

A family business: Women, children and smallholder sugar cane farming in Fiji

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Abstract: *This paper highlights the contribution of women and children to the sugar industry in Fiji by examining the importance of family labour in the historical development of the smallholder system and describing the present situation for the study participants. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during 1996–97, on the island of Vanua Levu in the northern region of Fiji. The twenty smallholder households in the study comprised both Fijian and Fiji Indian respondents who relied primarily on selling sugar cane for their cash income. How inequalities within the household in terms of allocation of labour and resources are legitimated is outlined. Resource distribution within the household in regards to two important issues for the sugar industry, land and trade liberalisation, are examined. In light of global trends in trade liberalisation and probable falls in sugar prices, future strategies for survival identified by Fijian and Fiji Indian smallholders are also discussed. The case study demonstrates that the sugar industry is still largely reliant on family labour and, particularly for low socio-economic smallholders, the unremunerated labour of family members makes an essential contribution to the production of sugar cane.*

Keywords: *smallholders, Fiji sugar industry, gender relations, family labour, land tenure, trade liberalisation*

This paper is based on doctoral research that examined the socio-economy of smallholder sugar cane farms in Fiji. An area of research that had received little attention is the participation of women and children in the smallholder sugar cane farm economy. The study therefore focused on the way gender relations intersect with generational relations, denoting age and kinship, in orientating socio-economic processes within the farm. The study also sought

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to examine how issues concerning the sugar industry at national and global levels play out in a localised context, including the trends towards trade liberalisation resulting in the demise of preferential trading agreements.

This paper examines the importance of family labour for the production of sugar cane and the relationship between paid and unpaid work on the smallholder sugar cane farm. The findings presented describe the main socio-economic processes on the study farms and examine how these are differentiated by gender and generation. The paper is structured to examine the interconnections between the past, present and future for smallholder sugar cane farming families. The significance of family labour in the historical transition from plantation to smallholder production of sugar cane is briefly outlined. The contemporary situation is then examined for the study participants in regards to the organisation of labour and the distribution of resources on their smallholder farms. This includes a gendered analysis of land control, an often-neglected aspect in discussions on land in Fiji. Future survival strategies were explored by asking study participants what they would do in regards to a reduction in sugar price, which would be probable with the end of preferential trading agreements.¹ The strategies demonstrate how regional and gendered opportunities for farming family members are differentiated.

METHODOLOGY

The research was based on fourteen months' of ethnographic fieldwork conducted during 1996–97, in a field site situated on the island of Vanua Levu in the Northern region of Fiji. Twenty smallholder households participated in the study. The ten Fijian households and ten Fiji Indian households comprised a total of 158 people. The decision to include both Fijian and Fiji Indian respondents arose as a reflection of the field site where people from both ethnic groups lived and worked together as neighbours, colleagues and friends. The majority of previous studies tend to concentrate on either one of Fiji's main ethnic groups, indigenous Fijians or those of Indian descent who are referred to here as Fiji Indian. Gillion (1977: 13) attributes the lack of research incorporating both ethnic groups to separate social, religious and political lives of the two groups during the early part of the twentieth century. He qualifies this by noting the 'pervasive influence' of British culture on the whole of the colony and exchanges between Fijian and Indian cultures that have yet to be thoroughly researched (Gillion, 1977: 15).

There are very few detailed accounts of Fiji's sugar cane farming families that focus on intra or inter-household relations and a consequent neglect of the involvement of women and children on smallholdings.² This study acknowledged ethnicity and differences in socio-economic status as important factors in the analysis but mainly focused on differentiation in gender and generational relations. The ethnographic study involved living on a smallholder sugar cane farm for one year. The households chosen for the study were mainly within walking distance of where I lived so that they could be visited

easily on a regular basis. The close proximity of the study households to each other also allowed for observations of socio-economic relations between households.

This ethnography involved observing and participating in daily life, which included being shown all the different socio-economic activities that the respondents were involved in and where appropriate participating in these activities. The qualitative methods used were daily field notes to record observations and develop ongoing analysis. Taped interviews were conducted with key respondents, including most household members over the age of fifteen, other sugar industry stakeholders at the local and national level such as employees of the Fiji Sugar Corporation and sugar cane farmers' union representatives. Interviews were also conducted with a number of local professionals who could provide information on the socio-economic context of the study area. Photographs and video recordings of farming life provided a valuable record for future reference and were also one way of giving respondents something back as I took many family portraits and videoed special events for them.

