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## **CARIBBEAN PEASANTS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY: POPULAR RESISTANCE TO THE PRIVATIZATION OF COMMUNAL LAND IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In Caribbean societies with the legacy of plantation production, land ownership continues to be critical in the definition of social and economic survival. The strategy of communal land institutions as late as the 1990s, continues to provide economic survival to marginal and small-scale farmers who must survive in a global economy where their agricultural exports are declining in value—at a time when international development agencies advocate land privatization and reductions in spending for social programs. This article traces the origins of communal land in the Caribbean and examines the successful response of peasant resistance to a 1986 registration project sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This project attempted to privatize communal land in St. Lucia on the assumption that by establishing an efficient land market based on freehold the problems of under capitalization associated with the communal land sector could be corrected and that export production could be increased. The research evidence found that the communal land sector, far from being anachronistic and unproductive, is very dynamic and integrated into the larger economy. Contrary to being a liability to economic performance in the global marketplace, the communal land institution, by providing economic and social resources through informal networks, buffers the society from adverse global market changes.

# **CARIBBEAN PEASANTS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY: POPULAR RESISTANCE TO THE PRIVATIZATION OF COMMUNAL LAND IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND**

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## **1. Introduction**

In Caribbean societies with the legacy of plantation production facilitated by forced African labor, land ownership was, and continues to be critical in the definition of social, economic, and political freedom. Following the termination of formal slavery, the struggle of displaced Africans, the majority in all slave plantation societies in the Caribbean, to redefine themselves from captive labor to free economic agents would largely be fought in an arena where owning land, and access to land, signified success and true freedom. Various strategies were employed.

As late as the 1990s the strategy of communal land institutions continues to provide economic freedom and survival to marginal and small-scale farmers who must survive in a global economy where their agricultural exports are declining in value. Additionally, they faced stringent conditions from international development agencies, such as the World Bank and USAID, which advocated land privatization and reductions in spending for social programs. This article examines the role of communal land in sustaining the relative economic freedom of marginal and small-scale farmers, despite the current international pressure to dismantle communal land. It examines the combination of historical, social, and political circumstances which permit economically marginal small farmers in the developing world to define a sphere of existence that allows them fundamental benefits in the face of the globally dominant ideology of neoliberalism which has left so many destitute. It argues that communal land resources, the social networks, and informal institutions which sustain them provide an alternative analytical perspective to understand the conditions that have allowed such a microeconomy to survive in a global marketplace and how they may articulate options to navigate the challenges ahead. To accomplish this objective, the current social and economic significance of communal land in one island, St. Lucia, is discussed as an example where the struggle for economic survival, in an increasingly dominant global economy, continues to be based on land ownership. That experience is directly linked to the evolution of communal land in the region and the struggle for economic independence from the period following emancipation into the rather different economic circumstances of the 1990s.

The article concludes with some observations about the role of communal land in future economic development.

## 2. The Caribbean Region in a Global Economy

Caribbean economies currently face some of the same basic economic problems which plague other developing countries. How do countries, in this case micro states, which rely on the export of a few primary agricultural and mineral products as the main source of foreign exchange generate growth and economic development in a global economy where, on the one hand, free trade is advocated, and, on the other hand, developed countries form protectionist economic associations which impose quotas and other trade barriers to restrict imports? Indeed, the current disagreement over bananas between the United States, the European Union (EU), and banana producing islands over access to the EU market is the latest in a series of such incidents.

During the 1980s, most Caribbean countries experienced dramatically worsening social and economic conditions and rising debt burdens (McAfee, 1991). The industrial economies and multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), urged Caribbean countries to undertake social and economic changes similar to those which were being imposed on other indebted countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. These structural adjustment programs (SAPs), as they were widely known, were designed to improve export statistics and credit ratings. These programs were expected to increase investment levels and to stimulate growth while generating benefits that would trickle-down to the majority.

The ability of export-led growth models and policies of market liberalization to encourage development in the Caribbean region is questionable (Deere et al., 1990). The successful application of these models generally relies on the injection of foreign capital lured by cheap labor, duty free zones, and tax holidays. In these models, there is little opportunity for states to accrue resources for investment in domestic projects such as infrastructural development, education, and social services. The employment generated tends to be for low-paying, unskilled jobs with limited multiplier effects in the economy. Additionally, such a strategy, as implemented by international development agencies, has invariably been accompanied by high social costs such as reductions in expenditures on education and health programs—as is exemplified by the case of Jamaica. In the Caribbean region, the impact of these programs has resulted in social and economic hardship, and quite often they have also resulted in political upheavals (McAfee, 1991; Antrobus, 1989; Worrell, 1989).

Although St. Lucia, unlike many of its neighbors, was enjoying positive economic growth rates in the mid-1980s, 6.0 percent in 1985 and 5.3 percent in 1986, and had a debt burden that was declared manageable (St. Lucia, 1987), a

land registration and titling project (LRTP) was undertaken in 1986 as part of an initial phase of a wider agricultural SAP sponsored by the USAID. The LRTP was to clarify and privatize land titles, establish a modern land registry, and thereby facilitate the efficient operation of the land market. The long-term objective of the registration and titling project was to increase export crop production through the intensification and expansion of banana producing areas and to facilitate crop diversification (USAID, 1983).

At the time of the implementation of the LRTP, the banana industry was vibrant; and the British Government, in the following year, 1987, reaffirmed preferential trading agreements through Protocol Four of the Lomé Convention. However, the decision to expand and intensify banana production, in retrospect, was questionable as a sustainable growth strategy. State planners were aware that in 1992 the preferential trading agreements with the United Kingdom which had assured protected access to the British market would be in jeopardy with the consolidation of the EU.

