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Considers family land as part of the small holder sector, reflecting problems such as small size and debt. The author argues that because family land is an intrinsic component of the small holding sector, the distinction between legal and non-legal tenure needs to be revised. She concludes that economic pressures have led to the sale of family land, causing a decline in agricultural production.

In: New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 68 (1994), no: 1/2, Leiden, 77-99

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AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO FAMILY LAND TENURE IN
THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN: THE CASE OF ST. LUCIA

The plantation economy forms the historical foundation and continuing legacy of modern Caribbean society. In the British colonies its formal restructuring in 1838 set in motion processes that involved the establishment of common institutions and practices that served to secure the livelihood for the majority of freed peoples. Additionally these various practices created mediatory links between state and people and among people themselves. Access to land has played a critical role in determining the nature of these links. Thus an analysis of land/people relations is a fundamental point of departure for understanding Caribbean society. Customary land tenure, more familiarly known as family land is a principal form of these relations and for most people their experienced reality. Hence its explication provides a special way of seeing the continuing formation of local societies in the Caribbean, while the generality of the relation provides a ground for understanding one of the underlying common structural features of Caribbean life.¹

Family land represents a principal form of tenure. It may or may not exist alongside other tenure types and is neither non-legal nor an anachronism. Furthermore, its so-called inalienability is mediated by practical considerations of the welfare of multiple co-owners and/or the economic opportunities available. Since the problems attributed to family land are found to exist for land under other forms of tenure, there is reason to rethink the place of that tenure pattern within the dynamic of the agricultural sector and the socio-economy in general. My argument runs against the more popular approach adopted by analysts who, while cognizant of these ambiguities, attempt to treat family land tenure as institutionally separated,

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with definite and fixed characteristics (Clarke 1957; Smith 1965; Besson 1979, 1987). And I should add, I here explicitly join those who call for restoring family land tenure to its rightful place alongside other recognized forms of tenure.

My exposition is in three sections. First, I consider family land as part of the small holder sector, reflecting problems associated with that sector. Thus the importance of land capability, small size, and debt have to be central to discussions of the "symbolic" versus the "economic" function of family land. Next I argue that because family land is an intrinsic component of the small holding sector, the distinction between legal and non-legal (e.g., family land) tenure needs to be thoroughly revised. For historically, as I shall show, small holders engaged in the purchase of their land at the same time that they were fulfilling "obligations" under family land ownership. And family land owners have various forms of documentation, some of which conform to accepted legal customs. Then, in the third part, using examples provided by my own research and that of others, I argue that the effects of external economic pressures have led to the sale of family land, causing a decline in agricultural production and the quality of life.

WHAT FAMILY LAND IS AND IS NOT

In the Caribbean, family land is defined as land owned by several heirs. St. Lucian owners acquired land from their grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, or other relatives such as aunts and uncles. Indeed the majority of respondents had inherited land in this way. Sixteen percent of them had inherited land from their grandmothers, from aunts, uncles, or even cousins. The number of owners who acquired land through the partition of family land was very small.²

There were some owners who still referred to land being family land although it was acquired within the past ten years. The operative distinction between this form of tenure and others, was that such land will be passed on to all (legitimate and "nonlegitimate") children. As Edith Clarke (1957) also found, land may be in a state of becoming family land at any time. Thus, the definition of family land remains imprecise. Family land is not communal land. It is accessible not to the community at large but only to heirs of a specific family. And its use is defined by family tradition. In theory, all heirs have access to family land and can produce any crop on it. In practice, family members usually invest one member with the responsibility of taking charge and seek his/her permission to cultivate or build on family land. In short, somebody, somewhere is in charge.

The main literature on family land in the Caribbean, following upon Clarke's now classic work on Jamaica, concur on the following features. First, land holdings are bequeathed through generations of heirs undivided. Second, all heirs irrespective of gender, residential location, and birth status are thus entitled to inherit. Third, such land is inalienable and finally, the continuing multiplication of the number of heirs or co-owners hamper productive activity on these holdings. Apart from these findings, research on the phenomenon on various Caribbean islands has highlighted the degrees to which these features differ in various important ways (Besson 1979:86-116; Carnegie 1987).

This literature shares a perspective in so far as it treats family land as a discrete "institution." Perhaps this is most clearly seen in the work of Clarke and M.G. Smith (1965). Clarke (1957:41) identifies two types of family land. Family land in the primary sense of the concept to which she refers is "land inherited from an ancestor who acquired it by gift from the slave-owner at Emancipation." In the secondary sense, family land constitutes land inherited from parents or grandparents who had originally acquired it by sale-purchase. Smith (1965:221) using his research on Carriacou as his point of departure, states that

Two highly distinct systems of land tenure are to be found side by side in many British Caribbean societies. One system is defined by statute and common law, and guides official policy in relation to land. The other system, which has recently been described for Jamaica by Miss Edith Clarke, is of a customary and traditional character which neither observes the forms nor directly invites the sanctions of law.

Smith (1965) would later use these "institutional distinctions" as evidence of the separation of folk practices from those of the elite as critical components in his thesis on plural society in the Caribbean. Similarly Besson (1979), who is primarily interested in the origins of family land tenure and sees it emanating out of conflicts between planters and peasants,³ commits a similar error of treating family land as an institution. For example, she treats the plantation as the principal system against which the small holder responds, and she credits this response as the reason for the emergence of the family land tradition. Drawing upon the Beckford thesis on plantation economy and the peasant/plantation conflict,⁴ Besson argues that the persistence of family land tenure is to be explained by the plantation's continued monopoly of the critical resource of land. The value of this approach is that it allows us to identify the socio-economic coordinates of property relations in the Caribbean. But here family land is still analyzed as if it were a monolithic institution – something that arose in response and in resistance to an equally monolithic institution, the plantation. This is the basis for the

argument of some analysts (Acosta & Casimir 1985) that family land tenure emerged in resistance to plantations and their mode of production.