Quantitative information was obtained from the respondents, such as work diaries and information on farm production. Generally literature was consulted from governmental and non-governmental agencies, the media and academic literature.

HISTORICAL FORMATION OF SMALLHOLDER SUGAR CANE FARMS

The development of the sugar industry in Fiji has been well documented.³ For the purposes of this paper it is important to briefly examine why there was a transition from plantation to smallholder production and how this transition was conducted.

The production of sugar cane in Fiji was initially based on a plantation system owned by European colonists and worked by indentured labourers from India. Notably the Australian-owned company, the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR), became the major player as both an owner of plantations and miller of cane to produce raw sugar. Moynagh (1981) conceptualises the transfer of cane production from European operated plantations to Indian smallholdings in three stages. In the first stage, 'from 1884 to 1912 Indian settlement was viewed by European planters and millers as a way to augment the supply of labour on plantations' (Moynagh, 1981: 69). During the second phase from 1912 to 1923 Indian settlement was regarded as a substitute for indentured labour. With the abolishment of indentured labour looming,⁴ sugar producers were anxious to find another cheap labour pool. During the third stage from 1923 to 1939 there were efforts to ensure that this substitute was effective (Moynagh, 1981: 69).

CSR had experience of smallholdings in Australia and from 1912 to 1922 in Fiji they conducted a series of experiments in settlement schemes for Indian tenants. Initially the plot sizes were either too small resulting in underemployment, or too large, thereby competing with plantations for the shrinking labour

pool. Eight- to twelve-acre blocks (3.24 to 4.86 hectares) were found to be appropriate because they could be operated by a nuclear family. Narsey (1979: 107) cites several major advantages this size of farm gave to CSR. The average ten-acre size (4.05 hectare) was just enough to keep one family and encouraged the farmer to 'plant all the land with cane to obtain a decent income' (Narsey, 1979: 107).⁵ Because the size was predicted to be too small to support more than one family, future generations would be a source of surplus labour available to work for CSR in its milling operations, thus helping to resolve the labour shortage problem brought on by the termination of indenture. Rapid implementation ensued from 1923 to 1939. CSR was able to maintain tight control by dictating husbandry practices and the pricing structure and off-loading production costs on to the farming families. Michael Moynagh (1981: 124–130) argues that with the tight control CSR had over growers and the retention of co-operative production methods such as harvesting gangs, farmers were little more than plantation workers.

Writers such as Ali (1980), Gillion (1962, 1977), Lal (1983, 1985, 1992), Moynagh (1981) and Narsey (1979) have critiqued CSR domination of the sugar industry and the position of smallholders within a framework of ethnic and class differentiation showing up economic and political exploitation. The extensive analysis of wage rates, 'man' days, payment systems, credit controls and cane contract arrangements that outlines this exploitation is fundamental, yet it still misses a vital factor: unpaid family labour. Some authors do mention it briefly such as Narsey (1979: 104):

... in Fiji, where the wives and children of the farmers pitched in to work the farm. They were not paid wages but were sustained from the income of the farmer. The farmer's income therefore represented the labour of his whole family and not just one adult.

Shaista Shameem (1990) addresses the contribution of Indian women's labour from the beginning of indenture in 1879 to 1930, and focuses on gender relations and concepts of femininity in the control of female labour. This period covers the transition to smallholder farming and her analysis of CSR's intention to use family labour as a viable alternative to indentured labour demonstrates CSR's awareness of women and children's involvement in cane production. The size of the farms and the contracting only to married men all accommodated the ideal of a nuclear family operation. Thus the smallholder schemes were ultimately reliant on notions of family that had a male head of household who ostensibly controlled the labour and resources of his family.