In St. Lucia, the risks and instability associated with the export of primary agricultural commodities are well-known. The country has gone through a period of sugar cultivation, followed by banana cultivation, and is once again searching for a new crop. In the past this strategy has enjoyed some success because of the provision of guaranteed markets and marketing linkages to the global economy. These supports have been facilitated by the colonial and post-colonial association with the United Kingdom. As this relationship becomes increasingly weaker, the country is challenged to identify and develop a viable niche for itself in the global economy. The prospects are grim. The decision to expand banana production under these circumstances was, and continues to be, debatable.

The land privatization component of the project was required on the premise that family land tenure, later reported in the 1986 Agricultural Census as approximately 45 percent of all agricultural land parcels,<sup>1</sup> inhibited productivity and increased production (USAID 1983). At the end of the project, however, although all holdings were registered in the new registry, family land was not converted into freehold titles. Tenure conversions which were to be undertaken in the field never materialized. This was due in part to administrative problems and in part to resistance of the privatization component of the project by family land holders. The failure to clarify which body of law should take precedence in adjudicating titles, the Land Registration and the Land Adjudication Acts which were created in 1984 to facilitate the LRTP or the Civil Code which recognizes family land and existed prior to these acts, led to administrative difficulties.<sup>2</sup>

Of greater significance, however, was the fact that claimants to family land chose not to participate in the voluntary process. At the end of the project, a report from the Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, esti-

mated that one-third parcels (agricultural and non-agricultural) were adjudicated as family land. The report concluded that few family land parcels were partitioned or had their ownership individualized through the LRTP (LTC, Volume 5, 1988, p. 2). The response to the tenure conversion objectives of the land registration and titling project gave pause to further implementation of the agricultural SAP and raised some fundamental questions about the development path to be followed. The puzzle of rational farmers resisting participation in a program that is presumably to their benefit prompts a reconsideration of the utility of family land, the role that multiple tenure patterns might play within an internationalized economy, as well as a reconsideration of some of the tenets underlying SAPs.

Many Third World governments, mostly in conjunction with international aid agencies, have undertaken the conversion and regularization of communal land tenure systems into freehold tenure systems as a step towards the implementation of export-led strategies to achieve development. The arguments for the conversion of communal titles have generally been expressed as a need to improve the rational use of land through the creation of individual titles that facilitate active land markets and, consequently, the efficient allocation of resources (USAID, 1983). In contrast, an "older" strategy in these economies is to hold land in common among communities or families as a security mechanism to buffer individuals against the uncontrollable forces of markets and adverse government policy (Woodman, 1988; Dujon, unpublished master's thesis, 1989). In St. Lucia and other Caribbean countries, this is not due to atavistic traditions but a long history of coping with land scarcity, high levels of unemployment, and unstable agricultural markets.

The existence of the communal land variant found in the Caribbean region provides a new and challenging opportunity to re-examine the communal land institution within the context of development models. Unlike more traditional forms of communal land tenure in other developing regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, which evolved prior to contact with capitalist forms of production, family land evolved within the context of market forms of production and an export-led plantation growth model with essential linkages to an international economy.

The larger work on which this research is based makes a case for the reconsideration of communal tenure as an essential part of development strategies that seek to encourage the beneficial and absorptive capacities of peasant forms of organization. It reveals an arena in which local actors, in the form of small farmers, can resist dominant world pressures to privatize agricultural land, to force the state to re-think the wisdom of eliminating family land, and to consider more eclectic and more appropriate strategies for development. In developing regions where communal land exists, these features are likely to assume increasing economic significance to peasant farming sectors as global

economic activities intensify the income gap between the haves and have-nots.

To understand the source of this successful resistance and the tenacity with which small farmers guard their land ownership rights, and those of future generations, it is necessary to understand the circumstances under which communal land evolved and the circumstances of a period covering more than 150 years that re-affirm the equation of land ownership and relative economic freedom.

### **3. Background on St. Lucia**

St. Lucia is located near the southern end of the Caribbean chain, between Martinique to the north and St. Vincent to its south. It is 238 square miles in area (616 km<sup>2</sup>.) and it has a population of 160,000 people. The official language is English; but Patwa, a French creole, is the predominant language in the rural sector. In 1979 the island gained independence and continues to be part of the British Commonwealth. The country is primarily an agricultural economy based on the export of bananas. In 1989 export of agricultural products accounted for approximately 18 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP), followed by tourism, 11 percent, and manufacturing, 8 percent (St. Lucia, 1991). On average banana exports account for at least 95 percent of the total agricultural exports—calculated for the years 1986 to 1994. In 1994 banana exports represented 97 percent of the total agricultural exports.<sup>3</sup> Communal forms of land tenure, known as family land in the region, is a long-standing element of the St. Lucian agricultural landscape and other islands, such as Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent, Barbados, Jamaica and Guyana. Communal ownership is based on lineage to the original purchasers of the land. This grouping of claimants is, therefore, different from that based on membership in a tribe or ethnic group, which dates to pre-capitalist periods.

Family land creation results from the process of succession of property on the death of a member and the development of a system by which control or exploitation are shared among several relatives or managed by one or more of them on behalf of the rest. Family land conforms to the class of common property resources in which access is controlled, and outsiders may be excluded. As a peasant form of organization designed to allocate resources, family land embodies within its social and economic structure a response to the opportunities and constraints of the wider society within which it is located. The rules of the institution are maintained by social obligations and sanctions.

