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Settlement and Land Use: Villo Point

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Villo Point is a small, rural community located about two miles inland from Colonarie on the Windward coast of St. Vincent. The settlement of Villo Point is along a third-of-a-mile segment of the pitch (paved) road which goes up the Colonarie Valley connecting the two communities of Colonarie and South Rivers (see Map I). Originally, Villo Point was part of the Park Hill estate. The estate was purchased by the colonial government in 1899 as part of the Land Settlement Scheme. The land was then sold to petty farmers in three- to five-acre plots. Presently, there are two settlements on the former estate -- Park Hill and Villo Point -- with a total population of approximately 900. Park Hill lies on the south slope of a steep ridge, while Villo Point is on the other, along one bank of the Colonarie River. The other boundary separating Park Hill is vaguely defined by the fork in the pitch road, one branch of which is Villo Point with the other branch leading to the bridge over the Colonarie River. Three Rivers lies on this opposite bank of the river. Three Rivers is another former estate partitioned following the Land Settlement Scheme in 1933. The final boundary between South Rivers and Villo Point is indicated by the area where the ridge and the river constrict the land around the pitch road. South Rivers was never part of any estate, but always an independent community. Officially, Villo Point belongs in the Park Hill District. However, considering the topographical features of the area, Villo Point is distinct from surrounding communities. The boundaries are ill-defined in an east-west direction where interaction between communities is regular along the pitch road, in the absence of handicaps to movement. The ridge and the river are fairly effective in limiting contact and, in the case of the Park Hill estate, dividing one settlement from the other (see Map II).

The northern ridge face and the river bank constitute the agricultural land of Villo Point, about 35 acres. The land from the road to the ridge top has a steep slope of approximately 45°. The one exception is a thumb-like projection of reasonably flat land, the Point, bounded by the ridge. The land between the road and the river is flat either at the road level dropping abruptly to the river side, or falling from the road side to the river level. The transitional area is at the fork in the pitch road where the land gently slopes from the road to the river. The change in elevation is from 400 feet above sea level at the top of the ridge to 200 feet above sea level at the river with the pitch road at the midpoint.

The majority of the buildings in Villo Point are located along the pitch road and along a deeply eroded track leading from the road to the top of the ridge. There, the track connects with a barely usable dirt road which leads down the other side of the ridge into Park Hill, while another track leads off the dirt road to snake the top. A few buildings are also strung along this dirt road and the track at the ridge top. The tracks, narrow paths, allow access to interior lands and passage between roads.
1: Banana Market and Central Arrowroot Factory
2: Site of Park Hill Estate Sugar and Arrowroot Factory
3: Colonarie Estate Arrowroot Factory
4: Three Rivers Propagation Station, 7th District Agricultural Officer and Site of Three Rivers Estate Sugar and Arrowroot Factory
5: South Rivers Banana Boxing Shed
The houses are variable in construction from wattle-daub, thatched-roof huts to cinder-block, galvanized-roof houses. The majority of the houses are a single story of cinder-blocks or wood. Wooded houses are raised several feet off the ground to protect them from dampness and insects. All houses consist of a sitting room and several bedrooms. The remainder of the house lot is taken up by a latrine; if large enough, a kitchen separate from the house; and animal sheds. Only those houses along the pitch road are able to tap the water line and connect for electricity, and they are of more substantial construction. Those houses off the pitch road are without electricity or water, and they are in generally poor repair.

There are two shops in Villo Point occupying the lower story of two houses while a third shop is now closed permanently. The range of items sold in both is limited and neither shop sells alcohol. The only large shops are in Colonarie, Park Hill and South Rivers. The shop in South Rivers is owned by a Portuguese and favored by the people in Villo Point. The Park Hill Post Office is located in the bottom story of a house near the fork in the pitch road. The other buildings besides those now occupied as dwellings are a storage shed, a garage for a van and four unused houses.

Villo Point has a compact, ribbon settlement pattern; yet this compactness obscures the segments that exist as part of the ethnic and familial composition of the community. Villo Point is primarily composed of Portuguese and East Indians. Negroes are the majority everywhere on St. Vincent except in Villo Point where they are the minority. This demographic-social feature further distinguishes Villo Point from Park Hill, South Rivers and Three Rivers.