The success of the smallholder scheme for CSR is blatantly demonstrated in the continuation of very substantial profits after the end of indenture (see Narsey, 1979). CSR dictated the pricing structure it paid growers for their cane, and the various payment systems it employed were largely upheld by the different Commissions of Enquiry that had been prompted by disputes between cane growers and the Company. It was not until Lord Denning's Commission

of Inquiry in 1969 made an arbitration award that apportioned a larger share of the proceeds to cane growers, that CSR was forced to share more equitably. Although the share of proceeds was not the main reason for CSR's departure from Fiji, it would have been a contributing factor (see Moynagh, 1981; Narsey, 1979: 118–119). CSR sold its operations to the Fiji government in 1973 including its freehold land. The government formed the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) which is the current organisation operating the four sugar cane mills, research and farm extension services.

CONTEMPORARY SMALLHOLDER SUGAR CANE FARMS

During 1996/97 there were around 22,500 registered growers contracted to sell sugarcane. The average size of the sugar cane farm in 1995 was 4.6 hectares (approximately 12 acres), with an area of 3.65 hectares of sugar cane harvested (Barrack, 1996: 6). The average production of cane per cane contract in the same period was approximately 180 tons (Maharaj, 1996: 5). The smallholder system, then, is still the mainstay of cane production in Fiji. The farms in the study fitted within this average size and sugar cane tonnage indicating that some generalisations may be drawn from the research. However, an important differentiating factor is the socio-economic differences between the Northern Division (Vanua Levu) where the research was undertaken and the Western Division (Viti Levu), which is the major sugar producing area. There are more off-farm economic opportunities for farming families in the Western Division in the tourism and manufacturing industries as well as the economic advantages of larger urban centres situated nearby.

THE HOUSEHOLD

The analysis of production and consumption processes on smallholder farms was conducted using the framework of the 'household', which is regarded as a locus for the allocation of labour and resources. Households are recognised in the study as being both variable in composition and internally differentiated. The study participants' interpretation of a household focused on the hearth, that is, each household operates their own kitchen.⁶ Resources may be shared between households, and members from one household, particularly children, may regularly eat in other households. However, generally a household 'unit', involving the management, production and distribution of resources, can be determined by the criteria of the kitchen and who contributes and partakes of food. Food of course is not the only resource or necessity to be managed by the household but is seen here as a distinctive feature.

The household was predominantly based around the married couple and their children. Both Fijian and Fiji Indian smallholder households tended to be patrilocal. That is, a woman would usually go and live on her husband's family farm. A smallholder farm may be divided among brothers and support more than one household. A more detailed analysis of household formation on smallholder farms is beyond the scope of this paper. What is important to note



Figure 1. Young women cutting cane for planting.

is that not only are there internal household relations that are differentiated by gender and generation, but that there are also inter-household relations, between households, to consider within a smallholder farm.

THE FARM ENVIRONMENT

To grow and sell sugarcane you must have land, usually leased through the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB), and a cane contract with FSC. 'Farm' here refers to land leased by respondents including the land designated as 'contract area' registered under a cane grower for the purposes of producing sugar cane.

The study farms were an average size of fifteen acres, with the majority of land being planted in cane and with smaller areas used for growing rice and other subsistence crops. The tonnage of cane that farms produced varied from 30 to 300 tonnes, with most households relying on between 100 and 200 tonnes as their main source of cash income in 1996. This placed them well below the 'basic needs' poverty line in terms of cash resources based on analysis from the *Fiji Poverty Report* (UNDP, 1997). While the poverty report estimated that to meet basic needs for a household of four adult units in a rural settlement it would cost \$84.10 a week, the study households were getting approximately half that in cane proceeds.⁷ It was obvious that this was not enough to sustain a household that could vary in size from two adults and two children to five adults and five children.

Subsistence agriculture was vital to the survival of the study households. The staple foods were rice and root crops, with all farms involved in rice cultivation and all the Fijian households growing root crops such as *dalo*, *tavioka*, *uvi* and *kumala*, usually on adjacent *mataqali*⁸ land. Along with the staples, households grew a variety of vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices. The food grown on the farm was estimated by respondents to account from anywhere between 50 and 90 per cent of the weekly food intake. Other food could be obtained from neighbouring properties through sale, barter or some form of obligation such as *lalakai*⁹ or *kerekere*.¹⁰ Goods could be brought from a few sparsely supplied local shops or in the nearest urban centre some considerable distance away.

