

Curaçao, Land and Property

Land ownership distribution in contemporary Curaçao, Dutch Caribbean, as of 2023.

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Dedication

To the past, present and future society of Curaçao.

Acknowledgements

I express my gratitude to the island of Curaçao, which has shaped me, and to my family and friends who have raised, inspired, loved, and guided me throughout the years. To my partner, who nurtured my patience and perseverance. I also acknowledge the great authors, scholars, and researchers from around the world, and especially from Curaçao, who helped me understand the history of struggle that has shaped the current social conditions of the island. I give gratitude to the music genre of conscious Reggae providing the right melodic rhythms and words for me to read, write and think critically. I am particularly grateful to my supervisors for their curiosity, unwavering guidance, and support. I hope this study helps other researchers like me reach a better understanding of the past and present condition of Curaçao.

Abstract

This paper delves into land ownership distribution in Curaçao, exploring the potential historical, socio-economic, and legal influences that shape the current landscape. The study examines the origins of land as a form of property and wealth, the impact of European colonial expansion, slavery, industrialization and tourism on land ownership distribution in Curaçao. Utilizing data from 2023 provided by the local land registry office ‘Kadaster’, the distribution of land ownership among individual owners, legal entities, and the government across the official zones listed by the EOP of Curaçao is analyzed. The results provide potential clarity on land ownership patterns that reflect the historical and socio-economic influences of colonialism, industrialization and tourism within Curaçao in the year 2023, highlighting the complexities of land ownership distribution on the island. Despite data limitations, the study calls for further research to explore the influence of slavery, racialization, and tourism on land ownership concentration, aiming to deepen our understanding of the socio-economic wealth disparities in Curaçao.

Key words: *Curaçao, Colonialism, Land ownership, Wealth distribution.*

Abstrato

Este artigo investiga a distribuição da propriedade da terra em Curaçao, explorando as potenciais influências históricas, socioeconômicas e legais que moldam a paisagem atual. O estudo examina as origens da terra como forma de propriedade e riqueza, o impacto da expansão colonial europeia, da escravatura, da industrialização e do turismo na distribuição da propriedade da terra em Curaçao. Utilizando dados de 2023 fornecidos pelo registo predial local ‘Kadaster’, é analisada a distribuição da propriedade da terra entre proprietários individuais, entidades legais e o governo nas zonas oficiais listadas pelo EOP de Curaçao. Os resultados fornecem uma potencial clareza sobre os padrões de propriedade da terra que reflectem as influências históricas e socioeconômicas do colonialismo, da industrialização e do turismo em Curaçao no ano de 2023, destacando as complexidades da distribuição da propriedade da terra na ilha. Apesar das limitações de dados, o estudo exige mais investigação para explorar a influência da escravatura, da racialização e do turismo na concentração da propriedade da terra, com o objetivo de aprofundar a nossa compreensão das disparidades de riqueza socioeconómica em Curaçao.

Palavras-chave: *Curaçao, Colonialismo, Propriedade da terra, Distribuição da riqueza*

Contents

Introduction.....	5
Literature review.....	6
Chapter 1: Understanding property, land, capital, and wealth.....	6
1.1 Land and Property Rights.....	6
1.2 Types of land ownership.....	7
1.3 Land, wealth, and Capital.....	7
1.4 Dynamics of land ownership and wealth inequality.....	8
1.5 Social implications of socio-economic inequality.....	10
Chapter 2: European Colonial Wealth, Land Ownership, and Enslaved Labour.....	11
2.1 European colonialism and land as property.....	11
2.2 Enslaved labor and capital.....	12
2.3 Colonial societies of enslaved labor and the concept of “Race”.....	13
2.4 Post-emancipation.....	14
Chapter 3: Curaçao - A socio-historical context.....	15
3.1 The Dutch colonial asset: Curaçao.....	15
3.2 Race Stratification in Curaçao.....	17
3.3 The industrial Era: Land ownership in late 19th and 20th century Curaçao.....	18
3.4 Early 21st Century Curaçao; land, tourism and policy.....	20
3.5 Inheritance Laws and Land Ownership in Curaçao.....	22
Methodology.....	22
1. Research Design.....	23
2. Data Collection.....	24
3. Variables and Measures.....	25
3.1 Ownership Distribution Calculation.....	25
3.1.1 Classification of zones into geographical areas.....	25
3.1.2 Finding Patterns in Property Ownership Distribution.....	26
4. Ethical Considerations.....	27
5. Limitations.....	27
Results.....	27
Land ownership distribution.....	28
Cluster analysis results.....	30
Discussion.....	32
Conclusion.....	35
Bibliographic References.....	36
Annexes.....	41
A. Kadaster Datasets: (Dataset of land registry Curaçao available upon request).....	41

Introduction

Land, which through a eurocentric lens could be recognized as one of the oldest recorded forms of physical capital, remains a cornerstone in studies of social wealth disparities. With wealth inequality now mirroring medieval levels in many Western societies, examining land ownership in contexts like Curaçao is crucial (Piketty & Zucman, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to make an initial contribution to filling a significant gap in the academic literature and statistical analysis concerning land ownership and wealth distribution in Curaçao. By mapping and analyzing these issues through a sociological lens, this study explores *how the socio-historical legacies of Curaçao influence current land ownership patterns in 2023*.

To address this, the study delves into Curaçao's socio-historical context and its implications for land ownership. The theoretical framework of this paper is divided into three parts. The first part examines scholarly arguments on the Euro-Asian origins and complexities of land as property, capital, and wealth. The second part explores how European colonial expansion between the 15th and 20th centuries institutionalized these concepts across their empires, using land ownership as a tool for dominance and resource extraction. The final part focuses on Curaçao, providing a detailed review of its socio-historical developments related to land and its distribution.

The literature is combined with the analysis of current land ownership distribution in Curaçao for 2023 relying on essential land ownership data from the land registry office, Kadaster¹. This data categorizes landowners into three groups: individuals, legal entities, and the local government of Curaçao. Using these categories, the study measures land ownership distribution across and between the 65 geographical zones that Curaçao consists of. Moreover, this study not only maps the distribution of land ownership but also connects it to broader socio-historical theories, linking past legacies to present patterns. By analyzing these results in light of the island's socio-historical context, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how historical influences shape current land ownership dynamics in Curaçao. This

¹ Kadaster Curaçao, the official land registry office of Curaçao since its inception in 1935, measures and documents land ownership and land ownership transfers.

foundational exploration opens the door to further studies on land ownership concentration and wealth distribution on the island of Curaçao.

Literature review

Chapter 1: Understanding property, land, capital, and wealth

1.1 Land and Property Rights

According to many Euro-Asian scholars the concept of land as property traces back approximately 10,000 to 11,500 years ago, coinciding with the transition from foraging to farming, known as the Neolithic revolution (Warden et al., 2017; Weisdorf, 2023; Bowles & Choi, 2019; Ang, 2015; Zvelebil, 1986). Scholars like Barker (2021) challenge this transition as a clear-cut shift, suggesting the coexistence of foraging and farming during this period. During the Neolithic revolution, the domestication of plants and animals reshaped human societies, introducing technological advancements, hierarchical organization, and new socio-cultural traditions (Bergman et al., 2013). This period marked the emergence of property rights as societies established fixed territories for farming, necessitating new social norms and rules to safeguard resources (Olsson & Hibbs, 2005).

As societies shifted from communal land use to individual or group ownership, the notion of property rights began to take shape. Legal and economic scholar Krier (2009) notes that before the Neolithic revolution, land was communal, but notions of property existed, such as attachments to gathered food and temporary habitations. The shift to perceiving land as property occurred during the agricultural revolution, giving rise to rights based on possession (Economou & Kyriazis, 2016). This concept, shaping relations to objects, catalyzed socio-cultural transformations across Eurasia (Gibson, 2008). Scholars debate the origin of property rights, with economists like Alchian and Demsetz (1973) proposing it as a means of efficient resource allocation, while Haijme (2018) argues for a more nuanced understanding, rooted in human-earth and human-to-human relationships. Despite differing theories, the Neolithic period is commonly cited as the phase where property rights concepts began to form, although the exact origin remains contested (Cole & Grossman, 2002).

1.2 Types of land ownership

Throughout human history, various forms of land property ownership have been observed, as highlighted by Nobel Prize winner Ostrom (2003). These forms range from communal ownership, characterized by strong familial connections, to private property and more contemporary ownership structures facilitated by the state or legal entities which differ from private property as they often involve collective or public ownership models. Communal property rights entail groups of individuals, such as families, religious communities, companies exercising collective-choice rights over management and exclusion concerning a defined resource system, such as land, sea, or rivers. Additionally, certain communal properties are recognized by legal systems as having a corporate existence, exemplified by the shareholders of a company, a concept first introduced by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the 16th century (Petram, 2011). On the other hand, private property rights are characterized by individual rights to exclusion and transferability of control over a resource system.

