

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with one sector of the economic life of a small village in the hill area--known as the Scotland District--of the island of Barbados, British West Indies. It will focus upon a description and analysis of the ways in which land resources in and around the village of Chalky Mount are exploited, and upon the kinds of social relationships villagers form in the pursuance of economic activities related to land exploitation. Of secondary, but related, importance is a concern with the ways in which villagers combine their land-based and other economic activities in order to meet their cash and subsistence needs.

Since this study deals with Chalky Mount's system of land adaptations, it is phrased in those ecological terms which stress "... man in adjustive and exploitative interaction through the agency of technology, with his inorganic and biotal milieu [and the] relations between men" (Helm 1962:637). It follows the perspective of cultural ecology which, in Steward's words, "pays primary attention to those features which empirical analysis shows to be most closely involved in the utilization of

environment in culturally prescribed ways" (1955:37).

In the largely agrarian world of Chalky Mount--and Barbados--land is clearly the most important element in the physical environment to which the villagers adapt. The economy of Barbados is overwhelmingly dependent upon the production and processing of sugar cane--over 75 percent of its cultivable acreage being devoted to this crop--and Chalky Mount is deeply involved in the national sugar economy. The majority of those persons engaged in wage-earning and/or cash producing activities derive a good deal of their income from activities directly related to the land, even though not all of the income of the village's inhabitants is directly derived from farming and other land-based economic activities. Further, adults spend most of their working time in and around the village in production activities which involve some form or another of land use and exploitation. Land, then, in Chalky Mount is the major instrument of production, and the ways in which most individuals meet their subsistence and cash needs depend to a great extent upon their relationship to the land.

Since Chalky Mount's adaptational system involves land use, this study is primarily concerned with Steward's first and second methodological points in his discussion of cultural ecology; that is, "an examination of the relationship of technology, or productive processes, to the environment" (1956:15), and "the behavior patterns involved in the

exploitation of a particular area by means of a particular technology" (1955:40).

In brief, I shall be concerned with the ways in which lands are exploited both in terms of "man-land" relations and "man-man" relations as these exist in the socio-economic system of Barbados and the geographical setting of the Scotland District. I shall focus upon the exploitative patterns which themselves are a product of the interplay between environment, technology and social structure, and the economic patterns, e.g., marketing, which are related to these. In general, then, I shall be concerned with that sector of Chalky Mount's economy which is directly and specifically related to the land as the primary instrument of production. The method of presentation rests upon a detailed description of the kinds of productive activities in which the villagers engage, and I shall place major emphasis upon the ways in which these productive activities are organized and carried out, the kinds of social and/or labor relationships formed in the pursuance of these activities, and the ways in which the products of these activities are disposed of by their producers.

Production activities throughout this paper will be discussed as complexes because such activities are organized in a series of unified steps surrounding a particular production focus. The villagers are involved in six of these land-based complexes, each complex playing a role of varying

importance in Chalky Mount's total economic life. The complexes include small-scale sugar cane farming, plantation farming, the cultivation and processing of arrowroot (a minor cash crop), the growing of subsistence or food crops, the raising of various types of livestock, and the production of pottery. However, sugar cane farming, whether it be on plantations or small farms, clearly predominates in the village's ecological system.

Although there is a great deal of overlap among most of the land-based complexes, e.g., emphasis upon cash-producing as opposed to subsistence activities, pecuniary considerations in the formation of work groups and dyadic labor relationships, dependency upon non-household labor, geographical factors affecting production activities, etc., the complexes can nevertheless be isolated for purposes of description and analysis. In the ensuing chapters each complex is thus isolated and discussed in turn. I have chosen this method of organization, rather than discussing production activities in one chapter and sociological and other concomitants of economic arrangements in other chapters, because I want to show how each of these complexes emerges as a functionally related series of activities surrounding a given production focus. In this way, it is hoped, "the behavior patterns involved in the exploitation of a particular area by means of a particular technology" (Steward 1955:40) will emerge more clearly.