The sale of any portion of the land to non-family members requires the consent of the whole family. This limits the ability of family land to enter the open market. Members within families may, however, sell their rights to other relatives within the group. As a result of the difficulty of family land entering the market, such rights are, for practical purposes, inalienable. This affords the

security of a subsistence to both members on the economic margins and those with more permanent employment outside of the agricultural sector (Dujon, unpublished master's thesis, 1989).

The economic dislocation caused by the termination of the traditional preferential access for bananas to the United Kingdom will require experimentation and the taking of risks. State programs to sustain the economy during the transition period between the loss of protected trade and the establishment of an alternative development strategy are far from defined. Under these conditions family land provides stability, it mitigates risk and provides a buffer against adverse economic circumstances, particularly for the marginal classes. Additionally, communal land cultivators as active participants in export crop production, and as key participants in the domestic market for food production, fulfill a critical function in the development process. To the extent that this type of tenure institution can shield marginal groups from adverse economic situations and demonstrates the potential to become actively involved in food and export crop production, it offers an arena where both marginal class actors and state policy makers may create a development path that challenges the current neoclassical dogma.

#### **4. Contested Ground in Caribbean History**

The Caribbean region once encompassed some of the most lucrative colonies in the world. During the eighteenth century, French St. Domingue (today Haiti) and the English colony of Jamaica were considered the richest among them in terms of yields accruing to the metropolis rather than the accumulation of wealth or capital within the colonies themselves (Mintz, 1974, p. 44). By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the British colonies were no longer as profitable as they had once been. Sugar could be produced more cheaply in other British colonies in the East (India), and the lobbying efforts of these interests along with the efforts of abolitionists initiated the withdrawal of economic and legal support from slave plantation colonies in the Caribbean. This withdrawal began with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and climaxed with the abolition of slavery itself in 1834 (Williams, 1944).

Although emancipation appeared to be a revolutionary step, it was systematically undermined by the very institution that had initiated it (Dujon, 1989; Cell, 1970; Swifen, 1970). British policy towards the Caribbean was ambivalent. Although the declaration of emancipation seemed to favor the slaves, the design and implementation of the Act itself worked against the newly freed laboring class. The planters (and absentee landlords), who were white Europeans, could continue to use the legal and social administrative structures in the colonies to actively pursue their class interests. This they achieved by regulating the activities of the newly freed laboring population. The free labor class

resisted this domination by developing survival strategies that gave them leverage to negotiate the conditions of work. Such strategies mainly included the acquisition of land to supplement their incomes.

The British colonial administrative apparatus abandoned the planters in their efforts to compete in the international sugar trade, but it facilitated their interests within their domestic economies. The Emancipation Bill was drafted in such a way that its structure allowed the planter class in the various colonies to design final versions for implementation with no more than an understanding that the planter/administrators would remain within the broad definition of the Bill. Planters passed legislation which required ex-slaves to pay rent for lodging and garden plots which they had occupied during slavery. New and higher property qualifications were instituted to keep blacks and mulattos from the voters' list. Squatting on Crown (State) Lands was made illegal and private land was sold in large lots and at high prices. One historian's assessment of the implementation of the Bill best sums up the result. He states succinctly, "there was no balance in West-Indian governments nor was any intended. The opportunities for corruption were widespread because the system was founded on mutual trust of members of the colonial elite who managed it in their own interests" (Green, 1976, p. 74).

Land availability and access became pivotal issues in the new society. It was the critical variable that determined how planters and labor pursued their interests and redefined their association relative to each other. On the one hand, planters tried to keep land out of the possession of ex-slaves to control the labor supply. For ex-slaves, on the other hand, there were limited avenues for employment away from the plantations and limited avenues for establishing political and social opportunity that allowed an improvement in status upon being free of slavery. Land acquisition was the single most important resource that could alter this predicament. In islands where the population to land ratio was high, planters' efforts were largely successful in keeping land out of the possession of laborers. In other territories where the population was low, ex-slaves squatted illegally or pooled their resources to buy large lots.

The formation of peasants took place in the face of severe planter resistance. As part of the strategy to retain a pool of cheap labor, planters generally refused to sell land to former slaves or sold it in parcels too large and too expensive for ex-slaves to afford. It is within this antagonistic context leading up to emancipation and immediately following it that freed slaves developed a variety of response strategies for survival. These included illegal squatting on lands, the strengthening of subsistence production, the development of family land tenure, and the formation of a peasantry (Marshall, 1969; Paget, 1945).

These workers, although commonly referred to as peasants in the Caribbean, do not adhere to the definition of the traditional peasantry and may be considered semi-proletarian. They supplied most plantation labor; yet they en-



gaged in subsistence production and participated in a domestic food market. Marshall's definition of West-Indian peasantries highlights their special characteristics. They are recent in origin (since 1834), their growth in terms of acreage and numbers were controlled, and they existed alongside and in conflict with the plantation. Finally, they did not depend exclusively on soil for income and subsistence (Marshall, 1969, p. 253).

#### **4. 1. Family Land in St. Lucia**

The early development of the rural laboring class and family land tenure in St. Lucia, compared to other Caribbean islands, is in part an outcome of the opportunities provided by an unstable and backward economy in the period prior to 1814 when the British took over the Island. On the other hand, the recognition of family land tenure in the legal system is an outcome of the French influence on the St. Lucian Civil Code. Although St. Lucia ended up as a British colony from 1814 onwards, the Island's Civil Code was not converted to British Common Law. The St. Lucian Civil Code is not based on primogeniture as is British Common Law. This provided the legal parameters within which this communal institution could survive.