1.3 Land, wealth, and Capital

The complex relationships between land, wealth, and capital have long intrigued scholars across various disciplines. Sociologist and philosopher Karl Marx's seminal work (1867) laid the foundation for understanding capital as a complex array of assets and resources instrumental in the production process to generate profits. According to Marx, capital is not merely about financial assets but includes all inputs that contribute to production. In this framework, land is integral because it directly supports the production of goods and services, thus becoming a crucial component of capital. Building on Marx's ideas, economic scholar Anita Kosnik (2020) categorizes capital into three main types: physical, financial, and human. In her classification, land is recognized as physical capital due to its tangible nature and its utility in production. This classification underscores land's importance in the accumulation of household wealth, providing a tangible example of how capital forms the bedrock of economic prosperity.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) offers a broader perspective by dividing capital into economic, cultural, and social forms. He identifies land under economic capital, defined as assets that can be directly converted into money and often institutionalized through property rights. Bourdieu's approach emphasizes the socio-economic power derived from land ownership,

extending the concept of capital beyond mere financial metrics to include social and cultural dimensions. Turning to economic historians, Luria (1976) explores land as a pivotal element in socioeconomic relations, often conflated with wealth. Luria's interpretation sees land as a form of physical capital that contributes to an individual or nation's wealth. Domhoff (2011) aligns this view with Western European economic definitions, where wealth is the total value of assets minus liabilities. He further differentiates between financial wealth, which is more liquid, and physical property, which is less easily converted into cash.

Classical economist Adam Smith's definition of wealth as "the annual produce of the land and labor" (quoted in Kurz, 2017) contrasts with modern views that often blur the lines between capital and wealth. Socio-economic scholar Piketty (2014) argues that wealth and capital are essentially the same, encompassing various forms such as physical, financial, and human capital. This interpretation suggests that capital, particularly land, plays a critical role in defining wealth and driving economic growth. In contemporary discussions, the interdependence of physical and financial capital becomes apparent. Pender et al. (2014) highlights that financial capital often measures the value of physical capital. Land, as a form of physical capital, thus becomes a crucial metric for assessing wealth. This relationship underscores how land ownership is fundamental to understanding the broader concept of wealth and its generation through capital.

From a sociological standpoint, Bourdieu's analysis of economic capital and Piketty's integration of wealth and capital provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the socio-economic implications of land ownership. Their perspectives reveal that land is not just an economic asset but a pivotal element that intersects with social and cultural dimensions, ultimately shaping the dynamics of wealth distribution and economic inequality in contemporary society.

1.4 Dynamics of land ownership and wealth inequality

The interplay between land ownership and social dynamics has profound implications for societal structure and wealth distribution. Scholars like Carruthers and Ariovich (2004) argue that the emergence of property rights, particularly land ownership, has fundamentally shaped social stratification. Property rights determine who controls resources and who is excluded from them, setting the stage for economic power and creating incentives that lead to social

inequalities. They emphasize that unequal ownership of land often results in broader social disparities, embedding inequality deeply within societal structures.

Building on this foundation, political economic scholars Dow and Reed (2013) explore how the concept of land ownership evolved alongside the development of agricultural societies. Unlike the relatively egalitarian foraging societies, the advent of agriculture brought about a sharper divide in land ownership. Technological advancements in land management, population growth, and increased productivity further exacerbated this divide. As agricultural societies grew, those who owned land became increasingly powerful, effectively forming an elite class. Korom and Planck (2015) note that landowners often wield significant influence and decision-making power over their property, illustrating the close link between land ownership, social status, and control over resources. This dynamic highlights how land ownership not only conferred economic advantages but also solidified social and political power.

Thomas Piketty (2020), provides further insight into the connection between land ownership and wealth inequality. In ‘proprietarian societies’, where private property is a fundamental principle, owning land equates to wealth, which translates into power and influence. Historically, land ownership has granted various privileges, such as voting rights, property protection, and access to financial instruments. Piketty argues that these privileges have entrenched a system where wealth is concentrated among landowners, perpetuating inequality. He also points out that the rate of return on capital, including land, often exceeds the rate of economic growth. This ensures that those with substantial assets continue to accumulate wealth faster than those who rely solely on earned income, deepening the wealth gap over time.

The issue of wealth inequality is further complicated by the role of inheritance. Piketty and Zucman (2015) describe inheritance as the transfer of wealth from one generation to the next. Although inheritance can temporarily equalize wealth distribution among descendants, its impact is often short-lived. Economists Nekoei and Seim (2022) explain that most heirs tend to deplete their inheritances within a decade, leading to a quick resurgence of wealth inequality. Wealthier heirs, however, are more likely to preserve and grow their inherited wealth, eventually restoring and even expanding their financial dominance. This dynamic diminishes the potential

equalizing effect of inheritance and reinforces existing wealth disparities, demonstrating how inherited wealth can perpetuate the cycle of inequality.

Furthermore, several economic scholars, such as Cipollina et al. (2018), analyze how land ownership inequality affects economic prosperity. They argue that concentrating land ownership in the hands of a few restricts the broader distribution of wealth and opportunities, stifling overall economic growth. This concentration of resources creates a significant barrier to prosperity for the wider population, as the economic benefits are not evenly distributed. Consequently, the societal divide between landowners and non-landowners becomes more pronounced, limiting the creation of a prosperous and equitable economy.

Through these interconnected analyses, it becomes clear that land ownership as property is a critical factor in understanding the broader context of social and economic inequality. The control and distribution of land not only influence economic wealth but also shape the power structures that define societal relations. By examining how land ownership impacts everything from social status to economic growth and inheritance dynamics, we gain a comprehensive view of how deeply rooted inequalities can be perpetuated and reinforced across generations.

1.5 Social implications of socio-economic inequality

The exploration of economic or capital inequality has profound social implications. Sociologists Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) assert that higher inequality erodes trust and deepens divisions along lines like gender and race. This erosion impacts health and life expectancy, leading to rising mental health issues, poor educational outcomes, and increased drug abuse. They attribute these outcomes to our inherent human need to belong and the competitive pressures in unequal societies. An excerpt from (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018, p.82-83) further explains this;

“Perhaps the most likely explanation of why inequality increases status anxiety across entire societies is because it increases the sense that people at the top of the social ladder are extremely important and those at the bottom almost worthless, and, as money becomes more entrenched as a measure of people’s worth, it makes us all more worried about where we come in the hierarchy.”

While Wilkinson and Pickett focus on income inequality, scholars like Skopec et al. (2014) and Berman et al. (2016) argue that the differences between income and wealth inequality are minimal, with both contributing similarly to social stratification. In stark contrast, business scholar Simpson (2009) controversially suggests that economic inequality can boost economic growth by motivating people to strive for success. However, Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz (2016) counters this by highlighting that greater inequality often undermines economic performance and societal well-being.

Chapter 2: European Colonial Wealth, Land Ownership, and Enslaved Labour

2.1 European colonialism and land as property

When discussing the concept and origin of land as private property and its role as a form of wealth, the economic phenomenon of colonialism cannot be overlooked. The sociologist Glenn (2015) identified two types of colonialism, namely, classic colonialism and settler colonialism. Classic colonialism is a form where the colonizer takes advantage of resources that will benefit the metropolis. In contrast, settler colonialism aims at permanently settling and forming communities. Glenn further elaborates that both types of colonialism led to violent confrontations with the native inhabitants. Classic colonialism sought not only to exploit natural resources but also to exploit human resources by enslaving natives, who were used as forced labor to extract and produce materials for export to the metropole. Settler colonialism aims to acquire land and gain control of resources. To achieve this, colonialists resorted to genocide, forced removal, and confinement of indigenous populations outside the colonial settlements. In addition, to secure land, settler-colonists imposed a modern property regime that transformed land and resources (including humans) into ‘objects’ that could be owned. This was usually in stark contrast to the indigenous understanding of land who had a strong sense of responsibility for its well-being and saw themselves as an extension of the land.

From the 15th century onwards, various European kingdoms mainly, the Portuguese, English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Danish, and Italian pursued economic expansion beyond the continent of Europe towards other continents such as Asia, Americas and Africa for wealth

accumulation through either direct forms of colonialism or indirect investments of capital into colonial ventures. The socio-economic historian Frankema (2010) argues that during European settler colonialism, the first subjugated land was held in the name of the crown. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, land distribution among European farmers occurred primarily through land grants. This colonial land distribution system aimed to cultivate lucrative crops such as sugar, tobacco, coffee, cotton, and more. As Frankema notes, this system resulted in the concentration of land ownership and forced labor in the hands of a small colonial elite. In Western European colonial settler societies, land ownership was predominantly held by entities such as the European Colonial clergy, the crown, plantation farmers, or merchants. This pattern of land distribution persisted for centuries throughout the European colonial period. European colonialism played a pivotal role in evangelizing the concept of land as private property to other parts of the world, such as the Caribbean region. This imposition of land ownership structures fundamentally altered indigenous relationships with the land, embedding the notions of ownership and economic exploitation deeply into the socio-economic fabric of these societies.

