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Family narratives and migration dynamics : Barbadians to Britain

Uses life-story interviews of Barbadian migrant families in both Barbados and the UK to study the family as the tool and the material which creates and shapes historical mentalities and identities.

The author shows how the links between family and migration continue to play a role in the motivation of migrants. Also published in *Immigrants*

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FAMILY NARRATIVES AND MIGRATION DYNAMICS:
BARBADIANS TO BRITAIN¹

It was an old man in St. Philip, Barbados, who first told me the story:

My father [who] was a laborer ... been to Panama ... and British Guyana [and] America. He die over in America ... I had a uncle over there too, my mother brother, was in America ... I went to America in 1944 and ... in 1945. I have thirteen kids by my wife ... some out in England.²

The cyclical labor demands of international capital, the policies of receiving countries, the “pressures” of over-population and unemployment – while these conventional models of migration may explain the timing and the scale of specific migratory movements, they fail to account for ways in which migration engages historically with other social and cultural goals, including the “open” goal of migration *per se*. Migration, particularly from the Caribbean, is assumed to be “the movement of labor” where, as the geographer Elizabeth Thomas-Hope (1992:8) comments “interpretation (of migrant behavior) at the level of societal meaning and personal consciousness has scarcely been touched upon.”

Between 1948 and the 1973 approximately 550,000 people of Caribbean birth migrated to Britain, the majority arriving before the 1962 Immigration Act effectively cut off further immigration. Britain after the war had experienced a shortage of labor in key areas of its reconstruction program such as the transport and catering industries, and the National Health Service. Although initially reluctant to call in Commonwealth workers, by the mid-1950s many employers such as London Transport, British Railways, Lyons Tea Houses, and the National Health Service had

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embarked on recruitment programs in the Caribbean. The first group of immigrants came from Jamaica, and they remain by far the largest group of Caribbean nationals. The 1971 census (which first differentiated Caribbean nationals by island of birth) revealed that Jamaicans comprised 171,775 of the total Caribbean population, Barbadians 27,055, Trinidadians and Tobagodians 17,135, and the Guyanese 21,070.³ By 1981 the Jamaican community stood at 164,119 or 55.6 percent of the Caribbean population, Barbadians at 25,247 or 8.55 percent, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago at 16,334 or 5.53 percent, and Guyanese at 21,686 or 7.35 percent, with the remainder from the Leeward and Windward Islands.⁴ Although overall the Caribbean community in Britain represents less than one percent of the population of Britain, migrants as a percentage of the population of their home countries are large. Between 1951 and 1971, 7 percent of the population of Jamaica migrated to Britain, 12 percent of the population of Barbados, and 1.4 percent of Trinidad and Tobago.⁵ These figures suggest very different cultural and economic pressures operated in each of those islands to encourage migration. Equally, although figures on return migration are difficult to ascertain, there has been a significant reduction in the size of the Caribbean communities in the last decade, some of it as the result of death, but mostly due to re- and return migration. There are also significant differences. Between the census years 1971 and 1991, the Barbadian and Jamaican communities have declined by 17 percent (from 27,055 to 22,294, and 171,775 to 142,483 respectively).⁶ The Trinidadian community has remained not only stable, but appears to show an increase from 17,135 in 1971 to 17,620 in 1991.⁷

Such significant differences in the patterns of migration, settlement, and return, require fresh explanation. Conventional explanations of migration not only limited an understanding of migrant motivation to the purely functional but, by disregarding the cultural and historical dimension of Caribbean migration, distorted interpretation of the nature and growth of Caribbean communities in the host societies. Early debate on the Caribbean community in Britain, for instance, was located within a framework of race relations which assumed an economic motive in migration, permanency in settlement, and placed assimilation and integration as the goal and yardstick of migrant success (Huxley 1964; Banton 1967). Recent studies, however, are beginning to redress this balance. In the United States, research by Philip Kasinitz (1992) or Constance Sutton and Elsa Chaney (1994) has located the development and peculiarities of Caribbean communities in the United States within the migratory culture of the Caribbean and within a tradition of mobility from the Caribbean to the United States which began early in the twentieth century. Both indicate

the strength and resilience of Caribbean communities and the growth of “transnational” identities as an identifiable and continuing feature of those communities and of their Caribbean identity. In Britain, however, where migration from the Caribbean is of more recent origin, and where the Caribbean community is only now entering into its second and third generation, revisionist research on Caribbean migration and communities in Britain has assumed a more conceptual position. Recent studies have (rightly) distanced themselves from the old race relations paradigm to focus on ethnicity, and on issues of identity and diaspora. For writers such as Stuart Hall (1990; 1991) or Paul Gilroy (1993) this contemporary focus is closely linked to notions of modernity and post-modernism, and an attempt to move beyond the simple geographic location of ethnicity into a construction of identity which stresses culture, mobility, and hybridity. A more empirically based study by John Western (1992) also takes identity as its central issue. The majority of *A Passage to London*, however, charts the geographic and social mobility within Britain of a small group of Barbadian informants and makes little attempt to address the historical, cultural, or ethnic context of Barbadian migration to Britain or the lingering context of imperialism in which the migrants found themselves in Britain. As a result, though described as a “social history,” the book is curiously ahistorical. His employment of reconstructed oral interviews does not enable verification of his sources; and the attempt to enter into contemporary debate on identity lacks the conceptual punch of Hall or Gilroy or, from a different perspective, Homi Bhabha (1994).

