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## SMALL WORLDS: CHILDHOOD AND EMPIRE

Mary Chamberlain

*There are no historical studies and—despite the concern of social sciences with Caribbean families—few scholarly works that have focused on childhood and child rearing. Yet attitudes to children, child care, and child rearing reveal many of the values and philosophies that underpin social organization and may be seen as a litmus test of (formal and informal) social provision. This article examines the narratives of Caribbean colonial childhoods, arguing that they reveal social principles that are essentially egalitarian, a social world characterized by order and respect and an organization of family life modeled on inclusive and communitarian principles. These village-based childhoods not only contrasted with the colonial view of West Indian social organization but also proved a bedrock of social pride, an antidote to the lack of social provision, and an idiom through which Caribbean migrants could both converse and survive in the world beyond the Caribbean.*

Many of the writers who contributed to the postwar Caribbean literary “renaissance” evoked at some point the colonial West Indies of their childhood, an evocation that necessarily implicated the British Empire but also isolated it as a structure out of sync with (or even irrelevant to) the rhythms of everyday human life. Such representations may be seen as part of the struggle for cultural and artistic as well as political and national independence.<sup>1</sup> But while colonial childhoods may have provided literary fodder, they have not for the most part engaged the research imagination of historians. Part of the difficulty lies in a paucity of sources and in the biases of the historical agenda. For the most part, interest in childhood is inextricably linked with concerns over the family (and mothering in particular) and/or education and welfare. Yet neither family, education, nor welfare exercised much of the colonial mind until the riots of 1937 and 1938 brought them sharply into political focus—and to the top of the research agenda where they have remained, more or less, ever since.

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This article, then, is based primarily on research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and conducted by Harry Goulbourne and myself (*Living Arrangements, Family Structure and Social Change of Caribbeans in Britain*),<sup>2</sup> which used life story narratives across three generations of sixty families who originated in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados and were born between c. 1910 and 1980. As part of the life story method, we asked about childhood experiences: how, where, and with whom our interviewees were brought up. We did not ask specifically about experiences of (in Austin Clarke's words) "growing up stupid under the Union Jack,"<sup>3</sup> nor were we volunteered this information directly except at those points where an authority (such as school) or a national event (such as the 1937 riots) intersected with their lives. While clearly all accounts of childhood were set against a backdrop of British rule, what has emerged is a portrait of a social world that ran in parallel with, if not aloof from, the (white and) colonial Caribbean, informing Creole society and reflecting, in many ways, the literary agenda. And, like that agenda, I would suggest that its indifference to British rule may well be interpreted in political terms, for the values it enshrined and encoded in a language and rhetoric<sup>4</sup> of its own devising married well with a wider subversion of British rule that was hinted at in 1937 and came to fruition in 1950s and 1960s.

The purpose of this article is, however, limited. It aims to reclaim the experiences of a Caribbean colonial childhood through the memories of its inhabitants, experiences that were deeply removed from the understanding (and imagination) of those in colonial authority and necessarily contradicted it.

First, let me say something about life stories as historical source. Quite apart from the validity and voracity of the information such sources contain, they also raise—because they are premised on—some fundamental questions about the self and narrative, autobiography and memory. There has been a considerable interest recently in the relationship between identity and biography and its development in the West. This relationship has been seen as a product of industrialization and modernity where, as Anthony Giddens put it, "the self . . . [is] . . . reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography."<sup>5</sup> The large literature in both the humanities and the social and behavioral sciences theorizes on the formations and representations of the self,<sup>6</sup> representations that may themselves be informed by narrative conventions,<sup>7</sup> without which no memory would be possible<sup>8</sup> and no story could be understood,<sup>9</sup> although the emphasis given to narrative convention differs between disciplines.

This, however, presupposes the universality of what Cavarera calls the "narratable self."<sup>10</sup> Memories are complex historical sources, in which what is recalled and recounted may be less revealing than why, how, or when recollection takes place. Equally, who is recalling may have a very different sense of self and may be remembering from a different epistemological base, through different narrative conventions and different narrative functions. One striking element of Caribbean narratives is the prevalence of repetition and the peculiarities of language. Many memories have a formulaic quality that point to what I have called (elsewhere) cultural templates,<sup>11</sup> imaginative structures that shape recall and recount, encode, and transmit values and mores and that may be seen as vestiges of African *praise song*,<sup>12</sup> prescriptions for the good life. The concept of self, its narration, and the concept of biography may have different meanings and purposes.<sup>13</sup> Some praise songs, for instance, function as both an individual and collective biography or praise one individual as the embodiment of all.