The St. Lucian Code prescribes equal inheritance for all children in relation to the rules on intestate succession. Under this rubric the family land institution, which adheres to equal inheritance for all children, has survived as part of the formal agrarian land system. Although family land is a Caribbean-wide phenomenon born out of the characteristics of the island economies that shared structural features of plantation economies (Acosta and Casimir, 1985), the peculiar nature of the Civil Code in St. Lucia helps to account for the extent, persistence, and characteristics of the system in this former British colony.

The periods of instability and warfare that ensued during the European conflict over possession of the Island prior to 1814 provided openings for the development of maroon settlements and an incipient peasantry by slaves who took advantage of the chaos to run away from the plantations. From the initial settlement by the French in 1660 up until the final British occupation in 1814, population to land ratio was low (Barrow, 1992). This meant that there was enough land for slaves wishing to run away to seek refuge and set up alternative settlements. Twice in the latter part of the eighteenth century large numbers of slaves abandoned plantation estates. The first occurred following a severe hurricane in 1780 when the island was ravaged; and the second in 1793 when slaves, inspired by the French Revolution, abandoned the plantations in massive numbers (Breen, 1970, pp. 76-81). The result of these combined factors is what Barrow (1992) refers to as the capturing of several niches of local autonomy and indigenous cultural development. It was within this environment that family land tenure was able to take early root and evolve.

The agrarian structure in St. Lucia at the time of the evolution of family land was characterized by large plantations which accounted for the majority and most fertile of agricultural land. On the periphery of these plantations were small leaseholds and rented plots to individuals who supplied their labor to the plantations. This small holding sector also included small villages established on land which had been purchased jointly and then subdivided among purchasing members. Family land which had been bought by blood relatives and held in community also made up part of this group. Squatters on crown lands, technically outside the legal system, were also a significant part of the landscape.

Acosta and Casimir (1985) describe family land as an adaptive response to the repressive social and economic structure of post slave society: in their words, part of the counter-plantation system. The structure and rules of the institution offer members social stability, economic security, and a sense of community and continuity.

#### **4. 2. The Late Nineteenth Century to the 1950s**

From the late nineteenth century until the 1950s, the agrarian landscape in St. Lucia changed very little. There was a small planter elite and a large estate labor force employed only seasonally on the sugar estates (Foreman, 1958, p. 10). During the out of crop season laborers survived on subsistence crops from their small holdings, intermittent job opportunities, and remittances from migrant relatives (Barrow, 1992, p. 24). Only 20 percent of the sugarcane crop was supplied by small farmers who cultivated their own land or sharecropped as metayers (Le Franc, 1980, p. 106).

The next major changes in the rural sector came in the 1930s and in the 1950s. In the 1930s the impact of the world economic recession triggered labor riots and the creation of trade unions in all the British Caribbean Islands, including St. Lucia. A British delegation (the Moyne Commission) was sent to the region to investigate claims of deplorable working conditions and poor wages. This Commission made certain recommendations for the improvement of working conditions and recognized the formation of trade unions which had begun. From these recommendations for trade unions political parties evolved. It was those parties that would eventually lead the movement towards independence in the 1950s and 1960s.

In the 1950s the experience in the four Windward Islands digressed from that of the other islands with a shift from sugar to banana cultivation. This shift initiated major structural changes in the St. Lucian economy. Banana production for export in St. Lucia first assumed significance in the 1950s, against the background of a slowly collapsing colonial system and the decline of West Indian sugar production. By the 1950s the sugar industry was characterized by production inefficiencies and growing labor problems which took the form of

strikes for better working conditions. Due to acute labor shortages, coupled with the decline of sugar prices, many large plantations were forced to sell their estates. On the initiative of a British-Dutch multinational corporation, Geest Industries Ltd., (henceforth Geest) which purchased some of these estates, the switch to bananas was launched.

Bananas provided a viable alternative to sugar because the crop had access to protected markets in the United Kingdom through Geest, and it was well adapted to small-scale peasant cultivation. There was an enthusiastic response in the small farming sector. Bananas displayed a potential for the resuscitation of the agricultural sector, creating new opportunities for capital accumulation for the emerging small farming class, and the remaining large landowners. In 1964, when sugar production was completely abandoned, bananas already accounted for 81 percent of the value of exports (Barrow, 1992, p. 22). For the local colonial administration, both small-scale and plantation banana cultivation presented an excellent opportunity to boost the economy from the failing sugar economy. The establishment of the industry was, therefore, actively supported (Thompson, 1987, pp. 28-29).

The quantity of land under cultivation increased. Nearly all the land taken out of sugar production was suitable for banana production. Laborers from sugar plantations and small farmers also resorted to planting on hillsides and encroaching on the forest reserve (Cole, 1982; Foreman, 1958). Bananas could be grown and harvested throughout the year and on a small scale. The prosperity triggered by the shift spread throughout the country. It encouraged settlement in the rural communities, the construction of feeder roads and eventually access to amenities, such as pipe born water and electricity (St. Lucia, 1987).

Banana cultivation also triggered a significant social restructuring in the agricultural sector. A relatively well-off small farming sector was created and supported by a well-organized parastatal producers' association and a guaranteed market for all produce of certain quality. The rigid system of social classification based on race and income was modified to a certain extent (Beckford, 1972). Although there were changes in land distribution, it was not significant enough to change the basic bipolar system of few large plantations and numerous small farms. Many plantation owners moved into commercial enterprises, predominantly into the imports of goods, to meet the growing demand for consumer goods. These planters, for the most part, abandoned agricultural production, but they did not sell their idle estates.