The recent emphasis on identity, however, while making a valuable and exciting contribution to debate, does not address completely Thomas-Hope’s notion of “societal consciousness” and, with its focus on response rather than motivation, does little to explain the cause or process of migration, or the impact of both on migrants and their families. Nor does it fully investigate the contemporary historical development of Caribbean communities in Britain. Although the original motivations of migrants may be “history” for their children, nevertheless the dreams and aspirations which were forged by them may retain a dynamic, translated and transformed by subsequent generations. The global dimension of migration, played out in international labor markets, and mediated by the maneuvers of the host polities, engages with a home-based social and cultural history which has furnished and continues to furnish Caribbean migrants with their own agenda. In this agenda, the family can be seen to play a role as both the end goal, and the means to achieve it. It is worth reconstructing

those motivations, for the historical insights they may bear on present and future migrant behavior.

The old man's story was one I was to hear many times again. Its significance lay, I believed, in the challenge it offered to the assumption that migration arose from an historical, rather than an economic vacuum. This was a *family* which for three *known* generations had migrated. Drawing on insights from both the social and behavioral sciences, this suggests several important dimensions (Byng-Hall 1990; Bertaux & Thompson 1993; Thompson 1993). First, the existence of a family dynamic, in this case, a migration dynamic which both determined behavior and gave it meaning; second, the interplay between this migration dynamic and other family dynamics (such as color), and family goals (such as social mobility); third, the importance of the family in approving and enabling migration; and fourth, an ethos reflecting and reproducing a broader culture of migration which perhaps ran parallel with, but did not necessarily conform to, the vagaries of international labor demands. Indeed, once family stories and memories are taken into perspective then the motives for migration become more complex, ambiguous, and culturally specific.

My research, using oral, life stories and engaging with different generations of Barbadian migrant families is an attempt to see the family as both the tool and the material which, through its dynamics, creates and shapes historical mentalities and identities. The family in terms both of its structure and directives may, therefore, offer a key to understanding change. The clues to this lie within memory in its twin role as agent of socialization and historical evidence. The migration narratives demonstrate the historical importance of what Maurice Halbwachs (1980) describes as the "collective memory."⁸ For Halbwachs the language, images, and priorities which structure memory are socially and culturally produced. Individual memory is, moreover, always collective, for it contains, and synthesizes, the memories of previous generations. As an active ingredient in socialization, it influences the behavior and actions of successive generations. For the historian, memory as a source offers a clue not merely to past experiences, but to the interpretation of, and meanings given to, such experiences.

This article is therefore as much to do with understanding the history and culture of migration as the process by which such a culture is transmitted and transformed through the shape, structure, and meanings of the memories recounted. At the same time, in the case of Barbados, it can show how the links between family and migration continue to play a role in the motivation of migrants and thereby contribute towards a contemporary understanding of the hopes, aspirations, and lifestyles of the Barbadian community in Britain, including the emergence of Caribbean family

structures in Britain, and demographic change. Moreover, by focusing on one Caribbean community, rather than a conflation of the community as a whole, it is possible to isolate features which may link, and distinguish, behavior. In the case of the migration from Barbados to Britain, the length of the migration proved, for a variety of reasons, considerably longer than anticipated. As a result, partners and children eventually joined the primary migrant in Britain. Although this has imposed different kinds of strains on the migration ethic, nevertheless the narratives here hint at the multiplicity of meanings which migration held for the first generation of migrants.⁹

This essay is based on a quota sample of eighty-five life-story interviews conducted across two and three generations of Barbadian families in Britain and Barbados. Contact with informants in Britain and Barbados was made initially through membership of, or an association with the members of, various branches of the Barbados Association, of whom the majority had family members of previous generations migrate. The sample ensured a balance of class, gender, occupation, and educational attainment. From the interview sample, three families have been taken as case studies. Tracing a detailed lineage within these families shows that family ethos is closely linked to family history. In all the families, members of the previous generation had migrated in the early decades of the twentieth century, where some of the influences of the nineteenth century could be expected to resonate. In all families there is clearly a "migration dynamic" of which the meaning differs as it engages with other predominant cultural discourses of both class and color. Migration, even within families, is never that simple. It probably never was.

JASPER'S FAMILY

The first family illustrates how independence from plantation discipline became a precondition for the family's migration, and continued as a theme of social mobility throughout the continuing migrations of family members. Jasper's¹⁰ father had migrated to Britain in 1954, his mother in 1956. Jasper himself migrated to join his parents in Britain in 1961, at the age of fifteen and returned, a successful restaurateur, in 1987 with his mother and family. Jasper's father, at the time he migrated, was employed in Barbados, and economic improvement was one consideration in his decision to migrate. Social influences also played some part, "It was an exciting time," Jasper recalled "because everyone on the island ... was talking about emigration to Britain."¹¹ Talk which was placed, significantly, within a broader historical context.