The arguments of these institutional-structuralists operate within the paradigm of the plantation economy thesis (Bernstein & Pitt 1974; Sudama 1979). Therefore criticisms appropriate to the latter may also be applied here. In summary, these criticisms deal with, first, the inadequate treatment of the historical process and second, the treatment of “peasants” as an undifferentiated mass defined by a confrontational relationship to planters and plantation production. If, however, we shift the focus away from family land to a broader analysis of the contours of small holder existence, to facilitate closer scrutiny of the lives of those who established and sustain family land tenure, things become less discrete, more ambiguous, and more complex, and the assumptions underlying these institutional/structural paradigms less plausible. It is necessary to begin this analysis in the immediate post-emancipation era, since this is the period from which institutionalists find evidence for their arguments of resistance and antagonism to plantation production.

In the first place, resistance to the plantation was a fact of small holder existence. Ex-slaves used small plots of land to restructure their relations with the planter and plantation production. One of the effects of this restructuring was the complete or partial withholding of their labor. As plantations were labor intensive enterprises integrally linked to the circuit of capital accumulation in an emerging global economic system, this act threatened (or at least was perceived as threatening) planters and colonials alike. This was why planter response was so brutal and intransigent (Hall 1959; Marshall 1965; Louis 1982). But resistance was always accompanied by some form of accommodation. The formation of a Caribbean “peasantry” was at once an act of resistance and an act of Westernization (Mintz 1974:155). That is to say, newly freed people were also motivated by positive attitudes aimed at restructuring their lives. For example, socialized on the plantation they eagerly sought wages to supply them with material goods to which they had grown accustomed. To continue to afford this lifestyle, as well as to forge a new life associated with a certain amount of social and economic freedom, it was necessary and even desirable for them to pursue arrangements with the plantation. Additionally, the small holder shift from food production to sugar production in the face of higher sugar prices and the incapacity of the planters in St. Lucia to meet production needs by the 1870s plus the multiple contractual arrangements made with the planters, strongly hint that “peasant” existence involved other relations besides antagonism and struggle against the plantation.

This scenario demonstrates that, historically, both tendencies of resist-

ance and accommodation have operated simultaneously in the lives of the small holder. Perhaps they were even complementary. To focus only on one aspect of "peasant"/plantation relationship therefore obscures the multifaceted responses and initiatives of the newly freed people to a complex social system, which at once sought to deny their humanity and promote socio-economic values associated with a social structure dominated by planters if not plantations.

Rather than constantly assume that resistance was the major response of the ex-slaves to the plantation, we should pose more pertinent questions, answers to which would provide us with new insights into the lives of small holders. For example, "How did Caribbean ex-slaves seek to establish themselves as dignified citizens in a hostile socio-economic and political environment?" We may answer that they sought to do so – under the constraints of the period⁵ – primarily through the control of land under various forms of tenure, including family land, free hold, land under common tenantry, or metayage.⁶ Moreover these diverse yet linked forms of tenure stemmed from/led to hostile, accommodative, symbiotic relations between planter and peasant, all of which reflected the complexity of purpose of the newly freed peoples of the Caribbean. By virtue of such insights, we should be able to grasp more clearly the meaning(s) of family land to small holders and their communities in various parts of the Caribbean.

The approach proposed here forces us to see the plantation in its proper perspective and not as the source of original sin eliciting passive responses from those it attempts to dominate. Rather, the plantation is but one influential thread in the lives of Caribbean small holders and the degree of its influence varies in time and place according to specific historical patterns and opportunities – patterns and opportunities created as often as not by the initiatives undertaken by small holders themselves. If it is but one influence, however powerful, we may be forced to examine the socio-economic and political context of small holder existence to locate other influences – notably, state policies that have shaped land transactions in the Caribbean. In the absence of such research it is useful nonetheless to treat tenure patterns including family land as constantly in a state of flux and linked to the actions of people who may have been frequently, but not constantly, preoccupied with the actions of the state or *massa*.

Thus the institutional-structural approach characterized by the tendency to emphasise the so-called contrasting properties of family land and non-family land tenure flouts the historical process. In a very insightful article Carnegie (1987:83), noting this tendency, appealed for a review of this rigid institutional framework and cautioned that, "while it is useful to isolate the family land tradition for scrutiny at one end of a continuum of land tenure

forms, it must be put back into place alongside the seemingly contradictory forms with which it coexists."

SMALL HOLDINGS: STRUGGLE AND SURVIVAL

Family land in Choiseul on the southwest, Caribbean coast of St. Lucia, and on St. Lucia more generally, is usually found among small holdings in an agricultural sector where land distribution and ownership is highly skewed; that is, acreage and the number of holdings are inversely related. As Table 1 shows, on St. Lucia, according to 1986 reports, holdings under five acres accounted for 76 percent of a total of 11,551 holdings nationally.⁷ In Choiseul the equivalent figure was higher. Over 90 percent of the agricultural holdings was less than five acres. The second largest category consisted of those between five to ten acres (10 percent); in Choiseul slightly over four percent of the total number (Government of St. Lucia 1986: 22).⁸

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF HOLDINGS AND ACREAGE BY SIZE IN CHOISEUL 1986

Size acres	Holdings		Acreage	
	no.	%	no.	%
Landless	31	3.12	N.A.	N.A.
<5	895	90.04	1197.4	61.69
5-9.9	44	4.43	297.9	15.35
10-24.9	17	1.71	233.5	12.03
25-49.9	7	0.70	212.5	10.95
Total	994	100	1941.3	100.02*

*Due to rounding, figures appear uneven.

