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Back to the Caribbean: Narratives of Adjustments among Adolescent Migrants Returning to the Caribbean by Algernon Ward

Introduction - A historical perspective on Anglo-Caribbean Migration

The process of Return Migration to the Caribbean is not a new phenomenon. It has always been part of the process of the Caribbean migratory circuit. One of the limitations identified shows that literature on Caribbean migration concentrates primarily on the movement of Caribbean nationals to the metropole and their experiences within that space.

It can be noted that though the field of Return Migration is now emerging, the existing literature does not fully interrogate the different shades of the migration circuit of Caribbean nationals. There is a lack of academic scholarship on the process of migration of adolescent children returning to the ancestral homeland of their parents and/or grandparents. These are children or grandchildren who were born into Caribbean migrant families and have returned with their parents or have been sent back to the Caribbean space to live with members of the extended family.

Caribbean people are often depicted to have inherited an inclination to migrate. A range of historical and socio-economic features have often been the attributes that have described the push or pull factors of Caribbean people that migrated to countries in North America, Europe, Central America and other territories within the region, eventually, creating influential economic and social networks connecting the Caribbean to a transnational environment.

The process of migration and return migration in the Anglophone Caribbean has been an important and constant component in the economic expansion of the region for over one hundred and fifty years. In *The Caribbean in the Wider World 1492-1992*, Bonham Richardson posits that since full emancipation of the enslaved in 1838, Caribbean people have migrated to improve their economic and social status (73). This point has also been articulated by Sydney Mintz in *Caribbean Transformations*. Immediately after the end of slavery some of the former enslaved persons moved away from the sugar plantations into the cities or towns in search of jobs. Some also moved away from the plantation and cultivated small plots of land where they could grow their own crops which were later sold at markets. For many former enslaved the plantation represented a space of violence and confinement. Bohman Richardson posits that in the post emancipation period West Indians saw migration as a vehicle to improve their social and financial capital (5). He also argued that migration was considered an empowering feature for the former enslaved as it provided an impetus for them to leave the plantation and seek out new experiences and opportunities for them and their families (5). In *Narratives of Exile and Return*, Mary Chamberlain articulated a similar argument when she posits that the Caribbean region has always been a space for migration given its cultural traditions, history and legacy of the

forced migration during the period of enslavement which, brought many of its people from Africa. Since emancipation of the enslaved in 1838 Caribbean people believed migration provided opportunities and emigrated to improve their economic and social status. Roger-Mark De Souza has also articulated a similar position to that of Chamberlain when she posits that “West Indians have always been on the move. Historically, as players in the plantation economy dynamics, inhabitants of these islands always moved in and out of the region” (229).

In the second half of the 19th century Afro Caribbean people moved to other British territories within the region, like Trinidad and Guyana, where salaries were better on sugar cane plantations. Moreover, there was a need for additional labour given the increase in sugar cane production in Trinidad and Guyana (British Guiana at that time) during the latter half of the 19th century. At the end of the 19th century Costa Rica also became another destination that provided employment for Caribbean people. Avin Chomsky states that in the latter half of the 19th Century, U.S. companies recruited Jamaicans to build railroads and plant bananas in Costa Rica (837). Chomsky further showed that between 1900 to 1913, it is estimated that over twenty thousand Jamaicans migrated over a thirteen year period to Costa Rica to work on banana plantations (838).

During the construction of the Panama Canal, Barbadians, Jamaicans and other Caribbean nationals migrated to Panama to assist with its construction. Like Trinidad and Guyana in the 19th Century, Cuba increased their sugar cane production in the early 20th Century. This increase in production was accelerated and encouraged with the Reciprocity Treaty that was signed in 1903 between the United States and Cuba. Louis Perez in *Lords of the Mountain: Banditry and Peasant Protest in Cuba, 1878–1918* posits that this treaty, in essence, reduced the duties on imports from Cuba into the United States by twenty percent (155). As a result, the island became an appealing location for American businesses in the manufacturing sector. Given its tropical climate, sugar cane producers saw Cuba as the ideal location with large tracks of unused arable land where sugar cane cultivation would be ideal. Hence, there was a need for additional labour given the increase in sugar cane production. This was an appealing feature for many blacks in the English speaking Caribbean given the poor and harsh economic conditions and high rates of unemployment throughout the British Caribbean colonies.