Thus, revisiting these life story narratives for childhood memories has necessarily raised issues of the self and of interpretation, for what is the status of this memory? Childhood memories, after all, have a design imposed on them by the adult life story. What, therefore, is the relationship of the child to the adult self, and vice versa? Who is the child? And is the child both universal and eternal? The importance of childhood and childhood memories in adult (Western) autobiographies has been noted as the link that explains, excuses, or exonerates adult behavior and, as such, has a long and interesting pedigree. Yet, as Adriana Caverera has argued (more existentially), all autobiographies contain desire, for they are necessarily lacking:

At birth (and death) our narrative has to be told by another. The first and fundamental chapter of the life story that our memory tells us is already incomplete. The unity of self . . . is already irremediably lost in the very moment in which that same self begins to commemorate herself.<sup>14</sup>

This may be a peculiarly European angst. Despite Mintz's<sup>15</sup> argument that the Caribbean people were the first "modern" people, in the narratives of Caribbean childhoods, two features stand out that suggest a different epistemological base. First, the language of childhood conveys markedly different concepts and approaches. What Caverera argues as a loss—the memory of birth—is circumvented in the Caribbean partly by a notion of lineage and rebirth and partly by an intrinsic existentialism, epitomized by phrases such as "when I first knew myself coming up." Second, the repetitions in narratives convey social principles and a social world characterized by order and respect and reveal many of the values and philosophies that underpinned social organization and inform cultural representation. Such accounts were not only at variance with the British view of West Indian social organization (interpreted as in crisis and collapse) but also provided an antidote to the lack of social provision and an idiom through which West Indians could both converse and survive in the Caribbean and beyond. Both contributed to and represented a counterculture that ran in parallel with British authority. West Indians learned to duck and weave within both cultural (and political) worlds, the social equivalent of what Edward Kamau Braithwaite describes as "bi and inter-lingualism [that] is a feature of our cultururation."<sup>16</sup> As such, how people recount childhood reflects not only their experiences but also the assumptions and attitudes to childhood that they have inherited or acquired in their adult lives. And I suggest that these convey a very different sense of self and the child.

But what was the British view of childhood? After the 1937-1938 riots, a Royal Commission, under the chairmanship of Lord Moyne, was appointed to investigate the causes of the disturbances. It was hoped that the Royal Commission would reassure West Indians of the continuing commitment of the British government and provide an authoritative (and neutral) source to back Colonial Office arguments for Parliament to agree to an increase in public spending on the West Indies.<sup>17</sup> Full publication of Lord Moyne's findings was delayed until the end of the Second World War but pointed, as predicted, to the poverty prevalent in the West Indies at the time as direct causes of the riots, to the gulf between the rulers and the ruled, and to what they perceived as the loss or lack of a culture that could provide some form of social cohesion. If further unrest was to be avoided, the colonial administrators had to bridge or at least soften the political divide, make adequate provision for social services, and construct some semblance of what could be called a social community in the British West Indies. Even before the

final publication of the Royal Commission's report, measures for reform were already in place or in the pipeline. Universal suffrage was introduced, as was a notion of and money for development, and attempts were made to reorganize the administrative framework of the colonies to make it more responsive to local needs, including welfare and education. And Thomas Simey—the Charles Booth Professor of Social Science at the University of Liverpool, a key proponent of the “modern sociology” and of the burgeoning field of social policy—was invited to undertake a scientific analysis of the West Indies that could form the basis for formulating social policy and reforming the administrative framework. The result was published in 1946 as *Welfare and Planning in the West Indies*. It was the first scholarly attempt to come to grips with the sociology of the region and set the agenda for discussion on the family for the next two decades. Simey believed profoundly in the “applied science of social engineering.”<sup>18</sup> Much of his work was a critique of colonial mismanagement and attitudes up to and including the findings and recommendations of Lord Moyne and the measures that had been put in place in the interim. But there was also much that he had to say about childhood.

Simey's starting point in his investigation into the social structures of the West Indies was the family. It was, he argued, “the outstandingly important social institution of the West Indies.”<sup>19</sup> In this he echoed Sir Frank Stockdale, the comptroller of Development and Welfare (an office established as part of the package of wartime reforms), who in 1943 observed that “many if not most of the social problems of the West Indies centre round weaknesses in family organisation.”<sup>20</sup> The Moyne Commission itself had observed that “the argument that the man is head of the household and is responsible for the financial upkeep of the family has less force in the West Indies, where promiscuity and illegitimacy are so prevalent and the woman so often is the supporter of the home.”<sup>21</sup> Such thinking had been prefigured in the concerns of colonial administrators in the West Indies who, from 1843 (the first post-Emancipation census), were much exercised by the link between what they perceived as the sexual immorality of West Indians (as evidenced by the high rates of illegitimacy) and lack of citizenship. Such patterns had also been observed and condemned from the seventeenth century, although ironically, then, they were a feature of the white, rather than the black (and slave), community. It was in the post-Emancipation period that concerns with and views on the inherent instability of the black Caribbean family began to crystallize. For the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial governments, citizenship and social stability were closely related to domestic stability. This theme was repeated by West Indian colonial governors and by the registrar generals of Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Tobago throughout the nineteenth century. For them, illegitimacy and concubinage were the major impediment to “any real moral or social progress”<sup>22</sup> for “the foundational elements of good citizenship are thus lacking and the progress of the state is hindered.”<sup>23</sup> Such views were endorsed by the many missionaries to the West Indies who sought to resolve what were considered to be the anarchic structures of family life in favor of stable Christian marriages, characterized by a male breadwinner and his dutiful, dependent wife and children.<sup>24</sup>