Source: Adapted from Government of St. Lucia, *Final Report on the 1986 Agricultural Census of St. Lucia*, Tables 2 and 2.1, pp. 18-19.

For the entire island, family land accounted for 45 percent of all parcels and occupied 24 to 30 percent of the total acreage of all agricultural holdings.⁹ Of all the districts in St. Lucia, Choiseul had the largest bloc of family land (Government of St. Lucia, 1980). For example, 58 percent of all holdings there was thus categorized.¹⁰ As shown in Table 2, family land owners in Choiseul, were the predominant group; 76 percent of land owners held family land, while 25 percent held land under other forms of tenure.¹¹ More women owned and/or had access to family land than to land under other

forms of tenure. This was so for men as well, but women were less likely to have additional parcels of land. For example 88 percent of women were family land owners while 12 percent held land under different tenure. This contrasts somewhat with men, 63 percent of whom were family land owners but 38 percent of whom had access to land held under other forms of tenure.¹²

TABLE 2. LAND TENURE BY SEX IN CHOISEUL

Sex of Respondent	Family Land	Non-Family Land	Total
Male	15(62.5)	9(37.5)	24(49.0)
Female	22(88.0)	3(12.0)	25(51.0)
Total	37(75.5)	12(24.5)	49(100)

Source: Land Registration and Titling Project (LRTP) Baseline Survey, St. Lucia 1987.

The lack of alternative forms of employment in the village and elsewhere on the island or the inability of owners to capitalize on employment opportunities meant that the most of the interviewees (67 percent) did not have the resources to purchase additional parcels of land.¹³ But the possession of family land saved them from a state of landlessness.¹⁴ This observation holds also for the district. According to the 1986 agricultural census, 69 percent of all agricultural holdings comprised one parcel of land, 23 percent had two, and a little over 3 percent had three or more. Most people therefore had no other land but family land. Without the existence of family land, a large number of poor people, particularly women, would not have had access to land.¹⁵

As part of the small holder sector, family land is expected to exhibit similar constraints associated with small farming. These constraints, which have been extensively described elsewhere,¹⁶ include small size of plot, infertile soils, and inadequate access to credit and advice. Small holders are generally poor, and relatively older (over forty-nine years old), have low levels of education, have inadequate housing, and in the specific case of St. Lucia, speak French Creole (patois) more easily than English, the official language. Our research on Choiseul revealed several of these composite features. These constraints have circumscribed cultivation practices. The question considered here is whether and to what extent family land owners differ from owners under other forms of tenure in first, the area under cultivation; second, the level and type of production; and finally, the type of farming investments that they make.

PRODUCTION AND UNDER-PRODUCTION ON FAMILY LAND

Within the structural/institutional framework perhaps the most potent attack against family land is that its peculiar arrangement, i.e., multiple-heir ownership, leads to waste, underproduction, uneconomic decisions, and neglect. Indeed St. Lucia is often said to have an “antiquated” land tenure system.¹⁷ Analysts invariably have a tendency to lift family land out of its socio-economic context, thereby obscuring the role of factors such as soil fertility, access to credit, availability of labor in restricting production and productivity. This is partly because they fail to make any serious comparison between family land and non-family land.

The study of the Choiseul area suggests a few areas which need to be re-examined. Comparing family land and non-family land, I will show that family land in the Choiseul area presents few insurmountable barriers to cultivation. Moreover, the problems associated with production are at once historical and structural and represent the generic difficulties associated with farming in Choiseul, St. Lucia, and throughout the Caribbean in general. In any case, the “inefficiency” of farm-land is the flip side of the belief that land *qua* commodity, and owned individually is the prerequisite of “efficient” farming – a very common view, but one not commonly made explicit, is that alienability usually leads to land concentration.

In Choiseul small farmers plant according to the help available, the amount of land they can manage, and the crops they select given the market conditions. Although farming is not calculable in a strict capitalist accounting sense, it is not an erratic operation. Precise calculations of how much land is under cultivation by the type and number of crops is rarely ever done. Information on land use, garnered from this sample, is useful here less for its statistical precision than for a general sense of land use patterns.

The findings show that although privately held land parcels are more arable than family land, smaller amounts of it are cultivated. For example, 18 percent of freehold land is cultivated compared with 39 percent of family land. To put it another way, 66 percent of arable land on private holdings is uncultivated compared with 35 percent of family land. However, because family land plots tend to be smaller, in an absolute sense, the cultivated area of individually-held plots is larger. Among the major reasons given by family land owners and others for unfarmed sections of both types of land are: lack of accessible labor or the financial inability to hire available labor, the poor conditions of the soil, and the deterring presence of tree crops on the land. Only family land owners cite soil infertility as being a deterrent to production.¹⁸ Owners and cultivators cite labor shortages as the main problem. Household help is limited and mechanization being practically nonex-

istent, middle-aged cultivators find it difficult to spend long hours performing manual tasks.¹⁹ The cultivation of temporary crops like peanuts, potatoes, yams, and cucumbers requires much time and energy.²⁰

A word about soil fertility. In St. Lucia only alluvial soils are well suited for intensive production of crops. These soils are mostly level and well drained, with few if any limitations with respect to land use (Le Franc 1980:97). Choiseul has very little fertile land. Its soils consist mainly of imperfectly drained clay and sand, which is least well suited for the growing of bananas, the main export crop in St. Lucia. While concrete geographical data on Choiseul are not readily available, St. Lucian analysts agree that the district suffers from some of the worst cases of soil erosion on the island. Bare rocks, dry river beds, and hardy grasses have replaced a wide variety of field and tree crops (sugarcane, cocoa, limes, and coffee) that thrived in the earlier part of the century. Choiseul has only 0.1 percent of its acreage under banana cultivation while coconuts, the second national export crop, occupies only 0.3 percent of the total land acreage. The district's greatest contribution to agriculture is in the production of avocados and breadfruit (Government of St. Lucia 1986:22). Choiseul is also known for its peanut and sweet potato crops which, aside from remittances sent from relatives (co-owners) abroad, may be the most important sources of income for its villagers.²¹

