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TRANSNATIONAL GRANNIES: THE CHANGING FAMILY
RESPONSIBILITIES OF ELDERLY AFRICAN
CARIBBEAN-BORN WOMEN RESIDENT IN BRITAIN

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My granny, Oh! a beauty. What can I say? She used to love me so much, and love all the grandchildren. She used to be so good. I don't know ... probably it was a tradition in their day. Oh, so beautiful! And she always sing, or read, or tell us Bible stories, and things like that she used to be so sweet! Oh God! Everybody say I look like her sometimes. But her hair was like satin. Like satin. When you plait her hair, it just flicks up, you know, soft, soft, soft. She, those people would be Christian in those days. ¹

One of my grandparents lives on Lavender Hill, which is about half an hour away. That's my grandmother. On my dad's side. And my mum's mum, she lives in Newark, so we have to travel to get to her, and that's 115 miles or so from here. We normally go there, like, if there's anything like weddings and stuff, we just go there, that's when I see her. Or sometimes she comes down here. I see her about every year, maybe twice a year, something like that ... But in general I don't miss not seeing her ... sometimes I just phone. ²

ABSTRACT. This paper explores the role and position of grandmothers in African-Caribbean families resident in Britain. The data used for this paper comes from a sample of 180 life-history interviews collected in 1995–1996 from three generations of Caribbean-origin people living in Britain and the Caribbean. Findings from this research suggest that African-Caribbean grandmothers resident in Britain have come to play a less active role within their immediate family compared to earlier historical periods. At the same time however, these grandmothers have come to take on a more a transnational emissary role for their family and kin located throughout North America and Europe. Caribbean-born grandmothers appear to be using more “modern” means for fulfilling certain traditional tasks like “child shifting”, “story telling” or acting as a “social safety net”. Using



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their agency African Caribbean-born grandmothers have been able to carve out new niches for themselves despite changes in family structure brought about by migration and settlement patterns in Britain.

This paper explores the role and position of grandmothers in African-Caribbean families resident in Britain. The data used of this paper comes from life-story interviews collected from three generations of Caribbean-origin people living in Britain and the Caribbean. By examining the narratives on the role and status of grandmothers between the three generations, this paper will show that grandmothers resident in Britain today have come to play less of a “social safety net” role for their family. At the same time however, grandmothers have come to take on a more a transnational emissary role for their family and kin located throughout North America, Europe and the Caribbean. By taking on new functions, British/Caribbean grandmothers are able to continue performing variations of the traditional practices grandmothers are legend for doing in the Caribbean.

This paper is based on data collected from an ongoing Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project entitled: **Family Structure and Social Change of Caribbeans in Britain**.² The project explores the patterns of Caribbean-origin family, kinship, and households in Britain from the 1950s to the present. The study compares 60 three generation families originally from Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad in order to investigate: (a) the patterns of maintenance and/or transformation of established Caribbean living patterns; (b) the relationship between specific migration traditions and processes of household adaptation; (c) the long-term prognosis for intra-family support; and (d) the extent to which gender and colour continue to affect family and household patterns of kinship. While the study did collect statistical data on Caribbeans both in Britain and abroad, the main methodological tool used to compile data was the life history approach. From the main sample of 180 life-story interviews, data was selected from first, second, and third generation interviewees on grandmothers for this paper.³ The combined stories and personal reflections of the three generations within each family allows us to examine in some depth the longitudinal changes in the structure of Caribbean families.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first section provides a review of the sociological and anthropological research on the role and status of women and grandmothers within Caribbean families. The second section uses the narratives of the first and second generation interviewees to reflect on the role and the status of grandmothers in the Caribbean. The third section provides an overview of the migration process of Caribbeans to Britain and the kinds of social adjustments that individuals and families endured in moving to a “modern” society. Finally, the fourth section uses the narratives of the third generation interviewees to reflect on how the adaptation to a “modern society” has affected the role and status of Caribbean grandmothers.

THE CARIBBEAN FAMILY

Since the period of formal slavery in the Caribbean, African men and women have been stereotyped by Europeans as irresponsible “savages” incapable of having monogamous relations or forming stable families.⁴ The colonizers’ perception of the lifestyles led by African slaves rarely took into consideration the harsh and brutal conditions imposed by the plantation economies or the formal restrictions placed on men and women by the planters (Patterson, 1967). In some respects the institution of slavery and the exploitation of African labour power was rationalized as a necessary “civilizing” stage in the evolution of the Black “race”; the ultimate goal, of course was its assimilation to European values and practices both at the society level, and more specifically, within the family structure.⁵ When slavery was abolished in 1834 the “mother country” – England wasted little time in dispatching representatives to study and come up with solutions for the “deviant social problems” they felt existed within African-Caribbean families. The objective of the “Victorian” influenced investigators was not to provide an explanation for how the macro economic structure affected the micro individual families but, rather, the concern was more with understanding the Caribbean family structure in a pathological sense. This tradition of regarding Caribbean families as a “deviant problem” continued until well into the 20th century

(Moyne Commission Report, 1938; Frazier, 1939; West Indian Royal Commission, 1945; Herskovits, 1947; Henriques, 1953).

It was not until 1956–1957 that R.T. Smith and Edith Clarke published the first two systematic studies on the Caribbean family structure. These studies were more reliable because both used longitudinal census data on household composition comparing family organization in three selected communities. Both studies also emphasized the influence of the current social and economic conditions on the organization of the household. It is not surprising, therefore, that both researchers eventually drew similar conclusions that types of family organization found in the communities studied are related to the low economic position of males.

Only recently have researchers (Massiah, 1982; Powell, 1982; Black, 1995; and Barrow, 1996) dropped the social pathological view of the Caribbean family and the so called “marginalized” status for men within the family. Contemporary researchers have come to adopt a more realistic version of the role Caribbean men play in their families.⁶ Black (1995: p. 51) points out that women do not create or raise children alone because gender hierarchy and kinship norms in Caribbean societies value and determine differently what men and women do including how they raise children.⁷ Researchers are in unanimous agreement, however, on the importance of the mother’s role in child socialization when compared to that of the father.⁸ For Caribbean women of all ages, public admiration is achieved through the functions of motherhood. Although a man may take pride in his children, his reputation seems to depend less on the functions of fatherhood and more on virility; on the impregnation of women and the physical reproduction of children (Dann, 1987).

