rooms' on the farms.[8] On a number of occasions I overheard farmers voicing their frustration over this and other requirements, but what does the standard actually say? GLOBALGAP version 3, published in August 2007, added 11 new 'major must' and 21 new 'minor must' control points (Cooper and Graffham, 2009). The control points that gave rise to the issue of lunch rooms were two of the new 'minor musts': one dealing with worker welfare and the other with personal hygiene during fruit handling. The worker welfare requirement stipulates that workers should 'have access to clean food storage areas, designated dining areas, hand washing facilities and drinking water' (GLOBALG.A.P., 2007a, AF. 3.5.4.). The hygiene requirement stipulates that 'smoking, eating, chewing and drinking [should be] confined to designated areas segregated from products' (GLOBALG.A.P., 2007a, FV. 5.2.4.). None of these control points call explicitly for a *lunch room* in the sense of a physical structure, but they specify that a *designated area* should be set apart from areas of produce handling and storage. Yet, the idea that GLOBALGAP required lunch rooms seemed to be firmly entrenched in the Vincentian banana industry. If the requirement had been interpreted in a stricter than necessary manner, why was that the case? To answer that question it is necessary to examine two factors that have had a strong bearing on standardizing work in this case. First, when new GLOBALGAP requirements are introduced, an interpretative space is opened that can only be closed when an external audit has taken place and the auditor, with their interpretive authority, has made a judgement. During this period between revision and audit, uncertainties with regard to what is demanded could well have the effect of swaying certification stakeholders into operating with stricter interpretations than would have been necessary. If, as claimed, farmers were failing their internal inspections partly because they lacked lunch rooms, in all probability this was because internal inspectors wanted to avoid any questioning of the integrity of the QMS. Second, when no authoritative interpretation has been established there is more room for other actors with a stake in certification to influence the understanding of requirements. In this case, the SVGFTO did just that by seeking to assist farmers in attaining GLOBALGAP certification by providing materials for the construction of lunch rooms. In the following two sections I examine these propositions in closer detail.

The Chain of Interpretive Authority

Once a revised version of the GLOBALGAP standard is introduced a process is initiated by which key actors' interpretations of the requirements are calibrated.

It is a process whereby multiple layers of control manifest themselves as actors of increasing authority check up on each other. Uncertainties occasioned by new or changed rules will eventually be reduced if not completely eliminated. This case demonstrates, however, that one manner of dealing with uncertainties is to entrench stricter than necessary interpretations, which may divert time and resources that could have been employed more strategically in ensuring standard compliance. At the heart of this process is what I call the 'chain of interpretive authority', emphasizing the involvement of a chain of actors with diminishing privilege in establishing interpretations.

The chain of interpretive authority consists of the GLOBALGAP standard setters, the certification body carrying out the annual external audit,[9] WIBDECO's QMS, industry extension officers, and the farmers. While the GLOBALGAP standard is published online and in theory available to anyone in the chain, it is not expected that farmers, many of whom have little education beyond primary school (Titus et al., 2008),[10] get immersed in standard documents. The farmers rely rather on others, primarily the extension officer in their area, to explain the details of what needs to be done. The extension officers, who each assist about 100–150 farmers (Sylvester Vanloo, personal communication, 1 October 2008), build up a good deal of experience with the standard and share their experiences with one another in weekly meetings. Furthermore, once a farmer has completed an inspection he or she will take the results to the extension officer who, in the case of non-compliances, will assist in making any necessary corrective actions. In this manner, the extension officers stay attuned to the internal inspectors and adjust their own understandings of the requirements when necessary. When a revised standard is introduced the first internal inspections are important 'first tests' of the extension officers' interpretations. However, the internal inspectors may find that their take on the standard differs from that of the external auditor whose interpretive authority outweighs their own (Djama et al., 2011). Consequently, the external audits are awaited with anxious anticipation by all industry stakeholders. Everybody knows that the auditor's judgements will validate or reject interpretations made further down the chain. The authority relations of the chain are rigidly formalized: the certification body must be approved by GLOBALGAP, the WIBDECO QMS is audited by the certification body, and farmers are inspected by the internal inspectors. Additionally, a random sample of farmers and the extension services in their capacity as advisers are also checked during the external audit.[11] While there is fairly frequent communication among the actors of the chain situated in St Vincent, and also between St Vincent and WIBDECO's head office in St Lucia, the crucial delay in the chain is caused by the lapse of time between a standard revision and the external audit. When an external auditor eventually provides a definite interpretation of requirements, time, money and efforts may have been invested in complying with a stricter than necessary interpretation.