Yet, in order to avoid excessive repetition of the patterned similarities which cross-cut the complexes, the method of presentation shifts with the nature of the complex. For instance, in Chapter III (Small-Scale Sugar Cane Farming) production techniques, the agricultural cycle, physical environment, and the nature of small land holdings are emphasized as well as such factors as land tenure and working relationships. In the discussion of the sugar plantations (Chapter IV) I have stressed the organization of the plantations as this organization is revealed in the statuses and roles of the workers, the work groups they form, and, in general, the ways in which they acquire wages from the plantations for which they work. Sugar producing activities which are unique to the plantations are also included and contrasted with activities on the small farms. Chapter V (Minor Land-Based Economic Complexes, i.e., arrowroot production, subsistence crop cultivation, livestock raising and pottery making) omits and simply cross-references those patterns and activities which would duplicate materials presented in preceding chapters, concentrating upon unique features of the complexes under discussion.

One problem that arises in the organization of these chapters and the presentation of data stems from the nature of the land exploiting units. Although the household is a basic unit of the village's social structure, the nature of exploitative activities and economic patterns

mitigates its effective functioning as a unit of production. The small farms, for instance, are not held--nor quite often even worked--by corporate kin or household groups as such. As we shall see, the household's weakness as a unit of production seems, in part, to be functionally related to the land exploitative patterns and productive processes concentrated upon in this paper. Consequently, economic roles in a number of production settings, e.g., small-scale sugar cane farming, subsistence cultivation, etc. are defined less within what Steward has called "vertical segments" (1955:66), such as household or other local groups, than on the basis of one's relationship to the land and/or technological processes. A farmer is a farmer because he (or she) rents and/or owns a parcel of land which is used in some economic way. Similarly, the status of potter depends on the ability to make pottery upon a wheel--persons unable to use the wheel but who might be actively engaged in the village's pottery industry are not considered by themselves or others as potters. Such economic roles are not defined in terms of the household or other local groups because the exploiting unit is the individual. This feature of Chalky Mount is in direct contrast to those "peasant" communities which have been described in other areas of the Caribbean, such as Martinique and Jamaica (vide Horowitz 1960). However, on the sugar plantation the roles of individuals are defined in terms of their positions within the plantation's organization--the plantation being the exploiting

unit--and for this reason Chapter IV, which deals with the sugar plantations, has more of a "structural" orientation than other chapters devoted to the land-based economic complexes.

But, the delineation of economic roles is not complete when these roles are discussed as discrete units, even though this approach is taken as a matter of convenience in presenting the data. Following the emphasis on land use and exploitation, then, and interwoven with the main discussion, will be a discussion of the villagers' multiple involvement in a number of income-producing activities, or what Comitas (1963, 1964) has called "occupational plurality."<sup>1</sup> The multiple involvement in income-producing and/or wage-earning activities makes it inappropriate to view many of Chalky Mount's adults in uni-occupational terms, and also makes it difficult to "fit" Chalky Mount into the plantation and peasant framework that is often utilized in the delineation and identification of rural Caribbean socio-economic segments (Cf. Padilla 1957, Horowitz 1960). Undoubtedly a variety of cultural features are affected by the adaptive processes which form the major

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<sup>1</sup>"Occupational plurality is a condition wherein the modal adult is systematically engaged in a number of gainful activities which form for him an integrated economic complex" Comitas (1964:41). This concept will be developed and further explained in Chapter II where the village's occupational structure is discussed.

concern of this paper, but for present purposes I shall try to suggest how "occupational plurality" is related to land exploitative patterns<sup>2</sup> and how it affects the villagers' adaptations to the larger social and economic environments of Barbados.

The combination of land-based economic complexes with other income-producing activities increases the adaptability of Chalky Mount individuals and households to the island's socio-economic environment. An important feature of this environment for the rural lower class is the need for cash income in order to obtain essential materials and services, and an emphasis upon the acquisition of a variety of "non-essential" consumer goods.

The villagers' dependency upon cash cannot be over-emphasized. Virtually all of the goods and services they regard as essential can only be realized with cash. And of equal importance is the fact that a variety of "biologically non-essential" items used to maintain and increase the villagers' culturally prescribed standards of consumption also require--and are powerful inducements to the acquisition of--cash. Most of these goods and services come from sources outside of the village and are integral parts of a system of cash exchange and a market economy.

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<sup>2</sup>This concern is linked to another interest of cultural ecology which is "to ascertain the extent to which the behavior patterns entailed in exploiting the environment affect other aspects of the culture" (Steward 1955:41).