2.2 Enslaved labor and capital

The late anthropologist David Graeber (2012) draws on the history and anthropology of various civilizations, both large and small, from the first known records of debt in Sumer in 3500 BCE to the present. He notably argued that the concept of land as private property also led to the emergence of the idea of owning human bodies. This type of private property first appeared in many groups as a form of debt, or servitude (serf), and became a growing form of capital, status, and power. Humans who were forced into becoming an economic commodity to serve as forced labor, were exchanged, bought, and sold. These humans had no rights to own any property. Although enslaved humans were present in many societies around the world, the most scaled form of this inhumane practice took hold during the period of European colonial expansion through the trans-Atlantic trade of enslaved people (D. Eltis & D. Richardson, 2008).

Socio-economic historian Frankema (2010) elaborates that with the encounter of foreign land came the encounter of the native inhabitants that lived and stewarded these lands. Through violent and deceitful military coercion campaigns, the early Iberian European colonial powers took the land in the Americas and subdued the native inhabitants into forced labor through the ‘encomienda’ system. This Iberian colonial labor system was one of the early forms of a return

on capital through forced labor in the Western Hemisphere. The European colonial settlements demanded an incredible amount of labor to yield any returns, therefore, an immense amount of forced labor was trafficked from the west coast of Africa to the Western hemisphere through the transatlantic trade of enslaved humans. During this period enslaved labor was deemed a commodity and thus also a form of Capital/Wealth (Anderson, & Gallman, 1977).

2.3 Colonial societies of enslaved labor and the concept of “Race”

The scholars Chang et al. (2023) define race as a societal construct that classifies people into different groups based on physical characteristics, including skin color, hair texture and color, and eye shape or color. Historically, this classification has been used to segregate and differentiate individuals, frequently serving as a basis for exerting control through various forms of oppression and subjugation. It was during European colonial domination and subjugation between the 15th and 20th century that the concept of race crystallized within European colonial societies of the East, west, and South. Gonzales and Kertész (2022) argue it informed colonial power structures and relations. Race within the colonial context was an attempt to create the ‘other’ by dehumanizing and justifying the exploitation and violent subjugation of humans who live(d) under colonial rule. This became a reality for millions of enslaved people throughout the aforementioned European colonial empires.

The European colonial cultural elite usually deemed themselves superior to everyone else, based on European physical and cultural features. They used various forms of racial classification, such as language, physical features, gender, and education, as discriminatory social markers. These classifications were employed to fabricate the dehumanization and oppression of other groups (Fanón, 1952; Freiré, 1968; Davis, 1982). Additionally, as sociologist Glenn (2015) argues, masculine whiteness became central to the colonial settler identity, which was closely tied to the status of owning private property, such as land, through the establishment of an exclusionary property regime. In these societies, the enslavement and commodification of racialized individuals rendered them incapable of owning private property or land, as they were themselves considered property under the existing regime.

2.4 Post-emancipation

Trinidadian historical scholar Eric Williams (1944), controversial in his time, argued that the decline of the transatlantic trade of enslaved people and the use of enslaved labor in European colonial empires was primarily driven by the newly extracted wealth from their colonies, destined for various European metropolises. According to Williams, this wealth was invested in technological innovation, which, in turn, sparked the Industrial Revolution within various European metropolises. Concurrently, economic hardships and capital inefficiencies faced by slaveholders in the late 18th century, combined with the growing resistance of enslaved people, led many European colonizers to outlaw the trade in enslaved labor and eventually to abolish slavery throughout the 19th century. Williams presented this argument to challenge the dominant colonial narrative, which claimed that the end of this era was mainly due to moral and ethical reasons.

Historical scholar Biondi (2003) explains, by analyzing post-emancipation in the United States of America (U.S.A.), that while the use of enslaved labor was outlawed, new laws of racial segregation swept in from the mid-19th century. After continuous political battles, the descendants of the formerly enslaved populace gained more rights around the mid-20th century, which lowered the barrier to participating in their respective settler colonial society as equals. Notably, rights that pushed for access to education, employment, and the banking and real estate industry.

Human rights and legal scholar Saito (2020) argues further that although within the current and past European colonies around the world, the formalization of racial segregation and subjugation has been outlawed, its intergenerational cultural relics still perpetuate racialized stratification in areas of economic mobility or freedom. This social phenomenon is termed structural racism. Where the once enslaved are now equal by law, but are still subjects within a structure that racializes their position. This statement is supported by scholars studying the formerly racially segregated U.S.A. They elaborate that, although de jure property rights are now formally equal between whites and blacks, persistent disparities in education, wealth, and home ownership reveal how significantly de facto property rights can diverge from the ideal of equality (Munnell et al. 1996).

North American socio-political scholar Shapiro (2004) explains that this especially seeps into the area of owning land or other forms of capital and wealth compared to the not historically racialized group. This phenomenon is further analyzed by Derenoncourt et al. (2022), who offered a staggering analysis of how wealth is distributed among the descendants of formerly enslaved African Americans, racialized with the term 'Black' (due to the darker pigmentation of their skin), in the U.S.A. post-emancipation. This analysis also examines how wealth distribution evolved between descendants of non-enslaved Americans, termed 'White'.

Chapter 3: Curaçao - A socio-historical context

3.1 The Dutch colonial asset: Curaçao

Curaçao, known as Kòrsou to its inhabitants, is an island situated just off the coast of Venezuela, it has a rich history dating back 5,600 to 5,700 years ago when it was home to the Arawak (Caquetíos) communities (Kraan et al., 2024). Rupert (2012) recounts that it wasn't until May 1499 — 4,100 years after the island was first settled — that Spanish conquistadores made their initial contact with the island. Upon their arrival, the Spanish imposed the *encomienda* system², brutally subjugating and forcibly relocating many of the indigenous Arawak people to mine for precious metals on other Spanish-controlled territories in the Caribbean, such as Hispaniola³. In the year 1634 the Dutch West India Company (WIC), a powerful military and trading entity, ousted the Spanish and took control of the island. According to Noord (2018), the Dutch WIC quickly divided up the island by implementing a plantation system carving out the island into around 111 plantations for agricultural exploitation. The plantations were partially owned by the Dutch WIC executives and given as land grants to other European colonial settlers, mainly Dutch and Portuguese plantation farmers.

Although there is anthropological evidence suggesting that the Arowaks first inhabitants of Curaçao settled certain parts of the island, there is no substantial evidence found of any land ownership documentation within their culture in the way the European colonial powers do.

² The *encomienda* system was a violent Spanish colonial practice in which the crown granted colonists control over indigenous communities, allowing them to extract labor and tribute in exchange for providing protection and Christian instruction.

³ Hispaniola is a Caribbean island discovered by Christopher Columbus during his voyages to the “New World”, notable for being the site of the first permanent European settlement in the Americas. Today, it is divided into two independent nations: Haiti, on the western third, and the Dominican Republic, on the eastern two-thirds.

Therefore, the mapping of the Dutch plantation system could be marked the first recorded form of land registry on the island of Curaçao. During this colonial period, the European concept of private land ownership was introduced to Curaçao's new colonial society. Dutch sociologist Hoetink (1972) explains that the Dutch WIC trafficked large numbers of enslaved Africans to Curaçao as forced labor to work on the newly established plantations. Therefore, Curaçaoan society became divided into several dominant social groups during this period: Dutch Protestants, Sephardic Jews, Catholic evangelical priests, and the enslaved African population. Of these groups, only the enslaved African population was deemed private property under Dutch colonial law and, thus, had no rights to own private property. Curaçaoan anthropologist Allen (2007) explains that shortly after the WIC's plantation system was implemented, the Dutch colonial government aimed to develop a more efficient land governance regime in Curaçao. To achieve this, they divided the island into five land districts, each overseen by its own district master.

Dutch Historian Oostindie (2011) argues that even under these conditions the enslaved Africans of Curaçao revolted, intervened, or fled the Dutch systems of Dutch colonial oppression to reclaim their humanity instead of living under the systems that denied it. The Dutch WIC violently exploited land and humans in the early 17th century until the mid-19th century up until slavery was abolished within the Dutch colony of Curaçao in July 1863 (Willemsen et al, 2011). Curaçaoan Anthropologist Allen (2007) further explains that former slave owners of enslaved people received compensation from the Dutch state for their loss of private property in stark contrast to the now legally free human bodies; the former enslaved of the contemporary Curaçao population received no compensation for their forced enslavement within the Dutch Colony Curaçao. Soon after the abolition of slavery, many formerly enslaved individuals, due to centuries of legally enforced inaccessibility to owning or stewarding land, were left with little to no choice but to participate in the *paga tera* system (sharecropping). In this system, a share of land was loaned out in return for continuous work on the plantations. Meanwhile, other family members sought alternative means of employment, such as domestic care, work at the harbor, and braiding straw hats (Van Stipriaan, 2023). Curaçaoan Anthropologist Allen (2007) elaborates that during this period very few self-governing descendants of African enslaved Curaçaoan

families acquired economic capital assets such as land to secure their economic mobility in the Dutch colonial society of Curaçao.