There was also a movement of Caribbean people to the United States in the early 20th Century. They played a pivotal role in civil rights and the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance during this period. The scholarship that the Caribbean writers, like Claude McKay and Cyril Briggs who were associated with the Harlem Renaissance, can be contextualised in a transnational framework of cultural and political exchange given the content of their speeches, writing and race philosophy. In *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, Winston James has argued that Caribbean migrants in the U.S., given their lived experience in the Caribbean, played an important role by contributing to the international focus of different migrants that arrived in the early 20th Century (50). Immediately after the World War II migration increased to the United States of America and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom and Canada. More importantly in the case of Britain there

was a need for labour to assist in rebuilding their shattered and decimated economy after six years of war with Germany.

In 1948, in an effort to alleviate their labour shortage, Britain introduced the British Nationality Act. This act provided British citizenship to all Commonwealth citizens. The mobility of Caribbean people since emancipation has been extensive and diverse, extending from permanent migration, both voluntary and forced, to temporary patterns of migrations. Nevertheless, consistent with many migration traditions has been an objective to ultimately return “home”. Richard Nutter has argued, in the case of Jamaica, that migration within and outside the region had widespread effects upon the socio- economic structures of Jamaica. He cautioned that this is not to imply that the movement was unidirectional. Jamaican migrants returned from Panama to the Caribbean with the failure of the first canal project in the latter half of the 19th Century. On the successful completion of the second canal project in 1915, the closure of countries like Cuba and Costa Rica to alien immigrants all resulted in sizeable return flows to Jamaica in the early 20th Century (199).

This paper/presentation is a very brief overview of ongoing doctoral research into the question of return migration to the Caribbean as experienced by adolescents who represent the second, third or later generations of Caribbean emigrants to Britain.

Rationale

This research project will build on existing scholarship on issues of migration and return migration. This study will examine adolescent children who were born into Caribbean migrant families, spent their childhood in Britain, and have relocated to the Caribbean space. The study will focus on children between the ages of 11 and 18 years. The island nations of Jamaica and Barbados will be used for this research. This research on return migration to the Caribbean space is important because it enables an examination of both the adolescents’ experience of migration throughout the migration process and the changes in their sensitivities of identity and place as a result of their migrations.

With the focus on the process of Return Migration since the Windrush Generation of the 1950s, this research examines the adjustments that were made, and are constantly being made, by adolescent children who have been relocated to the Caribbean. For this reason the hybrid positions of these individuals will be closely analysed as well as the sociocultural, economic, and political impact on the receiving society. This research will utilise a Cultural Studies interdisciplinary approach which allows for an examination of the conceptual frameworks of **disapora**, **transnationalism** and the process of **identity formation**.

One of the shortcomings that has been revealed is that literature on Caribbean migration circuit has not addressed the different shades of migration including returning adolescent children in the group. Elizabeth Thomas-Hope [YEAR] agrees with this point and argues that

“the return is a significant aspect of Caribbean migration, but one that only recently has caught the attention of academic researchers and policy makers in the regions. In the

countries of destination, most of the attention paid to Caribbean international migration has been with respect to outward movement and especially to migrant adaptation to and assimilation in the receiving country” (187).

Therefore, in an effort to fill the gaps in both the literature and theoretical conceptualisation on Caribbean migration, it is imperative that this significant demographic group be examined.

Research Question

This paper investigates notions of belonging, diasporic subjectivities, concepts of home and transnational identities. The primary question is: How does the process of Return Migration to the Caribbean influence constructs of identities of those affected adolescents?