Climatically the area experiences extreme drought for at least half of the year and farming is undertaken only during the rainy six months of the year. For the rest of the time much of the land lies idle and many household members actually engage in other occupations, like fishing, handicrafts, and pottery. The rearing of goats, sheep, cows, and poultry is carried on throughout the year.²² Another environmental factor is the location of the land. In our sample, most of the parcels of land of both family and individual tenure are located on steep hillsides; very few are situated on level land. Although the terrain of the land presents few problems of access, the absence of labor, the presence of low soil fertility, and the common lack of sound agricultural knowledge creates difficulties. It is a combination of these factors that makes the owner/cultivator either of family or non-family land an unattractive candidate for credit from formal institutions.²³ Because of the temporary nature of small holders' crops, the types of crops they grow, and the extremely small scale of their agricultural operations, bank officials perceive them as a credit risk. Agricultural extension officers generally prefer to service larger operations, involved in the production of the traditional export crops, primarily bananas.²⁴ This practice deprives small holders of crucial technical advice and guidance and severs them from formal institutional support.

INVESTMENT DECISIONS

Thus soil infertility, small acreages, and lack of credit-worthiness partially explain small holder indifference to increased agricultural production and investment. The situation appears to be double-edged. Small holders abhor debt and find loans repulsive. At the same time, they cannot attract credit because of what is perceived as ad hoc "hit or miss" farming practises. Small investments are paid from their savings. They may also sell produce including livestock or borrow from relatively "safe" sources like relatives – anything to avoid jeopardizing ownership and control of their land.

What are the investments that they make in relation to agriculture? Of five owners/cultivators who secured loans, two were private land owners, and three family land owners. Interestingly the former cultivated approximately six to seven acres of land, and obtained financing from formal institutions like the St. Lucia Development Bank. The others who were farming roughly one to two acres, borrowed money from the local Choiseul Credit Union and Barclays Bank. The loans are used for consumption purposes and include the building and repair of houses, the purchasing of a truck, and agricultural inputs. Direct agricultural expenditures are kept to a minimum. These include the purchase of fertilizers, insecticides, seeds, plants and agricultural implements (e.g., machetes and forks), and the hiring of labor for weeding and manual plowing. Hired labor is often temporary, on a "when needed" basis for daily or task-work. When not hustling in the nearby towns or simply hanging out, youth may perform specific tasks on farms.

These various factors affecting agriculture suggest that land use and investment patterns on agricultural plots may count for more than land tenure. More specifically, the particular practices of family land tenure bear a striking resemblance to those encountered on land under other forms of tenure. Furthermore, when one examines the relation of co-owners to a registration and titling program held in St. Lucia between 1985 to 1987, the practice of treating family land as an enclave is unsupported.

DOCUMENTATION OF FAMILY LAND TENURE

Since formal wills are generally absent, one of the key distinctions cited in the literature between family land and other tenure is that family land is not within the legal system. One of the main problems associated with this is the uncertainty of boundaries, and the extra-legal nature of relationships among co-owners (Bruce 1983:31). These observations strengthen the structural/institutional approach. The more one can identify differences

between family land and other forms of tenure, the stronger the case for treating family land as a separate and discrete folk institution, maintained by people who exist in constant conflict with formal bureaucratic authorities. Although family land differs from other forms of tenure particularly in the way in which it is acquired in the district of Choiseul, there is little to suggest that owners consciously try to protect land from the law by resisting legal forms of documentation. Everyone knows more or less who owns what and where the boundaries are.

At least for the Windward Islands (which includes St. Lucia), historical evidence provides ample proof of the practice of ex-slaves functioning outside of the formal institutions, but functioning through them as well. As Marshall (1965:313) points out, the voracious appetite of the ex-slaves for land led to the formation of hamlets and towns in St. Lucia. Furthermore, he notes that ex-slaves did utilize the legal system to secure land titles. As he describes, there were some ruthless planters who, taking advantage of this demand for land, actually sold land with fraudulent titles. The reaction of the ex-slaves was two-fold. In the first place "some consulted their stipendiary magistrates beforehand ... others were prepared to pay a higher than the market prices for land which carried a title" (Marshall 1965:308-9).

Purchasing of land and acceptance (however reluctantly) of the rules of the system were some of the early customs of many who were actively engaged in establishing ways of making themselves and their families less dependent upon the plantation and constructing dignified lives. And today, their descendants continue to make concessions to the formal system even as they organize around and outside of it.

My findings show not only that family land owners and others are generally willing to comply with the requirements of the land titling and registration exercise undertaken in the Choiseul area in 1987, but also that family land is fairly well documented; even when partially or totally undocumented, it is recognized by members of the family and community to be "titled" and the property of a particular family.²⁵ In the land titling exercise no distinction is made between the documentation proffered by family land co-owners and by individual land-owners. But the high percentage of family land in Choiseul leads me to believe that family land owners presented kinds of documentation similar to that presented by owners of non-family land. Table 3 shows the kind of documentation presented to LRTP officials.

TABLE 3. DOCUMENTATION PRESENTED TO THE LRTP BY ALL LAND OWNERS

Types of Documentation	Number of Respondents	%
Title Deeds	23	57.5
Document of Transfers	2	5.0
Affidavit thru Inheritance	10	25.0
Long Possession Affidavit	4	10.0
Survey Plan	0	0.0
Other Declaration	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Source: Land Registration and Titling Project Baseline Survey, St. Lucia 1987.