These historical developments laid the foundation for the land ownership patterns that continue to shape Curaçao today. The introduction of European land ownership concepts during the colonial era, particularly through the plantation system, has left a lasting impact. Understanding these origins is essential for analyzing the current distribution of land on the island, where the influence of this colonial history remains evident.

3.2 Race Stratification in Curaçao

With the introduction of the plantation system and enslaved labor in the Dutch colony of Curaçao, both the formerly enslaved and those still enslaved were subjected to racialization under Dutch colonial rule—a widespread social phenomenon across European colonial empires. As documented by Oostindie (2011), one of the earliest censuses of the Curaçao population in 1760 outlines the social makeup of the population as white (Dutch and Jewish), Manumitted (legally freed formerly enslaved people), and Black (enslaved Africans). Dutch sociologist Hoetink (1958) explains that early Dutch colonial society in Curaçao was highly segmented. Initially driven by religion (Protestant, Catholic, and Judaism) and later reinforced by the introduction of Afro-descendant forced labor, the concept of racial segregation became increasingly entrenched.

Most recently, the Anthropologist Roe (2016) explored the introduction of the concept of race in Curaçao and how this has contributed to social stratification over time from during to after the abolition of slavery through markers such as income, education, culture, and language. Roe (2016) concluded that the concept of race could have a strong negative influence on the socio-economic positions of the Afrocuracaoan population. Roe therefore argues that the concept of race became a silent marker of cultural, economic status, and prestige within the contemporary society of Curaçao.

3.3 The Industrial Era: Land ownership in late 19th and 20th century Curaçao

The Curaçaoan Anthropologist Allen (2007) states that in Curaçao, enslaved individuals often attained freedom through diligent labor, and some masters emancipated their enslaved workers out of humanitarian or economic motives, occasionally endowing them with land. Allen (2007)

further argues that a significant portion of freed individuals, particularly those of mixed heritage, owed their freedom to paternal ties with the owners of the enslaved. As a result, Curaçao had a relatively sizable free-colored population. Within this community, social statuses varied widely: some members prospered economically, while others, especially descendants of Jewish owners of enslaved people, achieved integration into higher social echelons, notably in commercial endeavors.

As land ownership evolved, so did its measurement and registration. A historical report from the Kadaster & Openbare Registers Curaçao (2023) explains that prior to 1868, land was described and recorded in a plantation registry. The introduction of the Civil Code in 1869 in the Dutch colonies of the Caribbean formalized the mortgage system, necessitating that land parcels, which were previously described in vague terms, be documented using specific identifiers known as ‘Rooibrief’⁴. This evolution was further marked by the establishment of the Land Registry Office in 1935, which became a pivotal development in Curaçao's land registration process. By 1941, the system had transitioned from ‘Rooibrief’ to measurement letters, streamlining property transactions. After the establishment of the new island-wide coordinates system in 1960, which was named the Triangulation Points (TP) system, the precision of land measurements was enhanced, reflecting Curaçao's commitment to continuously refining its cadastral systems from their inception to the present day.

Historian Schields (2023) elaborates that 52 years (1915) after the abolition of slavery, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Dutch fossil fuel giant Shell chose Curaçao as the site for a new oil refinery. Over the following 25 years (EOP report, 2003), Shell acquired vast amounts of land, including former plantations, from both private owners and the Dutch colonial administration. This land was used to build a crude oil refinery, oil storage facilities, and residential areas for its workforce. The arrival of the Shell refinery initiated a period of profound transformation in Curaçao's infrastructure, which had remained largely unchanged since the 19th century. Within just three decades, the island's population surged from 32,000 to approximately 125,000, driven by the influx of foreign workers from the Netherlands, China, Cuba, Suriname, British Caribbean, etc. to meet the refinery's labor demands. Shell's investment in extensive land

⁴ From 1868, a document known as a "rooibrief" was prepared for the sale of a parcel. These rooibrieven were created by "rooimeesters," who initially described property boundaries based on geographic features (such as trees, rocks, etc.) and later used compass observations and distance measurements. This practice continued until 1940.

acquisitions and the provision of social benefits, such as housing and loans for its employees, played a crucial role in reshaping land ownership distribution patterns on the island. Over the following decades, Shell's presence became a cornerstone of economic prosperity for the new, rapidly growing population.

Despite the socio-economic segregation of Curaçao's neighborhoods, mirroring the hierarchical structure of Shell's organizational chart, Schields (2023) argues that Shell's operations fostered the emergence of a diverse middle class, significantly enhancing economic mobility for many men⁵ on the island. However, the legacy of Curaçao's plantation system continued to cast a long shadow, with economic oppression and racial discrimination perpetuating disparities in land ownership and social dynamics. Anderson and Dynes (1975) explain that these entrenched social realities contributed to the May Movement of 1969. This movement, spearheaded by labor unions - most notably 'WESCAR'- which predominantly was composed of Afro-Curaçaoan members, protested the stark wage disparities between local and foreign workers employed throughout all of Shell's industrial facilities. On May 30th, the movement culminated in a significant strike demanding better working conditions, marking a pivotal moment in Curaçao's history toward a more inclusive society for Afro-Curaçaoans.

Anderson and Dynes (1975) further argue that the aftermath of the May Movement precipitated the establishment of a new government and exerted socio-political pressure on key industries to improve worker wages. For the first time in Curaçao's history, Afro-Curaçaoans occupied key institutional positions. During the mid-20th century, as a nascent democracy that started around 1948, the Curaçao government also embarked on purchasing substantial amounts of land, designating it for both public and private use, thereby further reshaping the island's socio-economic landscape.

By the late 20th century, the Shell refinery faced economic decline due to the 1970s oil crisis⁶. According to Paap (2014), Shell sold the refinery to the state of Curaçao for a symbolic

⁵ Only 'men' are mentioned in this paragraph due to the focus of the source material. Although this paper does not specifically address gender disparities within 20th-century Curaçao, the scholar C. Schields explores this nuanced topic extensively in the book : *Offshore Attachments*.

⁶ The 1970s oil crisis was triggered by OPEC's decision to reduce oil production and impose an embargo, leading to a dramatic rise in oil prices and widespread shortages. This crisis severely impacted global economies, causing inflation and economic stagnation in many countries.

sum of 1 Antillean guilder. Shortly after, the refinery was leased to the Venezuelan petroleum company *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.* (PDVSA), which continued its operations until 2019. Paap further argues that as the fossil fuel sector faced insecurity and automation during the last decades of the 20th century into the 21st century, other industries, such as tourism and the financial sector, began to gain prominence, driving further economic diversification in Curaçao.

3.4 Early 21st Century Curaçao; land, tourism and policy

As early as 1991, geography scholar Thomas observed that Curaçao and several other Caribbean islands were experiencing gentrification related to the development of tourist resorts, particularly along their coastal areas. Thomas (1991) argued that the economic and symbolic significance of land ownership in these regions was deeply intertwined with the history of European colonial domination and the exploitation of enslaved people of African descent. The legacy of slavery and the plantation economy has left behind many Georgian and Victorian-styled buildings⁷. These structures, often renovated or used as models for new construction, are aimed at attracting tourists, embedding within them the historical relationship of race and economic power. Building on Thomas's arguments, as the 21st century began, Curaçao's tourism sector started to flourish, leading to significant economic growth.

Croes et al. (2011) and McElroy (2003) note that this boom not only brought economic development but also began to transform land ownership dynamics on the island. The influx of tourists and the subsequent investment in tourism infrastructure led to significant changes in land use and ownership patterns. This transformation was further accelerated by fiscal policy changes aimed at attracting investment, such as the well-known 'Tax Holiday,' which provided tax exemptions to newly incorporated businesses such as hotels, as discussed by Dinica (2012). Policies like the Curaçao Investor Permit Program (CIPP), ratified in 2014, included residency and eventual citizenship programs for investments in real estate and business ventures. These incentives encouraged both local and foreign investors to invest heavily in the island, fundamentally altering the landscape of land use in Curaçao.

⁷ Georgian-style buildings (1714–1830) are marked by their symmetry and classical proportions, while Victorian-styled buildings (1837–1901) are known for their ornate, eclectic designs and intricate details.