There are other investigative points that emerged in the research process filtering into the above question. These have raised the issues of diaspora, identity, migration, transnationalism and the concept of “home”:

- How do adolescents of African Caribbean origin who have been relocated to the Caribbean adjust to their new environment?
- How do these adolescents create new spaces of belonging?

- What role has the Internet (instant messaging and online social networks) played in maintaining transnational relationships, transnational livelihoods and the construction of transnational identities?

Methodology

This project will utilise both primary and secondary sources of data. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data will be used to collect information. The primary sources methods that will be used are interviews, surveys and observation. Qualitative Research methods will be used to obtain information from the Jamaican and Barbados Diaspora communities in the United Kingdom. The interview process will collect information from returning nationals and their adolescent children. The structured and semi structured interviews will be conducted in Barbados, Jamaica and the United Kingdom and attempt to cover all of the major life areas linked with return migration. Information from parents and their adolescent children perceptions of the social realities they face and their consideration of their own personal experiences of return migration.

Information will be collected through semi-structured interviews, along with observational methods. These research methods will be used to examine and observe return migrants and their adolescent children in their environment while simultaneously allowing the events of their lives to be at the forefront in relating their own experiences. Therefore, the interview process will seek to report the challenges that these children have in meeting new individuals in their age range, culture shock, their experience at school and their participation in other activities.

Secondary data will also be used for this study. It involves processing data that has already been collected by another party. Information will be gleaned from previous

studies and findings such as reports, government statistics, documents, press articles and previous research projects in the field of migration. Archival research for this study will focus on providing more detailed historical data on migration from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom and Return Migration from the United Kingdom to Caribbean with an emphasis on Jamaica. The British Library Newspaper Archives at Colindale in the United Kingdom will be used to determine the social and economic historical context for migration and return migration. The Archival Research will be specifically focused on clarifying periods of migration and return migration.

Children have been sent back to the Caribbean since the first generation of migrants to Britain, The United States of America and Canada, but their voices have not been heard in this process. This research will attempt to examine the adjustments that were made and are constantly being made by these adolescent children that relocated to Jamaica and Barbados. For this reason the hybrid position of these transnational individuals will be accentuated. This research will attempt to examine the conceptual frameworks of diaspora, identity and transnationalism to respond to the post colonial theories that have neglected adolescent children that relocated to the Caribbean.

This research will provide a brief history of migration in the Anglophone Caribbean from emancipation to the contemporary period. The research will consider the existing theoretical frameworks for older retirees and young adults returning migrants as articulated by George Gmelch and Roger De Souza. The conceptual framework of transnationalism will be examined in relation to the experience of the Caribbean migrants that returned to the Caribbean. Finally an examination of the methodology will be done for the overall epistemological approach that will be adopted by the study.

As such, this research builds on existing scholarship on issues of migration, return migration and transnational identities. This paper will seek to develop a framework for adolescent children returning to the Caribbean. This theoretical framework will be essential in examining the varying reasons why adolescent children relocate to the Caribbean. These various reasons would provide typologies that can be added to the discussion on Caribbean migration.

Transnationalism

The ability to claim membership in more than one geographical space has been articulated by a number of academics in recent time. In *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans In Transnational America*, Michel Laguerre refers to the ability to claim membership in multiple spaces as 'diasporic citizenship' (18). For Laguerre, 'diasporic citizenship' includes "a set of practices that a person is engaged in, and a set of rights acquired or appropriated, that cross nation-state boundaries and that indicate membership in at least two nation states" (190). He uses a transnational perspective to illustrate the adaptation of Haitian migrants in the United States and the traditions they have used to retain their relations with Haiti. Laguerre posits that the nation-state up till now represented a space where citizenship was demarcated but has become powerless because