Although Choiseul has a lower level of documentation than other districts (e.g., Micoud and Millette), it is higher than we expected considering the predominance of family land tenure. In fact the district as a whole received 48 percent Absolute (uncontested) titles and 52 percent Provisional titles (from officials of the Land Registration and Titling Project, LRTP) pending the presentation of other forms of legal proof of ownership. These figures may be understated because the process of registration had only recently been completed and all the required procedures for registration and review were still underway at the time of our study. Nevertheless, titles did in some cases assure co-owners and the community in general of their property claims long before the implementation of the LRTP; while for others the LRTP made no difference to their feelings of security. These perspectives can be distilled from the following concerns.

The eagerness with which owners responded to LRTP appeals was a case in point. Ninety-three percent of the respondents actually spent time showing LRTP officials their boundaries in spite of the fact that the land had not been surveyed and most of the owners had visited the LRTP offices to claim their land.²⁶ Second, although people took time to respond to the demands of the LRTP they expressed a certain amount of reservation about its use²⁷; 52 percent felt that they were not any more secure about their rights to the land, nor any more or less certain that they would receive credit. Neither were they more or less disposed to sell the land. At the same time, 31 percent of the owners said that the LRTP had made them feel more secure.

Like other forms of land tenure family land tenure may or may not be fully documented. Clearly more research needs to be done to explore why this is so. However, using legal and non-legal documentation to distinguish between non-family land and family land is unilluminating and uninterest-

ing. Perhaps earlier conclusions were based on the confusion between the absence of documentation as a function of conscious resistance to the legal system and that which came about because of social and economic impediments posed by difficulties in understanding the requirements of the registration process. However, if as some analysts imply there exists less regard for the formal legal system in the post-war period, then careful study is needed to explain these tendencies in order to trace the possible erosion of this attitude. Account also needs to be taken of the nature of the land titling process in order to determine whether co-owners experienced real difficulties in their attempt to legalize their claims or whether there existed a conscious disregard for and resistance towards the legal system. We need to know how and under what circumstances any one attitude (or both) held sway.

OF ECONOMIC PRESSURES AND LURES

Attitudes towards the sale of family land is another area where ambiguities abound. We could argue that while access to family land is regarded by family-members as security, loyalty to its inalienability is circumscribed by the material conditions of the multiple co-owners. For example, Leslie McKay highlights the correlation between tourism development and the fragmentation of family land in the Jamaican village of Negril. Owners took advantage of land development and sold their land. McKay (1987:148) argues that "peasants" became economically minded in the face of external forces, and concludes that "[i]f family land evolved as a means of existing independently of a dominant colonial system, that of plantation agriculture, then the use of family land can be seen as a means of competing with or maintaining an interest in a new export-orientated foreign dominated industry."²⁸

Carnegie's (1987:88-89) research on Jamaica also identifies the commodification of family land: he notes,

Given the provision that family land be passed on in undivided units and the stricture against its alienation by heirs, it has surprised me, in my work in Sturge Town so far, to find there a lively market in real estate; small plots are bought and sold much as they might be in any large city. A few of these involve the buying or selling of somewhat larger tracts of farmland ... but the vast majority involve minuscule plots within the village itself. Many of the purchases coincide with periods when outside earnings have been more readily available. Young men from the village who went to work in Cuba in the 1920s and earlier ... all came back with extra amounts of cash which allowed them to buy houses and small plots of land of their own on which to raise their new families. Some of these sale transactions were between close kin or affines: brother and brother, father's brother and nephew, mother's brother and sister's daughter's husband, for instance, but most seem not to have been between close relatives.

The sale of family land may not be anomalous, but the likelihood of its commodification has to be contextualized within the particular historical dynamics of the household, the community, and the island's economy. To this end, understanding how decisions are made is vital. Unfortunately, neither Carnegie nor McKay provides data on the decision making process involved in these sales. Thus there are no insights on the nature of family ties, and the likely impact of economic pressures on family solidarity. Nor do we know to what kind of family land they refer – whether it was old family land such as that inherited from grandfathers, or new family land that will be so established by the next generation. These issues deserve to be carefully explored and researched. For it is possible, too, that attitudes towards family land will vary depending on its relative age.

The point here is that a strong sense of inalienability of family land may crumble unceremoniously in the face of economic pressures or lures – i.e., the attraction of converting land to cash resulting in the dissolution of that form of tenure. In our study, two situations confirmed this. In the first case, where the question was posed about willingness to sell family land, some family members (21 percent) said that they would sell the land for a good price, and that its sale would depend on the family opinion (26 percent). At the same time, 40 percent adamantly refused to entertain any question of sale. However, very few of our respondents felt that sale of their rights to other family members was a more feasible probability than to non-family members.²⁹ This ambiguity in attitude to family land was also discovered by Greenfield (1960:173-74) in his study on Barbados. He notes “two conflicting sets of attitudes held by villagers, 1. which supports the sanctity of family land and 2. which supported its alienation.”³⁰

This ambiguity can lead to the actual alienability of family land. One family member can undertake to separate his/her share and thus contravene its “sanctity.” The following case demonstrates how, why, and with what consequences this might occur. Ma E. of Morne Dubout returning from England where she had resided for over twenty-eight years, discovered that her family land was in a state of gross neglect. Although she had access to other land inherited from her father, she surveyed the family land and separated her share from that of the other co-owners. According to Ma E. she wanted to cultivate the land and safeguard it against encroachments by other heirs to the property such as the “way-ward” son of her brother who resided there.³¹ However, such independence has its price. Ma E.'s family is incensed over her actions, since they feel that family trust is violated. The irony of the situation is that these family members were (during our field work) negotiating with an outsider from the capital city of Castries to sell a piece of family land located elsewhere. The only obstacle to the sale was that

the price offered was considered too low. Perhaps family members objected to Ma E.'s style rather than the issue of partitioning of the land.