The Portuguese are the descendants of indentured laborers brought from the sugar-island of Madeira in 1846 to work on the estates (Duncan 1970: 37). They recognize themselves as physically distinct from the rest of the population because of their white skin, although in all cases this is not really distinctive due to interbreeding. Culturally, they are not different from the rest of the population except for claiming a Portuguese ancestry and heritage, and retaining a very small Portuguese vocabulary. The Portuguese dominate Villo Point economically. All the Portuguese live along the pitch road in homes of better construction with access to the available utilities, and they own most of the land in Villo Point. Now, and even more so in the past, the Portuguese are entrepreneurs. They are active in shopkeeping, freight-hauling and any other middle-range market which is vital to a rural community. Twenty or thirty years ago, Villo Point was a viable Portuguese community, but now this is changing. Most of the adults and young adults have left Villo Point for better opportunities in Kingstown or in North America and the United Kingdom. The elderly retain their homes and lands although they doubt that any of their children will return to live permanently in Villo Point. The children will probably continue in the established migration pattern, and leave for better situated family
when they reach maturity. Meanwhile, irregular remittances from overseas serve to help support the young and old family members who remain on St. Vincent.

The East Indians arrived on St. Vincent in 1861, also coming as indentured laborers (Duncan 1970: 37). They maintain that a physical distinction exists, mainly from Negroes, because of their straight hair and noses. Again, there is interbreeding between them and the Portuguese and Negroes. Culturally, they are not different although they are said to retain some East Indian food preferences. The East Indians live in a cluster at the fork in the pitch road and along the track running up the ridge. They also own some land in Villo Point, and operate the Park Hill Post Office and a van. Some time ago, the East Indians entered a ritual relationship with the Portuguese. On conversion to the Roman Catholic Church, they took the surname of their Portuguese sponsor (although the East Indians do not now attend). Consequently, many East Indians have Portuguese or English surnames. Further details on the rights and obligations of this ritual relationship are uncertain. Unlike the Portuguese, the East Indians tend to remain in Villo Point, and possibly they will inherit the Portuguese position as the local elite in time.

Negroes are the descendants of the slaves emancipated on August 1, 1834. There are a few Negroes in Villo Point, on the fringe of the community. One rents a house while working an outside job, and another is the caretaker of a house-shop. The remainder live on top of the ridge, doing some agricultural work and renting some land. The houses and lands belong to Portuguese who have left Villo Point, or are too old or sick to work themselves. The one exception is a Negro owning and planting land, but living in Georgetown.

It is difficult to estimate the amount of antagonism between ethnic groups. None are completely distinct. There is considerable physical as well as cultural blending. The problem is that these people see themselves, and others see them, as different. Many of these differences may be ideal rather than actual, so that any group identity is magnified by generalities. The specifics of daily interaction cross-cut groups as the necessity of living in proximity demands. There is an overall harmony covering hostility centering on different, isolated incidents and individuals. However, it is here that the idea of ethnic groups is most apparent in referring to race, culture and origins, and it is also here that maintaining one's ethnic identity is important. From the Portuguese viewpoint, for example, they are hardworking and thrifty while Negroes are lazy, thieving and promiscuous, and any Portuguese who behaves in this manner is betraying his color. Conversely, Negroes view themselves as open and sincere while the Portuguese are crafty and unsympathetic. Moreover, these groups can be tentatively ranked in an economic hierarchy from the Portuguese through the East Indians down to the Negroes. This ranking is based on the type of house and the amount of land owned. Ethnic criteria are "of significance in most rural communities only where wealth permits status aspirations" (M. G. Smith 1965: 188). Paradoxically, the Portuguese claim the status of a local elite, yet they have done so by catering to the needs of Negro peasants (cf. Mendes 1934).
The aspirations of the Portuguese are to leave the area, and many have already done so; while physically part of a community, they are socially distinct. They, for example, bear the brunt of preadial larceny, the stealing of crops and livestock, emphasizing their superior status and further distinguishing them from other groups (M. G. Smith 1965: 184).