In regards to livestock, nearly all the farms had chickens and many had small herds of goats. Bullocks, and occasionally horses, were used for ploughing and harrowing and for clearing tracks to lay portable rail lines in the fields for the cane 'trucks'.¹¹ Many families did not own cows, which are relatively expensive and difficult to feed when there is limited land for grazing; this can also apply to bullocks, goats and horses (Ali, 1988). Only Fijian¹² families raised pigs that were highly valued as food for occasions such as funerals and weddings.

The amenities available to the households were extremely limited. At the time of fieldwork there was no mainlined electricity and most families in the area did not have generators. Therefore there was no access to refrigerators for food storage, which meant perishable food items had to be procured regularly (Bolabola, 1983). Cooking was done either on an open fire or, more rarely, on gas rings. Spring water was piped in to nearly all the farms, in the form of an outside tap and shower. No one in the case study had indoor plumbing, flush toilets or hot water. Up to four households may share one tap and during times of drought the water often runs low or stops completely. Most of the farms either had a river running through them or had access to the river which was an essential source of water for farm and household uses.

ORGANISATION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOUR ON THE FARMS

This section discusses the organisation of household labour on the study farms. To contextualise the importance of unpaid household labour, a brief overview of paid employment on these smallholdings is outlined. The families in the study were relatively poor; therefore few households could afford to pay labourers to work for them on the farm apart from cane cutting and sharecropping arrangements.

In regards to harvesting sugar cane, growers would join together in a gang to harvest each other's farms. They were headed by a gang committee and a *sirdar*¹³ whose job was to co-ordinate the gang and liaise with FSC. The gang signs a Memorandum of Gang Agreement (MOGA), which is an agreement between members that refers to rules as set out by the Sugar Commission. For example, nine households in the study belonged to a gang of nineteen cane contractors. Five of the other households were in another gang. These harvesting

gangs comprised both Fijian and Fiji Indian growers and were 'portable line' gangs. The way harvesting gangs were organised was subject to variation.

The gangs in the study stipulated that for every 100 tonnes of cane, a cane contractor should provide one cutter. The contractor may replace his own labour with a 'substitute' cutter as well as hiring additional labourers. Most of the respondents who were cane contractors were also cutters and their brothers, sons or other male relatives were employed as extra cutters depending on the tonnage. Those contractors who did not cut were either too old, had poor health or a few had other paid employment. The reliance then, was mainly on family labour to provide a cane cutter.

It was difficult to ascertain how much casual farm labouring went on that was paid for in cash. Labour could be exchanged for goods and services as well as in the spirit of helping out. There were few opportunities for females to obtain waged work in the study area, with the exception of a few women who earned cash through casual farm labouring. Women would primarily earn cash through the sale of their agricultural produce and craftwork, such as woven baskets made by Fijian women respondents. For men the main source of paid employment was associated with the sugar industry.

The smallholder farms incorporated a wide variety of socio-economic activities along with sugar cane production, which included:

- market gardening
- subsistence agriculture
- animal husbandry
- domestic work including cooking, washing, cleaning, child care, care of elderly and sick
- barter and exchange networks
- social/religious events and obligations
- community work
- handicraft production for exchange and sale
- off-farm employment e.g. in the forestry industry
- Fijian families who were landowners had access to revenue from rents, sale of timber and river gravel.

The organisation of work within the household was mainly based around the married couple who negotiated work programmes that were often separate but also shared. Respondents generally talked about two spheres of activity, 'house work' and 'farm work'. The husband as head of the household delegated responsibility to his wife to organise the work women, girls and young boys were expected to do. The senior man was responsible for the overall running of the farm and ultimately the care and protection of his family. Women also gained authority with age and were able to delegate more tasks to growing children and to daughters-in-law when their sons got married. A Fiji Indian respondent stated, 'the mother-in-law is the boss of the house, sometimes the elder brother-in-law's wife is', indicating the chain of authority when the mother-in-law passes away. Within extended family farms with several

households, there were kinship protocols in regards to seniority and who has legal title of a land lease and a cane contract, which were predominantly held by the senior man on the smallholding.

Certain tasks on the farm were seen as more suitable for women, children or men. Women did house and farm work but did not plough or drive tractors, and nor were they formally employed in cane harvesting gangs. However, many of the women said they had harvested cane during times of labour shortage and when there was pressure to complete harvesting. Farms that were not part of a harvesting gang system formed their own gang with neighbours and utilised family labour, including females at times. Women participated in all other activities involved with cane production such as planting, fertilising and weeding.