##### **5. Family Land: Obsolete?**

The internalization of the economic value of land, borne of its ability to provide food and its social value in providing group and spiritual identity, is

common in almost all rural societies. The additional association of land ownership with freedom assumes greater significance in societies that have experienced slavery and where people themselves were once treated as property. In the literature on family land in the Caribbean, much of the discussion has focused on the symbolic value of family land with freedom and social dignity, and it often identifies the potency of this association as the main contributing factor to its persistence.

Although family land embodies considerable social significance for the Afro-Caribbean ex-slave peasantries, the continued social and economic relevance of this communal tenure form in a market economy has been questioned by state development planners. Some inherent qualities of family land were identified as being incompatible with increased efficiency and productive cultivation. However, field evidence suggests a rather different reality.

First, the communal land institution along with the social and informal networks that sustain it remain critical to the social and economic survival of large numbers of small farmers. Second, the distinctions made about efficiency on private holdings relative to communal holdings were exaggerated. Additionally, both types of tenure are often combined in a single economic strategy by small farmers. Family land is not obsolete, rather it has become indispensable in the lives of many small rural farmers.

An investigation of the small farming sector based on a survey of eighty-seven small farmers across three tenure categories—family land holders, freehold only, and a combination of both—and in-depth interviews with eight family land farmers was conducted in St. Lucia from September 1992 to January 1993. The survey was designed to compare management strategies of farmers across tenure categories while the in-depth interviews were used to identify factors affecting decision making for resources, investments, and conflict resolution on family land.

### **5. 1. Family Land, Social Networks, and Economic Welfare**

Though the family land institution is described as informal, field evidence suggests that this in no way implies a lack of structure, intent, or predictability. Family land management essentially relies on a different set of rules, norms and practices, rather than those associated with legal rationalism, to structure its internal social relations. Its status as a legal entity also facilitates access to the external legal system. Such access to two institutional mechanisms facilitates and encourages long-term decision making by providing tenure security both within the social network and externally in the formal legal system.

The social network which supports family land is made up of a web of complex relations among a group of people related through kinship. The rela-

tions and transactions between two individuals of a social network occur in the social context where these ties are embedded (Granovetter, 1985). It is within this network that, over time and with repeated interactions, the rules, norms, and expectations that govern transactions are forged, sustained, and on occasion altered. Everyone in the network is enabled and constrained in several ways.

Resource allocation is mediated by the social obligations and responsibilities of members and is responsive to members' needs within the physical limitations of the resource. These needs range from commercial cultivation of crops for some, subsistence production for others, supplemental income through access to perennial crops for those employed in other sectors, and the sense of security conveyed to all claimants from the knowledge that they can always return to family land when all other employment options fail.

It is common for large numbers of the extended family to receive social and economic benefits from relatively small parcels of land. This is possible because there is an understanding among members that those who find more lucrative employment outside the family land holding will withdraw from the full exercise of their rights to cultivate the land, although all the claimants' rights remain intact. The withdrawing claimant willingly gives up additional income in the interest of continued access to the social capital, essentially social security, provided by the network.

Resource allocation is constantly re-negotiated. Although technically all claimants are entitled to equal shares according to the number of siblings of the individual bestowing claim, in practice, actual allocations are influenced and adjusted by a number of social and economic factors. For example, older or earlier generation claimants have more authority in making decisions. The decisions of these individuals in turn are affected by the nature of the relationship with members wishing to cultivate the land. Potential claimants who show enthusiasm for farming or a willingness to take care of older relatives when they are no longer able to farm are more likely to be shown favor in the allocation of resources. In the same vein, more economically marginal relatives, with no alternative options for income generation, may be allowed more than the technically determined share of the resource.

Thus, although the institution is grounded in a principle of equality of inheritance, irrespective of gender or status at birth (legitimate or illegitimate), resource allocation is also mediated by other factors—such as the quality of social relationships and the extent of economic need. Resource allocation is, therefore, not always egalitarian as is traditionally assumed for communal forms of resource exploitation. This is not uncommon. The empirical evidence from other cases suggests that communal resource management can embody significant inequalities (Quiggin, 1993).

Although such inequalities may exist, the basic rule of family land is to provide access based on proof of lineage, irrespective of the extent of the resource, guarantees a minimum safety net of protection against landlessness, and social security for all members of the family. Social sanctions guided by the original tenets guarantee some minimum benefits for all.

The efficiency or smoothness with which family land is managed is nurtured by trust and reciprocity. A breach of trust between two individuals can jeopardize future relations, not just with the immediate party but potentially with all members of the network. The guilty party cannot be expelled from the property, but life can be made extremely difficult. In this same vein reciprocity is not only bilateral. Members do favors for each other knowing that the favor may not be returned directly by the benefiting party or even in the current generation. In some cases, individuals may resort to the external legal system to resolve a dispute. Such access is most often sought by members who stand to benefit as individuals by invoking rules and regulations that do not conform to the internal ones. This action signals a dysfunctional social network which may or may not recuperate.