The issue of interpretation and the case of the lunch rooms came up when I interviewed the man who did the 2008 external audit on St Vincent. Speaking on one of the final days of his visit, and with reference to what he had seen during farm inspections, he was happy that the internal inspectors had taken a tough approach to farm inspections. They 'should give no mercy', he expressed, explaining that he himself did not want to have to give mercy on the external audit. 'Let the external auditor maybe make a judgment, but the internal auditor get very strict', he concluded (interview, 6 November 2008). The operations manager in charge of the extension team had a somewhat different perspective, worrying that for every farm

with a lunch room the pressure would increase on the remaining farmers, regardless of what GLOBALGAP actually required. 'The thing is', he explained during an interview, 'once you've started [building lunch rooms], it is like you set the standard' (Sylvester Vanloo, interview, 15 May 2009).

The external auditor had left no doubt that the lunch rooms, while nice additions to the farms, were not required by GLOBALGAP:

> 'You take eating facilities. I'm quite impressed with what they've done here, on this island… Had they approached it in a more simple fashion I would almost certainly have been quite happy with that as well. If you've got three people working, you don't need a great big eating facility. You can always have three chairs and a sunshade or umbrella. That's it really' (interview, 6 November 2008).

The view was echoed by WIBDECO's GLOBALGAP scheme manager who proclaimed, while speaking to farmers in St Vincent a few months later, that the lunch rooms were not required by GLOBALGAP but nonetheless a positive step for the industry, which exemplified how St Vincent on occasion went 'beyond the standard'. It seems, however, that going beyond the standard was not a deliberate choice, but the outcome of strict internal inspections. This was operations manager's opinion and in his view the damage had already been done by the time the external audit took place. At that point there seemed to be no turning back, a momentum having been created that would not be stopped easily. To understand why, we must expand our view and look at the role played by the SVGFTO.

The SVGFTO and GLOBALGAP

With the growing popularity of Fairtrade among British consumers and retailer insistence on GLOBAGAP certification, the two certification systems were, at the time of fieldwork, both essentially acting as market entry requirements for Windward Islands bananas to the UK. Consequently, the SVGFTO's pursuance of Fairtrade premium financed projects hinged on whether the Fairtrade farmers were also GLOBALGAP certified. Were they not, these farmers' bananas, grown in compliance with Fairtrade requirements, would likely end up being sold as conventional bananas on the regional market. Thus, the SVGFTO had a direct interest in facilitating GLOBALGAP certification. To this end the monthly meetings in the 16 local Fairtrade groups were sometimes used for informational and educational purposes. The meetings provided a convenient means for extension officers to pass information to farmers on a regular basis. From time to time the groups would also be used for workshops on topics such as record keeping, health and hygiene, first aid and pesticides – all rendered necessary by GLOBALGAP. The SVGFTO provided an organizational structure that could be utilized in the task of bringing hundreds of farmers 'up to standard'. Nevertheless, information given about GLOBALGAP in regular group meetings was often ad hoc and on several occasions led to heated arguments, which perhaps diminished the value of the meetings as a source of unambiguous guidance.