The relationship between a mother and child constitutes the core of Caribbean family structure. The bonds are close, combining intense love and affection with some fairly harsh punishments at times. Mother and child are continually together in companionship and interdependence (Clarke, 1970: p. 158). The relationship is typically formed on the day the child is born and lasts until the death of the mother. Within the Caribbean family, a man’s most intensive and enduring relationship is the one with his mother. It is a relationship of close emotional and material interdependency, first he on her, then she on him. The relationship survives and he may live

at “home” with her until her death, often a devastating period in the life of the son. The mother-son relationship constitutes the pivot of Caribbean family structure around which the other family relationships revolve. Clark (1970: p. 163) described the mother-son bond as “exclusive and often obsessive” and cited cases in which sons continue to depend on their mothers well beyond adolescence, often postponing co-residence with a conjugal partner and continuing to live at home.⁹

By extension, a child’s relationship with their maternal grandmother is also very close. When children live with their grandmother, they often refer to her as “Mama” whether or not their own mother is present. She may well function in place of the mother, but the more usual relationship has been described by R.T. Smith (1956: p. 144) as follows:

There is a normal grandchild-grandparent relationship which is one of affectionate indulgence, and a kind of equality. A grandmother, in particular, will often identify herself with her grandchildren and take their part in quarrels they have with their own mother. It is commonly said that grandparents spoil their grandchildren, and old men certainly display far greater affection for their grandchildren than they ever do towards their own children.

Maternal grandmothers are often looked upon to take over child care responsibilities from their young daughters. One of the commonest ways this “child shifting”¹⁰ occurs is when a daughter begins to establish a family while still resident in her parent(s) home. If she has to migrate to some other part of the country or internationally in search of work she is often unable to take her child(ren) with her and leaves them with her mother. A grandmother’s readiness to assume responsibility for her grandchildren is a central aspect of this pattern of childbearing in Caribbean society. It is often the intention that the children should spend only a limited period with the grandmother, that is, until the mother is satisfactorily settled in her new community. In most cases, however, the result is that the child(ren) remain in the grandmother’s home for very long periods (Roberts and Sinclair, 1978: p. 161).

The active role that grandmothers played in the post-emancipation period (circa 1834) seems to be more of a responsive strategy to economic circumstances than it is a tradition passed down from West African family norms and practices. Close family and

kinship links allowed the ex-slaves and their families in the post-emancipation period to respond to hardships and day to day crises of peasant life. Evidence that the grandmothers' "social safety net" role is a recent phenomenon comes from Higman's (1973) work on slave plantations in Jamaica. Higman found that Jamaican grandmother families were virtually unknown on the three properties he studied. No households could be found which consisted of a woman and her grandchildren, with the mother of the children living elsewhere. In the households containing identifiable grandchildren, the mothers tended to live in the same household. Higman, therefore, concluded that even in the widest sense the grandmother family must have been extremely rare in the pre-emancipation period. Higman's conclusion leads us to think that grandmother families in the post-emancipation period were an outcome of a particular economic circumstance where the population had to contend with an unstable peasant production, the cycles of a boom bust economy, and migration. Hence, families needed a "social safety net" in case the biological mother could not make ends meet on her own. In Caribbean peasant societies, therefore, grandmothers became a solution to these dilemmas because they tended to be stable and could be relied upon to "come to the rescue" in times of need. Taking on this rescue role was easy for grandmothers because it served to boost their status both in the family and within the community. Consequently, from the post-emancipation period to the present grandmothers in the Caribbean continue to play an important role in their families.

TRADITIONAL GRANDMOTHER ROLES IN THE CARIBBEAN

Having examined in some detail both the direction in which research on the Caribbean family has progressed and the specific importance of women and grandmothers in Caribbean based families. We are now in a better position to use the qualitative interview data to explore the traditional roles that grandmothers have performed within their households in the Caribbean, in examining the reminiscences of the first and second generation it becomes apparent that there is a continuity among Jamaican, Trinidadian, and Barbadian interviewees about their grandmothers. Universally, grandmothers

were remembered for having played an important “safety net role” for their grandchildren and families. Other roles which these women were identified as performing included: being responsible for a significant economic contribution to the household income, being the household head, maintaining kinship and family ties over time and space, acting as a midwife, taking over the full responsibility for grandchildren, caring for the sick, counseling and socializing the young, and carrying on the oral story telling tradition. All of these functions were performed by grandmothers in a “totally loving and selfless” manner according to most of the interviewees.

For many of the first and second generation informants grandmothers were thought of as the main breadwinner and the household head. For Sheila who grew up in her grandmother’s yard in Christchurch, Barbados, this was certainly the case. She tells us that her grandmother’s home formed the nucleus for the entire family’s activities in Barbados. She says:

Yes. Yes. With my grandmother, it was, you know, my grandmother’s house, an aunt, cousins, and other relations around, how it was, you know. And, as I said, my grandmother was very very good to us. I used to class her as like a mother, you know, cos I think she brought up most of us, and most of her grandchildren. So my grandmother was the head of our house.³

In some families, grandmothers would live in the homes of their children but they would still remain economically independent. This was the case in John’s Barbadian household in the 1940s. He recalls his grandmother Elsie working as a servant at a local plantation in order to supplement her son’s (his father’s) income. Elsie’s contribution to the family savings was important because ultimately it allowed John’s father to open up a small village rum shop. John says:

My grandmother, I mean, she lived in the house for all the years that I’ve known ... although my mother was present, you could still see her as a surrogate mother, as such, because she was very caring and very religious, and really, you could say, supplemented, initially, my father’s income. I remember her working as a servant on the plantation. She had my father, and then his father went off to America, and she never had another man since. So she spent most of her time in the church and with us.⁴

Other grandmothers were recognised for making an economic contribution to the family through “working the land”. Beulah’s

grandmother Hazel maintained a parcel of land on which she grew cash crops. Hazel's estate in Trinidad was so successful, she was able to assist five of her seven children to emigrate to the United States and Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. When Hazel's grandchildren were older she was then able to help each of them by providing employment. Beulah explains to us:

Well, my grandmother had land, what they call "estate", with nutmeg, cocoa, cloves, cinnamon, all those things. She live off of her land. Well, she used to pay people to bud the trees when the branches dry, and because she had three sons and four daughters, and they all travel, and there were two at home, but they had to go to their job, right? And she paid men to do the land, and pruning the trees, and everything else. When all her grandchildren get big, then we take over the land and go get the nutmegs, seeds off the ground and so we survived.⁵

Some grandmothers were not active in the labour market and, therefore, had to rely on their wide network of family, kin and friends to support them in times of need. This was the situation for Leroy's grandmother Clover. Clover was a well-known woman in the district of Golden Grove, Jamaica because, according to Leroy, she did "good works for others throughout her lifetime". From Clover's diverse network built up over the years, she was able to respond to most hardships and crisis. By Leroy's account Clover seemed to be one of those individuals in the district who could always manage for herself and others. Leroy tells us:

Well, I, I lived with my grandmother for 18 months to two years, to be honest with you, after my mother leave, I was actually staying with my grandmother. By this time, my grandfather had died, so I've got no recollection of him. But my grandmother, oh yeh, I mean . . . again, she's so similar to my mother, it's unreal. She's the same, same person really, Mum is a younger version of my grandmother. I mean, very religious, again, you know, very kind. She was also very strict on discipline, and, you know, she would, she would definitely make you aware that things have got to be done. I mean that sort of thing, you know. She lived to a very old age, still active, you know . . . Well-respected in the area. And again, she was somebody that you know, people would go to for advice and things like that, and she was always ready to give advice or to share out what little she had.⁶

A common memory among the interviewees was the excitement their grandmother showed at the birth of a new family member. Additional grandchildren were never regarded as a liability, rather new additions to the family were seen as a "precious blessing from God". According to Philbert, his grandmother Matilda was "always

eager to see her new grands". She made every effort to be present at each new birth and to act as the midwife although she lived in Murrant Bay and would have to travel to Kinston where some of her daughters lived. Philbert describes her as:

My grandmother, my grandmother was very religious. Very much like my mother. And again, I can't remember her working. She was also at home, looking after, initially, her own children, and subsequently, some of her grandchildren, and so she was there for us. For instance, when the aunts had a child, she was always in attendance. Often she went to extremes to be present at those births.⁷

Along with playing an active role in childbirth, grandmothers also seemed to be ready to take on the full responsibility for raising grandchildren. This "child shifting" practice came up in a number of the interviews especially among the second generation who arrived in Britain as teenagers. These men and women had typically been left behind in the care of maternal grandmothers while their own mothers left for England in search of work and a better life. Once established, the mothers would then send for each of their child(ren) left behind. In practice, this "shift migration" process sometimes took many years to complete because economic resources in Britain were never quite what the migrants had imagined they would be. Henry's account of growing up with his grandmother and 27 cousins in Black River, Jamaica is illustrative of the burdens many grandmothers endured while their children were off "trying to make it" in Britain. Henry's situation also highlights the incremental nature through which children were sent for by their migrant mothers in Britain. He says:

Yeh, she left me with my grandmother, when I was about, I think, a couple of months, or something like that. When she first arrived here, she arrive by herself ... then she send for one of her brother, and then she sent for her sister. Then she sent for her next brother. She sent for about, maybe about five of them, and they all come up here and start their own life over here. All the rest of we stayed with my grandmother. And growing up in a big family, maybe of about 26, 27. Grannie she had a lot of responsibility, and she had to really prepare things for us, and make sure everything was all right. She was very hard- working, a very hard-working woman. I can remember her very well, and then my mother she sent for each of us ... She first sent for my bigger brother and my big, eldest sister and eventually she sent for me.⁸

Grandmothers also played an important part in minding the sick and socializing their grandchildren. These roles were an extension

of the child caretaker relationship that grandmothers played in their families. For Lynett who grew up with her grandmother in San Juan, Trinidad the only way she survived into adulthood was through the nursing and loving care she received from her grandmother. Lynett explains:

Oh, she was quite a lady. Very careful with me and, she be as to I was her child. When I was born, and . . . how must I put myself? Don't know anything until I was sensible enough, to keep calling her "Mummy", not knowing she was just my granny, because I didn't know better, until I grew up, and she start telling me my mother died when I was small, and she looks after me until she died . . . she loved me a lot. I don't like talking about it, it kinda hurts. But you ask me the question, I try to give it to you. I was sickly born. Not premature. I born all right, insides and everything. But I get no breast feet from my ma, I start getting to be a sickly child. And she had a lot spend on me, and take me to doctors, and all sorts. She was very caring.⁹

Lynett's grandmother was also responsible for her childhood socialization because her biological mother died soon after giving birth. In reminiscing about this, Lynett commented that her grandmother might have been strict when she was growing up but it was for her own good. As Lynett points out, the other girls in the village ended up "falling pregnant at an early age or finding themselves in some wicked fate" but because of her grandmother's guidance and strictness she was able to avoid any of these pitfalls. In commenting on her situation, Lynett says:

She used to take me to church with her. If she go on a day of the week when there is mass in the church, I'm there. When I was a little girl, she teach me a little bit of everything how to cook, how to look after washing clothes, cleaning the house, the yard, a little bit of everything . . . I follow everything she said do, I do. "Don't go there", I don't, because maybe like there they have bad children, I can't go there, I have to stay here. And I don't regret it right now.¹⁰

Along with teaching grandchildren values, manners, and responsibilities, grandmothers were also remembered for the "quality time" they spent with grandchildren and the close loving relationship that they maintained. Giselle's narrative about her grandmother Emma in Hanover, Jamaica, highlights the close bond that grandmothers and grandchildren often shared. Giselle's family history also illustrates the way "child shifting" could be a two way exchange. In this particular situation, Giselle's grandmother asked her parents if she

could adopt and raise her despite the fact that the family was not facing any financial emergency. Giselle explains:

I only knew my mother's mother. As a kid, I used to visit her. My dad didn't like it though. He didn't want to send me to spend any time with her. I always used to look forward to her coming, because she used to live in Spanish Town, and I used to live in Kingston, so she used to come down on a Sunday, you know, at a certain time, and I always looked forward to my gran, we call her "Granny", coming down to see us, you know, and bringing us little goodies. I always remember her, you know. She and I would talk and share secrets . . . She, she even wanted to adopt me, really, and my dad, my dad wouldn't have anything like that. She wanted to actually take me, because, you know, in West Indian families, you know, they do sometimes. Yeh, yeh, you grow with the grand parents . . . I remember, on the rare occasion when I did get to go and stay with her, she always used to feed me condense milk. I always remember her making me this sweet milk drink, you know, or using the milk to sweeten the mint tea, and you know, that sort thing . . . she used to spoil me rotten, really. And, grown up now, I suppose I look at it in a way, yes, she was glad that I'm her granddaughter, but because she didn't really give my mum the love she should have given her. I think she was just pouring it out on me, more than anything else.¹¹

Having examined in some detail the qualitative interviews from the first and second generation we can now understand the traditional roles and the high regard that grandmothers enjoyed within their households in the Caribbean. In the next section we will examine the emigration process of Caribbeans to Britain and how adjustment to a "modern society" affected the traditional living arrangements and family structures for Caribbean migrants. These changes are ultimately reflected in the variations to the traditional roles for grandmothers in British/Caribbean households. These changes in values are clearly reflected in the narratives provided by the third generation who were born in Britain of Caribbean-origin parents.