"Occupational plurality," then, is that aspect of the "cultural core" (Steward 1955:37) which facilitates the adjustment of the villagers to an economic environment with relatively high cash demands placed upon the fulfillment of basic and "socially-derived" (Ibid.:40) needs, and to a social environment which often makes single occupational or income-producing activities inadequate to supply the needed cash. In this socio-economic environment an enormous quantity of goods, such as tools, building materials, clothing, and most foods, are imported, placing them within a system of cash exchange with relatively high prices. At the same time, wages are relatively low, land holdings are of a limited size and often of marginal agricultural potential, consumption needs are increasing, and the occupational outlets or income-producing alternatives are limited for the relatively poorly educated and lower class Negroes of Chalky Mount. Consequently, combining several cash-producing activities enables individuals and/or households to acquire more of the cash they need, and is thus not only a concomitant of ecological processes, but also a vital feature of the villagers' adaptation to the social and economic environments in which they live.

In this paper, then, I shall try to show the ways in which villagers combine several of their cash-producing activities related to the land, and also how some of these land-based activities are merged with other economic activities--divorced from the land--in order to provide

the cash which culturally defined needs have made mandatory.

It is apparent that the land-based complexes relate to and dovetail with insular institutions and respond to forces which have arisen outside of the community. The extra-community dependency of the villagers will be indicated in succeeding chapters, although it will not be overly emphasized. This dependency involves such things as the overriding importance of sugar cane, the decline in recent years of markets for arrowroot starch and pottery, the minimizing of subsistence and non-cash oriented economic activities, and the fact of emigration with its effect on land purchasing power and the village's labor supply. These and many other features reveal how many factors which regulate and determine the daily lives of the villagers "originate" outside of the community. Chalky Mount's land-based economy, then, is inextricably a part of the insular and extra-insular society, and the villagers' activities are responsive to pressures which arise outside the village.

At this point, however, it is advisable to note that neither Chalky Mount nor its land-based economic complexes comprise a subsystem of Barbados' total economy.

R. T. Smith's comments on a British Guianese Negro village aptly portray Chalky Mount in these respects, and reflect the approach taken in this paper:

It is crucial to make clear the fact that the village is not a bounded economic unit, except insofar as we decide to treat it as one for the purposes of

description. Farming activities and animal husbandry are balanced against participation in the labor market of the colony as a whole, for villagers sell their labor for wages outside the village as well as cultivating the soil within it (1956:22).

And further,

If we try to look at the economic system of the village as a whole we find that there is really no sense in which the village functions as a subsystem of the total economy of the colony. There is instead a series of lines where the economy of the whole society cuts across the village as a unit. For example, villagers participate in the economic life of the sugar estates, but these estates are external organizations so far as the village is concerned. Similarly farmers produce rice which is sold to external agencies, and they may even engage tractors to do part of the cultivation, but the tractors are also external to the village. Whilst we must bear in mind this intrusion of external factors... we may look at the village as though it were a distinct unit... (R. T. Smith 1956:25).

Chalky Mount, then, is not a circumscribed or bounded economic unit; although, for descriptive purposes, I have often treated the land-based economic complexes as if this were so.

Further, I do not profess that Chalky Mount with its ecological adaptations is a microcosm reflecting in its particulars conditions found in all other rural villages of Barbados. However, from personal knowledge of the island and from discussions with others who have worked in Barbados, it seems probable that much of the following presentation is generally applicable to other villages in the island, especially those in the Scotland District. Basically, Chalky Mount reveals the same fundamental economic behavior, household and family organization, community structure, religious and educational patterns, etc.

as do other villages in Barbados (vide Greenfield 1959) even though it does include certain features, e.g., pottery and arrowroot, which give its economic life a distinctive flavor.

Consequently, the problem of community "distinctiveness" is not particularly germane for research in Barbados as is the case, for example, in Jamaica (Clarke 1957; Comitas 1962, 1964), Puerto Rico (Steward 1956), British Guiana (R. T. Smith 1956, Jayawardena 1963), and Trinidad (Klass 1959, Freilich 1960). The lower class rural population on this small 166-square-mile island has been subject to fairly uniform pressures which have led to considerable cultural and ethnic homogeneity. In addition, the communication and transportation network of Barbados is too well developed to permit the perpetuation of isolated, culturally differentiated population enclaves. To be sure, there are some differences in land adaptations in various ecological zones of the island, but these do not seem to have had an overriding influence in the sense of producing culturally "distinctive" communities.