Paralleling the two main ethnic groupings in Villo Point is a clustering in the settlement pattern, each group tending to focus in upon itself. Map III suggests this patterning. This map represents house ownership, regardless of whether the owner is actually resident, and land ownership. The pattern is slightly more complicated as some houses and a little land are rented; however, a consideration of ownership simplifies matters. Houses and lands cluster not only in terms of ethnic groups, but also in terms of extended family groups. As an example, Figure 1 indicates the links of two Portuguese extended families actually owning or residing in Villo Point.

It appears that the entrepreneurial activities of the Portuguese led to the accumulation of capital which was invested in land (see R. T. Smith 1966, Laurence 1965 and Lowenthal 1972). The Portuguese and other minorities, such as East Indians, Chinese and Jews, are seen as marginal to the traditional West Indian color/class system. This marginality allowed the minorities access to the rural (Negro) market and to the urban (White) elite. With their background of economic enterprise, these minorities succeeded in a middle-class position. An important aspect of this success was the community and family structure of these minorities. For the Portuguese of Villo Point, the extended family, variable as it may be with respect to specific obligations, composition and size, allowed them to bring larger manpower and capital resources to bear at a given time and place. Each family established itself in the community, purchased land and generally prospered, relying on some sort of reciprocal aid among family members. This larger extended family remained viable despite natural or economic setbacks. In describing family lands among Negroes, R. T. Smith (1955) and Clarke (1955) suggest that instead of producing family solidarity, they serve to cause disputes over occupancy and are worked individually. Thus it may be postulated that the co-operation of the extended family, whatever its source, represented the advantage that the Portuguese possessed over Negroes. Co-operation is practiced not only in terms of joint land use, but also in other economic activities. This is not necessarily an advantage over East Indians where similar extended families occur. It may be significant, in this case, that the Portuguese arrived earlier on St. Vincent, and occupied this status in the Park Hill area to the exclusion of the East Indians.

Traditional Agriculture in Villo Point

Traditional agriculture, as opposed to modern agriculture, may be characterized by the following: 1) small scale of operations; 2) major reliance on family labor; 3) use of traditional techniques and generally
Figure 1
conservative attitudes toward innovation; 4) individual rather than
collective cultivation; and 5) a significant concentration of produc-
tion for household consumption (Edwards and Morgan Res 1964 and Mel-
lor 1969).

Traditional agriculture in Villo Point consists of both subsis-
tence and commercial production. Subsistence and cash cropping are
interdependent. The major subsistence crops are the starchy roots
typical of the tropics: tannia, dasheen, eddoe, sweet potato and yam.
They provide the carbohydrate bulk of the diet. The excess is sold
either on St. Vincent, or as part of St. Vincent's intra-Caribbean
export trade (Beckford and Guscott 1967: 7). Bananas are the major
cash crop, yet they are consumed along with plantains, providing a
part of the subsistence needs. Both are planted to produce a con-
tinuous harvest and rotation system where as a field of root crops
matures, young banana plants are intercropped.

The main portion of the diet consists of the ground provisions
with breadfruit and rice. A breadfruit tree is planted and more or less
ignored while it bears, but rice must be purchased. Protein intake is
irregular and rather low. It comes from a variety of sources: fish which
is purchased, and animal flesh which is purchased or butchered from the
household supply. The problem is availability. Fish comes from the Lee-
ward coast of St. Vincent and, even if some is on the market, it still
may not be sent to the Villo Point area. The low prices that people are
willing to pay for fish discourage fishermen and middlemen alike. Cows
are killed occasionally while small meat animals such as pigs, goats,
sheep and chickens too often disappear before they can be slaughtered.
This may be due to lack of care; chickens wander freely, and the other
animals are tethered in any convenient spot. They get lost or fall to
predators: mongooses, dogs and humans. The remainder of the diet is com-
posed of miscellaneous fruits, vegetables, herbs, beverages and so forth,
some growing wild, some cultivated and some purchased. The only canned
goods regularly used are milk, meat and sardines, all relatively expen-
sive. The Portuguese of Villo Point rarely drink anything alcoholic.
There does not appear to be any severe malnutrition in the area. How-
ever, in the past before the use of improved crops and fertilizers, May
through August were called the "hard times" of seasonal deprivation pre-
ceding the breadfruit bearing and the later harvest of ground provisions.