CARIBBEAN EMIGRATION TO BRITAIN

Caribbean migration to Britain effectively started in 1948, reached its peak in 1961, and ended by 1973, after which date the annual net migration balance between the two countries amounted to only a few thousand people. The pattern of emigration from the Caribbean to Britain between 1951 and 1962 can be divided into three distinct

TABLE I
The geographical origins of the Caribbean-born population

	1961	1971	1981	1991
Barbados	9 273	27 055	25 247	22 294
Jamaica	100 410	171 775	164 119	142 483
Guyana	10 889	21 070	21 686	20 478
Trinidad	n/a	17 135	16 334	17 620
Other Caribbean	53 087	67 035	67 793	61 706
Total Caribbean	173 659	304 070	295 179	221 821

Source: Owen (1993) Various Census tabulation years.

phases. Intakes between 1952 and 1956 were stimulated by intense labour shortages due to post-war reconstruction. The boom tapered off between 1956 and 1960. However, in 1961 intake increased to a new peak of 66.3 thousand, stimulated primarily by a large influx of immigrants trying to reach the United Kingdom before the passing of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act¹¹ (Hall, 1988).

The early pioneer migrants as we might call them, initially headed for the urban centres in Britain because these were the places where factories and jobs could be found (Peach, 1968). It is no surprise, therefore, that in the present period according to the 1991 Census we tend to find the largest concentrations of Caribbean-born people in Greater London, the West Midlands (Birmingham), and the industrial cities of Northern England predominately in West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester. The Caribbean-born population is almost absent in the more rural regions of England, together with Scotland and Wales (with the exception of Aberdeen and the cities of South Wales) (Owen, 1993c).

According to the 1991 Census the Caribbean population in Great Britain was 633,425¹² (Owen, 1995). The largest ethnic group within the Caribbean population are the Jamaicans who make up 64 percent of the total. Those born in Barbadoes and Guyana from a smaller 10 percent each of the population, while those born in Trinidad and Tobago are the smallest group eight percent (see Table I).

Almost all of the early pioneer migrants originally intended to go home after five years but this expectation for most has not mate-

rialized because resources were never quite sufficient. In most of the first and second generation interviews conducted with migrants in Britain, individuals revealed an initial resistance to establishing permanent roots or in admitting that they would be spending longer than five years. Dexter a sixty-five years old Jamaican-born resident of Birmingham makes this point. He says:

In 1952 we heard that England open up, and people is emigrating, and we heard there is a lot of money in this country, and everybody want to better them-self ... So, therefore, that is really what drive us ... Most of us came over here, for five years ... but you do find out when you came, five years is like you just land. So you start spending another five years again, and then you start sending for your family. And then you find that when you want to go home now, you've got to wait and wait till you're almost retired before you can say I want to go home, because you're going home with nothing, even though you've been here all these years where the money is supposed to be.

The early pioneer migrants typically entered jobs that were unpleasant, hazardous, and menial. These were the jobs the native white workers refused to do because of the long hours (night work) and the low pay. This trend of occupying the lowest paying jobs continued over time and is reflected in the 1991 Household Sample of Anonymised Records. From Table II it is apparent that Caribbean-born workers are over represented in the unskilled (9 percent) and part skilled (20 percent) occupations compared with white workers (4.8 percent) and (15 percent). White workers are significantly better represented at the upper end of the occupational ladder in the professional (6 percent) and in management occupations (30 percent).

One of the realities that all three generations of Caribbean-origin people have had to deal with is the overt discrimination and racism they encounter in their workplace and day to day activities in Britain. Although Caribbeans had come from societies where distinctions of social behaviour, speech, and education played an important part in determining treatment; in Britain none of these fine distinctions were of much significance in relation to the more dominant issue of race and ethnicity. Learning to deal with the colour and race issue was difficult for some because it went against their constructed notion about Britain as the "mother country" where all of her subjects are supposed to be equal and united under the Union Jack. Opportunities for mobility were supposed to be avail-

TABLE II

Occupation profile of Caribbeans compared to the white, and other ethnic populations

	Caribbean Population	White Population	Other Ethnic
Professional	2.8	6.3	102.
Manag/Tech	20.3	29.9	26.2
Skilled Non-manual	18.5	13.0	14.0
Skilled Manual	24.8	29.0	23.6
Part Skilled	20.3	15.0	18.4
Unskilled	9.0	4.8	4.4
Other ¹³	4.5	1.9	3.3
Sample Size	1,332	122,935	4,162

Source: 1991 Census of Population 1% Household Sample of Anonymised Records.

able to everyone so long as he/she was willing to endure sacrifice and work hard. The reality of the situation, however, is that a “colour bar” exists in Britain and it continues to be directed at those who are a dark skin colour.

Although many of the early migrants were qualified in certain skilled trades, most were systemically blocked from positions commensurate with their qualifications because they were assumed to not have the mental capability or initiative to do supervisory tasks. These beliefs were based on racist assumptions about Blacks being inferior to Whites. Horace, a sixty-two years old Jamaican-born resident of Birmingham, makes the point that life was not easy for individuals working in the early days in Britain. He says:

When we came here first, you could never get a good job . . . we could never get, like to use any of the new machines that came on the project, the new machines always went to the White fella’s and then whenever they get something new then we get what old that’s coming down. Things only start to change a little bit when we start to call things racial and make a fuss . . . and demand our equal. After some time you start to see coloured get the machine work, and they start to get things like crane driving, machining, driving in the yard, and some get to do office work . . . before that early period though, the only thing available for a Black man was manual labour.¹²

One of the effects of the long-term exposure to racism is that Caribbeans have come to regard themselves as outsiders from British society. From the interviews it seems that Caribbean males in particular have a different experience with respect to the racism they are exposed to compared to their female counterparts. The women interviewed in the study did not seem to experience the same physically hostile acts or the taunting by Whites because of their “race” because as Raymond, a 55 years old Trinidad-born resident of London, explained: “White men did not see our women as a threat in the same way as he saw us ... our women were their nurses and helpers ... we Black men however, threatened his jobs and more importantly we threatened to take away and spoil his women”. Feeling marginalized in British society was a common theme repeated in many of the interviews with Caribbean-origin men. Raymond’s narrative captured the feelings that some of the male informants had about Britain and how they saw themselves fitting in. He says:

I’ll be frank with you, I don’t feel comfortable in this country, I still do not feel relaxed among White people ... I don’t see myself as British, no. I have a British passport ... and my body is here, but I am still in the Caribbean. I’m very very Caribbean, whereas Gail my wife is, more or less British. She likes here and all this sort of thing. But I don’t see myself as British. If people ask me where I’m from, I usually say “Trinidad”. Or the Caribbean, or Afro-Caribbean ... Definitely not British.¹³