I loved listening ... to the old fellas ... telling stories ... about how they went off to Curaçao and they went off to Panama and they was building the canal, and they went off to Cuba and Aruba and they found the oil ... the new place on stream then was Britain ... the big talk back in the 1950s was emigrating to Britain ... these men were talking about emigration to Britain, it was the new thing.¹²

Yet the stories played also into a particular domestic context. Jasper's mother, Olive, (born in 1926) describes how:

My grandfather ... was in Cuba and send for my two uncles ... then after my mother could get grown up, then she went to Trinidad ... and leave me very small, as a baby ... [My mother] was working ... then she leave Trinidad and went on to Panama, and meet her husband there ... he took her from Panama to Jamaica ... *Our family love to travel* [emphasis added].¹³

Olive, an only child, had been reared by her grandmother, a cook in a plantation house, by her great-grandmother, Lola, and by her aunt, while her own mother was away in Trinidad. Olive's mother had also been reared by Lola, while *her* father was away in Cuba and her mother had worked. When Olive and her husband migrated to England, Jasper was cared for by his maternal great-grandparents; his siblings were reared by his grandmother who was still in Jamaica. The importance of other families members, in particular grandmothers, in child care is a characteristic of many Barbadian families. In this case, it facilitated and enabled the migration of two generations of one family (see also Barrow 1977). For three generations – including Jasper's great-grandfather's migration to Cuba – a parent had been absent through migration. In terms of family models and historical continuities, this had resulted in the youngest generation being brought up by grandparents whose own historical reference points were a generation removed. Models of migration were part of the family lore, and migration was the norm.

The family facilitated migration in other ways. Although, as pointed out by Olive, the family was not "very big" principally because they "was away," both she and Jasper maintained they were "very close." The extended family, of cousins and aunts, included Jasper's grandfather's "outside" families. All provided mutual support for each other, in terms of exchanging and sharing provisions,

relatives used to travel for miles to bring ... provisions ... breadfruit, sweet potatoes, yams ... when one of the old cousins ... were growing things like sweet potatoes, we'd probably be growing cassavas and eddoes, so we'd do a swap ... back in that period ... for a woman to bring up a family completely on her own would have been difficult.¹⁴

Mutual support was "all part of the family thing" and applied, in this case, whether a partner was absent as the result of migration or for other reasons. Second, Jasper's great-grandfather had sent the money for his sons to join him in Cuba. When Jasper's father decided to emigrate:

he didn't have the fifty pounds [for the passage] ... so my grandmother from Jamaica sent the money to my father ... she was instrumental in helping him get to Britain so that, in turn, he could help us to get to Britain.¹⁵

Third, throughout the travels of the various members, regular remittances were sent back home,

the boys [Olive's uncles] went and send back to their mum. My mother went too, and my mum send back to her Mum and they're always sending ... thereafter then ... my uncle [in Curaçao] used to send out a lot of clothes, pretty bath towels and powder, and everything you could think of, panties, everything.¹⁶

Clearly, with each remittance, contact was maintained. Just as family support enabled the migrants to leave, so migration assisted in the maintenance of the family at home, ensuring family loyalty and identity across the generations, and across the seas. This may account for the ultimate return of family members to Barbados which, in turn, became incorporated in the family model of migration. The family demonstrated a positive disposition to migration, and a determination to maintain family links and unity throughout migration. This was a family which, as Olive said, "love to travel."

But how did it start? Both Jasper and his mother emphasized that they were not "plantation" people, that is, agricultural laborers. Olive's maternal grandmother who brought her up, was "a cook. She never worked *in* a plantation ... She uses to work *at* Wiltshire's plantation" (emphasis added).¹⁷ Her grandfather was a fisherman. Jasper's father worked as a butler and chauffeur for a plantation owner. This pride of independence can be traced to Lola, who, although originally a "located" plantation laborer, (that is, a laborer *in* a plantation) baked bread, and by working

very, very hard ... was able to buy the land from Wiltshire's plantation ... that cost her just over ten dollars. But ten dollars in the late 1800s was a fortune, you know.¹⁸

Lola, in other words, had raised sufficient money, by baking and selling bread, to buy her family land and therefore release from the Contract Law. This Law had been imposed in 1840 and bound the former slaves to their plantations of birth or residence. For nearly a century, until its repeal in 1937, the Contract Law controlled the conditions, behavior, and location of plantation laborers and their access to plantation land (Chamberlain 1990). Lola – and her descendants – were free to sell their labor, and to migrate without constraints.¹⁹ Olive, her great grand-daughter was still carefully distinguishing between working *at*, rather than *in* a plantation. Jasper, his mother, and grandmother had lived on this land and,

attached to the kitchen was a lovely large oven ... that was my great-great-grandmother's oven ... she used to bake as well. Our whole family's always been in cooking or catering ... in fact, today ... there is a corner ... known as Lola Corner ... because that's where she baked ... everyone converged there every Friday and Saturday ... there's nothing there now, just the piece of land ... which has been handed down from the family, from Lola to her daughter, which was my great-grandmother, to my grandmother, to my mother, and I suppose my mother pass it on to me.²⁰