Chalky Mount as a village and community, especially its "informal structure" (M. G. Smith 1956:309) and "weak sense of community cohesion" (Wagley 1957:8), is discussed in Chapter II where the more salient socio-cultural features of the village are delineated. The ecological points at which Chalky Mount appears to be at variance with non-Scotland District villages are dealt with in the chapters

devoted to the various land-based economic complexes.

This dissertation presents a type of data not readily available in the growing anthropological literature on British West Indian Negro communities. It is hoped that these data will not only increase our understanding of life in rural Barbados, but will also contribute to future comparative work on ecological and economic problems in the British Caribbean. Further, by describing a village that is neither "plantation" nor "peasant" this dissertation gives further empirical support to the concept of "occupational plurality" thereby extending our knowledge of rural socio-economic types existing in the British Caribbean.

For the most part, "community-oriented" field studies of the British Caribbean by social or cultural anthropologists offer little intensive treatment of ecological adaptations and agrarian economic patterns in communities whose populations are largely Negro. Rather these topics have been minimally presented as a background for other focal interests of the investigators, most often kin and domestic groups and/or other non-economic institutional and cultural features of the communities (Cf. Freilich 1960, Greenfield 1959, Hickerson 1954, Jayawardena 1963, Skinner 1955, M. G. Smith 1962a, R. T. Smith 1956).

Where sugar cane farming has been emphasized, this emphasis has often centered upon "factory-and-field" plantations (Cf. Jayawardena 1963) which are organized on a

much larger scale than the relatively small, non-corporately owned, factory-lacking, and lightly mechanized plantations for which Chalky Mount's laborers work (Chapter IV). Although detailed treatment of work organization on these "factories-in-the-field" is often lacking, technological processes and work organization appear to vary in a number of significant respects from the plantations dealt with in this dissertation. There has been little intensive research on the nature and specifics of small-scale sugar cane farming even though this type of farming assumes relatively major proportions in parts of some of the more prominent sugar growing islands such as Jamaica, Trinidad, and Antigua. Furthermore, there is almost no treatment of the ways in which small-scale sugar cane farming interlocks with plantation wage-labor in communities where it forms a major type of ecological adaptation.

In general, rural communities in the British Caribbean which have been the object of relatively frequent and intensive investigation by anthropological field workers are located in the three largest territories, Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Guiana. Barbados, which ranks fourth in the area in terms of social and economic importance, has received comparatively little social scientific attention. The only anthropological "community-study" on a Barbadian community which has appeared to date (Greenfield 1959) concentrates upon the family from a functional and historical perspective, deals with a village in a different

"ecological zone" of the island, and, in general, touches only very lightly on the topics treated in this paper.

Further, as I mentioned above, most of the Negro agrarian communities upon which community studies have focused, have been discussed, either tacitly or explicitly, in terms of a "plantation-peasant" dichotomy which appears to be an organizing framework of considerable popularity in Caribbean studies. This framework, however, does not have great analytical value for Chalky Mount, and, probably for many other villages in Barbados as well.

I suspect that the "occupational plurality" which seems to be characteristic of Chalky Mount is a more widespread feature in the Caribbean than might appear from the literature, although I am not prepared fully to argue and substantiate this point. This characteristic is not only an important aspect of Jamaican society--for which, as far as I know, it was first explicitly named and described by Comitas (1963)--but exists in other areas such as British Guiana (vide R. T. Smith 1956) and perhaps Carriacou (M. G. Smith 1962a). It is also quite possible that this socio-economic type is appearing in other areas of the world where, for example, "peasant" or small farmer communities are under increased pressures from wider societal sources, and where a single agrarian or other economic activity will not provide the cash that is needed for subsistence and increasing consumption demands. Such areas would probably include those places where rural peoples

have faced what Geertz has termed the "depeasantizing process" (1962:6). That there might be an alternative to types such as cash crop farmers and rural proletarians that supposedly result from this "depeasantizing process" is suggested here, as indeed it has been suggested by Comitas. As we shall see, for instance, a mixture of cash-crop farming and plantation wage-labor, quite often combined with other income-producing activities, is a fundamental characteristic of Chalky Mount's economic life. Such "occupational plurality" however, does not merely involve the supplementing of primary occupational pursuits with subsidiary ones, but rather forms for the participants "an integrated economic complex" (Comitas 1964:41). Hence, analysis and identification of Chalky Mount in terms of "uni-occupational models" (Comitas 1964) will reflect inaccurately the actual occupational situation and the kind of socio-economic type this population represents. The possible practical or applied implications of such a misidentification are suggested by Comitas and are also touched upon in the final chapter of this paper.