Sociologists Gould and Lewis (2018) describe these changes as part of a broader contemporary phenomenon they term "Green Gentrification", where ecological or economic crises are used to justify the acquisition of property by wealthier entities. They argue that global capital often cloaks its expansion under the guise of addressing environmental or economic concerns, which in reality, increases inequality. Wealthier individuals or groups purchase land and properties, driving up prices and displacing poorer locals. This is particularly evident in Curaçao, where the booming tourism sector has led to a significant rise in property values, often to the detriment of the island's lower-income residents.

Adding to this, Santiago-Bartolomei (2022) argues that the proliferation of digital platforms and the formal expansion of short-term rentals have exacerbated these gentrification trends. The rise of platforms like Airbnb⁸ has accelerated the concentration of land ownership, as properties are increasingly purchased for short-term rental use rather than long-term residency. This shift not only contributes to the displacement of lower-income residents but also intensifies the economic divide within the community.

Together, these scholars highlight a complex interplay between historical legacies, economic policy, and modern tourism-driven development in Curaçao. Therefore, the early 21st century has seen significant changes in land use and ownership, driven by both the booming tourism industry and broader socio-economic trends such as the decision to not extend the lease of the oil refinery 'Isla' to PDVSA (Cohen, 2019; Newsdesk Venezuela, 2019) and the extreme measures of the global COVID⁹ pandemic of 2019-2021 (Rojer, 2021).

3.5 Inheritance Laws and Land Ownership in Curaçao

One of the most widely adopted forms of recycling wealth globally is through inheritance—the formal and legal transfer of assets from one generation to the next. Cross (2007) notes that many Caribbean states, including Curaçao, have legal systems heavily influenced by their former or current colonizers. In Curaçao, this means the Dutch legal system, a legacy of colonial rule, governs many aspects of life, including inheritance laws.

⁸ Airbnb, established in 2008, is an online platform that connects property owners with individuals seeking short-term rentals, ranging from single rooms to entire homes. It operates globally and also offers unique lodging options and local experiences organized by hosts.

⁹ COVID stand for the Corona Virus pandemic which has negatively affected the majority of the world population and economies during the years of 2019 and 2021.

Van Zwieten (1999) elaborates on how these inheritance or succession laws operate in Curaçao. He explains that the legal framework allows for the formal distribution of private property—such as land and houses—among family members. Dutch legal scholar Verbeke (2011) explains that central to this process is the concept of a will, a document where property owners specify their wishes regarding the distribution of their assets after death. When a will is absent, predetermined laws provide guidelines for asset distribution based on family relationships, typically prioritizing the spouse and children of the deceased. Understanding these inheritance laws is also crucial for assessing land ownership distribution in Curaçao, particularly regarding individual or familial land holdings. As the formal transfer of wealth through inheritance plays a significant role in maintaining and shifting property ownership, it directly impacts the socio-economic landscape of the island.

Methodology

To answer the research question—*how do the historical and social legacies of Curaçao influence current land ownership patterns in 2023?*—the following methods were chosen. This section discusses the reasoning behind the research design, detailing data collection, chosen variables and measures, ethical considerations, and limitations.

1. Research Design

This study aims to measure the distribution of land ownership among individuals, legal entities, and the government in Curaçao for the year 2023. Curaçao is divided into sixty-five zones, as outlined in the Eiland Ontwikkelings Plan report (Eilandsraad van het gebied Curaçao, 1995), which serve as the primary units of analysis (see Figure 1). Within each zone, the percentage of parcels owned by individuals, legal entities, and the government was calculated. Following these calculations, a cluster analysis was conducted to identify trends in land ownership across the zones.

To answer the research question, data was consensually collected from the Kadaster, the official land registry office of Curaçao. The requested data, referred to as Land Parcel Data,

included details on parcel size (parcels below and above 450 square meters) and ownership type (individuals, legal entities, and government), (Dataset Kadaster, 2023).

The data was analyzed using two primary methods: Ownership Distribution Calculation, which provided the percentage of land parcels owned by each type of owner within each zone and across the entire island, and an exploratory cluster analysis, which aimed to identify potential patterns and trends in land ownership distribution across the various zones. The results were then compared with three self-ascribed groups based on local navigation terminology, to determine if the clusters aligned with these historically prescribed areas and to uncover any new insights.

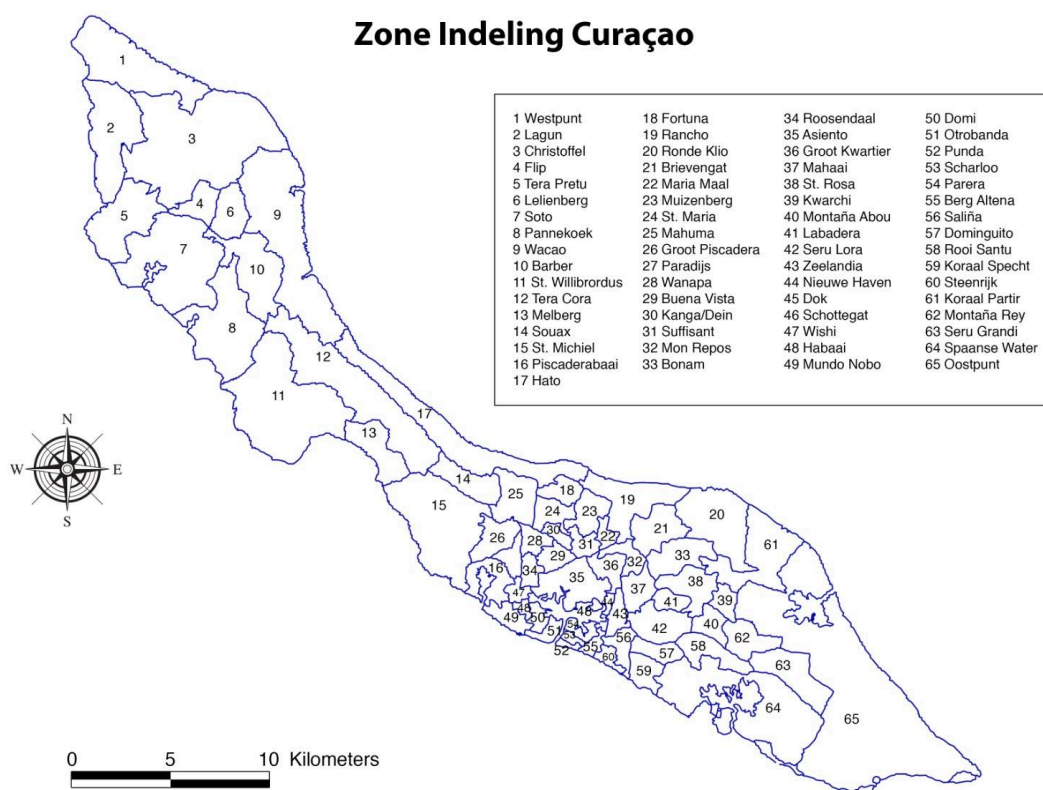


Figure 1: The zones of Curaçao, Design by Crystal Boomgaart, 2018

2. Data Collection

Initially, the data required to analyze land ownership distribution within Curaçao was intended to be sourced from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Curaçao and the land registry office ‘The Kadaster’ (Dataset Kadaster, 2023). However, due to unforeseen circumstances, such as delays in receiving additional statistical datasets on time, only data provided by Kadaster could be

collected and analyzed. To interpret this data correctly, a few in-person and online meetings were held with a Kadaster official in January, 2024. These meetings were key to understanding the categorization and certain limitations within the datasets provided by the local land registry office of Curaçao (Meeting with Kadaster Official, January 2024).

The data provided by Kadaster is categorized into three types of landowners: individuals, legal entities, and governmental entities (Kadaster, 2023). Individuals are any person that owns land parcels on their given name, Legal entities are legally constructed entities such as companies, foundations, etc. that are registered owners of land parcels, and governmental entities are referred to as land parcels owned by the democratic state of Curaçao. For this thesis, the Kadaster official recommended studying land parcels larger than 450 square meters within each zone, as this is considered a common size among landowners who aim to develop (e.g. houses, warehouses, apartments, etc.) on their property in Curaçao. About 65.32% of the total amount of land parcels fall within the recommended category of parcels larger than 450 square meters in Curaçao. This further reaffirmed the land parcel measurement size advice provided by the land registry office.

Additionally, upon request, Kadaster provided data for parcels smaller than 450 square meters within each zone to analyze potential differences in land ownership distribution among owners of smaller parcels (Dataset Kadaster, 2023). This data was still useful as it also allowed this thesis to include smaller parcels of land (below 450 square meters) and the distribution between the type of owners that typically own these parcels. Including this information helped to provide a more comprehensive understanding of land ownership patterns, highlighting any potential distinctions between owners of small and large parcels.