The land was at once both a symbol of individuality, and of resistance to the plantation (Mintz 1987; Besson & Momsen 1987; Marshall 1993). In this family there is a clear recollection of genealogy, and a clear recognition of the role of their ancestor in differentiating and demarcating the family route away from direct dependence on the plantation. Lola's independence, and success, became incorporated into a family dynamic which was as much a part of the family inheritance as Lola's Corner. It pervades the accounts of her family, whether descended by blood or marriage. Olive's grandfather returned from Cuba. He was a fisherman who owned three boats, (and supported an "outside family") and "was considered fairly wealthy." Olive's uncles returned from their travels, and built "a lovely bungalow." Olive's mother has a restaurant in Jamaica. It may be to this that Jasper's final entrepreneurial success (in food) may be attributed. It is possible, too, that the fact, as well as the sense, of long established independence from plantation control may have been a contributory factor in the ability and the willingness to migrate. The decision of Jasper's family to migrate appears to have been prompted by a simple and time-specific economic expedient, but in fact contains within it a far more complex

history of *family* social mobility and geographic migration. It is a history which confirms the patterns of migration identified in the nineteenth century: of individual “casual” migrations of both men and women.²¹

URSULA'S FAMILY

In the second family, although migration has been a consistent pattern, it is not migration per se, but another powerful family legend – and one which in Barbados has a particular resonance – which can be used to explain and understand motives. Ursula was born in 1938, left Barbados in 1959, and returned in 1976. Ursula's father, a carpenter, emigrated to Curaçao, visiting home every three years. Although he was absent throughout most of her childhood, his remittances from Curaçao paid for her secondary education, and a range of private tuition which she enjoyed as a child.

Ursula's interview contained one agenda item: that of difference. Her childhood was “different,” she married a man “completely different,” her own migration pattern – and her return – was “different” to the majority of those who migrated in the 1950s. The family circumstances which eased her settlement in England were “different.” Ursula had been brought up to believe she was “different,” by her mother and, particularly, maternal grandmother, with whom she lived, and “gradually it's instilled in me up to the day, and I'm still that sort of person.”²²

Her father's migration, her status as a singleton child (her mother's only child) provide one explanation for her “special” status. It is not, however, sufficient, for the strong sense of difference derives not from the material comforts resulting from her father's migration, but from the fact that:

My mother was mulatto ... my grandmother remembers her father was white ... So naturally my mother still had a very strong high color ... so I was of a lighter complexion. People tell me that I still have features that show I am [partly white] ... my grandmother ... had actually grown up on the plantation ... [and] looked more to the white race than the colored.²³

Although her grandmother's sister had “married back into white,”²⁴ her grandmother had “married to a colored person,” which “created a stir ... so ... she used to more or less stay to herself.”²⁵ Ursula's grandfather, a tailor, migrated to Panama.

My grandmother said that ... he did not stay for long because he was not the laborer type of person ... being very soft ... he couldn't work as hard as the others, he was not used to it.²⁶

Race was the leitmotif of her life. The story of her ancestry was told in the opening stages of the interview. It continued to dominate her narrative. She was the child, and the grandchild, of migrant workers. What appeared to be important was not the absence of her father (in other interviews, this is often given priority) but that her father provided the means for the family – and Ursula in particular – to live out a life of difference which it was felt, as light-skinned people, was their entitled inheritance and which her grandmother, in particular, wished to convey by stressing, and practicing, difference. “I suppose having all this for me I was special.”²⁷ This was something her grandfather had failed to achieve for her grandmother, and mother, in Panama. He was too “soft.” In one stroke – repeating her grandmother’s story – she both dismissed his attempts, and explained it by elevating his status. He was not a natural laborer, unlike other Panama migrants. For, unlike her grandmother’s sister who had married a white man, it was her grandmother’s “lot”²⁸ to marry someone who was “a colored person and brought her here, on this very estate.”²⁹

Ursula went to the Modern High School. She wanted to be a nurse but,

I didn’t want to really go to England with the people that were going at the time ... my mother used to say [if] there were too many people rushing anywhere, it can’t be [for you] ... she brought me up that way too ... it’s funny, I didn’t want to go [to England].³⁰

Ursula left in 1959 to train in Canada. After two years, however, she returned to Barbados to marry “somebody completely different.” They returned to Canada, but in 1963 migrated to England, in order for Ursula to complete her training, and for her husband to begin his. In England, Ursula experienced neither discrimination nor prejudice. Everyone was always friendly; they were treated as “special.” “Especially me coming from Canada.”³¹ “We have always integrated.”³² ... But then everybody’s not like me, you see. Having mixed and travelled, I suppose it made a difference.”³³ England, moreover, “felt like home.”³⁴

When their second child was born, Ursula’s mother came over from Barbados to help look after the baby, an “arrangement ... *different* to other people.”³⁵

This baby was light in complexion ... And she used to always say, “if anybody sees me outside they’ll think he’s my child” ... She didn’t even want my husband to do much for him. She wanted to do everything with him ... She said, “If anybody sees him outside they’ll think he’s white.”³⁶