The SVGFTO's involvement with lunch rooms did not confine itself to group meetings alone. On the national level the National Fairtrade Committee, consisting of an elected representative from each group, had decided to use from the Fairtrade premium to assist farmers with GLOBALGAP certification. Allocations were made in 2008 to assist farmers with infrastructure necessary for certification, including pit

toilets, shed improvements and lunch rooms. That assistance had contributed to the construction of the lunch rooms that had so impressed the external auditor. According to the work plan presented to the SVGFTO general assembly in 2009, a total of approximately XCD52,000 (Eastern Caribbean dollars) (USD19,000) was again allocated for these measures that year. The SVGFTO had been in the process of securing significantly more money, however, through external funding from the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Social Investment Fund (SVGSIF), a development programme largely funded by the EU. In March 2009, four months after the external audit, Vincentian media could report that the SVGSIF was about to sign a contract with the SVGFTO 'for the building of 282 ventilated improved pit toilets and 519 lunch facilities' throughout the island (NBC Radio News, 2009). With the expressed goal of assisting 645 Fairtrade farmers in attaining GLOBALGAP certification the SVGSIF committed a total of XCD815,000 (USD300,000) to the project – a sum that reportedly would be met by an equal investment from SVGFTO (NBC Radio News, 2009). The money would be used to provide necessary building materials to Fairtrade farmers actively seeking GLOBALGAP certification. With this development the process of building lunch rooms gained momentum as the whole organizational apparatus of the SVGFTO was employed to tackle logistical challenges, comply with procedural requirements and ensure that the targets were met.

The sourcing of external funds had committed the SVGFTO to a course of action and made it very difficult to raise the question of whether the 519 lunch rooms were strictly speaking necessary. In fairness, the lunch rooms, while sometimes described as elaborate, were really very simple expansions to existing packing sheds. But was there ever a point in time when a more cost effective 'three chairs and a sunshade' solution was considered? Although I was not privy to many of the meetings and discussions on the national level, I know that the National Fairtrade Committee, following the external audit, had been made aware that other and simpler options were acceptable alternatives to lunch rooms. In fact, the National Fairtrade Committee chairman himself, who was also an extension officer, stressed in a meeting the month after the audit that a few chairs in a sheltered and bordered off space would have been sufficient for compliance. Yet, once the external audit had afforded clarification with regard to what GLOBALGAP actually demanded, the SVGFTO had already established the practice of assisting farmers with materials and had applied for funds to scale up that assistance. Farmers who had seen lunch rooms appear on other farms were expecting to benefit themselves. From this I infer that the lunchroom initiative continued because it had considerable support from the farmers. Yet, as the distribution of materials progressed, one of the chief barriers to meeting the construction targets was the inability or reluctance of many recipients of materials to build the actual structures or to pay someone to do the work. Some did not even collect their materials from the hardware store. The project coordinators warned that foot-dragging threatened to bring the whole project to an early end, and they had to spend a lot of time doing follow-ups of recipients to ensure that they did their part. In the end, however, only a total of 282 lunch rooms were constructed (Ellisia Tesheira, personal communication, 3 May 2011).[12]

The Entanglement of Certification Systems

The case of the lunch rooms demonstrates nicely the ongoing and never-finished process of standardizing work, but it also demonstrates how certification systems