Bananas (Musa cavendishii) are currently the chief export of the
island. In Villo Point, they and the root crops are grown extensively.
However, in the past, Villo Point experienced, as did the rest of St.
Vincent, the shifts in crop emphases. When St. Vincent was ceded to
England by the Peace of Paris, ending the Seven Years War in 1763, its
major exports were coffee, cocoa and cotton. As a British rather than
a French possession, the emphasis changed to sugar. The Sugar Boom
about 1800 was not shared by St. Vincent. The Carib Wars of 1795-96 ruined
the estates, and the Soufriere volcano devastated the island in 1812. By
1815, the price for sugar was declining due to East Indies competition
and cane sugar substitutes, and by the 1850's, the generally inefficient West Indian sugar industry was in acute distress. On St. Vincent, arrowroot (*Maranta arundinacea*), a rhizome yielding a high quality starch, was a successful alternative. In 1886 arrowroot, followed by cocoa and sugar, were the chief exports (Duncan 1970: 42). Despite the change to new crops, there was a world-wide drop in prices for agricultural products. Faced with a depressed economy, the hope of St. Vincent seemed to lie in creating a self-sufficient peasantry (G. K. Lewis 1968: 89; Sands 1911, 1914; Watts 1914). In 1899, on the recommendation of the Royal Commission Report of 1897, the 1,101 acres of the adjacent Park Hill and New Adelphi estates were purchased as part of the Land Settlement Scheme. The beginning of Villo Point as an agricultural community distinct from the estate can be marked from this time. Again St. Vincent was hit by natural disasters, the Great Hurricane of 1898 and the devastating eruption of the Soufrière in 1902-03 (Ciski and Mulcahy 1972). Villo Point continued to grow mainly sugar and arrowroot.

The banana industry began in the 1930's with sales to Canada, but it was small until the 1950's (Walker 1937). The export trade of St. Vincent remained fairly diversified among cotton, arrowroot, sugar, copra and bananas until about 1950. In 1960, the cotton ginnery and the coconut oil factory burned down, and delays in rebuilding ruined the revival of these industries. The last sugar factory near Georgetown closed in 1962 because of decreasing production and labor problems. As with sugar before, a cheaper substitute was found for arrowroot starch and by 1965, arrowroot was overstocked and unsalable (O'Loughlin 1968: 47-8). Presently, arrowroot is still grown as an estate crop and there are signs that the market is improving. The banana industry has flourished as the main peasant commercial crop. Now, it dominates Villo Point and St. Vincent although there are indications that it is suffering from overall inefficiency. As a consequence, the future may witness a shift from banana to arrowroot production among peasants. In the Villo Point area, there is speculation that the unused Central Arrowroot Factory (Map I, 1) will become the site of a new cocoa processing plant. In sum, new crop strategies which are alternatives to bananas appear to be developing.

The cultivation of bananas is not particularly difficult. The Lactatan and Robusta varieties are grown in Villo Point although the Robusta is preferred because of earlier maturation and less susceptibility to wind damage. The field is cleared of weeds, and the soil turned over by hoes and contoured in the steep areas. Holes about three feet deep are dug eight feet apart, a row with eight feet separating the rows. This gives 650 to 700 plants per acre. A sucker, a follower of the main pseudo-stem, or the cleaned base of a previously fruited plant is obtained to propagate the new plants. It is washed, dipped in a pesticide solution to prevent borers and nematodes, and planted. After planting, the banana plants are periodically fertilized, weeded, and sprayed to prevent leaf-splot fungus. Planting and harvesting are continuous, but when a new field is being planted, it is recommended that it be timed to mature during the high value months from April to September. It takes approximately 10 to 15 months for a banana plant to mature. After the stem of
fruit is harvested (while it is still green, or three-quarters full), the crown of the plant is cut off and a sucker of the parent is allowed to mature out of the same base. After the second and third harvests, the entire field is cut down. The land is allowed to rest, and the banana parasite population to decline, under the root crops.

The preparation of a field for root crops is similar to that of bananas, i.e., clearing, tilling by hoes and contouring. The root crops are propagated by slips which are buried in mounds. They are ready to be harvested in nine months. The yields are rather high, averaging eight to 12 tons per acre (cf. Coursey 1967 and Campbell and Gooding 1962). Following the root crop, the field is returned to bananas, and the cycle repeats itself.