3. Variables and Measures

3.1 Ownership Distribution Calculation

To measure the distribution of parcels among individuals, legal entities, and governmental owners in Curaçao, several variables were employed. The ratio of these ownership types was then computed as a percentage of the total parcels within the zone. The formula used for this calculation is:

$$P = (A / T) \times 100$$

Where P is the percentage of parcels owned by a specific type of owner, A is the number of parcels owned by that type of owner, and T is the total number of parcels in the zone. Lastly, multiplying by 100 converts the ratio into a percentage, making it easier to compare the proportions of different ownership types across zones. This formula is relevant for this analysis as it standardizes the data, allowing for a clear comparison of land ownership distribution across various zones in Curaçao (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

3.1.1 Classification of zones into geographical areas

To further analyze the data, I divided the 65 zones into three groups: West, Center, and East (see Figure 4). These groupings were self-ascribed and were inspired by how local inhabitants culturally describe navigation on the island of Curaçao as I was born and raised there. This approach aimed to explore potential patterns between the various clusters created with SPSS and the self-ascribed groups, focusing on the percentage of parcels owned by different types of owners. This method finds the potential relationship between the various clusters of zones and their location within the three culturally ascribed historical geographical areas. This may become important when applying socio-historical context to the land ownership distribution data of each zone or self-ascribed area. Each self-ascribed group was coded as follows:

- West = 1
- Center = 2
- East = 3

The West group consists of 13 zones, the Center includes 43 zones, and the East 9 zones (see Figure 4&5). The West area starts from the zone of Westpunt (zone nr.1) till Melberg (zone nr.13). The Center area is all the zones that surround the capital of Curaçao Willemstad which is located in the zone of Punda (zone nr.52) and the zones that surround the large industrial zones of Curaçao which currently harbors the oil refinery such as, zone Asiento (zone nr.35). The East area starts from the zone Oostpunt (zone nr.65) and Montaña Rei (zone nr.62). An exploratory

hierarchical cluster analysis was performed using SPSS (Figure 6), with the results presented in the subsequent section of this paper.

3.1.2 Finding Patterns in Property Ownership Distribution

To categorize the 65 zones based on the distribution of ownership types, a cluster analysis was conducted. This technique groups similar objects into clusters, ensuring greater similarity within clusters than between them (Hair et al., p. 478, 2014). As an exploratory tool, cluster analysis is descriptive and does not depend on theoretical or inferential models (idem, p. 482, 2014). The analysis used agglomerative hierarchical clustering, a "bottom-up" method where each zone begins in its own cluster, and clusters are progressively merged as we ascend the hierarchy. The Squared Euclidean Distance was used to measure the distance between zones, and Ward's Method was applied to minimize variance within the clusters (Idem, p. 478, 2014).

The clustering process considered the distribution of different property ownership types such as Individuals, Legal entities, and the Government across each zone. After reviewing the dendrogram, which visually represents the clustering process, both two-cluster and three-cluster solutions were evaluated. The three-cluster solution was ultimately chosen for its superior representation of the data, providing a more granular analysis and comparable results, as discussed in the previous paragraphs.

Validity, and Reliability

These concepts do not apply for the cluster analysis due to its exploratory purpose.

4. Ethical Considerations

All data utilized were obtained from official sources and were treated with confidentiality and integrity. Moreover, efforts were made to ensure the anonymity of individual landowners and to adhere to legal and ethical guidelines regarding data usage. The code of conduct of ISCTE was used to maintain high standards in regard to writing this academic research report and data collection.

5. Limitations

Several limitations were identified regarding the dataset. The land registry (Kadaster) data, while comprehensive, contained approximately 3% missing information on parcels and their owners, due to lost files and complexities within the documentation systems. Moreover, the dataset did not distinguish between individual members within legal entities or instances where individuals owned land through multiple legal entities. This distinction is crucial for filtering potential landowners who belong to both the individual and legal entity groups. Another significant limitation was the inability to filter out overlapping individual or legal entity ownership within zones, which could lead to double or triple counting. Despite these limitations, the data was analyzed to provide a credible overview of land ownership distribution in Curaçao among various owner types. Unfortunately, no effective strategies could be implemented to overcome these limitations due to the inherent lack of precise data available.

Results

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of land ownership distribution in Curaçao based on data from November 2023. The analysis examines the distribution of land parcels by size, owner type, and zoning, including a cluster analysis that identifies patterns of land ownership across the island. Curaçao is divided into 65 zones, a categorization developed over time and formalized by the Eiland Ontwikkelings Plan (EOP) report—Island Spatial Planning report—(Eilandsraad van het gebied Curaçao, 1995). These zones serve as the primary units of analysis and for the cluster analysis of this research were grouped into three main areas—West, Center, and East—each with distinct land ownership distribution patterns.

Land ownership distribution

The results presented in this section will begin with an aggregated overview of the land parcels in Curaçao, as documented by the land registry on November 11, 2023. This includes land parcels measured both below and above 450 square meters. The analysis will then provide the total number of landowners and the percentage of land owned by each type of landowner. Lastly, the results of the cluster analysis are presented to be able to map any groupings of particular zones with similar land ownership distribution patterns.

After analyzing the data provided by 65 zones in Curaçao, the total amount of parcels recorded on Curaçao registered by the Kadaster in November 2023 was 65,525, owned by a total of 88,198 owners. Out of these land parcels and owners, Kadaster recorded 22,721 parcels of land below 450 square meters in all 65 zones of Curaçao in November 2023, with a total of 29,987 landowners. Of this amount of land parcels 57,4% is owned by individuals (Particulier), 26,2% is owned by legal entities 'Rechts persoon', and 15,4% is owned by the government. The total amount of parcels on Curaçao registered by Kadaster of parcels above 450 square meters in all 65 zones in November 2023 was 42,804, of these parcels there are a total of 58,211 land owners. Of this amount of land 58,4% is owned by individuals (Particulier), 26,7% is owned by legal entities (Rechts persoon), and 14,9% is owned by the government (See Figure 2).

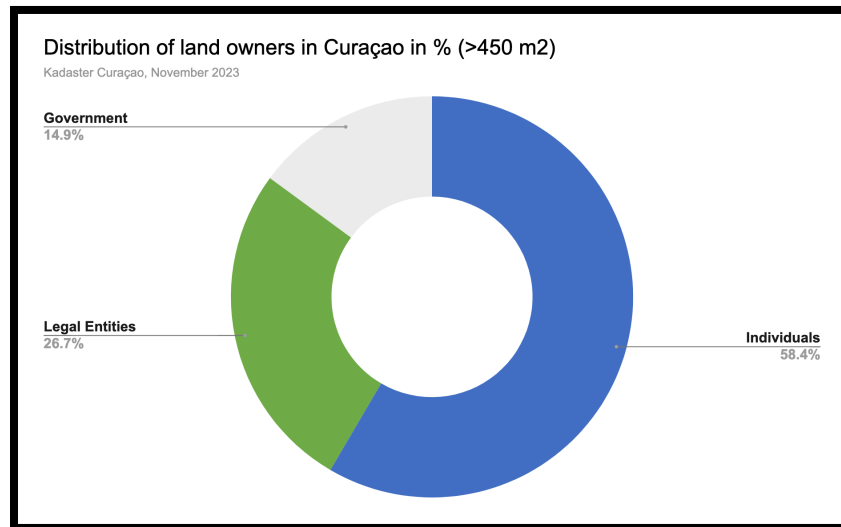


Figure 2: Distribution of land ownership between types of owners in Curaçao (>450 m2)

The overall distribution of land ownership within all 65 zones of Curaçao between the three types of owners is calculated at 70,9 % in the hands of individuals, 18,7% in the hands of legal entities, and 10,4% in the hands of the government (See Figure 3). It becomes evident that combining the total parcel owners for both those below and above 450 square meters reveals a significant increase in individual ownership whereas land ownership by legal entities has a smaller share and governmental entities the smallest share. Despite these distribution results it is still important to consider the size in square meters of the land parcels owned by the government and legal entities which could lead to changes in the distribution results per type of land owner.

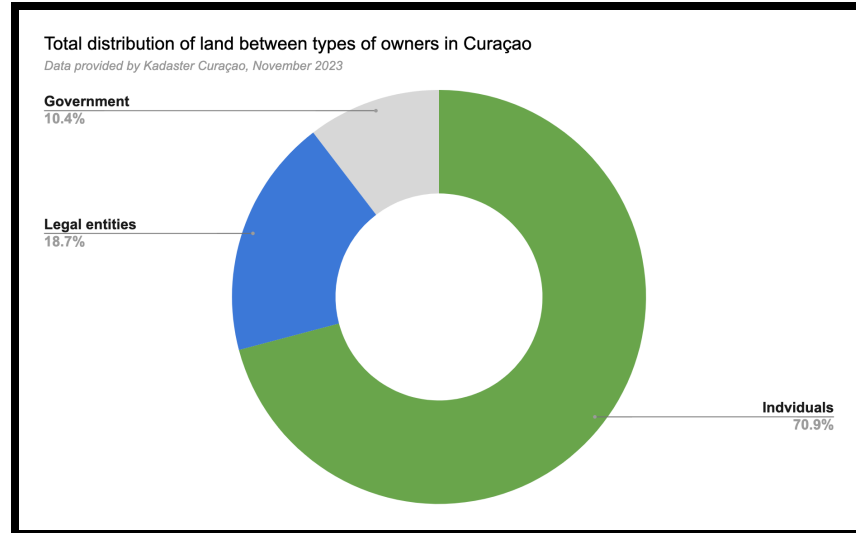


Figure 3: Distribution of land ownership between types of owners in Curaçao (<450 & >450 m²)

To provide a more detailed overview of each zone and the land ownership distribution between individuals, legal entities, and governmental entities the following bar chart was generated (See Figure 4). The results of this chart indicate that the *Spaanse Water* zone is notable for having the highest concentration of landowners across all categories—individuals, entities, and the government—for parcels both below and above 450 square meters. This suggests a highly active and diverse land market in *Spaanse Water*, reflecting its role as a key area for various types of land ownership and investment.