can entangle through their standardizing networks. Some further remarks should be made in this respect focusing on the features of the systems that seem to provoke entanglement. It has been noted that the SVGFTO effectively found itself a stakeholder in GLOBALGAP certification when both Fairtrade and GLOBALGAP had become market entry requirements for Vincentian bananas to the UK and, consequently, the continued influx of a Fairtrade premium relied on farmers having both certifications. Seeking to assist farmers with lunch rooms was in this sense a measure of self preservation for the SVGFTO. Yet, when the organization took this action it was also very much in line with the intent of the Fairtrade standards, which place a great deal of weight on the small producer organization's potential for empowering and facilitating the social and economic development of its members (FLO, 2009). Based on the premise that the producer group plays a key role in educating and raising awareness among its members, the Fairtrade standards are directed at the producer group rather than at the individual farmer. An integral part of the Fairtrade standards therefore deals with organizational structures and practices intended to 'maximise the participation of members and their sense of ownership over the organization' (FLO, 2009, p. 7). Possibly because of the strong emphasis on the organization, farmers in St Vincent in many cases do not distinguish between the Fairtrade and the SVGFTO. Indeed, the term 'Fairtrade' is typically used to refer to the SVGFTO, rather than the certification system, the international organization or the larger social movement. With GLOBALGAP the situation is very different. A producer group, as defined by GLOBALGAP Option 2 certification, is a different kind of entity altogether, its primary function being the operation of the QMS (GLOBALG.A.P., 2007b). While this does not preclude the producer group from assuming wider responsibilities with regard to its members, it is evident that GLOBALGAP enacts the producer organization as a risk mitigation tool rather than as a potential agent of producer empowerment. The fact that the Vincentian farmers' producer group for the purposes of GLOBAGAP certification is WIBDECO reinforces a perception among farmers of GLOBALGAP as an external force exerted upon them, much like other demands of the market. WIBDECO is based in St Lucia and has since its inception wielded considerable power over the farmers as a standard setter and the sole link to the UK market. As such, many farmers view the company with suspicion and it is accused regularly of having concern only for its own profits and not for farmers' well-being. Its presence in St Vincent is limited as it falls upon the extension officers to advise farmers on the GLOBALGAP standard. In sum, where Fairtrade is manifested through the SVGFTO and has a continuous presence in farmers' lives, GLOBALGAP is manifested only occasionally through the WIBDECO QMS in a context of control. Where Fairtrade invites farmers to participate through the SVGFTO, the GLOBALGAP standard reaches the farmer through extension officers as directives from WIBDECO – a removed gatekeeper to the market. The glaring absence in St Vincent of a GLOBALGAP equivalent of the SVGFTO, i.e. a visible producer organization manifesting the standard and taking a lead in standardizing work, invites the SVGFTO to assume that function. The frequent discussions of GLOBALGAP requirements in Fairtrade group meetings, the use of Fairtrade groups as a basis for conducting GLOBALGAP workshops, and the use of Fairtrade premium to assist farmers with GLOBLAGAP certification are all indicators of the entangled nature of the two certification systems. The SVGFTO, it appears, has become a central actor in the GLOBALGAP standardizing network.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have demonstrated two important features of standardizing work in the Vincentian banana industry. The first feature pertains to the significance of interpretation as a kind of standardizing work and the possible ramifications of action taken in the absence of authoritative interpretations. The case of the lunch rooms shows how a chain of interpretive authority is at work where each actor in the chain is in a position to validate or refute interpretations made closer to the farm setting. In this chain the grower is expected to pay heed to the advice of the extension officer, the extension officer must accept the interpretations of the internal inspector, and the internal inspector is subject to corrections from the external auditor. I argue that in the time following a revision of the GLOBALGAP standard there is a tendency that internal inspectors interpret requirements in a stricter than necessary manner so as to avoid questioning of the integrity of the QMS in the subsequent external audit. As a consequence, time and resources invested in ensuring standard compliance may be deployed in a less than optimal manner while interpretations are being calibrated.

The second feature demonstrated is the capacity of certification systems to entangle where actors from one standardizing network have a stake in another network and consequently seek to influence the standardizing work in it. This is the case in St Vincent where the SVGFTO has found that Fairtrade sales hinge on whether Fairtrade farmers are also GLOBALGAP certified, both certifications having become market entry requirements in the UK retail market. As a producer group actively seeking its members' participation, the SVGFTO was well situated to act on behalf of the Fairtrade farmers and the Fairtrade premium gave it the financial capacity to do so. Moreover, the organization's endeavours to benefit its members contrasted sharply with the more control-oriented focus of WIBDECO. The SVGFTO's provision of assistance made it easier for farmers to see the lunch rooms as a potential boon and not just a burden; however, it also had the effect of reinforcing prevailing strict interpretations. The National Fairtrade Committee realized, following the external audit, that the building of lunch rooms was a somewhat 'elaborate' way of ensuring compliance but found itself committed to a course of action. With the benefit of hindsight one may well question the wisdom of this approach. However, the more important message is that the delay in calibrating interpretations created a window of opportunity for the SVGFTO to become involved in standardizing work and influence the farmers' understanding of the standard.