The case studies suggest that there are numerous social and economic variables in constant interaction which dictate the parameters of behavior at the point of transactions. Factors such as age, education level, people-to-land ratio, crops grown and disposal thereof, type of investments, and supplemental income interact in various combinations as families develop strategies for resource distribution and use. In any one extended family, there may be multiple levels of resource use. The holding may be used for residence and cultivation as primary and immediate life-sustaining activities, with limitations defined by the physical constraints of the holding. The harvesting of perennial communal crops to supplement incomes from other sources, employment in the urban center, for example, may also be undertaken. In the latter case, no cultivation is involved and the size of the holding does not figure as a limitation. At a more removed level are claims to social security in the sense of returning to the land should difficult economic times arise. At this level expectations for social security are associated with the holding. These expectations in no way obstruct or inhibit current full cultivation of the holding. At the most removed and abstract, yet fundamental, level are concerns over maintaining a sense of community and continuity over time and an expectation that future generations will never be landless. These aspirations are embodied in the institution of family land and reflect a philosophy about family and survival over time. These different levels exist simultaneously in a complex structure that guarantees a minimum appropriation of benefits

. Analysis of the eight selected cases of family land in St. Lucia led to: (1) the identification of five central operating rules of family land tenure which form the foundation of the institution; and (2) the development of four ideal types.

The rules include (a) claim to rights by virtue of proof of family lineage which guarantees two significant distributive features: first, access to resources irrespective of the extent of the resource and, second, equal access to family members irrespective of gender; (b) claim to perennial crops which guarantees a subsistence survival or a supplement to other income; (c) claim to an undivided share which permits flexibility and mobility in terms of physical location of plots and can accommodate the cultivation of areas larger than the technically allowed share; (d) sale of land only through consensus of all claimants; and (e) the right to occupy or cultivate a portion of land irrespective of how long the claimant may have been a non-resident.

Following these basic rules each family arrives at a management strategy that is commensurate with the economic and social needs of its members. The fact that these rules are enforced in large part by social norms of family obligations, reciprocity, and sanctions translate into an institution that is primarily supported by a philosophy of community which assures the survival of all members and provides a superior enforcement mechanism than recourse to legal action.

From the basic patterns developed from the eight cases, a description of the distribution and management of resources in the context of cultivation makes the internal dynamics of family land more apparent. In the first type, young farmers, mostly single, use family land as a beginning point to undertake farming careers. To gain access to a plot large enough to generate surplus income, these young farmers must generally demonstrate a willingness to work hard and be willing to contribute their labor or some other form of benefits to the elder member(s) who have allowed them generous tracts. Lacking initial capital, these farmers cultivate family land in order to accumulate capital to then purchase their private holdings. They then undertake cultivation of their individual holdings. Some continue cultivation of the family land parcel, undertaking management of two farms.

Marcus Regis—the names have all been changed to protect the privacy of the respondents—is twenty-four years old. He cultivates a plot (one acre) on family land to which he gained access from his grandmother. He grows mostly vegetables and root crops, some of which is marketed, some given as gifts to siblings and cousins, some retained for household consumption by himself, and his grandmother whom he supports. The gifts to his siblings and cousins are not required, but he felt it was an appropriate gesture since technically he was cultivating an area that was partially theirs. His main investments are labor and fertilizers. He has never attempted to get a loan; but he saved enough capital to buy his own private land, which he is in the process of doing. Although relations with his uncle and cousins who also cultivate the family land are cordial, he is driven to purchase an individual parcel because of his desire to have a larger holding, exercise greater managerial authority, and begin his own family.

Joseph Marquis, twenty-six, also falls in this category. He currently has permission for full cultivation control of the family holding given to him by his mother and aunt who are the eldest living inheritors. He is the main income earner in his family, supporting his mother and a younger sibling. He also sends food on a weekly basis to his aunt who lives in Vieux-Fort, a nearby town. She in turn occasionally contributes part of the tuition for his sibling's education. He anticipates acquiring his own private holding soon when he begins a family of his own. It is important to note that in both cases farmers have access to relatively small parcels: one acre and one-and-a-half acres. The aspiration to acquire a second parcel is motivated by a desire for greater managerial control as well as larger holding size.

In the second ideal type farmers have access to more family land than they are capable of cultivating, and they are content to invest all their labor resources in the family land. Other claimants who earn their incomes from other activities do not cultivate nor express any desire to do so. The resident cultivator is, therefore, left to work with a larger parcel than would otherwise be the case. It is understood, however, that other claimants can approach the farmer for food, but not cash crops. There are no points of conflict with other claimants, and the farmer is content with earning a living from the family land. Most production is marketed.

Glenda Fontenelle and her partner, both in their forties, cultivate a ten-acre holding. Glenda's husband, an only son, has three sisters who are married. They all share freehold parcels with their husbands and can easily support themselves. They have little immediate economic interest in the family land. Relations among the claimants were very cordial. The Fontenelles' main investments are labor and capital. They have never tried to obtain credit. Most of the vegetables and root crops are sold in Vieux Fort, the closest commercial town. The other couple in a similar situation, Mariana Sonson and her partner, cultivate an eight-acre holding. Her husband informally inherited the land from his adopted mother, the only living claimant to the land, who was aged and incapable of farming. She lived in her own home nearby on the land. She is supported by the couple whose eldest son sleeps in her home in case of emergencies.

In the third type, there is a high people-to-land ratio. Scarce resources limit the ability to shift cultivation or expand the size of plots. The social relations tend to be more strained and conflicts are likely to develop. This is the situation with Janice Francois, who referred to hostile remarks from co-cultivators. She and her husband gained access to the family holding through the wife of his adopted father. At that time the family had been redefined to include someone who participated in the social network but did not meet the requirement of lineage. As the number of claimants grew, land availability declined and the couple's position seemed tenuous. To secure their position, the couple decided to build a concrete (immovable) house on the land to evade eviction. They did so



with the full knowledge that the co-cultivators would disagree with such an action. As expected, their relationships deteriorated even further. Essentially, the couple jeopardized the trust of the network and any further access to its social capital in the interest of retaining resources to which they had a tenuous claim.