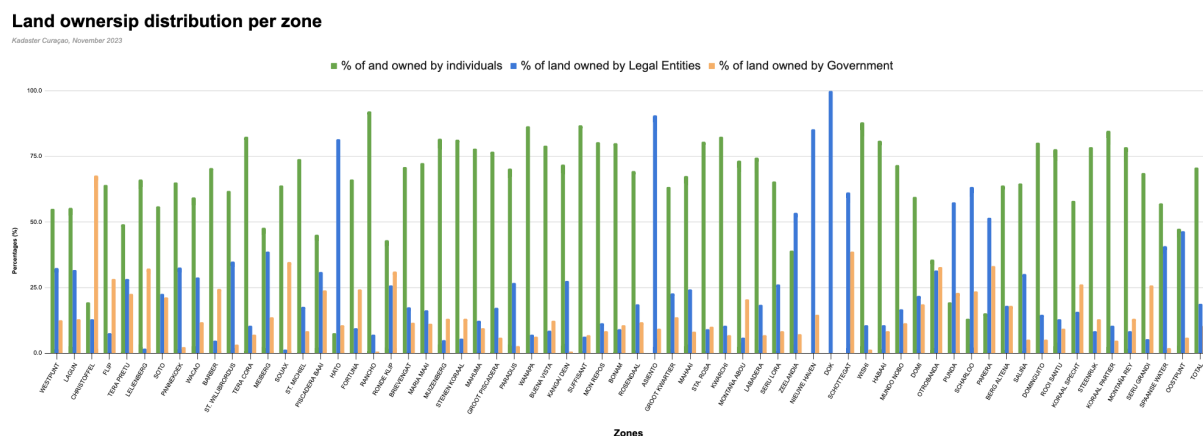


Figure 4: Land ownership distribution between Individuals, legal entities, and government in percentage per zone.

In contrast, smaller parcels (below 450 square meters) are predominantly owned by individuals in *Brievengat*, *Suffisant*, and *Steenrijk*, indicating these zones could be more accessible or desirable for personal use. Conversely, larger parcels (above 450 square meters) are mainly held by individuals in *Mahuma*, *Spaanse Water*, and *Tera Cora*, which may reflect these areas' appeal for larger-scale investments in businesses or housing. Legal entities predominantly own land in *Nieuwe Haven*, *Dok*, *Asiento*, and *Hato*, suggesting these zones are commercial hubs, while government ownership is concentrated in *Christoffel*, *Lelienberg*, *Punda*, and *Schottegat*, highlighting areas of strategic public interest or development.

Cluster analysis results

After conducting two cluster analyses the results with the most interesting outcomes was the cluster analysis that had generated three clusters of zones (see Figure 5). These three zones would be easier to compare with the self-ascribed geographical areas West, Center, and East. The following values are averages representing the mean of the percentage of the zones classified for this analysis. In the three-group cluster analysis, Cluster 1 exhibited a high proportion of land ownership by individuals (58,67%) and legal entities (30,4%), with government ownership being comparatively lower. The second cluster (Cluster 2) grouped zones with a high degree of legal entity owners (60,1%), followed by government (28,78%), and lastly individual owners (11,12%). The third cluster (Cluster 3) grouped zones with the highest degree of individual owners (78,38%) and a low degree of legal entity (26,7%) or government owners (14,9%). It is important to note that the the results based on the second cluster with three groups used the data of land parcels above 450 square meters this is due to the advice provided by the Kadaster official.

Ward Method		% of total parcels owned by individuals	% of total parcels owned by Legal entities	% of total parcels owned by Gov
1	Mean	58.6712	30.4361	10.8927
	N	25	25	25
	Std. Deviation	9.82100	8.20272	7.38756
2	Mean	11.1179	60.1208	28.7613
	N	12	12	12
	Std. Deviation	10.83384	25.29201	19.35651
3	Mean	78.3825	9.0714	12.5461
	N	28	28	28
	Std. Deviation	8.80927	4.10543	10.94480
Total	Mean	58.3831	26.7131	14.9037
	N	65	65	65
	Std. Deviation	26.13386	22.20652	13.42094

Figure 5: Second Cluster: Ward Method clusters with SPSS

By comparing the self-prescribed groups with the data clusters revealed that the clusters offer a more detailed socio-historical understanding of land ownership differences across zones. To enhance visual clarity, two maps of Curaçao were created: one displaying the self-categorized groups and the other showing each zone labeled according to the three clusters (See Figure 6&7).

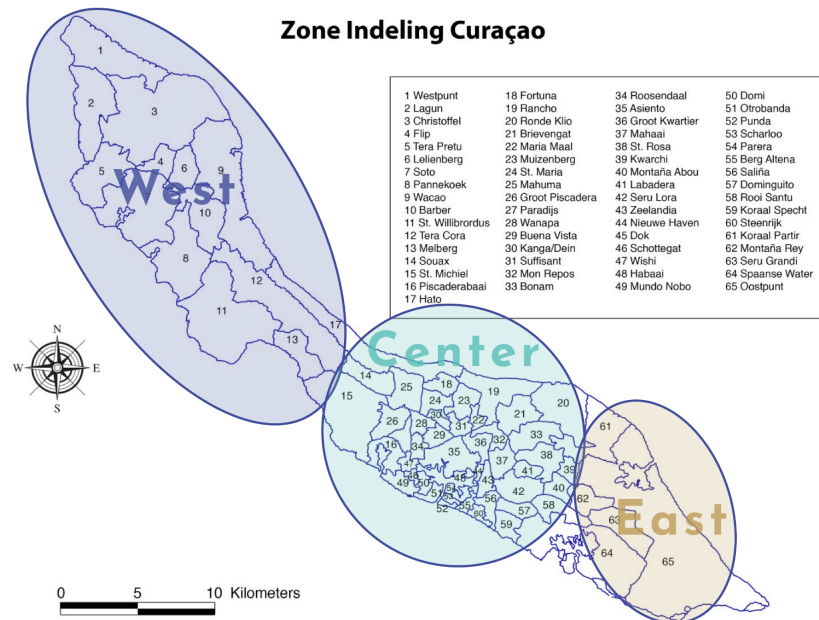


Figure 6: Zones self-prescribed groups based of local identification. Designed by Crystal Boomgaart, 2018

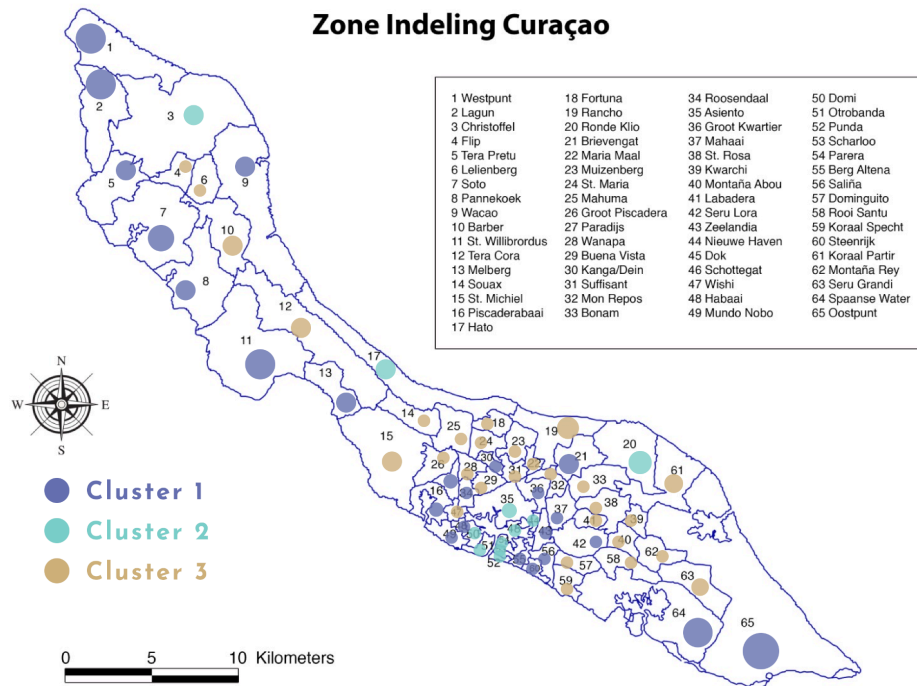


Figure 7: Zones labeled by 3 clusters Design by Crystal Boomgaart, 2018

The visualized results of the clusters display that the zones that have a high degree of individual and legal entity owners (Cluster 1) find themselves mainly in the Western, Eastern, and a few in the Center areas of Curaçao. In contrast, the zones that have a high degree of owners who are legal entities and government (Cluster 2) find themselves mainly in the Center of the island with minor outliers in the western parts of the island most notably the *Christoffel* and *Hato* zones. Lastly, the zones with the highest degree of individual owners (Cluster 3) are scattered at the periphery of the center and towards the western parts of the island. These results provide a start in understanding land ownership distribution within Curaçao between the various zones in 2023. In the following chapter, I will discuss the results in relation to the literature and Curaçao's socio-historical context.