The causes of this instability, at least in the eyes of the colonial authorities, lay for the most part in what was considered the inherent fecklessness and promiscuity of the “Negro” character. By the time Simey came to investigate the West Indies, however, two new and influential explanations were in the public arena. In 1939, American scholar Franklin Frazier published *The Negro Family in the United States*. The “maternal” emphasis of the African American family and the high incidence of illegitimacy

found within it could, in Frazier's view, be traced to slavery, which had stripped the African male of his culture and in so doing had distorted the institution of marriage and the sanctity of the family. Two years later, in 1941, another American scholar, Melville Herskovits, argued in his book *The Myth of the Negro Past* that, on the contrary, the patterns of family life noted for African Americans throughout the New World were powerful evidence of the retentions of African custom and tradition, with its emphases on matrifocality and polygamy.

Simey, in this debate, sided with Frazier. "The contemporary looseness of the family structure in the British West Indies," he wrote, magisterially, "requires no further explanation than this."<sup>25</sup> And how was this contemporary looseness manifested? Borrowing from Lewis Davidson's typology of family based on his analysis of the 1943 Jamaican census, Simey observed four principle forms of West Indian family organization.

- (a) *The Christian Family*, based on marriage and a patriarchal order approximating to that of Christian families in other parts of the world.
- (b) *Faithful Concubinage* again based on a patriarchal order, possessing no legal status but well established and enduring for at least three years.
- (c) *The Companionate Family* in which the members live together for pleasure and convenience and for less than three years.
- (d) *The Disintegrate Family*, consisting of women and children only, in which men merely visit the women from time to time, no pattern of conduct being established.<sup>26</sup>

By far the majority of families, as revealed in the Jamaican census of 1943, were in the third and fourth category, of companionate and disintegrate families. "Such evidence as there is," he concluded,

goes to show that in the majority of cases the relationships between the sexes which lead to the procreation of children are temporary, and the institution of marriage is unstable. The family group is, indeed, one which is brought together in a very casual way and this obtains for the Christian as well as the Disintegrate family.<sup>27</sup>

For Simey, there were two compelling explanations. The first was the legacy of slavery. The second was poverty.

The most striking fact about the West Indian peoples is their poverty: the first factor which moulds the West Indian personality is therefore an economic one. . . . The common family meal is one of the strongest ties of family life, since the sitting together at a common table involves the sharing of many more things than food, but this is rarely made a practice by the masses in the West Indies.<sup>28</sup>

He commented, rather oddly, that "if the West Indies has a characteristic complex it must surely be one about food rather than one about sex."<sup>29</sup> This material and moral impoverishment—what he describes as "looseness"—of the family led to further impoverishment of social life and of the community as a whole, and this, coupled (as both cause and effect) with the pernicious divisions of race and color that prohibited social and political mobility, amounted to a damning indictment of the contemporary West

Indies and a convincing explanation of what Simey (in line with the contemporary fascination with social psychology, as well as borrowing from Dollard's influential study of the Deep South) considered to be the "inferiority complex" of West Indians.<sup>30</sup>

But Simey's concern with citizenship, poverty, and family form mirrored contemporary thinking in the metropolis. It was behind much of the views of his influential contemporary William Beveridge and equally implicit in the work of Richard Titmuss. Like Beveridge and Titmuss, Simey saw social policy as the way to remedy social ills. If the structures of social instability could be identified—and for Simey they were—then a solution could be engineered. The legacy of slavery and the constraints of poverty, as the prime causes of social instability and injustice, were capable of being restructured out of the social equation in much the same way as the inequalities of class, poverty, and poor health were being restructured out of the postwar British equation.

In the meantime, too many children were brought up in a context where there was, in Simey's view, "a general lowering of moral and ethical standards amongst the younger population, due to many circumstances but mainly to idleness, the absences of Christian ideals and the fact that moral standards are poorly evaluated in the general life of the community."<sup>31</sup> Enlightened welfare and education policies could ensure that families—and mothers in particular—could in the future meet the practical demands of economic self-sufficiency and domestic stability, where girls, in particular,

will learn the essentials of housecraft with a better focus, on living infants, and with a stronger motive power in their awakening maternal instincts than are to be found generally on domestic science courses. They will acquire knowledge and skill of direct application to their future lives and of the highest value in the improvement of rural living and of the health and happiness of the next generation of children.<sup>32</sup>

Bearing in mind Braithwaite's notion of "interlinguality" in terms of the history of Caribbean cultururation, let me now put an alternative spin on Simey's observations and point to a counterdynamic of childhood in the British West Indies. But first, Simey, again:

Amongst all the 270 families . . . studied in Jamaica, not a single one consisted only of parents and their children. Every family included additional children and adults variously described as nephews, grandsons, stepsons, cousins, "aunties" and "grannies."<sup>33</sup>

Family membership in the Caribbean was (and is) complex and fluid. What the authorities considered to be the bedrock of civilization—the nuclear or "Christian" family—was but one of a continuum of family forms where siblings did not necessarily share parenthood or were necessarily brought up together. Stepfathers (and mothers) regularly substituted for or supplemented the attentions of birth fathers (and mothers). One of the first memories of childhood is, therefore, the expansiveness of family and family roles. One Trinidadian informant explained how her father (in the 1930s) assumed responsibility for her mother's children from an earlier marriage:

They was like his children. He, he never make no distinction with them. He always love them, treat them the same way, and all this sort of thing, yes, you know . . . long

ago, the people took children and all this kind of thing, they used to treat as their own, you know. They didn't have no family, you know, "That's my children, and this is yours." They treat everybody as one. Yes.<sup>34</sup>

A Jamaican informant, Beryl (born 1935), did not share paternity with her eldest brother, her mother's first child. Nevertheless, her father assumed responsibility for him, and

he grew up as part of the family, because, again, this is the order of the day . . . we all grew up in a lovely, loving household. . . . His [father's] seven children were all with my mother. . . . Had he had any [outside children], it would have been accepted, because that, again, was the order of the day. They would have been part of the family and visited, and we'd have known about them.<sup>35</sup>

Children grew up as members of shared and different families who in turn would have experienced further replication (or multiplication) of kinship. Avis (born Barbados 1940), for instance, recalled that as a child,

I didn't sort of appreciate the importance of the family tree. [But] my mum used to make us know every cousin, brother, uncle, distant, whether it was fourth, third, sixth. She used to tell us who had what, who had how many sons, what daughters, what children, who they were, where they lived. And she used to visit as well. Mmm. She used to tell us all those things. . . . I can still remember all the generations.<sup>36</sup>

Relatedly, parents were also part of a continuum of carers. Above all, in memories of childhood, grandparents—and grandmothers in particular—loomed large. Growing up in the Caribbean for the majority of our informants meant growing up in close proximity to a grandparent or two. Indeed, for many, it was the grandparents (or an older female relative) who were primarily responsible for their care, either because one or both parents was absent through work or migration, temporarily or permanently, or because a grandparent (or another female relative) chose to foster—and a parent to relinquish—one or more children.

Two images of grandmothers recur throughout the narratives. Grandmothers were invariably described in terms of endearment, frequently couched in spiritual metaphors. In parallel with these images are notions of strength. Grandmothers were as frequently described in terms of being a "strong woman," a "hard worker." For instance, Claudine, who was born in Jamaica in 1956, described her grandmother as "a blessing, she's sweet, she is so sweet."<sup>37</sup> Although Claudine was born toward the latter part of British rule (and ten years after Simey published), her upbringing replicated that of her mother and grandmother. She and her two (Jamaican-born) younger siblings were brought up by their maternal grandmother, Beth, when their mother migrated to Britain in 1960. Claudine's parents were not married, and each of her Jamaican-born siblings had a different father. (Claudine's mother subsequently married in England and had two more British-born children by this husband.) Beth had ten children, six of whom died in infancy. Although she was married, this occurred late in her life, to the father of her two youngest children. The other children did not share this father. Claudine's description of her grandmother as a blessing is also bound up with the image of strength and hard work. Beth worked some ten acres of farmland, traveling to market each week to sell the produce and, as Claudine recalled,



I can't remember a day when we were . . . ever hungry . . . [or] wear, like, torn clothes . . . she used to go to market and . . . bring either a piece of material, or a little dress, or a little pair of shoes or something . . . we would look forward to it. . . . And on Sundays, she was very, very strict . . . we never missed Church, we have to go to Sunday School. So every Saturday night she's home, the first thing she does, she'll just come into our bedroom and she'll look, she'll want to see the dress you're wearing to church, the shoes, the socks, the ribbon, everything she needs to see . . . if anything was dirty . . . you have to wash it over . . . but she was really . . . really good. . . . And from school, you get home, you have to do your homework, and she sits and she helps you to do your homework. And after that, you'll have to read to her and then you get ready and you go to bed.<sup>38</sup>

While the notion of "blessing" may be seen as an epithet of endearment, it also contained a recognition of a wider community role. Beth was also a "blessed person," taking in and bringing up, in addition to her three grandchildren, nine nephews and nieces and six other non-kin children such as Tyrell, who "came from a different parish, and he was like, in the area, and his dad was . . . doing little bits and pieces for her, following her to get . . . oranges when she was going to market and then, all of a sudden, he was living there!"<sup>39</sup>