of the transnational practices used by migrants. Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blanc in *Nations Unbound* have articulated a similar point when they posit that transnationalist theory has underline transnationalism as an affront to assimilation (20). Brent Hayes Edwards' interpretation of cross cultural contact in *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* is similar to Laguerre's diasporic identities and the ability to claim multiple spaces. He however rejects Paul Gilroy's concept of the black Atlantic as the changing same as articulated in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. For Edwards these diasporic communities represent spaces of cultural resistance (12). Although Edwards agrees with Gilroy's basic hypothesis that black nationalism is a retort to modernity, he does not approve of the point that this retort is characterised by consensual politics on the part of black international cultures. Edwards' hypothesis uses music and other artistic endeavours as processes where tensions among diasporic communities can be discussed and negotiated. Given his hypothesis, these processes represent different experiences and circumstances where the migrant no longer has allegiance to any one particular culture, but is a product of both. He argues that the practice of diaspora takes into consideration different methods of articulating race, identity and goes beyond the nation state and even language. This hypothesis of diaspora provides a platform for discussing distinctions between all the African diasporic communities throughout the world.

Returning migrants to the Caribbean from Britain and elsewhere have utilized transnational approaches to live in different geographic spaces. Basch *et al* have argued that these migrants "take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities rooted in networks of relationships that link them simultaneously to two or more nations" (7). These social developments have socio-economic components in their cause and effect. In the *Experiences of Return Migration: Caribbean Perspectives*, Potter, Conway and Phillips have argued that returning migrants to the Caribbean have been agents of change and have utilised transnational approaches to live in the Caribbean and Britain. They demonstrated how returning migrants to the Caribbean are now younger with multiple identities and these migrants have claimed multiple spaces. Potter argued that migration was a strategic response by individuals and their families for advancement given the economic conditions that existed in these territories throughout the 20th century. Potter *et al* have argued that return migration to the Caribbean has to be contextualised in

economies that are experiencing change and integration within the wider global economy. Their research demonstrates that the younger adult returnees to the Caribbean also have a role to play in these changing societies which are now becoming part of the global economy. Potter's work focuses on the returnee rather than the process of return migration; in other words, on the agent and not the process.

In her article entitled *Transnational Livelihoods and Identities in Return Migration to the Caribbean: The Case of Skilled Returnees to Jamaica*, Thomas-Hope has posited that "international migration is not just the movement of people between places, it is the relocation of the individual and, by extension the group, with respect to the global social, economic and political system" (187). She further argued that the return migrant is an important component of Caribbean migration given the unpredictability that takes place

in the return stage. This unpredictability is largely predicated on the initial reasons for migrating and the features in terms of period of movement and the time spent abroad. Specifically the complete displacement of individuals from the society and home in the Caribbean when migration occurs is not usual, when the time spent abroad extends over several years. For Thomas-Hope the distinguishing features of the return migrant to the Caribbean are primarily informed by the depths and determination of the transnational connections sustained linking those family units overseas and those remaining in their country of origin.

Why Do Caribbean Emigrants Return?

A review of the existing literature has further demonstrated that a theoretical framework exists on return migration for older individuals and younger adults that returned to the Caribbean. Within this framework, return migration can be defined as the process when older retired individuals return to their country of origin after living in another country for an extended period of time. In the case of younger adults, return migration has been associated with second generation individuals who were born outside the region to Caribbean parents in North America, Europe and elsewhere and have returned to their ancestral home. Within the current discourse, return migration can be seen as a voluntary action or a forced act. However, little attention has been paid to forced migration and the literature reviewed to date has privileged voluntary return migration.