Her mother died in England, and was buried there. "I suppose it's *more usual* for people to fly bodies backwards and forwards" (emphasis added).³⁷ At the time, they had no plans to return to Barbados. England was "special." In 1976, however, the family returned. Ursula's daughter, Rosamond, recalls that in England "Mum and Dad ... never had any colored friends at all."³⁸ She was eleven when the family returned. England, she felt, offered

an easier life than here ... a better life than here ... It was a shock when I first came ... Mum and dad didn't talk that much about it [Barbados] ... we knew they were not born in England ... that they came from Barbados, but we hadn't a clue about what it was like, nothing ... [Barbados] felt really strange ... at first I said, "Dad, look at all these black people" ... That was really strange at first ... it was a bit of a shock.³⁹

Rosamond was sent to a private girls school on the island. In her opinion, "The best schools, the private schools, are more white than black ... the schools that you find low in standard, you'll find more black people."⁴⁰ Rosamond works as a clerk in a department store in Bridgetown. She admits that her GCE results were not "really too good" but is nevertheless determined to send her own child to the same school when she is of age. Her brother, the "light skinned" child, however, "didn't seem to like it [Barbados] and never settled," and has returned to England to live.

Ursula returned to Barbados on the death of her father who left her some property and a small grocery business (described by Rosamond as a "rum shop"). In the course of the interview with Rosamond, it emerged that Ursula had not been her father's only child. She had a half sister (an "outside" child), who had migrated to Trinidad, and who also inherited some land from their father, which she then sold to Ursula. Whether Ursula, as a child, knew about the existence of this half sister or not is almost immaterial. She did not mention her in the interview. The value she inherited, cherished, and nurtured was that of racial difference which was offered as an explanation for a life which she perceived to be radically different from those around her. This was a "specialness" which would not have been shared by her half sister, was not shared by her father, nor her grandfather. It is, however, a characteristic still sung by Rosamond, and repeated in her aspirations for her own daughter. That single white ancestor is now six generations removed from Ursula's grand daughter. Migration, for Ursula, enabled a perception of difference to be materialized, initially through her father, secondly through her own migration to England. It is still reflected by her daughter.

JEFFREY'S FAMILY

In the final family the ethos concerns again the role of migration in social mobility, although it was given a fresh twist as perceptions were interpreted to conform to myth. Jeffrey came to England in 1962. He was twenty years old.

My plans was to start out five years in England ... from England go to America, Canada, do a bit of travelling ... get a lot of money, and go back to Barbados ... and build a right, nice house.⁴¹

He was a carpenter/joiner. Like many other informants, economic hardship was not the primary reason for leaving Barbados. Indeed, most of those who came to England were young, skilled, and employed.⁴² Like Dick Wittington, he came for adventure and hoped to find fortune.

Jeffrey nearly made his fortune. Soon after he arrived, he formed a rock group in which he was the lead singer. In time, they turned professional and were due to cut their first record, when Jeffrey left the group. Nevertheless, the group "got the nerve to do the recording, and they got the worst singer in the group, he ended up singing the record."⁴³ The record made the charts. If he had been the singer, Jeffrey believes, "it would have got to number one."⁴⁴ "I do regret it, when I talk about all that money we could have made ... thousands, millions of pounds."⁴⁵

Fortune had eluded him, fate was against him. Even small opportunities were lost, "if I was as wise as I am today, I would have buy a house in the sixties, probably I'd be in a better position."⁴⁶ Although Jeffrey went to Germany to work for a while, the big opportunity never returned again. "Unless you're a gambling man that win the money all the time, or have a crooked mind to get money other ways."⁴⁷ But what was the context for this? Jeffrey's father, Garfield, was born in 1920. His mother left him when he was four months old. "In them days," he says, "boats come and pick them up alongside the wharf and carry them away to Guyana."⁴⁸

His mother never returned. Unlike Olive, whose mother also left her as a baby, or Ursula, who lived without her father, Garfield's experiences were not so fortunate. Under the regime of his father and stepmother, he "had to do everything around the house ... I couldn't leave home and go out and play when I got work to do."⁴⁹ During the school vacation, he had to work for eight cents a day, "picking grass" on a plantation. He gave the wages to his father and stepmother. He left school at fourth standard, working full time at the plantation for eighteen cents a day. The work was "hard," so he went to learn the mason's trade. As an apprentice, his wages

were less than agricultural work, and he was exploited by his boss who required him to work at the weekends with the horses.

"It wasn't easy," Garfield said, "not for me." His life he characterized by bad luck, and hard work. When he was eighteen he went to the United States as a migrant worker and continued going for the next twenty-five years. Jeffrey remembers his father, "was always travelling ... Cuba ... Panama ... America," for two, and three years at a time.⁵⁰ Garfield went to harvest his fortune. However, "I wasn't lucky." One time, for instance,

[w]ent to Florida to pick oranges. When I get there, last year enough oranges, last year. Oh Lord ... but not when I get there! Oranges gone! ... The American people would get the best bearing tree, and you, a contract man ... you never get the best.⁵¹

Although Garfield used to write, Jeffrey recalls that "he never used to get enough money to send ... home."⁵² As a result, with eight children at home, Jeffrey's mother worked as a domestic. His maternal grandmother, with whom they lived, helped with the child care. She died when Jeffrey was twelve, "so that's when I had to finish school ... early ... because I had to help the other kids ... I had no choice."⁵³