The material from St Vincent demonstrates the usefulness of standardizing networks as a concept, reminding the analyst of the often broad participation in standardizing work. As such it is a methodological pointer, guiding the researcher concerned with standard implementation processes, as well as a means of making sense of the often less than straightforward nature of those processes. Because standardizing networks may well entangle, the concept allows us to appreciate how multiple certification systems in the sphere of production can influence and be influenced by one another. Despite the now commonplace scenario of co-implementation of certification systems, this is a trend that has received little scholarly attention. Research on the impact of agri-food certification systems is a rapidly evolving field of study reflecting the tremendous societal importance of certification as governmental technology. However, to reach a fuller understanding of certification as a mode of governance, researchers need to be critical of techno-scientific discourses, as well as realist approaches to standardization. To these should be added meticulous studies

of sometimes entangled standardizing networks and the standardizing work going on within them.

Notes

1. I use the term 'certification system' to refer to the totality of a 'standard' and a 'certification scheme', the latter term referring to the rules that guide the use of certification as an enforcement structure.
2. The article draws on qualitative data collected during a year of field research in St Vincent from July 2008 to August 2009. Of particular importance is participant observation at a range of meetings within the framework of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Fairtrade Organization, including 27 meetings in four separate local groups, but also national- and zonal-level meetings and workshops. Thirty-three farmers were chosen for in-depth interviews of about an hour on average and 28 in-depth interviews of similar length were conducted with industry officials and other key figures. Data are also drawn from participant observation of extension work, including extension service meetings, and both internal and external GLOBALGAP farm inspections. Finally, informal conversations with farmers in the farm setting as well as participation in farm work provided a ground-level perspective on certification requirements.
3. The term refers to bananas from Latin American plantations owned by US multinationals, the trade of which was carried out in US dollars. For the historical background on the emergence of the Latin American/US and the Caribbean/European commodity systems in the global banana trade, see Raynolds (2003).
4. WIBDECO changed its name to Winfresh in 2010, emphasizing a diversification away from bananas. Because the material presented here is from the period prior to that name change I use the old name throughout the article.
5. Note the distinction between 'Fairtrade' and 'fair trade', the former referring to the certification system and the latter to the idea and the movement.
6. The organization was originally named Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International, changing its name to Fairtrade International in 2011.
7. As a civil society organization, WINFA should not be confused with the statutory banana growers' associations buying bananas from farmers and selling to WIBDECO. WINFA has been heavily involved in championing the cause of Windward Island banana farmers since 1992, but the organization also addresses the situation of Caribbean farmers and rural communities more generally, advocating on issues such as food security, gender equity and sustainability <http://www.winfacaribbean.org/index.php/about-us>.
8. The results of farm inspections being confidential, I was unable to verify this through inspection reports.
9. To my knowledge the same European company had been contracted by WIBDECO each time, possibly because there is no GLOBALGAP accredited certification body in the Caribbean.
10. Titus et al.'s (2008) survey of 194 farmers in St Vincent found that 66.5% had received only primary education.
11. In practical terms, this means that the external auditor inspects a sample of producers not smaller than the square root of the total number of GLOBALGAP registered producers. The auditor also verifies documentation establishing the extension officers' competence, training, and qualifications.
12. It may be that a sizeable number of farmers who were set to receive assistance left the banana industry during the period that the project ran.

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