ISSUES OF ADAPTATION FOR CARIBBEAN FAMILIES IN BRITAIN

Shift work over the years in Britain has been a major adjustment for Caribbean migrants. The constraints of both men and women having to work odd hours has put added pressure on the family and caused many domestic break-ups. Having to work alternative shifts in order to manage child care duties meant that many couples went for weeks without seeing one another or having time to “just share a little intimacy”. In most Caribbean families in Britain it seems that the women continue to be responsible for the triple duty of working full-time, maintaining the primary responsibility for the care and welfare of the children, and being a full-time supportive wife. Men, on the other hand, are often burdened with having to hold down

TABLE III
Marital status of Caribbean migrants over 60 years old

	Male	Female	Total
Single	11.7	12.3	218
Married	59.8	47.7	989
Remarried	10.4	4.3	139
Divorced	12.1	19.9	286
Widowed	5.9	15.8	191

Source: 1991 Census of Population 1% Household Sample of Anonymised Records.

more than one job in order to meet household debts. The effect of these economic and social pressures are reflected in Table III. From the table we can see that those Caribbean pioneer migrants who are now over 60 have a high rate of divorce. This trend is especially evident for Caribbean women over 60 years old who have a (20 percent) divorce rate compared to the overall average of (13 percent) for British-born women of the same age.

For many of the migrants, the problems of living on low wages was compounded by the need to return remittances to their family back home. Savings, at least in the early years, were difficult to come by. Similarly, the post-war shortage in housing, particularly in the inner-city areas in which most migrants settled, was aggravated by the racism of many landlords. Simply, Caribbean migrants found accommodation at a premium and were initially forced to live in overcrowded conditions for which they often paid extravagant rent. Roland a 55 years old Trinidadian-born resident in South London, reminisces about these conditions. He says:

Well when we came here first, the White people got a lot of place to put up people if they do want to. I go to a few homes, and they always point me to where the Black live. Always. They always says, "You're people over there", but they do it in such a special way that you think they didn't have the place, do you know what I mean? That's why you find so much coloured in one house, you see. I know a room where you have nine men in the one room, sleeping ... Well, you could not get a room so much, you've got to share your room. Well, the first place that I start, that was a Jamaican house, and it was ... Three beds in that one room. Well, those people who was on nights from St. Elizabeth, they're all one people. When they come from work in the morning, their mate's ready to go to work, so they go in the same bed. And that's around the clock. Shift was in that room.¹⁴

TABLE IV
Housing tenure by ethnic group in Britain

	Owner occupant	Private rental	Housing ass.	Public rental	Sample size
Caribbean population	48.1	5.6	9.7	35.7	216.5
White population	66.6	7.0	3.0	21.4	21,026.6
South Asian population	77.1	7.6	2.5	11.1	357.2
Chinese population	56.1	19.9	4.9	15.9	185.5

Source: 1991 Census Local Base Statistics (ESRC purchase) in Owen (1993a).

A further consequence of the labour profile and resistance to establishing fixed roots in Britain by Caribbeans was that many families could not enter, or entered late, into the housing market. As a result, for Caribbeans as a whole, a relatively small proportion own their houses, and a relatively large proportion live in public housing (Owen, 1993a). Table IV provides evidence of the low rate of home ownership among Caribbeans. Only (48 percent) of Caribbeans compared to the White group (67 percent), the East Indian group (77 percent), or the Chinese group (56 percent) own their homes. The majority (52 percent) of Caribbeans are still renting their homes from the state or other private landlord arrangement.

Although many Caribbeans are clustered in particular city areas, the structure of urban living in Britain tends to be predicated on discrete and single units of housing. This "British" norm in settlement has mitigated against more collective or communitarian patterns of family and household living arrangements that most Caribbeans were accustomed to from back home. Notwithstanding the fact that the early pioneers lived in multi-occupied dwellings, this was inappropriate for families. At the same time, the kin and friendship networks which were an essential ingredient of the migration and settlement process, could not be sustained over time as Caribbeans moved into improved accommodations. There was necessarily a dispersal of kin and other networks over city and even regional areas which, in the long term may have mitigated against the formation or continuation of close kinship patterns. Such patterns were based on locality and geographic proximity common

in the childhood recollections of the first and second generation informants from this sample.

A common feature reported by our informants related to the atomization of the family unit. This is partly the result of the structural problems, cited above, in replicating the proximity of family networks. It is also partly the result of a generation change. However strong the family values, children of Caribbean-born migrants have necessarily been influenced by British as well as Caribbean values. This sense of isolation from the family takes two forms. In the first instance, the men and women from this sample felt acutely that their role as grandparents had been displaced within Britain. The grandchildren living in Britain also seemed to express less importance for the role of grandparents in the British/Caribbean family.

While many third-generation children were growing up, their own grandmothers were still in the Caribbean, as a consequence they were not socialised (except at long distance) into recognising the centrality of the role of grandmothers in the rearing of children. The pioneer elderly migrants in this sample are essentially the first-generation of Caribbean-born grandmothers living in Britain. Although they can fondly recall their grandmothers, this recollection is often denied to their grandchildren because of the settlement patterns and acculturation to British norms and values. This has resulted in the role of grandmothers being made somewhat redundant. In Britain relatives live considerable distances apart and the opportunities for getting together are limited by the pressures of a "modern" lifestyle. In contrast in the Caribbean, individuals recalled living on family land and being close enough to extended kin that they could walk "in and out of each others houses". For children born in Britain during the 1960s or 70s many were raised without ever really knowing their grandmothers. Information about family history, cultural reference points, and aspects of the families oral culture were for many children of this generation dependent on the willingness of the migrant generation to share their expenses.

Becoming accustomed to the British norms and values it is little surprise therefore, that when the third generation began to have their own children in the 1980s and 90s most did not see the importance of grandmothers or grandfathers in the socialization and care of children. The British society that they had been socialised in relegated

grandmothers and grandfathers as peripheral members of the family. The state also has taken on the role as the surrogate grandmother for both British citizens and Caribbean migrants. The “social safety net” built by the state tends to replicate many of the same roles that grandmothers once fulfilled in the Caribbean. Acculturation of Caribbeans over the years to British expectations for state intervention has meant that many of the third generation, but to some degree as well, the second generation, have come to accept that grandmothers are no longer needed to engage in such Caribbean practices like “child shifting”. In a “modern” society like Britain these functions have become more or less become the responsibility of a particular government agency.

Having examined the migration process to Britain and how adjustment to a “modern” society has affected the living arrangements and family structures for Caribbean immigrants. We are now in a better position to use the qualitative interview data provided by the third generation to explore the roles that grandmothers perform within their British/Caribbean families. In examining the reminiscences of the third generation it becomes apparent that there is some continuity in the roles that Jamaican, Trinidadian, and Barbadian origin grandmothers play. Migrant grandmothers in Britain have, however, taken on new roles or perform variations of the traditional roles that were discussed in the first section of this paper.