At fourteen Jeffrey began his apprenticeship as a carpenter. A few years later, Garfield managed to make sufficient money in America to buy some land. He built the house himself, "because I didn't able to pay." The children helped by fetching water to mix the mortar; nobody else helped. "Friends? Ha! Friends help if you got money."⁵⁴

Despite these interpretations, Jeffrey's perception of his father is that he "done well." Indeed, the contradictions in their perceptions and narratives is striking. According to Jeffrey, when it came to building the house,

I [did] the laying out, the foundation work and all that ... and some of the lads that I was learning trade with, my father says to me, "tell them to come and help me build indoors," he says, "I'll pay them" ... so they came one evening, straight from work ... they used to come on Saturdays and Sundays ... they got it all finished.⁵⁵

When Jeffrey migrated to Britain, he sent money home, with a letter, every two weeks. Garfield remembers,

He never send back nothing ... I can remember, oh, help me Lord ... I can remember. I ask him one time ... if he had anything to send, and help me to progress. I think he send twenty pounds ... and told me, remember, he has a wife and children now. And as soon as I catch myself, I send back his twenty pounds. So he never send nothing, ever. Never. Ever.⁵⁶

Garfield, however, believes Jeffrey has “done well” in England and it is parsimony which prevents him sending money. According to Jeffrey, his father believes,

[y]ou should be working all the time and you’re making, you’re earning about three times the wage that you’re earning in Barbados. He always think like that, you know? ... His thing is “Well, you’re in England, and you’re earning three or four hundred pounds a week, and you could save three hundred pounds a week.” That’s his thinking all the way.⁵⁷

A sense of exploitation, grievance, and lack of control pervades Garfield’s narrative, commencing with his mother, who was “carried away,” continuing through his father, his boss, American workers, the failure of the harvests, the friends who would not help, and finally his son who sent no money. His life was a series of misfortunes; his agenda was one of perceived failure. Garfield went regularly to America. Now, however, his life had been conflated into a shortage of luck and money and an abundance of fruitless labor. Migration had failed to give him the rewards he expected. Rather, it had left him as poor, and as abandoned, as he was as a four-month-old baby, when his mother departed to seek her fortune in Guyana.

The contradictions between their narrative accounts reflect and reinforce a mutual, though different, sense of grievance and failure. Both father and son explain their lives in terms of failed opportunity – *if only* the bumper orange harvest had been a year earlier; *if only* the pop group had made their record two months before. Like seasoned gamblers, both father and son were waiting for the big win. Even though Garfield had clearly failed to make a fortune, Jeffrey had perceived migration as the chance to do so. The themes which pervade Jeffrey’s own narrative – his failure to make his fortune, his entrapment in England – are as obsessive as that of his father. Yet both maintain that the other “done well.”

CONCLUSION

Although the detail of the family histories outlined here differ, they represent ways in which a study of migration is provided with a further dimension when two or more generations are studied. First, at a structural level, the role of the family in enabling and permitting migration is clearly identified. In the studies presented here, the importance of grandparents in the raising of grandchildren is clear. The wider sample confirms the resilience and role of the “transnational” family where examples are presented of first- and second-generation British-born children being sent home to

grandparents, or family, in Barbados. Indeed, the sample begins to suggest a link between the role of the family in other areas such as the creation of cultural identity in Britain, and professional success (Chamberlain 1994b). The maintenance of links throughout migration through, in particular, remittances suggest a primary loyalty to the family, made all the more remarkable precisely when it fails to occur. It suggests also that while economic advancement, or social mobility, may have been a consideration in the desire to migrate, its locus was directed not towards metropolitan contrived notions of success, but towards home-island rewards, and a maintenance of social and family structures. It accounts also for an expectation and, in two of the cases here, realization, of return migration. It may help account for the relatively large decline in the last two decades of the Barbadian community in Britain, and suggests that the much vaunted "myth of return" may in fact have more grounding in reality than is commonly acknowledged, although the timing of that return may also be influenced in some cases by actual, or anticipated, redundancy.

The strength of family organization in supporting migration suggests, clearly, a willingness to sanction it, and a positive disposition towards it. What may appear to be a personal economic motive to migrate, often involves a *family history* of social and geographical mobility. This history, moreover, links back directly to the migration movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the particular form which such movements assumed – the conjunction of the role of the individual within the broader framework and long-term perspectives of the family, the primacy of the family in establishing a sense of independence and identity, and the flexibility of the family as an essential mechanism for so doing. Migration could be seen as an extension of what Sidney Mintz (1993:98) described as "liquid capital" and the use it could be put to "escape the plantation regimen in order to define their lives outside its iron order."

In the case of Barbados where "free labor" was effectively curtailed by the Contract Law, and where the opportunity for exploiting other skills were also limited, the notion of "liquid capital" as the mechanism of establishing both freedom and identity through family lines, was vital in the shaping of both family and culture, and remains a dominant, if obscured, dynamic in migration.