This type can be contrasted with the fourth type in which family land is not fully utilized. Some members, however, are at the economic margins and considered relatively disadvantaged. In this situation, less fortunate members are permitted to use as much of the resources as they need or their labor allows them to utilize. A difference in scarcity of resources affects the nature of the social relations as well as access in the two cases. Other researchers have found that disputes over family land are relatively few, and that they are due more to motivation rather than confusion over rights (Bruce, 1983).

Majorie Justin, thirty-nine, farms two acres with her husband on her family land. This is as much as her nuclear family can handle. She inherited the land from her mother's side and she is of the third generation of cultivators. There are ten people in her household, the couple and eight offsprings. Farming is their only source of income. The two acres are much more than her claim, but the property is large enough that some of the land is still wooded. Her relatives consider her poor and they have given her permission to cultivate as much of the land as she is capable of handling. An aunt who lives in the United Kingdom occasionally sends her financial gifts.

Family land management and operation has an inbuilt flexibility which can accommodate a spectrum of users' needs ranging from subsistence production, on one end, to capital accumulation, on the other. In addition, a significant, though uncalculated, number of farmers in the small farming sector have access to both family land and private land, and they often combine access to the two to develop income generating strategies. Flexibility in resource allocation, the pivotal characteristic of family land, reaffirms its selection as a viable option for resource allocation in an unstable economy with high unemployment and land scarcity. By combining the welfare function and commercial potential of family land with the commercial potential of freehold farms, small farmers can socially underwrite the risks associated with export crops and unstable markets. Family land is integrated into entrepreneurial strategies. This explains why, as revealed by this research, family land is being actively created by private landowners who bestow their holdings as family land. This dynamism of the family land sector is contrary to the perception of state planners who regard family land as a stagnant sector that is confined to a limited traditional component of the agrarian landscape.

The social networks associated with the informal family land institution facilitate access to resources and welfare benefits in an economy which offers no viable alternatives. Small farmers in the rural sector depend on the family land institution to provide a spectrum of needs from social security and welfare

benefits to opportunities to accumulate capital. Efforts to encourage growth and development in the country would be substantially enhanced if the advantages of family land could be coordinated with efforts to improve agricultural productivity.

### 5. 2. Family Land and Market Strategies

The revolution brought about by the production regime of bananas, where the fruit could be successfully cultivated in small parcels, has not altered land distribution imbalances; and family land continues to fulfill critical needs in the economy (Barrow, 1992). The profile of the agrarian structure has not changed significantly from the decades following the creation of a peasantry. Large land owners, who continue to be predominantly white or of mixed race, have for generations refused to subdivide their estates, even after production levels had declined substantially or in some cases ceased altogether. Land continues to be a source of considerable social prestige and political power. In addition, members of the landed elite, lacking alternative investment opportunities because of underdeveloped capital markets, use land as an investment because it is a secure form of wealth and a good hedge against inflation.

Land distribution recorded in St. Lucia in the 1986 census indicated that the agrarian structure was still rather skewed. Peasants with 0 to 10 acres accounted for about 86 percent of the total number of holdings, but they only occupied 35 percent of total quantity of farm land. Farms with 100 acres and more represented 0.4 percent of farm holdings, but they held 42 percent of all acreage (Table 1). Barrow (1992) argues that the basic agrarian structure has not changed, and that skewed land distribution is a more critical problem affecting the small-holder sector than limitations of family land tenure.

**Table 1: Area and Number of Holdings by Size Group**

Size of Holdings	Acres of Farmland	% of Total Farmland	Number of Holdings	% of Total Holdings
under 10	20152.4	34.7	9961	86.2
10 -99.9	13319.7	23.0	693	6.0
100+	24544.5	42.3	47	0.4
Total	58016.6	100	11551	100

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of St. Lucia 1986.

Analysis from survey respondents comparing the three categories of tenure indicated that eighty-two out of eighty-six farmers would not consider selling their main farms. Of the thirty-four who had more than one parcel only four said that they might sell a parcel. Of 131 parcels covered in the survey only about 7 percent were likely to be sold (Dujon, 1997).

Although the open market in land tends to be inactive, land transfers do occur in the small farming sector, both with family land and private holdings. Transfers occur within preferred networks of relatives. There is an informal responsibility associated with all types of tenure rights to sell or transfer land to family members. Approximately 43 percent of the sixty farms purchased in the sample surveyed had been bought from relatives. Additionally, farmers in both tenure categories (freehold and family land) explained the desire to pass on land to their offspring as a function of land scarcity and a preoccupation that their families should not become landless. Most farmers in all tenure categories expressed the desire to leave their land to their children (Table 2). Of the eighty-six responses from farmers regarding whether they would sell their land, sixty-five indicated specifically that they wished their land to be left to their families—partners and children. Fifteen indicated that they would not sell because their land was their only source of income. This response does not rule out the likelihood that the land may also be left to family members.