VARIATIONS ON THE TRADITIONAL GRANDMOTHER ROLES IN BRITAIN

There seems to be strong evidence from our research to make the claim that there has been an enculturation to certain “British” norms and values for the third generation of Caribbeans. Evidence of this change comes from the fact that few of the third generation could recall their own grandmothers as significant role models or socializing agents. Individuals did, however, recognize that their grandmothers spent time with them, although this was often mediated by “modern” devices like the television set. Arlene’s narrative about her Trinidad-born grandmother who lived in South London for thirty years makes the point that the traditional story telling roles has continued but in a modern form. She says:

My grandmother was lovely. She was so funny. She's gone now, she died a couple of years ago. But she was always one for telling stories! (LAUGHS) She always, liked telling me what my dad used to get up to when he was small, and . . . he used to make her run around all over the place and things . . . I just always remember her for sitting at the table and just telling me loads of stories, really. And she just used to get so involved with things like . . . I don't know, for example, like things on the telly, like soaps, it could be any soaps, or it could be the football, and she used to jump around in her chair and, you know, "Get him!" "Get him!" She used to be so involved in everything. She was so funny! She was really sweet.¹⁵

The practice of "child shifting" has also come to take on a new construct in Britain. Grandmothers are no longer relied upon to take over the long-term responsibilities of child care for their grandchildren. Grandmothers do, however, still provide short-term care when needed. Regular short-term care is more likely to occur when the grandmother lives in close proximity to her family. In a few cases from our sample we learned of situations where grandchildren were living full time with grandmothers. These living arrangements were "modern" in the sense that both parties shared equally in paying the bills. Clifford, a twenty year old Jamaican-origin man living in South London describes his situation as an ideal one because both he and his grandmother, maintain "separate lives". In 1992 Clifford had a serious quarrel with his parents and, as a result he decided to leave their home and live with his grandmother Beverly. Originally Clifford was only leaving to "cool out", but since Beverly was so easy to live with, he decided to remain. The two of them now share a large four bedroom house. Clifford describes his situation as:

I didn't move out until I was 17 . . . I've been there three years now, since '92. She was on her own, she'd got a four-bedroomed house on her own, so it was no big problem. It's just like my house, and you know, I have to do my own shopping, my own cooking, pay the rent, the bills, so I'm living there, really, as I'm living on my own, like, but my grandmother's there when she comes in from work. She works as a nurse/help with old people, so she's rarely, if she is home, it's only during the night, because she'll be up in the morning to go to work. So weekends are mine, every weekend, and during the week she's there. On a Thursday, she's home all day, but until the night, she'll go to work. I only see her now and again when she's in from work.¹⁶

In Britain, grandmothers do continue the tradition of visiting their grandchildren on a regular basis. The frequency of these visits not surprisingly depends on the proximity of the family to the grand-

mother or whether the grandmother is still a full-time worker. In Britain Sundays tend to be the day when Caribbean families and their extended kin meet to share a meal. The designation of Sunday as the day of meeting is significant because this is a family tradition transplanted from the Caribbean where the day is recognized as a Holy day of rest and togetherness. Suzanne, a twenty-two year old Jamaican-origin woman living in Birmingham, makes the point that Sunday was the day she was most likely to meet up with her grandmother. Her narrative also highlights the fact that regular family get togethers were important for Caribbean migrants as a way for maintaining family cohesion. She says:

Not near, but ... I have my grandmother, my grandmother, my dad's mum, she lived down the road. Not near, but every weekend we'd go to somebody's house, like, like ... we still do it now, we take it in turns, sort of thing, we'll go to somebody's house. Not so much my mum's side, but my dad's side. We still do it now, like one week we'll go to one aunt's house, next time another auntie, and then my uncle's house, and then they'll come to my dad's house and we'll all go to his house. So I remember, always remember that, every weekend we'd be down to somebody's house for dinner, or whatever, just like for dinner, after dinner just sit down and play with my cousins, or something like that.¹⁷

Some third-generation informants were not quite as lucky as Suzanne, in terms of having a grandmother who lived in Britain. The vast geographical distance between the Caribbean and Britain and the expense of travel meant that for some individuals, they would never have the opportunity to meet their grandmothers in person. Telephone calls or pictures were commonly reported as the only contact. Cheri, a seventeen year old Barbadian-origin woman living in Brixton, recalls that she could only construct an image of her grandmother's character based on an old photograph and from what she had heard through stories told by her father and other relatives who lived in Britain. Cheri recalls:

Well, I've never spoken to her, but I've seen a picture. She's not that tall, she's about, I don't know, about 5'2". She has very very long hair, or she had, sorry, very long hair, about down to her knee, it was very thick, like rope, as my dad always says. "Very thick, like rope". And she seems very sweet, and it would have been very nice to get to know her, but, sadly, I didn't.¹⁸

For other third-generation informants, spending time with their grandmothers was restricted to return visits back to the Caribbean.

Since most Caribbean immigrant families were never financially well endowed this meant that making return visits to the Caribbean was a rare occasion. The long periods in between each visit meant that the grandchildren matured and developed their own character while grandmothers aged in the “home” country. For Denise, a twenty-five year old Trinidad-origin woman living in South London, her return visits were important because she was able to satisfy a “missing part” of her desire to understand her roots. The Short duration of each return visit meant, however, that she really did not know either her grandmother or grandfather very well. What personal information she did now know about them came filtered via what her own mother told her. By the time Denise was old enough to ask serious questions about the family history both of her grandparents had passed away. She says:

I met her a few times, yes, but ... I didn't really know her. None of my grandparents I don't really know, unfortunately, which I think is really sad. I mean, it's too late now, they're both dead. I think it's one of the sad things about West Indian parents, or West Indians coming to Britain, because I've never really known my grandparents, not on a daily basis, you know, I've never really known that. It's been sort of a holiday, and that's it. I could still count on one hand, if you see what I mean. I went when I was a baby, I was about a year old, but I don't remember that. And the next time when we were going, I was 10. And the next time I was going was when I was 19. So it was like once every ten years, nine years, so ... for a couple of weeks sort of thing.¹⁹

Coral a twenty-eight year old Trinidad-origin women living in London, had a very similar experience in terms of her family visits to the Caribbean. In Coral's case, however, her Caribbean-based grandmother did visit London on a number of occasions, but again, the amount of time that she actually spent with each of her British grandchildren was minimal. Coral felt that the lag between each visit contributed to the poor relationship she had with her grandmother. Coral also believes that her grandmother gave her Trinidad based cousins preferential treatment because they lived nearer and, therefore, could spend more time with her. She tells us:

All I know about her, she died last year, sorry, she died this year, in May. I met her ... four times in my lifetime. I mean, she came to stay with us for six months in ... I must have been about 10 or 11, when she came to stay with us, she came for six weeks and she stayed for six months! And she was a lot younger then, and, I mean, she was a very ... playful person, is the word I'm looking for, you know.