Part of the ethos is a codified family history which recounts the successes, allegiances, and the importance of various migration moves. Neither can the links between family and culture be ignored. It is, therefore, reasonable to extend the notion of a migration ethos from the family and into the broader culture, and to look at ways in which the two interrelate.

These were individuals, specific families. At the same time, the stories

conformed, or were recounted and interpreted so as to conform, to what had emerged as a wider cultural myth. From the nineteenth century, migration from Barbados was perceived as a mechanism of both asserting and achieving independence. The symbolic value and material rewards of migration were one and the same. They tended to be reinforced with each migratory movement and, as such, entered into a mythology of success (Richardson 1985; 1983). Two of the three families delineated here perceived themselves and, by any material measure, can be perceived as "successful." Migration did its job; it enabled a "better life." Disparate though the stories and motives are, they all conform to a broader consensus: migration equates with opportunity. This is the stuff of myth, the mechanism by which collective experience is expressed and explained. For the final family, migration, by the same measurable standard, has been unsuccessful. Garfield made no money; Jeffrey has experienced periods of unemployment. Yet both father and son not only persisted with their migrations but, more importantly, perceived each other to have succeeded, even though the reality suggested the opposite. Myth has become the means by which they interpreted, and made sense of, their own and each other's lives. The contradictions and the omissions are not so much evidence of "faulty" memory, but clues to unrealized dreams, to lives which require reconstruction, and as evidence of myth under construction and transformation.

The mythology of reward manifests itself in other, more oblique ways. There are, for instance, very few Barbadian folk songs which have migration as their primary theme. Given the scale of the migrations, this is surprising. But "Panama Man," one of the few which does, features return, rather than exile, suggests an expectation of wealth, rather than impoverishment. In this particular case, the returning migrant is mocked by his girlfriend because, whereas "Curaçao man ... bring me a calico dress/ When de Panama man come back to Bim/ All he bring is de Spanish caress." This may indicate how migration, for Barbadians, was not a social and cultural trauma, but a temporary expedient. By contrast, in Ireland, where migration has also been a consistent pattern, though return rare, a profound sense of loss, longing, and exile permeates traditional folk songs. Although such a comparison is speculative, it may well reflect very different cultural expectations of, and meanings ascribed to, migration.⁵⁸

Britain, however, proved a tougher nut to crack. The highways of the "mother country" were not paved with gold and, contrary to all expectations (and previous migration models) return did not take place within three to five years. The migration to Britain proved to be of a longer duration. As a result, many Barbadians eventually sent for their children and/or partners from Barbados and established households and families in Britain.

The patterns of family and household which have emerged and developed over the last thirty years in Britain, however, are not dissimilar from those in the Caribbean. Such continuities suggest the strength of the family form as the most efficient way of maximizing resources. The predominance of single-parent households in the Caribbean community – 51 percent of African Caribbean mothers are reported to be lone-parents, as compared to 14 percent of the population of Britain as a whole.⁵⁹ – rather than reflect dysfunctionality or breakdown, may indicate the active and supportive presence of an extended family, the continuing role of grandmothers in child care, and a continuing emphasis on individuality within the family (Brockman 1987). It suggests also that the family itself may have become a statement of cultural and ethnic identity – a response to immigrant “minority” status replicating and reinforcing nineteenth-century responses to slavery and post-slavery.

Within the perspective of a migration history, Britain was merely one stop in a continuum of migratory destinations. Yet Britain was different. Britain was the “mother country”; many Barbadians knew more about the geography, history, and literature of Britain than they did of Barbados. John Arlott was as familiar a voice to them, as he was to the British. Britain, nevertheless, was a culture shock, and the difficulties encountered in the mother country were played down, and even denied, in letters home. This was partly so as not to cause worry. Most of the migrants – as in other migrations – were young people, leaving behind both elderly parents, and/or young children. But the silence also served to perpetuate the notion of improvement which should ensue not merely from migration, but in this case from migration “home,” to the “mother country.” At the same time, oral evidence suggests that previous migrations, particularly to Panama and North America, were also beset with difficulties, primarily of loneliness and discrimination which, for whatever reason, were also carefully concealed and protected by secrecy. Britain was different, but in this sense, not that different. This suggests the need to perpetuate, and reinforce, the particular mythology of success surrounding migration, by suppressing individual anxieties and hardships both for the greater family good, and to maintain the family reputation if, as seems the case, that reputation and status was largely built on the successful migration of individual members. Evidence from the interviews confirms a reluctance to return to Barbados unless substantial material improvements can be shown.

This particular notion – of improvement and mobility – has been highlighted here because components of it were appropriated by government agencies, and find echoes in models of migration. It is not, however, the only dynamic. It may, finally, not be the most important one. In Ursula’s

family, for instance, the relationship between color and mobility is well articulated and engages directly with the rewards of migration. In Jasper's family, the connection between land, independence, and mobility suggests more than a material connection. The theme of abandonment also figures centrally. All the families, though in very different ways, were shaped by it. Equally, the motif of denial and exclusion – of opportunity, of parental love – recurs throughout the narratives. In many ways these may be the melodies of the universal migrant. But they may also be specific to the Caribbean, and a cultural history shaped by slavery – whose resonances found easy analogy between biblical myths of liberation and movement, emancipation and mobility, diaspora and return on the one hand,⁶⁰ and on the other, in Bible teachings of stoicism, patience, and deferred rewards in the final migratory destination of heaven.