Both Fijian and Fiji Indian households were organised in this way. There were no distinctive differences in the way labour was allocated or the amount of labour performed by ethnicity. Rather any differences between households were due to the size and composition of the household and the enterprises household members were engaged in. For example, younger children required more attention and were not so able to provide labour as older children. Some of the women were involved in enterprises such as basket making, sewing or market gardening, which could increase their workload. The disposition of various household members towards work also varied, but here again there were no discernible differences by ethnicity.

Depending on the agricultural calendar a woman could spend anywhere from two to ten hours a day involved in agriculture. Women were generally only able to work longer hours on the farm if other female householders, including daughters, were helping with the childcare and domestic work. Pre-school children often accompanied their mothers or care givers to the fields where they played and began to learn how to help, fetching water, pulling weeds, planting and harvesting produce. During the winter months, May through to October, all the farms grew vegetables in their river gardens. Because the majority of males, from youth through to middle age, were involved in harvesting cane from June to January, it was mostly up to the women and children to tend these gardens and any other plantations such as root crops. Older men and women would also participate in these tasks depending on their capabilities and health. Incorporated into this daily routine are commitments of work for social, religious and community obligations.

In total most of the women worked 16 hours or more a day getting up at 4am. They were often involved in doing tasks simultaneously such as looking after children, answering their questions and teaching them skills while working in the field tending crops that are utilised for both cash and subsistence needs. Men did not generally do the daily cooking, food processing, cleaning the house, washing dishes and clothes, or care for children, the elderly or the sick. However this needs to be qualified by age and situation. A boy may help his mother in some of these activities, although some families criticised boys for doing work that was thought of as too feminine. Older children including boys may look after younger siblings and cousins, and older men could spend a lot of time with their grandchildren.

In regards to children, the invisibility of much of the work that women did within the family was also applicable to children for the same reasons. It was mostly unpaid and regarded as 'normal' and a child's duty to help their parents and family. The research found that the children in this study made a tremendous contribution to the farm economy and consequently to the sugar industry. Generally gender roles and seniority protocols directed the organisation of daily life on the study farms. However, labour availability was also a reality and if tasks needed to be done but people of the appropriate gender and age were not available, then others would do them. There could be tension when people stepped out of the mould. Men in particular seemed very protective of their masculinity and status and would refuse to do what they regarded as 'women's work'. As one female respondent commented:

A women's work is very hard and they work longer hours than men who have more time to relax. While a women can do anything a man can do and if she wants to she can go and do this work, the men will not do the cooking and the washing as this is women's work.

A differentiating characteristic of the way women's and men's work is organised is that much of men's work can be clearly located in time and place as farm work. Men finished harvesting or working on the farm for the day and could relax at home in the evenings while women continued working into the night processing and cooking food, caring for children and other household members, sewing, and weaving mats and baskets. That is not to say men were not involved in tasks too, but generally they had much more time to pursue leisure activities such as sport or to *talanoa*¹⁴ around a bowl or two of grog. The amount of leisure time a woman had would depend on her status and responsibilities within the household.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

I have chosen to present two issues from the study that relate to the distribution of resources for smallholder households, as they are important and topical issues for the sugar industry. The first is land control on the study farms from a gendered perspective as this is an aspect that is seldom focused on in the many discussions on land issues in Fiji, with the exception of a few authors such as Cema Bolabola (1986). The second issue is the impact trade liberalisation will have on Fiji's preferential trading agreements in regards to sugar sales. In the study I was interested in such questions as: In what ways could this global trend play out at the local level and effect the income of farming families? What do they identify as alternative strategies for survival if sugar cane prices drop substantially? How this might impact differently on household members is explored.

Land control

Ethnicity, patrilineal inheritance and class largely determine land ownership in Fiji. However gender also plays a major role in determining ownership and

control of land on smallholder farms. The predominance of men on smallholdings as titleholders to land leases and cane contracts and the lack of women in this role reflects gendered notions of ownership, the control of land and the commercial production of cane.