Returning to bananas, when the stems approach maturity, they are wrapped in heavy plastic to control pin-spot fungus on the fruit. At harvesting, each stillD weighs about 20 to 30 pounds. This yields about two tons per acre. The stem, plastic wrapper and all, is wrapped in a foam rubber pad to prevent bruising the fruit. It is then picked up by trucks and taken to the banana sheds where processing occurs. The hands on the stem are weighed, graded, washed, wrapped and boxed. The boxes of bananas are finally trucked to Kingstown and loaded by conveyor belt into the banana boat. The banana boat is owned by Geest Industries Ltd, which is the sole exporter of bananas in the Windward Islands (including Grenada, St. Lucia and Dominica). The banana boat leaves St. Vincent for the other Windward Islands, and then to the United Kingdom. The weekly cycle in Villo Point is harvesting on Monday and Tuesday, and processing and shipping on Wednesday and Thursday (cf. St. Vincent Banana Growers' Manual 1966 and Simmonds 1966).

The return to the farmer is between $0.04 to $0.05 (E.C.C.) per pound. However, the commitment of the farmer to the St. Vincent Banana Growers' Association costs him about $0.035 per pound for fertilizer and pesticides (Beeckford 1967). The actual profits to the farmer are estimated in a gross fashion by people in Villo Point on the basis of the number of stems maturing per month, or the total number of producing plants. These profits, averaging $20 to $30 (E.C.C.) per month, allow a farm family to live comfortably by meeting cash expenditures along with subsistence production. The Association makes arrangements for fertilizer and pesticides and provides technical assistance, as does the St. Vincent Department of Agriculture. In addition, it operates the banana sheds and provides transportation to the loading area (see Map 1). Finally, the Association, as part of WINBAN (Windward Islands Banana Growers' Association), serves an administrative function in dealing with the farmers and Geest. Besides negotiating the prices paid by Geest, WINBAN arranges overseas shipping and insurance.

Farming is the main occupation in Villo Point, involving most men whether on a full- or part-time basis. Outside jobs can be extremely important. For example, one Portuguese farms and operates a shop which was purchased after his return from the oil refineries on Curacao while
another Portuguese farms about 20 acres of land in various communities as well as serving as a government agricultural agent. Full-time farmers have either worked their fields all their lives, or have previously worked at other jobs to accumulate money to retire into farming. The principal activity of women centers on the maintenance of the household. They restrict themselves to gardening except where necessary to survival. Only the Negroes in Ville Point work as agricultural laborers, who are paid in cash, or sharecroppers who are paid in kind. Some outside labor comes into the community.

Map IV shows the utilization of land in Ville Point. Bananas are grown on the major portion of land, followed by the root crops. Some fields are mixed, representing the beginning and ending of the banana-root crop cycle. There are several plots of uncultivated lands whose owners are absent from the community. Patterns of land use are complicated by semi-random planting, e.g., occasional breadfruit, citrus or coffee trees. Only in the vicinity of the house is there entirely random planting. Within the house lot there are miscellaneous trees, bushes and flowers. Plant mixing, or random planting, is efficient in avoiding the problems of mono-cropping. Mixed fields insure that a failure of one crop will not eliminate the farmer's sole source of income or subsistence. Also, the market risks are minimized with alternative cash crops. Thus, plant mixing represents a response to environmental and market uncertainty. However, little plant mixing occurs in Ville Point except in the house lots. It is possible to inter-crop bananas, but this is not done beyond the banana-root crop cycle. This may be due to the generally small size of the holdings, from one-half acre to three acres in any one place. Land cannot be given up to slow producers such as coffee and cocoa, or low value items such as most subsistence crops.

Chisolm (1962: 47-73) suggests that farm economics is a function of distance from the homestead to the field. As a general statement, the greater the distance from the homestead to the field, the lesser the productivity and the greater the work involved. The actual amount of work done on the field is smaller with increasing distance. However, the total amount of work on distant fields increases when the time and effort spent in travelling is included. One adjustment to this type of situation is to place less important and demanding crops at more distant holdings. This is precisely what occurs in Ville Point. In this context, the lack of large-scale inter-cropping and the large commitment to banana growing becomes intelligible.