The occurrence of child fostering or child shifting is a feature still recognized in many Caribbean households,<sup>40</sup> with varying degrees of stability and success and with a variety of explanations for its cultural origins and social causes, whether out of benevolence, duty, or as a form of exchange or, as in Beth's case, a combination of motives. Three features are significant about Beth's role. Her willingness to rear the next generation enabled her own children and her siblings to migrate to Britain and to the United States. Indeed, in this family, as in many Caribbean families, there was a long and continuing tradition of migration. Beth's father and her husband had both migrated for periods to North America. In her father's absence, Beth lived with her mother in her grandmother's house. The family model was one that implicated the grandmother in the rearing of children and featured as an unquestioned dynamic in family organization. Many scholars have argued that such practices were the result of male absence, serving as an explanation of the high incidence of single-mother-headed households and the subsequent heightened authority and power of women (what Constance Sutton calls the power by "default" thesis) and as evidence of the singular adaptability of the Caribbean family to adverse circumstances.<sup>41</sup> The corollary, however, may suggest that this family formation preceded the migration movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries<sup>42</sup> (in which, incidentally, women as well as men migrated<sup>43</sup>) and was the enabling factor in, rather than the consequence of, migration.

Second, while child shifting has been a regular feature of Caribbean families, Beth became what we might call a "gravitational grandmother," a figure in the community to whom parents—and children—could turn for help in this key area. Such a status could not arise in a vacuum but from a reputation transmitted through networks of contact and support and through an acceptance that children could be as adequately reared by another as by their own kin or mother. Tyrell, after all, came from another parish. The other children came as a result of requests; for instance, "his mum had three of them and she was only young and she couldn't take care of them"<sup>44</sup> and asked Beth to take care of one. Finally, the result for Beth was an incorporation into her family of other members who brought with them, as children, a share of and a contribution to the

human capital of the household and who now return this “investment” by caring for her in old age.

Part of the explanation for this active incorporation into parenting must lie in the “open” structures of kin membership,<sup>45</sup> and one of the recurring features in this research has been the strength of kinship and the importance of kinship networks in sustaining the emotional and the material support of its members. While Beth’s role as a surrogate parent involved a degree of instrumentality and exchange that may have been one motive behind the actions that she and many other grandmothers or women (particularly those who had been childless) in our sample followed, this was, however, within a cultural context that expected and approved such activity and thereby extended kinship and surrogate kinship bonds and networks. Yet none of this arises in a vacuum. The “adaptive” arguments as an explanation of Caribbean family formation and kinship may have a compelling rationale, in terms of maximizing scarce economic resources and as responses to poverty, and may be corroborated by other studies that appear to demonstrate that the formation of powerful mother figures and extended kinship links is a modern response to poverty with parallels among the Irish community<sup>46</sup> or in London’s East End.<sup>47</sup> Such explanations do not, however, take into account the importance of both history and culture in shaping contemporary behavior for such patterns can also be discerned among middle-class Caribbean families<sup>48</sup> and among Caribbean migrant communities abroad,<sup>49</sup> suggesting that culture may be a more enduring ingredient in family formation than (unstable) economic constraints.

There remains, however, another important consideration. While the “human” capital accumulated by a woman may in the long term be translated into dollars, and while “making” a child “for” its father may be seen as a ritualistic entry into adulthood, children themselves are regarded as the inheritors of a lineage, as evidence of continuity, and, in turn, as conduits of that continuity. As the distinguished anthropologist Constance Sutton has pointed out, there are important parallels between these beliefs and those held by the Yoruba, who

consider children their most important form of wealth . . . a woman’s ability to produce this form of wealth, that is, her procreative power, was regarded as a critical immanent power that women—referred to frequently as “our mothers” possessed . . . continuity was inscribed in the culturally constructed meanings of life, death, and rebirth of genealogically connected humans. New born children represented reborn ancestors, recent and distant. They in turn give birth to the future, and after their death become ancestors waiting to be reborn. This was the missing key in my earlier understanding of the power attributed to mothers in Barbados.<sup>50</sup>

The repetitions and commonality in the language used by women to describe their mothers and grandmothers suggest the existence of widely held beliefs relating to lineage and continuity.<sup>51</sup> Lineage becomes the logic that conveys the meaning of family, and the “pull” of the ancestors is reflected in a strong sense of “carrying” previous generations, in a belief that ancestors have the power to “take” a child into their thrall, and an equally powerful language suggesting a reconstitution if not a rebirth in the generations—“I am a nice woman,” one informant said, “I am *from* my mother” (emphasis added).<sup>52</sup> Lineage is both actual and symbolic, and it carries responsibilities as well as privileges. Mothers and mother substitutes, such as grandmothers, had to be sufficiently strong to carry out the physical labor of child rearing (and bearing),<sup>53</sup> as well as

bear the spiritual or symbolic responsibilities as carriers of lineage. Part of those responsibilities was to ensure that the children in the line could mature to respect and continue it, and as women matured into old age and grandparenthood, those responsibilities increased and extended over their grandchildren and those of others who could not shoulder the responsibility. It is, therefore, significant that such women were described both as “blessed,” for their symbolic capital had been extended, and they were “strong,” “hardworking” women. There is also one corollary. If children were regarded as wealth, then this also explains the redistributive practices of child shifting, the divesting of some of the symbolic capital into branches of the family who lacked it. Miss McLeod, for instance, “never meet a husband. I’m still a single person. I never have any children, but I grow my niece.”<sup>54</sup> In turn, Miss McLeod, who was born in 1926 in Jamaica, had also been “grown” by her paternal grandparents, because “my father loved me so much, you know, that he wanted me, and my grandparents loved me so much that they wanted me and then, you know, in the West Indies, them days . . . you just go to them.”<sup>55</sup>