The study found that when women were cane contract or land lease titleholders it is largely by default, as widows, sole inheritors or as access to land by way of tribal affiliations. The institutional structures and dominant social discourses do not encourage women to either inherit farms as their brothers do nor set out to become registered cane growers. That is not to say some women did not do this, only for participants in the present study this was still not socially acceptable.

A woman not having her name on the lease title legally meant she had no right of ownership and effectively control and use of the land had to be negotiated within the farming family. This also has implications for the distribution of matrimonial property in divorce settlements as the distribution is based on a monetary notion of 'economic' contribution to the marriage. This meant wives who have spent years raising children, looking after the home and working on the farm are disqualified from any claim to a share of property if the marriage ends (Jalal, 1997: 92).

Trade liberalisation

Fiji has relied heavily on preferential trading deals with the European Union (EU) where they are able to sell half the sugar Fiji produces at two to three times the world market price¹⁵. The demise of preferential agreements through trade liberalisation will be detrimental to small producers such as the people in this study. For example in 1995 Fiji sold 60 per cent of its sugar exports to the EU under the sugar protocol and received F\$875 per tonne compared to F\$383 a tonne on remaining contracts (Grynberg and White, 1998: 56). Roman Grynberg and Michael White (1998: 56) calculated that the decrease in income for the average cane farmer with the loss of sugar preferences would result in a decrease in net annual income from an average of F\$4,000 to F\$165, making the average sugar farm non-viable.

FUTURE STRATEGIES

I asked people what they would do if the price of sugar cane dropped by as much as 30 per cent.¹⁶ The following is a list of strategies the respondents identified:

- grow other cash crops, e.g. *yaqona*¹⁷
- develop market gardening to sell locally and at the nearest urban market
- increase bartering of goods and services
- increase handicrafts for sale
- expand subsistence base
- encourage education of their children in order to enhance opportunities for off-farm employment
- seek off-farm employment
- good marriages for their children¹⁸

However, respondents also identified the difficulties with some of these strategies. For example if everyone increased market gardening this could flood the local market with produce driving prices down. There were regional constraints in regards to available job opportunities. Off-farm employment opportunities were differentiated by gender in that they employed mainly men, for example sugar cane harvesting, gold mining and forestry. Emigration was not really an option for the respondents in the study due to their poverty. A few mentioned it, but it was regarded as a remote dream.

Therefore the impact on smallholder households could potentially be devastating considering at the time of the study income from sugar cane was their main source of cash. In regards to the differential impact on household members this could mean that families would have to further prioritise where they spend their cash. For example children's education could be jeopardised as expenses such as school fees, uniforms, books and transport costs became unaffordable. While food from subsistence crops may increase, bought foodstuffs would decrease, and there could be a potential lack of food in the household as homegrown crops are sold or bartered. Depending on the size, composition and disposition of households, those at the lower end of the hierarchical order such as young women and children could effectively end up with less to eat.

Migration of household members seeking employment could result in extra workloads for household members left behind on the farm. Again this could adversely impact on women and children as men are more likely to be the ones to seek paid employment off the farm in the study area.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this paper emphasise the importance of examining the smallholding as a complex of socio-economic relations and activities that are situated within specific physical, social and economic opportunities and constraints. The research focused on the way gender relations intersect with generational relations, in orientating socio-economic processes within the farm. It was found that smallholder households were internally differentiated in terms of gender and generation, with senior men predominantly retaining control over the allocation and production of resources.

Both social relations and material conditions interrelate in influencing a woman's working life as well as her access to resources. Generally speaking the women's agency in these processes is variable depending on the seniority they have within the household, which can be more quickly achieved if they move to their own households. Both young married women and men remarked on the relative freedom of 'no one telling you what to do in your own house'. Age made a difference to both men and women who gained seniority and status as they got older.

While all the respondents on the case study farms worked hard, women generally worked longer hours and had less time for leisure activities than men. Again this was dependent on age and the availability of labour, with senior women able to delegate more tasks to children and then to daughters-in-law,

allowing them more free time. Whereas a young mother with three pre-schoolers, an ailing elderly relative, her husband cutting cane full time and no one else to help her is overwhelmed with work.

The transition from a plantation to smallholder system of sugar cane production was primarily based on a need to address rising labour costs with the end of indenture labour. CSR knew the advantages of unpaid family labour as demonstrated by their experimentation of farm size; resulting in an area suitable for a 'nuclear' family and only leasing to married men. The unpaid labour of the family on smallholdings provided a viable alternative to indentured labour in keeping production costs down, to the benefit of CSR who continued to reap substantial profits.