Further underscoring this obvious disjuncture between appearances and reality, 70 percent of our respondents feel that (all things being equal) family land should remain as is for several reasons: the fear of disputes, the possible fragmentation of property which would have the effect of minimizing property values, and the desire to allow all members of the family to "enjoy their inheritance." This ambivalence towards the practice of inalienability suggests that further research should be conducted on the changes which have occurred in the lives of the household and community. For example, are households becoming less dependent on agriculture? Is income sufficiently removed from agricultural activity to erode the symbolism attached to family land and the preoccupation with extracting economic benefit even from family land? Are the integral family links becoming transformed? One area that will need to be investigated to this end is changes in family land use.

ACCESSIBILITY AND FAMILY RELATIONS

As various accounts have pointed out, unpartitioned family land can provide security and support to family members who most need it.³² The reason for this is the principle of common usage rights – the entitlement of all heirs of the former owner. At the same time there are unspoken family rituals to which such usage conforms. In practice, for example, common accessibility does not mean a free-for-all. If one family member is cultivating a section of the property, and another seeks access, it is customary that permission be sought.

The principle of open access to common property by several heirs and their offspring has led analysts into believing a priori that competing claims to usage are inevitable with disastrous consequences for cultivation practices, such as the planting of temporary crops unsuited for the soils, or an end to agricultural production altogether, and the spiralling of family disputes. This latter perspective informs the work of Clarke (1957:44), who argues that one of the most common causes of litigation in Jamaica are disputes over contradictory claims involving family land. The assumption is that since all heirs have rights, they will invariably invoke those rights resulting in a squeeze on resources. However, Blustain's (1981:48) research on Jamaica contests this perspective. Instead he found that family land involved much more than common rights to a property, "there are relatively few disputes. Almost all farmers working family-land stress the importance

of 'loving families' (sic) in which brothers, sisters and cousins cooperate in the farming or allocation of land left to them by their forbearers. Family-land thus involves ideas not only about land, but also about the cohesiveness and unity of the family."³³

Furthermore, the inheritance of rights does not automatically entail the invocation of those rights. In the first place, the existence of family land does not automatically translate into common habitation practices. The constant search for a better standard of living for one's self and family has meant a propensity to migrate from rural to urban areas, from urban to foreign countries or from poor rural to better-off rural districts (Marshall 1986; Roberts 1979). Out-migration therefore delays, and sometimes eliminates, the kind of pressure alluded to by Clarke (1957). Furthermore, a matter not considered by Clarke is that a number of family land owners have rights in multiple estates.

Only a handful of respondents claimed that all the co-owners of their land resided in St. Lucia, and most said that only a few members cultivated the family land.³⁴ Furthermore, roughly 73 percent were engaged in other occupations, mainly in urban areas, and several lived outside the district in which family land was located. Many were resident in the United States or in England. Perhaps as Keith Otterbein (1966:33) claims, heirs who migrate to other locations automatically face difficulties upon their return in asserting their rights. The assertion of rights from a distance is logistically difficult but also can incur social disapproval.³⁵ However, the extent to which this occurs depends on the particular nature of the relationship among heirs and the intricacies of the rules of access to family land.

While each co-owner has the right to access any (tree) crop cultivated by the original owner of family land, a different rule obtains for crops cultivated by present co-owners or their heirs. For the latter, permission has to be sought. There are exceptions though. Relations between co-owners determine the process and outcome. The specific relations among family members as co-owners of family land affect their use of each other's land. In cases where strong ties exist among co-owners, for example, such permission either to reap or even to co-cultivate may be totally unnecessary. The reverse holds where strong ties do not exist.

At the same time, it is equally important to recognize that the sharing of family land does not always predispose family relations to assume a particular character – e.g., lead to "lovingness" as discussed by Blustain (1981). Our study shows that family land relations are dependent on relations already forged between and among co-owners. Co-owners who reside off family land are treated in a way that reflects the character of that specific relationship. All things being equal, they are treated in the same way as

good friends or family regardless of their mutual rights to property. There were no elaborate exchanges of produce or gifts because of shared resources. The demonstration of goodwill among relatives is a function of many factors in addition to that of shared family land ownership.

This however does not mean that relationships between co-owners could never be the result of sharing family land. Close inter-personal relations may develop in cases where particular co-owners may agree to cultivate or maintain a portion of land together. These arrangements could lead to a level of sharing and "lovingness." Interviews conducted on two larger agricultural establishments reveal that where this occurred, "lovingness" and a "sharing" developed.³⁶ More detailed research is perhaps needed at the case study level, to ascertain what factors cause these kinds of relationships among co-owners of family land, and under what circumstances they are likely to occur and flourish.

CONCLUSION

My own research findings, though preliminary, raise a number of pertinent questions that challenge the rigid institutional-structural approach to family land tenure. Briefly, we can distinguish between family land and communal land of the sort associated with non-capitalist social systems. In Europe and elsewhere, the disintegration of communal land systems is fundamentally associated with the emergence of capitalist relations of production. Communal land belonged to communities and/or families.³⁷ Indeed fragmentation of communal property in land was key to the effective operation of land taxation that ushered in class and status distinctions among land owners and operators. As several analysts have noted, the individualization of property was at once a cause and effect of the spread of capitalist relations of production since it was a condition for the commoditization of land and the "freeing" of labor for work on estates. In colonial territories of the sort found in Africa, communal land tenure existed before the arrival of European colonists and the subsequent institutionalization of estate and plantation agriculture. Settler farming thus disrupted native culture making it difficult in some places for communal land tenure owners to subsist. The commoditization of land and production for a world market in Africa thus shaped new relations of production premised on the destruction of communal land tenure where these existed.