**Table 2: Disposal of Land Per Type of Tenure**

Type of Tenure	Disposal					
	Will Not Sell		Family Will inherit		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Private	8	29	19	68	1	3
Family Land	4	13	23	77	3	10
Both	3	11	23	85	1	4

N = 85; chi square = 6.04; p = 0.2

The indicators about land disposal point to a reluctance to sell land associated with land scarcity, economic need, or for purposes of passing land on as inheritance. The influential factors affecting the sale of land seem to be uniform in the small farming sector, and the type of tenure is not the most significant. Households across tenure categories are willing to transfer land to other relatives, either through sale or inheritance. Should transfer be through inheritance and in undivided shares, land may easily evolve into family land once this method of transfer is again selected by the next generation (Dujon, 1997).

This tendency to transfer land to relatives under these systems is significant in two ways: first, it implies that family land tenure continues to be a dynamic sector of the agrarian landscape, in the sense that it can grow or be continually recreated when land owners perceive of a need to do so. Second, it implies that many current cultivators already know that other family members will eventually succeed them on the land. One can assume that this knowledge must have positive bearing on how investments are perceived.

Since family land claimants have undivided shares in the property and that family land cannot be alienated, institutions are reluctant to lend resources when no transferable collateral can be offered. However, 90 percent of all the farmers surveyed had never applied for credit using their lands as collateral (Dujon, 1997). Under the structure of the banana industry, freehold is not required for gaining access to credit for inputs. The only marketing organization, the St. Lucia Banana Growers Association (SLBGA), deducts the cost of fertilizers and other inputs from farmers' production. The type of tenure does not affect this recurring investment. Contrary to the economic analysis that makes direct links with secure titles and increased investment and productivity, the evidence in St. Lucia suggests that under current structural arrangements for production family land tenure is as likely to be in banana production as in private tenure. In addition, analysis of credit use in the small farming sector by type of tenure suggests that the expected increase in investment may not occur because farmers essentially limit their participation in the open credit system because of the high risk associated with credit outside of that organized by the SLBGA. The general impression among small farmers, private and communal, is that participation in the established credit system, outside of that provided by the SLBGA, would expose them to the risk of losing the very source of their survival (Dujon, 1997).

Efforts to avoid such risk may explain why, even when institutional credit is available, small farmers with freehold will forego investment and possible increased productivity in the interest of long-term income security. For this same reason, the food crop sector, which has no parallel arrangements for credit similar to what exists in the banana sector, suffers from low investment and production levels.

Outlets for produce and the marketing system for crops other than bananas are very unreliable. Efforts to promote crop diversification through the establishment of marketing boards and farmers' cooperatives have fallen far short of expectations. Limitations due to the small-scale of operations, inadequate resources for providing reliable transportation, and the absence of expertise that comes from a tradition of regional and international marketing skill and experience have constantly frustrated attempts at diversification. Under these conditions the cost of borrowing capital is too high and investment remains low (Dujon, 1997).

## 6. Conclusion

In St. Lucia, family land owners resisted attempts to convert their holdings into freehold because of the social and economic benefits derived from the communal institution. The tenure flexibility of family land allows it to facilitate a wide range of economic needs in an economy where unemployment is high and the leading growth industry is likely to go into crisis. The provision of social security to relatively large numbers of people will assume critical significance as the country deals with the challenges of loss of protected trade.

Efforts to establish freehold tenure simplifies the complex interactions produced by the flexibility of family land. The simplified tenure structure produced from converting family land undoubtedly provides a legible framework through which state programs can be facilitated and implemented (Scott, 1996). This research maintains that this simplification, had it not been stopped, would have de-skilled the family land resource users and weakened their ability to respond to the myriad of social and economic circumstances which affect their members at different points in time. Additionally, the privatization project would have disregarded the extent to which family land and freehold are combined in economic strategies in the small farming sector.

At present all family land is registered in the Land Registry, and unless legislation is passed to convert this tenure form it will continue to be part of the agrarian landscape. Research has shown that the type of tenure of a holding does not adversely affect the production of bananas under the current system of production of that crop. However, the industry is entering a stage of crisis, and the prospect of replacing banana production with another commodity, perhaps non-traditional crop, raises many new challenges.

The banana industry has performed well because of trade protection and the services of a multinational marketing company that has handled purchasing and marketing of the crop. The fact that similar systems have not been established for other crops is indicative of the onetime dominance of the banana industry and the problems of duplicating its success in the future.

The debate over the future of family land should focus on how commercial cultivation on this tenure can be improved, how investment can be encouraged, and how the socioeconomic advantages of family land can be translated into policies that contribute to an integral national development strategy.

Research in some African countries, Kenya, Ghana and Rwanda, has shown that indigenous communal land rights are not a constraint on productivity (Migot-Adholla et al., 1991). Research undertaken in St. Lucia comes to the same conclusion (Dujon, 1997). The incorporation of peasant forms of organization in restructuring economies are encouraged because of the absorptive capacity, economic flexibility, and the welfare benefits that accrue from certain common property resource management arrangements and benefits that usual-

ly cannot be facilitated by freehold and are often impossible for the state to provide.

Finally, despite variations which may exist in different forms of communal land tenure, perhaps the most salient lesson to be learned is that in the Caribbean, where unemployment is high and social security services are limited, communal land resources provide large numbers of people of varying economic classes a buffer against uncontrollable market forces. For this reason, when given the choice, it is very likely that farmers and the rural poor will contrive to retain communal property.

## ENDNOTES

1. This percentage reflects the proportion of parcels held in family land as opposed to the proportion of holdings. A holding may consist of a single parcel or several parcels held under one or combination of types of tenure.
2. In 1987 Parliament re-instated the precedence of the Civil Code.
3. Statistics received from personal communication with Chief Economist, Marcia Philbert-Jules, St. Lucia Ministry of Planning, June 30, 1995.

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