The research found that notions of 'family commitment' still benefit the sugar industry. So what is the relationship between paid and unpaid work on contemporary smallholder sugar cane farms? I would argue that the production of sugar cane was interdependent with the other socio-economic processes on smallholdings, as the farming families could not survive on the income from sugar alone so employed a variety of economic activities to supplement this income. The unpaid work of women and children was integral to the production of cane, by contributing to the cane cultivation process and by performing work that allows other members of the household to participate in cane production. On the case study farms women and children were involved in subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, domestic work, small goods production for sale and exchange as well as cane production.

Yet there was a perception among some industry leaders that women and children no longer participate in the direct production of cane. This perception may be influenced by trends in the Western Division, where family members had more access to off-farm employment. Wealthier growers in the West and the North who can afford to hire farm labourers may also have this attitude. During the study period (1995–1999) women were noticeably absent from all the negotiations, debates and formalised structures of the sugar industry. Women and children were relegated to the world of family where they were simultaneously regarded as labour and as dependants. Unpaid family labour is seldom publicly acknowledged as important to the operation of smallholdings and thus essential to the production of sugar cane.

The smallholders in the present study were representative of the average farm size and tonnage in Fiji but were further constrained by regional opportunities. As families struggle to exist in this environment and meet their requirements it is expected that every member will work. Children are expected to help their parents as wives help their husbands. The unpaid work family members perform within the context of the family/household is morally unquestioned; it is generally not regarded as exploitative. This work is effectively hidden behind the expectations of family relations within and between households. Much of this work has become naturalised (Redclift 1988: 444) as part of what it is to be a 'wife', 'daughter-in-law', 'mother', 'child' and so on. The doctoral study this paper is based on explored contemporary notions of 'family' and household relations and concluded that they



Figure 2. Women and children winnowing rice.

were maintained through the process of marriage which was found to be the linchpin between paid and unpaid work on these smallholdings.¹⁹

Ideas of gender and generational constructs, along with other variables such as ethnicity and class, inform what is culturally acceptable. These cultural ideals, along with economic and environmental factors helped to direct the socio-economy of the farm. They are maintained through various institutional processes such as cultural traditions, religious ideology, and legal structures. These beliefs and practices can change in response to interpretation, circumstances and cross-cultural interaction. Respondents reported on changes in gender and generational relations they had observed in their lifetimes. However, when gender bias is enshrined in legislation, as in the example given on distribution of marital property, and beliefs have been long-standing in a community and are legitimated by religious ideology, they can be difficult to change significantly.

Theoretically the study took on post-structuralist concerns while retaining a legacy from Marxist and feminist frameworks that seek to integrate an analysis of gender and economic relations. I concur with feminist neo-Marxist arguments that point out capital is able to exploit the unpaid labour of women (and children) through their relationship with men. However, this transformation process must be situated in the local context, taking into account the cultural and economic variables, and not seen simply as a co-opting of women's reproductive labour. It is also important to recognise



Figure 3. Neighbours doing their daily washing at the river.

that personalities and circumstances come into play and while men may ‘ideally’ be the head of the household, power relations between couples do vary.

The use of Engel’s dualistic conception of the material base ‘involving the production and reproduction on the one hand of *things*, and the means of existence, and on the other of *people*, the propagation of the species’ (Bradley, 1989: 52) set up the framework of production and reproduction. This framework does not adequately explain what is happening in the farm context. Farm and family commitments require women and children’s involvement in all the labour activities on smallholdings including gift and barter networks, sale of goods and services and cash cropping. Much of this work has been labelled ‘productive’; however, the work blends into ‘reproductive’ work in the performance of tasks, which makes distinctions arbitrary and I think conceptually obscures what is going on (Sachs, 1996: 130). As Sarah Whatmore (1991: 2) notes,

... the concepts of orthodox Marxism, including PCP (petty commodity production), present major difficulties for the analysis of family enterprise and household production because they are founded upon an opposition between political economy and domestic economy which such forms of production confound. They are embedded in a dualistic conceptual framework which counter poses family and economy, reproduction and production and assumes that, under capitalism, home and work represent two functionally and spatially separate domains.