That grandparents—particularly grandmothers—and other female kin, actual or symbolic, were relied on to provide practical support in child care and fostering suggests a cultural disposition toward assuming this role and a broader disposition toward child care as a family, even a communal, responsibility. This extends interpretation beyond the physical nature of support into metaphysical concerns over the nature and meaning of family and lineage. Grandmothers linked family members and retained (and extended) kinship networks within and between families. They enjoyed a symbolic role in providing continuity through the generations (including ancestors) and a socializing and “community” role. Conversely, grandchildren often had close relationships with and responsibility toward grandparents, extending what Brodber<sup>56</sup> described as their “perceptual” field of family, and generated a sense of “emotional expansiveness.”

Closely allied with the “open” structures of kinship was the role of the community in parenting, and along with vivid memories of grandparents were recurrent memories of the communitarian basis for child care and child rearing. The repetitions in the imagery and language convey prescriptions in which appropriate social values were embedded and transmitted. At the same time, the behavior exhibited in the public arena also embodied practices and skills essential for “living good” and for the successful socialization of the young into adulthood. The notion that the community has, as one informant described it, a “parenting responsibility” is a theme that recurs throughout the islands. Mrs. B., born in Barbados in 1938, recalled, for instance, how “neighbours around . . . sort of keep an eye, you weren’t their children, but the fact that you were living, more or less, in the community, *you were their responsibility*.”<sup>57</sup>

In practice, what did this mean? First, adults had the right and duty to reprimand children. Any child caught misbehaving could be corrected and the child’s parent(s) appropriately informed.

Mrs. B: If they saw you doing something that you shouldn’t be doing, they would say, “Well, I’m going to tell your mother or your father,” and you knew, well, definitely they will tell them, and it’s lashes for you. So you had to be careful, even . . . although you were away, out of your parents’ sight, you know, there were still people there sort of keeping an eye to make sure that you didn’t do anything that you shouldn’t be.<sup>58</sup>

Our informant from Trinidad described it thus:

You hardly could have misbehaved really long ago, you know, because . . . family, and the neighbours, you are friends. . . . "Oh, that is Mr. Joe's daughter," you know, they want to know what going on. Why you here? Who you know, what you know. If they see you talking to anybody that they know [is]. . . . a loose person . . . bad . . . they would call you and tell you, "Listen, you must not keep that person's company, because they would lead you astray." And you frightened because you don't want them to go home and tell your parents you was talking to such a person. You have to go in front and tell your parents. . . . You have to talk the truth, you understand. That's how well they brought us up . . . you have to tell them the truth, you have to respect everybody, that's about it.<sup>59</sup>

While for a child such neighborly concern might, at times, have been intrusive (it was, as one informant put it, only "natural" for children to misbehave), it also acted as a brake on misbehavior. But implicit in the deterrent and corrective effects of neighborly behavior were wider social lessons of concern, reciprocity, and respect. Children were not only taught to pay (and return) concern and respect for others; they also learned that others had a deep concern for them. By the same token, few children would have fallen into danger or difficulty.

At the time anybody see a child walking, "where are you going?" "I'm going to such and such a place." "I will come." At least nobody could interfere with that child because they are going to carry that child to the house.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, while adults may have been owed respect on the grounds of seniority, and while seniority bestowed authority, it also implied protection. Children might not have been regarded as equals in a community, but they were aware that they had importance and a place in that community and were valued as members of it.

Children were taught principles of sharing and exchange. Again, informants recalled how in the 1930s and 1940s,

it was a caring community, by the way. So, a lot of giving was done. If you know that Mrs. Bloggs down the road has a daughter in America, and is living on her own, when my father came home from the fields with provisions and food, Mrs. Bloggs could have a little basket. And if Miss Brown across the road had just had a baby, and the father hadn't, wasn't supporting her, Miss Brown had a little package of stuff, or a couple of eggs for the baby. And there was this sharing, caring, cohesive community, which I believe is almost lost now.<sup>61</sup>

All kind of people, and anything we give. If they go on a hunt, they get a . . . a deer, you know . . . they make sure, when they kill it, that . . . this part, this is for Mr. Joe, this is for this body . . . when they bake . . . they always handing it . . . [to those] less fortunate . . . there's so much in this giving, that even you have, and they have something, they will still send something to give, you know. You know, people used to live nice a long time.<sup>62</sup>