Unlike communal land in Western Europe or in other colonial societies, family land in the Anglophone Caribbean is not a feature of a non-capitalist society or even a precapitalist one. Indeed, as many analysts have eloquently

pointed out, Caribbean societies were already linked to the world market and had within them a highly developed factory-like division of labor, namely plantations producing sugar. In short, Caribbean societies were neither feudal nor were they characterized by communal forms of land tenure, but were critical sites from which profits were secured for capital accumulation in Western Europe.³⁸

I have also argued that the ownership and practices of family land are ambiguous and inexact. Attitudes to farming, relations among co-owners, and relations to legally acceptable practices, cultivation techniques, and investment decisions all express these ambivalences. In this perspective, family land tenure is affected by similar processes that circumscribe and/or transform the practices of the small holder. In this sense family land tenure, like other forms of tenure, is relational and varies through time.

These exploratory findings scratch the surface of the workings of family land tenure in other Caribbean islands. They draw attention to the need for more rigorous research in several areas utilizing methodologies based on case studies, life histories, and in depth interviews in order to further isolate and link family land tenure with the rest of the agricultural sector in such a way that the lives of small holders and those families holding family land are captured in all their rich complexity.

NOTES

1. This paper is the result of research carried out in Choiseul, St. Lucia, on the impact of the Land Registration and Titling Project (LRTP) in St. Lucia. The research was organized under the auspices of the Land Tenure Center at the University of Wisconsin Madison. I would like to thank Dan Bradburd, Charles Carnegie, and Terence Hopkins for their very useful comments in the revision of this paper. As always, I bear sole responsibility for its shortcomings.

2. This clearly reinforces the view of Clarke (1957:63) about the inalienability of family land, that "once there has been joint inheritance, by all family, the principle of inalienability is also invoked." This also questions notions about the fragmentation of family land contained in some of the literature on the subject.

3. Clarke (1953) argues that there was a conflict between the peasant form of land tenure that was *African and English law primarily in the area of inheritance – i.e. ownership by the entire family and its insulation (non alienation) from the market.*

4. Beckford (1972) sees the peasant/plantation conflict as the principal dynamism in the agricultural sector of Caribbean countries.

5. As Edith Clarke (1957:35) so aptly summarizes this desire for land, "their hopes concerning land ownership indicated that they had sound ideas concerning the real meaning of freedom."

6. Metayage was a practice in which the planters and peasants shared the produce of the land under verbal agreements during the decline of sugar cane production. For more on how this system worked, see Marshall (1965:28-55).

7. Holdings are the total number of parcels of land owned by any one person. For example a person who has three pieces of land has a single holding. My sample consists of approximately forty-eight holdings comprising one to three parcels. The sample is drawn from representative map sheets compiled by the Land Registration and Titling Project. Sampled parcels led to "information about other parcels and other parcels and other people connected through either labor or other relationships both to the original parcel and to the person with whom we started talking" (Land Tenure Center 1988b:33). Thus we interviewed parcel owners, up to five when they were many and present, actual cultivators who were either co-owners, in the case of family land, cultivating owners of non-family land or cultivating non-owners as in the case of renters or sharecropping. The sample is very representative of the Choiseul area, and reflects (more or less) the findings of other researchers involved in the project. For a detailed analysis of the methodological framework used see the above cited report and Land Tenure Center (1988a).

8. Choiseul is not entirely composed of small holdings. Unfortunately, the number and size of these holdings over fifty acres in size are unrecorded in the agricultural census of 1986, erroneously suggesting that they do not exist in this district. I cannot document the actual number of such holdings. One of these alone, the River Doree Holdings occupies roughly 1,140 acres while another, the Windward Islands Tropical Plants, Ltd., cultivates approximately fifty acres of land, with plans for expansion. In any case, since the structure of land ownership is disproportionately distributed for every district in St. Lucia there is every reason to believe that Choiseul follows a similar pattern. The picture for 1986 shows that 76 percent of agricultural holdings in St. Lucia were less than five acres and occupied approximately 12,350 acres of land. In contrast, there were 47 holdings (.5 percent of all agricultural holdings) of over one hundred acres that controlled roughly 22,545 acres of land. Between these two extremes were the middle farmers cultivating ten to ninety-nine acres of land, and controlling 1,784 holdings that constituted an acreage of 13,320.

9. The Final Report 1986 records the total (i.e. for all of St. Lucia) agricultural acreage on holdings as constituting 56,795. Of these 13,880 are family owned. Privately owned land accounted for 34,214 (Government of St. Lucia, 1986). But there have a number of conflicting accounts. For example, Meliczek (1975:20) claims that the number was below 20 percent while others have cited various figures as high as 64 percent and as low as 3 percent. Bruce (1983:25-31) summarizes these disparities well.

10. Individually owned parcels account for 280, or 22 percent. Rented/private, rented/government, squatting government, squatting/private constitute 12 percent, 0.6 percent, 0.3 percent, and 3.5 percent respectively. These parcels represent roughly 1940 acres. Holdings that include family land, individually owned, rented/private, rented/government, squatting/government, squatting private occupied 1012.5 (52 percent), 715.1 (37 percent), 140.9 (7 percent), 9.0 (.5 percent), 2.0 (.1 percent), and 44.8 (2 percent) acres respectively. The sample include predominantly small holdings. For example, of the total number of parcels, 48, or roughly 96 percent (higher than the entire district) were four acres or less in size. Only two parcels (4 percent) were sixteen acres.

11. Fifty percent of the sample from which the final sample is drawn is family land. Twenty percent is individually held land.