Family stories are beginning to reveal the complex social and symbolic relationship between these cultural components. What is clear is that by reorientating migration studies backwards in time, sideways to the home, (as opposed to the host culture), downwards to family migration experience, and away from official and governmental sources, migration, at least from Barbados, appears as the norm, not a departure from it. It appears as located within the structure, culture, and history of the island. From that perspective, what may appear to be deviant migrant behavior in the metropole, may conform to an internal logic of migration survival strategies, translated and transformed by subsequent generations.⁶¹

Perhaps a family history can return a study of migration to the island of its birth, rather than that of its destination. In this way, it may be possible to measure more precisely the differences between migration movements in terms of culture and practice, motivation and expectation, settlement and return. It may also throw new light on the aspirations and behavior of second and third British-born generations by locating their lifestyles and living arrangements within a migration history, and pave the way for comparative studies with other communities in Europe and North America where, in particular, the longevity of the community has revealed significant characteristics which we may begin to see replicated in Europe. Elements of transnationalism and a continuing link with the Caribbean across generations can be identified in Britain, as it has in the United States, which suggest that the development of those communities may depend only partly on their reception in the host society. They may also be displaying resilient, and autonomous, characteristics which are peculiar to Caribbean migration and the culture which gave rise to, and has derived from, it.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to the Nuffield Foundation whose grant enabled me to undertake this research and to the Department of Archives, Barbados for their help and support.
2. M. Chamberlain, Barbados Plantation Tenantry System tapes, GA 1/15-6, Dept. of History, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados.
3. Office of Population Census and Survey of England and Wales (OPCS).
4. Percentage figures quoted in Peach 1991.
5. Figures calculated from Caribbean census and OPCS census data.
6. UK census returns 1971, 1981, 1991, OPCS.
7. Figures computed from UK census returns 1981-1991, OPCS.
8. See also Ardener 1989; Davis 1989; Tonkin 1992.
9. For analysis of second-generation responses see Chamberlain 1994a.
10. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this article.
11. B9/1/A/19. All extracts from the Barbados Migration Project (M. Chamberlain). Tapes and transcripts deposited with the National Life Story Collection of the National Sound Archive at the British Library. References refer to interview number, tape number, side, and transcript page number.
12. B9/1/A/20.
13. B5/1/A/48.
14. B9/1/A/9.
15. B9/1/A/20.
16. B5/1/A/11.
17. B5/1/A/3.
18. B5/1/A/3.
19. For a fuller exposition of this argument see Greenfield 1983.
20. B9/1/A/16.
21. See for instance *The Barbados Emigration Commission Report 1895*, Department of Archives, Barbados.
22. B18/1/A/10-11.
23. B18/1/A/3-4.
24. B18/1/A/13
25. B18/1/A/14.
26. B18/1/A/5-6.
27. B18/1/A/7.
28. B18/1/A/13.

29. B18/1/A/4.
30. B18/1/A/17.
31. B18/1/B/27.
32. B18/1/B/34.
33. B18/1/B/27.
34. B18/1/A/2.
35. B18/1/B/29. In other families from the sample, children were sent back to their grandmothers in Barbados. Ursula's was the only family where the grandmother came to England to look after the children.
36. B18/1/B/28.
37. B18/1/B/31. Winston James (1986) has also looked at this issue.
38. B19/1/A/4.
39. B19/1/A/3, 9.
40. B19/1/A/10.
41. BB2/1/A/12, 50.
42. This characteristic was referred to frequently in correspondence between the Barbados Immigrants Liaison Office in London and the Labor Commissioner in Barbados, correspondence 1957-63, Department of Archives, Barbados. It was, of course, a double edged sword for skilled laborers maintained the high "calibre" and "reputation" of Barbadians in Britain, while draining Barbados of scarce resources.
43. BB2/1/A/20.
44. BB2/1/A/21.
45. BB2/1/A/28.
46. BB2/2/A/61.
47. BB2/2/A/67.
48. B6/1/A/1.
49. B6/1/A/3.
50. BB2/1/A/3.
51. B6/1/A/7-9.
52. BB2/1/B/31.
53. BB2/1/B/36.
54. B6/1/A/11.
55. BB2/1/A/8.
56. B6/1/A/12.
57. BB2/2/A/66.

58. My thanks to Alun Howkins and the Barbadian Calysonian "The Mighty Gabby" (Tony Carter) with whom I discussed this issue.
59. 1991 census of United Kingdom and Wales, OPCS.
60. My thanks to Catherine Hall for pointing out this connection. The different historical experiences of slavery and post-slavery in Jamaica and Barbados may also be reflected in religious experience and practice. While Biblical myths of liberation were more powerful in Jamaica, where they conformed more readily to actual experience and to a pronounced history of slave resistance, in Barbados the religious emphasis most readily adopted was on stoicism and deferred reward.
61. This theme is touched on by Stuart Hall (1990:222) who suggests that the New World itself constitutes a "narrative of displacement" where diaspora identities constantly produce and reproduce.

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