All the land in Ville Point is "maiden land." This land is valuable because it is adjacent or a short distance from the owner's home, it is near the pitch road, and it is neither too rough nor too steep. The limited quality available is clearly reflected in the market value of the land, from about $1,500 to $3,000 (E.C.C.) per acre. The most lucrative, yet the most demanding, crop is bananas. Map IV emphasizes this by indicating the pattern of extensive banana mono-cropping in Ville Point. The less demanding and valuable crops, primarily subsistence items, are planted outside of Ville Point, in the mountains.
Everyone has a mountain plot which is visited once or twice a week for cultivation and to collect a supply of food for use in the household. The slopes of the mountain core are steep and rugged, and over two miles from Villo Point. Some bananas are grown in the mountains where fields are not too far from a road. Otherwise, only subsistence crops are grown. The value of this type of land is low, about $500 per acre. Population pressures have forced this dichotomy of subsistence and commercial crops in different areas. Sufficient parcels of good land are not available. Farmers must exploit the difficult mountain lands and/or have some sort of outside employment.

The desire for land to cultivate seems to reflect the lack of suitable alternatives to agriculture. Mellor (1966: 180-1) suggests that high land prices can be beneficial in eventually 1) facilitating the transfer of labor from agriculture; 2) encouraging intensification; and 3) leading to the utilization of idle land. In Villo Point, the significance of outside employment has been indicated. Although St. Vincent is not capable of sustaining a large non-farm sector of the economy, jobs off the island are available. Agricultural technology, particularly the commercial aspect, is improving. Yet, idle land still exists in Villo Point. These holdings are Portuguese property. In this instance, the commitment of the former British colonial government and the present government to a class of peasant farmers, as evidenced by the Land Settlement Scheme, the developmental plans for St. Vincent (Gibbs 1947), and the current low taxes on land have created difficulties. Remittances from emigrant relatives, the prestige and security of land ownership, and a favorable government, tend to maintain the holding of land whether in or out of production. In addition, with high land prices and the likelihood that prices will continue to rise, land speculation is a good investment. The possibility exists that Villo Point will become an absentee holding for emigrant Portuguese. Rumors of land sales, consequently, may be ill-founded, or simply represent a transfer of ownership from one relative to another. Such rumors, on the whole, seem to be symptomatic of the need for land.

Conclusion

In conclusion, whatever the financial, technical and commercial difficulties of the traditional farmer with his small holdings, it is not likely that he will be eliminated by large-scale competitors in the near future. There are two major advantages that traditional farmers possess: 1) the low cost of their production and 2) their flexibility (Courtenay 1965: 124-5). The primary input for commercial tropical agriculture is labor. Crops such as tea, coffee, rubber, bananas and so on, require large amounts of labor. For the traditional farmer, unlike commercial concerns, this labor is mostly supplied by his family. Further, the traditional farmer may produce a commercial crop, but in also producing subsistence crops, he has a measure of security. The fact that subsistence agriculture continues as part of the productive activities in Villo Point suggests that banana growing alone cannot
provide an adequate income, and that the economic situation outside of agriculture is uncertain. It appears that the pattern of subsistence and commercial agriculture as exemplified in Villo Point is not unique, but common to small, rural communities on St. Vincent. It also appears that this pattern will persist without a major shift in the structure of the Vincentian population and economy.
Map III

Part of the land in Villo Point is a condemned cemetery which has been cleared and will shortly be reopened by the government. The letter A represents the houses and lands owned by a Portuguese extended family. All the land in the Point belonged to one man. On his death, the land passed intact to his eldest son who on his death fragmented it among his children, A2. The youngest son received nothing, but he was later able to buy some land near the top of the ridge from a South Rivers Portuguese, A1. Recently, he purchased a house and lot from his niece although his son in Trinidad actually provided the money. B represents a section broken up and sold to several East Indians by an East Indian in F. C represents another extended family of Portuguese with differing surnames. D belongs to a Negro absentee owner, purchased from a Portuguese who also was an absentee owner. E1 are Portuguese bearing the same surname as A, but apparently not closely related to them. E2 is also a Portuguese, but without the same surname as either A or E1, although the land formerly belonged to the brother of a man in E1. F is the houses and lands owned by an East Indian extended family, all related affinally. The few Negroes in Villo Point are indicated by G. H is a miscellaneous category of Portuguese who only own houses in Villo Point, and who do not appear to be related to anyone else in the community.