You could talk to her, you know, and this was when I was sort of 10 or 11, yeh. I mean, she smoked, and she always used to have a, like, sneaky one, because you know you're not allowed to do it really. But the last time I saw her was five years ago, and I don't know whether it was because I was that much older, or she was that much older but I couldn't relate to her maybe because I hadn't seen her for quite a while ... I always felt like because we lived here, they didn't actually think of us as grandchildren. I mean, the rest of their other grandchildren are there, you know. I always felt that because we lived in England, we weren't actually part of that family ... Yes I felt I was an outsider, I never felt like a real grandchild, you know.²⁰

One of the new roles which Caribbean-born grandmothers in Britain seem to be taking on is that of "international flying grannies". These are women who spend part of their retirement days travelling between family, kin and fictive kin in the international diaspora (New York, Toronto, Miami, and the Caribbean). For many of these active women the visits they make are social in nature, some do, however, act as the messenger who maintains the flow of communications between family members. In our interviews we encountered five grandmothers who were also providing temporary foster care or child minding services for their international family. This often meant leaving Britain for short (1–6 month periods) and moving to the United States or Canada. This trend was more common within families where children had grown up in Britain but subsequently migrated to North America in pursuit of better mobility opportunities. When these "double lap" migrants, as we might call them, were about to have their own children, it was not uncommon for their mother to fly out in order to oversee the adjustment to the new baby. This role is reminiscent of the earlier recollection from Philbert whose grandmother Matilda lived in Morrant Bay but would travel to Kingston in order to be at the birth of her grandchildren whom she saw as the next important generation in the family tree. In recalling his grandmother's international travels, Jason, a nineteen year old Jamaican-origin male living in London, refers to his grandmother as the "frequent flyer granny". He says:

She travels quite regularly. She's got kids living all over America – Florida, New York, California – so she travels to see them quite often. She goes around in a big circle. Like a frequent flying granny! I think she's got her own seat ... She spends

her days travelling between the children while my granddad sits at home waiting for her reports. She is wonderful really.²¹

Another new role which Caribbean-born grandmothers have been taking on is that of the “returnee granny”. This individual is the anthesis of the frequent flyer granny in the sense that she returns to the Caribbean with the intention of shuttling back and forth to see her family in Britain. Once in the Caribbean however, the “returnee grandmother” often finds that her low pension does not allow her to make as many return visits to see children and grandchildren as she had imagined. Although the “returnee grandmother” phenomenon is more recent we were able to interview four of these women in the Caribbean. From these interviews we found a number of women feeling isolated and depressed because they would no longer be able to monitor the progress and growth of their grandchildren as they had recalled their own grandmothers doing for them. In our interviews with the first and second-generation informants we also noted that there seemed to be a concern about this trend. The third-generation, however, did not seem to have taken any notice of the situation. Angela, a sixty-two year old Jamaican-born grandmother in Birmingham made the following insightful observation about the loss of her close friend. She said:

Grandparents like me are vital in the development of the younger ones in British society. We are part of the coping strategy that helps out the family. Some of our younger children in this society are missing that. It was a very sad time in my life when I saw my best friend decide to move back to Jamaica. Not only was she leaving me but she was leaving her grands who would not have the benefit of her knowledge or stories. Its now been five years since she has seen them and I know that her memory is fading in their mind as they reach into adolescents. Its not right ... Grandparents are needed for nurturing and without them well you can seen the results in the society today.²²

CONCLUSION

This paper began with two very different narratives by individuals reflecting on Caribbean-born grandmothers. The different descriptions stem from the fact that the first narrative was provided by Patricia a seventy-five year old Jamaican-born grandmother who

migrated to Britain in the late 1959s. While the second narrative was provided by Tracy, a twenty year old Jamaican-origin woman who was born and lived all of her life in South London. The relationship that both women shared with their grandmothers was quite different. In trying to understand the differences between the two informants we need to consider a number of factors, most important of which are the migration experience, and the different historical periods about which each women is reminiscing. It would be too easy to try and explain away Tracy's relationship with her grandmother as just a product of "modern" living and acculturation to British norms where it is common for teenagers and young adults to care only about themselves and for their material possessions. We must, however, look more in depth at the historical periods in order to find a more plausible explanation for the different views about the role that Caribbean grandmothers played in families.

For Patricia, her grandmother lived in period of Caribbean history where grandmothers where the only "social support net" for the family. The peasant population in the Caribbean (circa 1860) were subject to the booms and busts in the plantation economies, unstable employment, and a general sense of anomie in the society. It was in this milieu that grandmothers came to take over the role as anchor for the family. Grandmothers also provided a base from which the family could take on whatever new challenge came at it. For grandchildren growing up in this more or less "secure" environment it is no wonder that they would recall their grandmothers in the most positive "angelic" light.

Tracy, on the other hand, grew up in a "modern" society where the atomized family structure was the norm and has dictated much of the relationship between grandmothers and their grandchildren. Throughout Tracy's life the role which her grandmother played in the family was less important because of geographical proximity and the fact that her grandmother had a full-time job. The anchors in Tracy's life were more likely to be her mother, father, and close family friends. The socializing agents in Tracy's life were likely to be the television set, friends she grew up with on the housing estate, and teachers from school. Weekends or holiday visits with her grandmother would not have been enough to forge a strong lasting impression in Tracy's mind about the importance

of her grandmother. If Tracy's family were to find themselves in a distressful situation it was more likely that they would look to family friends or state institutions to help then deal with the situation. Hence, in Britain family problems seem to be typically dealt with from within the nuclear family unit where everyone tries to "keep themselves to themselves" – this was a sentiment heard in a number of our interviews. Only in extreme circumstances did third generation informants recall their grandmothers being involved in family problems.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the role of the Caribbean-born grandmother has changed somewhat in the British milieu. Although grandmothers do still perform some of the traditional roles they may have done in the Caribbean, many of these roles have taken on a transnational function in response to new conditions such as the "double lap" migration of children to North America. Grandmothers are still very much a part of the typical British/Caribbean household, the only difference today is that their role is less of an economic or socializing one. They are also no longer required to be the foundation in the family. Because of this denuded status grandmothers no longer stand out in the recollections of the third generation as the lynch pin who keeps everyone and everything together.