Furthermore, Gmelch has conceptualised three categories of Caribbean return migrants. In *Return migration. Annals, Review of Anthropology* 9 he posits that the length of time spent abroad by migrants and their reasons for returning to the Caribbean are demonstrated in his conceptualisation of return. Firstly, individuals who intend temporary migration or circulation. The time of their return is determined by the objectives they set out to achieve at the time of emigration. Secondly, individuals who anticipated permanent migration but were forced to return. Their preference was to stay abroad but because of external factors they were required to return. And finally, individuals who intended permanent emigration but decided to return because of their inability to adjust in the new environment and resulted in their choice to return to the Caribbean (138). Roger De Souza has also articulated a framework of return. In *The Spell of the Cascadura: West Indian Return Migration* he articulated four typologies why migrants return to Trinidad and Tobago. His first typology is based on economic factors which he defined as “a mobile livelihood system”. This describes return as part of a circular or seasonal movement where the key concern is economic survival. Then there is the second pattern that has been defined as a double passage. This conceptualisation comprises longer term return by emphasizing that return migration is a long term re-entry of a local after a long period abroad. The third typology has been articulated by De Souza as return visitation. These are recurring visits to Trinidad through vacation and business flows. The final typology has been described as a swallow lifestyle movement. These are migrants who return to Trinidad as a lifestyle. These migrants are aided by liberal citizenship rules and regulation (232).

Potter, Conway and Phillips in *The Experience of Return Migration* have argued that Thomas-Hope has also articulated typology for return migrants, with her main characteristic revolving around a time variable which distinguishes between long stay and short stay migrants, and with further sub-categories characterized by migrants' skill and transformation and occupational change and migration intentions (3).

The lived experience of Caribbean people that migrated to Britain must also be examined to understand why adolescent children relocated to the Caribbean. Understanding the reason for return is paramount because it would help to further build the theoretical framework to explain this return. The lived experiences of Caribbean people in Britain has often been characterised by the challenges in respect of rights and privileges of citizenship. In *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain* both Winston James and Clive Harris have argued that the welfare system, law enforcement and psychiatrists were responsible for providing the environment where Caribbean people lived in the poorest neighbourhoods and were thus deprived of the privileges of citizenship. Notwithstanding these cruel and repressive surroundings, Caribbean people still had the strength to form a new identity.

This study, in its wider context, will also seek to determine how ethnic and racial identity informs adjustment in adolescents that returned to the Caribbean. The current scholarship on racial and ethnic identity examines the relationship between minority groups and their environment and how these two entities relate to each other. The literature also considers how identities are connected to the cultural adaptation of minorities and how these interactions differ across different ethnic groups.

Jean S. Phinney [YEAR] has argued that ethnic identity is threefold. It includes a recognition and affiliation to a particular group; examining the function of ethnicity in the lives of a particular group and finally obtaining and preserving the key features of that group. Harry C. Triandis [YEAR] believes that ethnic identity has to be examined at a broad level in relation to subjective culture and the distinctive manner how members of a cultural group come in contact with their immediate environment. This consists of beliefs, evaluations, expectations, norms, roles, self-definitions, stereotypes, and values. Phinney's research pays special attention to identity development in adolescent children in migrant communities. The integral element in her framing of ethnic identity is a sense of belonging.

It is against this backdrop that this study will seek to broaden the existing theoretical framework necessary to explain why adolescent children have been relocating to the Caribbean. It will attempt to add to understandings the experiences of adolescent children who relocated to the Caribbean with a parent or parents, or on their own to stay with extended family.

Apart from the classical migration literature, given that this is a cultural studies project, this study will examine some of the wealth of writing by Caribbean nationals about their experiences in Britain. An examination of Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* and Caryl Phillips' *The Final Passage* will be

used to examine the complex and multilayered perspective of the relationship between Britain and the Caribbean in the post-Windrush era. Having synthesised the ideas of diasporic subjectivities, migration, return migration and transnationalism, this research project will build on these theories by examining the added phenomenon of adolescent children returning to the Caribbean.

Conclusion

An examination of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks on return migration has demonstrated a relative lack of research on young adolescent children that returned to the Caribbean. These omissions have resulted in the research questions. In addition, the absence of scholarship suggests the need to conceptualise and develop a new theoretical framework embedded in verifiable and provable means of investigation. The research on return migrants has not taken into consideration the full range of returnees

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