The data which form the basis of this study were collected in Barbados from June to August in 1960, and from August 1961 to July 1962. During this time, I lived in Chalky Mount and there was also ample opportunity to survey many other areas within Barbados and the Scotland District in particular. During the summer of 1960 research was concentrated upon the village's pottery industry, and



1961-1962 was largely devoted to investigating the other economic complexes to be discussed in the following pages.

While doing field work in the community, it became apparent that much information about the village's economic life could be gathered from sources outside of the village itself. Sugar plantations adjacent to Chalky Mount provided a great deal of materials on wages, earning capacities, rents paid on lands, etc. The account books of sugar factories were invaluable sources of precise information on cane tonnages delivered by small farmers, and the monies paid on these tonnages. Governmental and other documents on file in the Barbados Public Library were also extensively consulted, as were the archives of the Barbados Registry which contains an extensive collection of deeds and wills and baptismal, marriage, and burial records. Likewise, a great deal of time was spent in the library of the Barbados Museum which has an excellent collection of materials relating to the island's history. The files of the Government's Department of Science and Agriculture were especially useful in providing recent historical documentation on the village's now moribund arrowroot industry and on its pottery industry. Also the files and archives of various local governmental offices (the parishes and regional districts) yielded much information on such matters as land taxes, size of land holdings, and land ownership.

In sum, the extra-village documentation on the village itself is fairly rich (though not always as copious and as accurate as one would like) and was intensively utilized as a source of data. Much data was also gathered employing the more customary techniques of formal interviews, participant-observation, the collection of genealogies, census taking, etc. Particular emphasis was placed upon the collection of quantifiable materials. Census materials, including data on age, sex, and relationships of household members, were gathered from each of the village's 117 households, and a lengthy questionnaire was administered to most of them. This questionnaire was administered during March and April of 1962 after I had spent about nine or ten months in the field. The questionnaire was single-spaced on 9 legal cap pages and covered 16 major topical areas.<sup>3</sup> Within these areas I sought responses to approximately 260 items. Difficulties in administering the questionnaire and problems concerning sampling are discussed with respect to particular topics as they are raised in the ensuing pages. Also a variety of other sources,

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<sup>3</sup>The major topical areas include: house; land tenure, acquisition, and use; household composition; family outside of Barbados; travel outside of Barbados; family outside of Chalky Mount but in Barbados; family history; rediffusion and radio; education and literacy; church attendance and affiliation; Friendly Society and other organizational membership; voting; insurance; banks and loans; stores and expenditures; livestock.

e.g., sugar factories and plantations, and various governmental agencies provided a great deal of statistical materials. Most of these data were not subjected to any elaborate statistical analysis, but are used mainly to support, where possible, qualitative judgments and analyses, and to indicate distributions and modal or average behavior. Some of these data are presented in tabular form when I felt that a more extensive presentation of statistical distributions was needed. All of these tables, except for number 1 and part of 2, are comprised of data collected by myself in the field, and were compiled from sources such as those described above.

The overall presentation of this study is primarily synchronic. Acknowledging that, "the actual process of adaptation depends, to a great extent, on the previous cultural forms" (Sahlins 1958:x), I have nonetheless viewed the various land-based complexes as a series of adaptations to present geographical conditions and the demands of a national economic system, a major feature of which involves the dependency upon cash income. The emphasis in this paper is upon the functioning of contemporary adaptive processes. For this reason the specific historical events which may in large measure account for existing ecological and economic patterns will not be treated in any great detail. Historical data--mostly from the recent past--have been included, however, where they seem to be

essential for an understanding and clarification of contemporary activities and adaptations.

With this general orientation to the aims, methods, and techniques of this dissertation I now move to a discussion of the island, regional, and village settings.