Discussion

By analyzing Curaçao's colonial influence, it becomes clear that the current land ownership patterns are deeply rooted in the island's socio-historical legacy. Under Spanish and later Dutch colonial rule in the 17th century, the island experienced its first private property regime and was parceled into roughly a hundred plantations, controlled by a small colonial elite. Over time, this ownership structure transformed dramatically. As recorded in November 2023, there could be nearly ninety thousand land title holders, a change driven by key historical events. While some emancipated enslaved experienced land ownership during the 18th and 19th century. It was the abolition of slavery that allowed formerly enslaved individuals, primarily of African descent and highly racialized, to acquire property. Further changes in Curaçao's land ownership compositions occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the rise of the shipping industry and the establishment of the Shell oil refinery. These developments led to the formalization of the land registry office, spurring considerable alterations in land ownership. The growth of these industries also drew many newly emancipated Curaçaoans from the western regions, historically home to former plantations, to the island's central areas in search of better employment opportunities.

The establishment of Shell's oil refinery in 1918, with its primary installations located in the areas of Schottegat, Dok, Melberg, and Nieuwe Haven, resulted in a high concentration of landowners who were legal entities in these zones. This directly spurred population growth due to increased labor demands. The combination of local migration to the western region and the influx of immigrant workers, many of whom settled in areas surrounding the industrial zones such as Ronde Klip, Mahaai, Mon Repos, and others, further contributed to this trend. Concurrently, the economic boom brought about by the refinery's operations facilitated the rise of the middle class. Employees of Shell, along with workers from industries benefiting indirectly from Shell, found opportunities to ascend the social ladder, leading to increased home and land ownership. As a result, land ownership expanded among individuals, particularly in the zones surrounding the refinery, primarily located in the central area. While the arrival of the Shell refinery generated new wealth for its workers, the legacies of slavery and colonialism left behind a highly racialized and socio-economically segregated workforce and society. This inequality in conjunction with the global economic downturn ultimately fueled the 1969 May Movement,

which demanded equal labor treatment from Shell, then Curaçao's largest employer. With Shell's subsequent decline in the last quarter of the 20th century and the sale of its holdings, land ownership diversified further, with more individuals and legal entities acquiring property.

Furthermore, Dutch inheritance laws have significantly influenced these patterns, allowing privately owned land to be passed down through generations. This, in particular, could have affected the land ownership distribution between descendants of the non-enslaved, non-racialized colonial populace, and the enslaved, racialized populace, who did not experience the same legal and economic limitations in governing or owning capital such as land in the capital-driven economy of Dutch-colonized Curaçao. This inheritance process could have also led to the high number of individual landowners within Curaçao as family plots were subdivided among descendants. As discussed by Thomas Piketty (2020), this process can also result in the concentration of land ownership, where wealth accumulates in certain families or groups over centuries.

Due to the recent decline of the fossil fuel industry on the island in the early 21st century and the rise of gentrification of certain areas and zones driven by investment attracting policies and tourism, further shifts in land ownership is leading to an increased concentration of coastal land parcels in the hands of legal entities, particularly for the establishment of beach and coastal resorts. The economic downturn experienced due to the decline of the fossil fuel industry may prompt more land, currently owned by individuals or the government, to be sold to foreign investors seeking to satisfy their ever-growing appetite for capital accumulation, potentially resulting in an even greater concentration of land ownership in fewer individuals, families or companies.

The Cluster analysis provides further basis for the land ownership composition within the specific self-ascribed geographical areas. Cluster 1 which consists of a high degree of individual and legal entity landowners in the West and Center areas may indicate a socio-historical pattern closely linked to the depreciation of the plantation economy. This phenomenon started the fractalization of land ownership among individuals and companies that either formally or informally received land ownership deeds through possibly sharecropping, inheritance, or through purchase. The composition of Cluster 2, characterized by a high concentration of legal entities and government-owned land parcels in the central area, is closely tied to the early establishment of Curaçao's Dutch colonial capital, Willemstad, named after the Dutch King. The

city's strategic location near a naturally deep harbor made it a hub for the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans and, later, a key gateway for modern industrial oil tanker ships to load and unload fossil fuel resources. Additionally, the fully operational shipping harbor in the Nieuwe Haven zone further explains the high concentration of land owned by legal entities, as much of the trade and commerce in these areas were conducted through such entities. This trend was also influenced by the rise of industrialization in the early 20th century with the arrival of Shell and the subsequent population boom in the following decades. The second cluster also gives clarity to special zones that are predominantly owned by the government, such as the *Christoffel* zone which is an environmentally protected area. The *Hato* zone, where the national airport is located, is also largely government-owned.

The land ownership composition of Cluster 3, characterized by the highest concentration of individual owners, is primarily found on the periphery of the central area and extends toward the western parts of the island (Figure 7). Historically, these zones were former plantations that were subdivided into land parcels for residential use, contributing to the high number of current landowners. Additionally, their proximity to major industrial and commercial areas in Curaçao led to increased population density over time. By analyzing the current land ownership distribution in Curaçao and its evolution, we open the door to understanding how wealth in the form of land ownership is distributed among various people and entities within the island. This exploration creates a compelling foundation for further research into the implications of land ownership for the local population's economic and social aspirations. Understanding these dynamics can spark discussions on how land distribution influences wealth and opportunities, shaping the future of Curaçao's socio-economic landscape.

However, the study faced some limitations due to a lack of detailed data from Curaçao's formal institutions. This restricted the ability to accurately measure land ownership concentration, as there were no datasets available to filter or group landowners who own multiple parcels across different zones. This limitation constrained the analysis and the depth of research that could be conducted.

Additionally, the inability to compare current data with historical land ownership trends limited the study's scope. Without this comparison, it is challenging to draw precise conclusions about the evolution of wealth inequality related to land distribution. Consequently, the findings cannot definitively assess the impact of land ownership concentration on wealth inequality.

Therefore, future research should focus on a more detailed analysis of land ownership concentration within Curaçao's population and the impacts of slavery and racialization on current land distribution. Further studies should also examine wealth inequality and its social implications within the society of Curaçao and the potential impact of racialization and tourism on land ownership and wealth concentration in Curaçao.

Conclusion

This thesis provides a detailed examination of land ownership patterns in Curaçao, demonstrating how these patterns are intricately linked to the island's historical legacies, socio-economic transformations, and legal frameworks. The analysis, primarily based on data from the Kadaster, reveals significant disparities in land distribution across various zones, reflecting the enduring impacts of colonial land division and ongoing socio-economic shifts.

The findings highlight that current land ownership in Curaçao is a complex reflection of historical injustices, including the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and industrialization. The data underscores the need for a deeper exploration of how these historical factors continue to shape land distribution and ownership dynamics today. The study calls for further investigation into the roles of wealth inequality, racialization, and tourism in influencing land ownership patterns, as these elements are critical for understanding the broader socio-economic context of Curaçao.

By unraveling these intricate narratives, this research serves as a foundational step toward a more nuanced and equitable understanding of land ownership on the island. It emphasizes the necessity for continued exploration and dialogue surrounding these issues, advocating for researching policies that promote fairness and inclusivity in land distribution. The insights gained offer a basis for practical interventions aimed at addressing socio-economic disparities and advancing justice.

Ultimately, this study not only contributes to academic discourse but also provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders. It highlights the importance of considering historical colonial and socio-economic factors in shaping land ownership policies, intending to create a more equitable and inclusive future for all inhabitants of Curaçao. The call for further

research and dialogue is essential in addressing the deep-seated issues that impact land ownership and socio-economic inequality on the island.

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Annexes

A. Kadaster Datasets: (Dataset of land registry Curaçao available upon request)