12. Indeed, one of the areas overlooked in the literature on family land tenure is the question of ownership and access to land by poor people and women. Our findings indicate that multiple tenure is desirable among family land owners. But this holds only for those who can afford to buy land. However, because most family land owners are poor, family land represents the only access to land that they would normally have in their lifetime.

13. Few job opportunities exist in the village. Teaching and work with government via the village council, fishing, handicraft, and shopkeeping are the alternatives to agriculture.
14. A few owners (29 percent) have two parcels and 4 percent own more than three parcels.
15. See Government of St. Lucia (1986:27). Table 7 shows that of 992 holdings, 686 consist of holdings of one parcel, 231 of holdings of two parcels, and 75 of three and more parcels of land.
16. See for example Beckford (1975) and Edwards (1961). Although the latter deals specifically with Jamaica, the analysis can be extended to other Caribbean territories including St. Lucia.
17. Analysts such as Clarke (1957:66), Comitas (1962:152), and Edwards (1961:112) support the view that family land is detrimental to production claiming that it is underutilized. Writing on St. Lucia, Mathurin (1967:1-5) and Meliczek (1975) identify family land as "an unfavorable system of land tenure" which is "stifling agricultural development." Finkel (1971) also describes it as a grave deterrent to agricultural development as a result of the many claims of access by co-owners that restrict the cultivator's interest in pursuing serious cultivation practices. This position also finds resonance in the work of others. Besson (1979:105), for example, faults the system's inefficiency in the use of "unrestricted cognatic descent" and contends that family land serves a symbolic as opposed to economic function, "for it enables the retention by numerous co-heirs of inalienable rights to freehold land."
18. Data were unavailable for 24 percent of the sample.
19. The average household has only two persons who can be relied upon to assist in the farming of land.
20. Approximately 721 acres are under permanent and medium crops in Choiseul. This no doubt constitutes the acreage of the large holdings unrecorded either in numbers or acreages. Five hundred and twenty one are under temporary crops. This would be the domain of the small holders who constitute over 95 percent of our sample. At the same time, Choiseul has the least land (148 acres) under forest and woodland (Government of St. Lucia 1986:22).
21. Furthermore, it is easier for census officers (or any one) to count tree crops than it is to estimate the amount of peanuts planted at any one time. Perhaps too, the peanut crop had been harvested during the census. These are all subsumed under the headings of short term and/or temporary crops.
22. Many engage in these various occupations simultaneously.
23. This was confirmed by officers of the St. Lucia Development Bank (one of the major agricultural financial institutions) during an interview.
24. In countering this position, extension officers believe that these small holders do not follow their advice. Whatever the reason, small holders seldom benefit from the critical services of extension officers.
25. The conclusions are tentative for a number of reasons. Our study began only two months after the LTRP had been undertaken. Information on parcels and holdings of land had not all been transferred to the Land Registry and the ninety-day period during which the maps outlining people's claims in the district were displayed for public viewing and comment was still in effect at the time of our survey.
26. Respondents took from half to nine days clearing their land in order to display their boundary poles to LRTP officials.
27. LRTP officials believed that people did not know their boundary perimeters, needed official approval to feel secure, and would agree wholeheartedly with their rulings.

28. McKay's work would have been more insightful had she captured the decision-making process involved in the sale of family land given the large number of heirs associated with it. Nevertheless, both McKay (1987) and Carnegie (1987) highlight the importance of approaching the family land question without any *a priori* assumptions about its stagnation, neglect, and sacrosanctity or the separateness of its existence.

29. Forty-two percent asserted that it was not possible to sell family land to a non-family member compared with 38 percent who were unwilling to sell to a family member. But those who felt that the sale of land to family or non-family members depended upon the opinion of other family members actually appeared partial to the sale of family land.

30. Greenfield (1960) refers to this Janus-faced attitude as "Modern" vs "Old" or presumably traditional. It is clearly a position that reflects at once the economic value of land and the need to conserve this resource, and probably reflects changes in the economic and social position of household members and/or the community at large.

31. In order to protect the privacy of informants the name and place used are fictitious. At the time of the interview, Ma E. and her husband were the main cultivators of the property but occasionally would employ the services of young men from the area to assist in the weeding and manual ploughing of the land. Since partitioning the property, they have planted fruit trees, vegetables, and tree crops including bananas and plantains.

32. See for example Barraclough's (1991:5) discussion of the positive role played by customary land tenure against famine and further food disaster in Africa. He states that "[i]t should be noted that traditional community organizations and communal land tenure systems, why they have survived, often protect rural residents and the environment from some of the worst impacts of rapid cash crop expansion."

33. Blustain's research (1981:48-56) was carried out over a two-and-a-half-year period and covered the Second Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDP). This area was located in the northeast and northwest Clarendon and northeast Manchester as well as "corners of Trelawny, St. Ann, and St. Catherine" covering roughly 4,000 small (three acres) farms.

34. Twenty-seven percent of co-owners farmed family land at the time of our field work and 29 percent did so within the last five years. It must be remembered that family land may still be cultivated by a tenant who may be charged a nominal rent or operate as a sharecropper, or even another family member who may not be an heir.

35. Although our research findings dispute Otterbein's claim, it is important to note the limitations of the interview method that we adopted while living in the area for approximately five months. One must allow for a disjuncture for how people feel particularly, hypothetically, and how they act in a concrete situation.

36. Of the twenty workers (wage and task oriented) employed on the River Doree Holdings and the Windward Islands Tropical Plants Ltd. who were interviewed, 40 percent were closely linked to family members with whom they cooperated actively.

37. There were certain periods when blood-linked kin may have composed entire communities.

38. The literature on this subject is vast and controversial. See for example, Williams (1944); Wallerstein (1979); Mintz (1984; 1987); and Blaut (1989).

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