In reflecting on whether this is a good or bad development one has to think about the grandmother's changing roles in historical terms. In the context of post-emancipation Caribbean society (circa 1834), grandmothers came to fill a vital niche in the family structure. Without grandmothers in this period the institutionalised practice of "child shifting", migration and ultimately the establishment of a migration tradition could not have taken place for Caribbean women. Today, grandmothers in Caribbean-origin families may be using more "modern" means for providing certain traditional practices for their families. What is important to note, however, is that despite acculturation to British norms and values Caribbean-born grandmothers are continuing to struggle in order to carve out a niche for themselves within their families both locally and internationally.

END NOTES

Refers refer to interview number, generation of interviewee, tape number and side of tape.

1. JF 020/1/Tape 1/ Side A.
2. JN 057/3/Tape 1/ Side A.
3. BJ 077/2/Tape 1/ Side A.
4. BB 056/2/Tape 1/ Side A.
5. TA 095/1/Tape 1/ Side A.
6. JH 026/2/Tape 1/ Side A.
7. JS 056/2/Tape 1/ Side A.
8. JN 049/2/Tape 1/ Side A.
9. TA 095/1/Tape 1/ Side A.
10. TA 095/1/Tape 1/ Side A.
11. JD 013/1/Tape 1/ Side A.
12. JB 007/1/Tape 2/ Side A.
13. TG 092/2/Tape 3/ Side A.
14. TJ 073/2/Tape 2/ Side A.
15. TF 047/3/Tape 1/ Side A.
16. JF 021/3/Tape 1/ Side A.
17. JG 023/3/Tape 1/ Side A.
18. BG 091/3/Tape 1/ Side A.
19. JI 063/3/Tape 1/ Side A.
20. TC 038/3/Tape 1/ Side A.
21. JK 031/3/Tape 1/ Side A.
22. JB 007/1/Tape 3/ Side A.

NOTES

¹ Assistant Professor in Department of Sociology at Oregon State University. This paper was presented at the XIV World Congress of Sociology, Montreal, Canada, July 26–August 1 1998.

² This ESRC funded project is lead by Professors Harry Goulbourne and Mary Camberlain.

³ Pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper when referring to the interviewees.

⁴ The moral justification of the slave trade rested largely on the refusal to classify Black people as human beings. Lord Chesterfield could therefore, argue that Africans were “the most ignorant and unpolished people in the world, little better than lions, tigers, leopards, and other wild beasts, which that country produces in great numbers” (Dabydeen, 1987: p. 30).

⁵ Missionaries also attempted to recreate gender roles within the nuclear family system according to biblical principles. The missionaries believed in the

“civilizing” influence of the idealized nuclear family and preached against the negative impact of the “chaotic and disorganized” Black family (Shepherd et al., 1995: p. 236).

⁶ Male authority is usually dependent on the man’s economic contribution to the household and the extent to which the family depends on this contribution. Barrow (1996), reports considerable sexual antagonism in Caribbean families because of the perceptions men and women have of each other. Women see men as authoritarian, dishonest, irresponsible and unreliable, while men consider women to be calculating, grasping, greedy, and materialistic. Barrow (1996) also points out that, although in many instances the father chooses to be absent, very often the mothers themselves exclude fathers from more intense involvement in the lives of their children, guarding jealously this area of responsibility which they view as uniquely theirs.

⁷ Black (1995: p. 52) suggest that women in the Caribbean never “father” children in the sense of negotiating or renegotiating maternity, as men can do about paternity. Nor do women usually exercise discretion about how much and when they will support their children, as fathers do regularly.

⁸ Caribbean women in the lower classes tend to assume motherhood readily since they gain status and identity within their communities on the basis of motherhood rather than on marriage. They often have their first child in their teen years, thus establishing their fertility and escaping the accusation of barrenness. Mothers also see children as both an investment and a resource. When they are young, financial support can be obtained from the father and, as the children get older and become wage earners, they are able to make their mothers less dependent on men by providing some additional income (Black, 1995: p. 51).

⁹ Mothers do not give up claims on their sons. Sons are expected to support their mothers financially and emotionally and seem to honour these obligations without hesitation. The end result is that women generally manage to secure company and support for their old age through their roles as mothers and grandmothers. Mothers and daughters, on the other hand, are linked through the fact of common lifestyle, their joint involvement in bearing and raising children, and the elder woman’s assumption of the role of grandmother. Indeed studies have suggested potential conflict between the two if the daughter becomes a mother and remains in the same household (R.T. Smith, 1956: pp. 144–145). Conflict between a son’s conjugal partner and his mother is virtually inevitable as the mother does all she can to prevent the son from leaving home and as the two women jealously make competing demands on his financial resources and emotional commitment.

¹⁰ Sally Gordon (1987) describes child-shifting as fosterage involving the reallocation of dependent or minor children to a household not including a natural parent. In her sample of 49 households in Antigua, she finds 41 cases of child-shifting spread over 21 households (42.9 percent). The reasons that children are moved from one household to another are varied and include “the child wanting to live with X, or X asked for the child”, as well as singular events such as the migration of a natural parent. Gordon notes that child-shifting is perceived

as a domestic “responsive strategy” to economic circumstances whereby the costs and benefits of child rearing are relocated among households by shifting children from those less economically secure and able to support them to those who are better off.

¹¹ The 1948 Nationality Act had granted UK citizenship to all members of Britain’s colonies, the state had to contend with Black labour and their families settling in Britain, whether the economy boomed or slumped, though it moved gradually towards the European system of contract labour through the operation of racist immigration acts. Black migration to Britain was not migrant in the sense of it being transitory or temporary, rather individuals arrived with the intention of exercising their legal rights of settlement. Black migrants’ initial desire to return “home with sufficient income”, was altered by the first Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, with the effect of encouraging a “rush to bring families”, as the right to remain in Britain became uncertain (Hall, 1988).

¹² The 1991 Census figures provide the best indication of the Caribbean population. The Black-Caribbean total of nearly half a million is broadly in line with data from the Labour Force Survey. However, the ethnic origin of around a fifth of all African-Caribbean people was written into the “Black-Other” box on the Census form, suggesting that the size of the population is somewhat larger than the Black- Caribbean total. Overall, 84.4 percent of the Black-other group had been born in the UK, indicating that a larger part of this ethnic group was made up of the children of Caribbean parents. A quarter of the respondents gave “Other answers” suggesting that the remainder of this group comprised of people with one Black parent while the other was either White or from another minority ethnic group. It would thus seem reasonable to add the “British” and “Mixed” components of the Black-Other ethnic group to the Black British total, to yield a total for the Caribbean population of Great Britain of 633 425 in 1991 (Owen, 1995: p. 6).

¹³ The “Other Category” includes those individuals in: the armed forces, inadequately described, and not stated on the Census form.

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