Such practices had an instrumental value, for exchange was a necessary part of the sharing equation, and implicit in the practices were the additional values of care, concern, and "as I say, like, we grow up, one thing I will say, you learn respect, you know."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, at the core of the system (and repeated over and over) is the notion of

“respect,” which contained within it two seemingly contradictory notions: first, respect or honor due to the position within a hierarchy, or seniority (of age, rank, or position), and, second, an essential egalitarianism that commanded honor and civility regardless of rank, age, or position. While children were commanded to pay respect to others, particularly to their elders (even among siblings), respect was paid to them even though it might have assumed a corrective and at times punitive character. Children could not expect equal treatment with adults, but they could expect adult concern, care, and interest. Yet although—or because—children were under almost constant adult supervision, they were free and able to develop confidence and autonomy and were encouraged to do so. Children were also taught, very early on, to take a part in (and responsibility for) family chores and were “encouraged to be self-reliant.”<sup>64</sup>

You have to do everything for yourself, because, I mean, they’re not encouraging you that they will have you sleeping, and coming to wake you up to take your breakfast. You had to get up. You have work to do. You have to sweep, you have to see after your fowl, or your goat, or whatever it is. And we, we used to enjoy that. We used to enjoy that, because everybody had their own, you know, their own goat and their own fowl. So we used to enjoy all of that.<sup>65</sup>

Equally, children grew up to expect respect for their adult status from those “coming up” below and, in turn, to convey it to those over whom they now held a respectful seniority.

The prevalence of the practice of community participation in the socialization of children suggests, moreover, that it was contrived rather than coincidental—that it was a desired way of bringing children up, rather than a system arrived at by default. The language of child rearing was characterized by the active, rather than the passive, verb and was proactive and self-conscious. Children were not “had by” but “made for,” “grown” rather than “brought up.” It is language and behavior that suggests that children were considered as emergent adults, whose self-reliance and responsibility were innate features of their humanity that required nourishment to develop, rather than isolation and the imposition of constraints. In this sense, it is part of the philosophical approach that underpinned Caribbean social organization, in which adult individuality, independence, and autonomy were valued as the best ways to contribute to the collective good and were reflected in the values taught and the resources developed in the processes of socialization.

These principles undercut the colonial (and official) view of West Indian society. “Looseness of family structure,” as Thomas Simey pronounced authoritatively,

is reflected in a striking weakness in social organisation. The only social institution with any degree of stability or any command of popular support is the Church, which everywhere in the West Indies stands out as a rock round which the welter of disorganised human life surges. There is little social tissue to act as an agent welding the inhabitants of villages or towns together, and there is but little cohesion in social life. The West Indian was forcibly divorced from his African culture and has not been able to establish himself securely as an inheritor of the “western” way of life. Neither has he been able to create a culture of his own as yet.<sup>66</sup>

What was interpreted as both looseness and weakness was a practice that contrasted with the colonial ideology of family, which privileged a nucleated and autonomous

unit as the key to social stability and privileged birth parents and those *in loco parentis*, such as a school, as the only adults responsible for the socialization of their children. And yet, had Simey been less willing to so disregard Herskovits, or so convinced of the Dollard argument on social inferiority,<sup>67</sup> or so smitten with the generative powers of social engineering, he may well have recognized (for there was much in Simey that was also very enlightened) that one of the pulses driving Caribbean social organization was the extensiveness and inclusiveness of Caribbean families in which children were second only to mothers as carriers of lineage but first in terms of symbolic wealth, where the neighborhood saw it as a collective responsibility to socialize children and could use the concept of family (with its hierarchies and its equalities) as a metaphor and a model of social behavior and organization, at home and abroad.<sup>68</sup> Revealing childhoods has revealed complex structures based on a communitarian philosophy of social organization and of the “self.” Moreover, the sense of pride with which West Indians described their childhoods and the family and neighborhood that structured them may be seen as one of the bedrocks of social pride, a contributory element of West Indian nationalism, and (still) of contemporary identities in the Diaspora. For Simey, as far as the West Indies were concerned, “the problem cannot be expressed in terms less than the rebuilding of society.”<sup>69</sup> For many West Indians, this failure to understand, recognize, and acknowledge Creole cultural forms and social practices—their society—offered, paradoxically, a protection against the “macocious”<sup>70</sup> eye of colonial authority, while the failure to “reform” family structure represented a continuing point of independence, if not defiance.

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### NOTES

1. See Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Zed Books, 1996).

2. Harry Goulbourne and Mary Chamberlain, *Living Arrangements, Family Structure and Social Change of Caribbeans in Britain* (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC], award no. L315253009).

3. Austin Clarke, *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack*.

4. See also Lorna McDaniel, *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998).

5. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1991).

6. Giddens, *Modernity*; see also Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 2000); Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, eds., *Feminism and Autobiography* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 2000); Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life 2*

(London: Sage, 2001); Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat, and Tom Wengraf, *The Turn to Biological Methods in Social Science* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 2000).

7. Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, "Textualisation of the Self and Gender Identity in the Life Story," in Cosslett et al., *Feminism*.

8. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

9. See Plummer, *Documents*.

10. Cavarera, *Relating Narratives*.

11. For further discussion, see Mary Chamberlain, "Praise Songs of the Family: Lineage and Kinship in the Caribbean Diaspora," *History Workshop Journal* 50 (2000): 114-28.

12. *Ibid.*

13. See also Mary Chamberlain, "The Global Self: Narratives of Caribbean Migrant Women," in Cosslett et al., *Feminism*.

14. Cavarera, *Relating Narratives*, 39.

15. Sidney Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*, 1989.

16. See introduction by Edward Braithwaite to Roger Mais, *Brother Man* (London: Heinemann, 1974).

17. Howard Johnson, "The Forster and Moyne Commissions," in *The Trinidad Labour Riots of 1937: Perspectives 50 Years Later*, ed. Roy Thomas (St. Augustine: University of the West Indies, 1987).

18. Thomas Simey, *Welfare and Planning in the West Indies* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1946), 237.

19. *Ibid.*, 79.

20. Cited in R. T. Smith, "The Family and the Modern World System: Some Observations from the Caribbean," *Journal of Family History* 3, no. 4 (1978): 337-60.

21. Great Britain, West India Royal Commission 1945, 217-20, cited in Simey, *Welfare*.

22. CO298/47, Deputy Registrar's report for Tobago for the year 1890. Papers presented to the Legislative Council of Trinidad, 1891.

23. CO140/208, appendix to papers of the Legislative Council of Jamaica, 1891.

24. See, for instance, Catherine Hall, "White Visions, Black Lives: The Free Villages of Jamaica," *History Workshop Journal* 36 (1993).

25. Simey, *Welfare*, 51.

26. *Ibid.*, 82-83.

27. *Ibid.*, 84.

28. *Ibid.*, 91.

29. *Ibid.*

30. John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937).

31. Jamaica Committee (1944), as cited in Simey, *Welfare*, 17.

32. Report of Sir Frank Stockdale for 1940-1942, para. 267, as quoted in Simey, *Welfare*, 166.

33. *Ibid.*, 84.

34. TM098/1/A/17.

35. JI028/1/A/5 born 1935.

36. BF069/1/A/18.

37. JK030/2/1/1/9.

38. JK030/2/1/10.

39. JK 030/2/1/2/15.

40. See Olive Senior, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English Speaking Caribbean* (London: James Currey, 1991), 12-18; Sally Gordon, "'I Go to Tantie's': The Economic Significance of Childshifting in Antigua, West Indies," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 18, no. 3 (1987): 427-43; Isa Maria Soto, "West Indian Child Fostering: Its Role in Migrant Exchanges,"

in *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions*, ed. Constance Sutton and Elsa Chaney (New York: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1994).

41. Constance Sutton, *Introduction to Virginia Kerns Women and the Ancestors: Black Carib Kinship and Ritual* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), ix. Kerns's thesis provides a very different perspective on family life and interpretation of the role of women within it.

42. See Barry Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

43. Mary Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile and Return* (Houndsmill, UK: Macmillan, 1997).

44. JK030/2/1/2/11.

45. R. T. Smith, *The Negro Family in British Guiana* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1956), 157, 164. Hyman Rodman, *Lower Class Families: The Culture of Poverty in Negro Trinidad* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1971), 101.

46. Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Networks* (London: Tavistock, 1957).

47. M. Young and P. Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957).

48. J. Alexander, "The Role of the Male in the Middle Class Jamaican Family: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary Family Studies* 8, no. 3 (1977): 369-89.

49. Sutton and Chaney, *Caribbean Life*.

50. Constance Sutton, "'Motherhood Is Powerful': Embodied Knowledge from Evolving Field-Based Experiences," *Anthropology and Humanism* 23, no. 2 (1998): 143-44.

51. Mary Chamberlain, "The Global Self," in Cosslett et al., *Feminism and Autobiography*.

52. JH141/1/1/1.

53. Sutton, "Motherhood."

54. JP061/2/1/1/8.

55. JP061/2/1/1/11.

56. Erna Brodber, "Afro-Jamaican Women at the Turn of the Century," *Social and Economic Studies* 35, no. 3 (1986).

57. BK080/1/A/8. Emphasis added.

58. Ibid.

59. TM098/1/A/9.

60. BK117.

61. JI028/1/A/8.

62. TM098/1/A/13.

63. BK080/2/A/43-44.

64. JI028/1/B/25.

65. TM098/1/A/10.

66. Simey, *Welfare*, 18.

67. Dollard, *Caste and Class*. Indeed, this argument neatly reverses responsibility and blame for the low levels of economic wealth and social mobility of African Americans from structural constraints to psychological inhibitors.

68. Mary Chamberlain, "The Family as Model and Metaphor in Caribbean Migration to Britain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 251-66.

69. Simey, *Welfare*, 239.

70. A Trinidadian and Grenadian word meaning nosey, prying, scandal mongering; cf. Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996).