The dualistic framework serves to maintain a conceptualisation of unpaid work, which is regarded mainly as women's domestic work, as somehow distinctive from other types of work. What is distinctive are not the tasks, but the context in which they are performed. Household/family relations subsume these tasks under duty, obligation, responsibility, altruism as well as love and emotional attachment. It is the conceptualisation of this familial context, with the associated gender and generational roles, that allow FSC and growers' organisations to, for the most part, officially overlook the contribution of women and children's unpaid labour to the smallholder system. Furthermore, discussions on land control and the demise of preferential trade agreements for sugar seldom take into account how gender and generational constructs differentiate these issues for household members. Rather the household is usually viewed as a homogenous entity under the control of the male household head or the 'cane contractor'.

As stated there are multiple and complex sets of beliefs that continue to perpetuate this view and only a radical rethink of the smallholder farm that takes into account a gender and generational perspective will start to reveal the inequities within the farm economy. A more holistic view of the farm, considering the ways that different socio-economic activities of the farm are inter-dependent would also allow for more comprehensive planning for the future of smallholder sugar cane farming.

NOTES

- 1 Some of these strategies also apply to the non-renewal of land leases. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss land tenure issues in regards to the Agriculture, Landlord and Tenants Act. See for example Kamikamica, (1997); Moynagh, (1981); Overton (1989, 1992, 1993/4, 1994).
- 2 For examples see Jayawardena (1975) and Mayer (1961).
- 3 For detailed historical analysis of the development of the sugar industry in Fiji see authors such as Ali (1979, 1980); Gillion (1962, 1977); Kelly (1989, 1991); Lal (1983, 1985, 1992); Moynagh (1981); Naidu (1980); Narsey (1979) and Shameem (1990).
- 4 The last ship of indentured labourers from India arrived in 1916. All indentured labour contracts were cancelled on 1st January 1920.
- 5 CSR actively encouraged monocropping and obstructed agricultural diversification in cane areas (Moynagh, 1981: 120). However, during World War II there was an increase in subsistence crops on cane farms due to pressure from growers and in response to food shortages. CSR did not revert to its previous restrictions after the war (Moynagh, 1981: 157).
- 6 The 1996 *Fiji Census of Population and Housing* (Bureau of Statistics 1998: 17) defines a household as, '... those persons who usually eat together food prepared for them in the same kitchen and who together share the work and cost of providing the food.'
- 7 When the cost of producing cane, according to the Sugar Cane Growers Council 1996 figures, is subtracted from the gross income from 150 tonnes of cane you are left with an annual income from cane of F\$2,298 or F\$44.19 gross a week.
- 8 *Mataqali* refers to a Fijian patrilineal tribal grouping and is one of the most common land owning units.
- 9 *Lalakai* refers to the Fijian custom of taking food to another household when they have a visitor as a sign of care and respect for the visitor.

- 10 *Kerekere* refers to the Fijian custom of asking another for a favour, either in the form of goods or services.
- 11 The study farms transported their sugar cane to the mill in Labasa via a rail system, which utilised small rail trucks that hold around three to four tonnes of sugar cane stems. These rail trucks would be taken to and from the farms on a tractor-trailer.
- 12 Muslims and the Hindu people I met did not eat pork for religious reasons. Likewise Hindu people would not eat beef as cows are regarded as sacred animals.
- 13 *Sirdar* is Hindi for overseer and in this context refers to the harvesting gang leader.
- 14 Fijian for talking and telling stories.
- 15 A respondent from the Fiji Sugar Marketing Company during an interview in 1996 conveyed this estimate of two to three times world market price.
- 16 This estimated drop in sugar prices is based on the worse case scenario predictions during the time of fieldwork.
- 17 *Yaqona* or kava (colloquially known as 'grog') is a drink made from the pepper plant, *Piper methysticum*.
- 18 In regards to some of the tenants whose land leases expire under the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act (ALTA), they would also employ strategies of looking for another farm or some other form of employment. Many saw education and employment of their children as an important future strategy in regards to gaining off-farm employment, in hopefully a reasonably paid job.
- 19 Unfortunately space does not permit detailing these findings in this paper.

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