

# **Parental Absence as a Consequence of Migration: Exploring its Origins and Perpetuation with Special Reference to Trinidad<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

While acknowledging that there are several reasons for which parents may be absent, there appears to be little insight into parental absence as a consequence of migration, a situation that seems to be severely understated despite its increasing global prevalence. In relation to Caribbean migration, its major phases of external outflows convey that parents have left in order to improve their living standards, as well as to economically support those left behind, who comprise mainly children. The literature suggests that for some of these children, the experience fosters healthy growth, development and strengthens kinship relations, while for others it may result in feelings of neglect, abandonment and loneliness. In this regard, the paper recognizes the need to further understand the nature of this phenomenon. By examining related literature, it attempts to trace and unravel the origins, as well as examine possible factors that may account for the perpetuation of parental migration with special reference to Trinidad and where necessary, the Caribbean region. Further, in providing information where there has been little consideration, it is hoped that this paper increases awareness and stimulates further research within this area.

***Keywords:*** Parental absence, migration, origins, perpetuation, Trinidad

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of a larger research dissertation on parental migration and its impact on the behaviours exhibited among a sample of young adults who have experienced this phenomenon within the context of Trinidad.

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## INTRODUCTION

While acknowledging that there are several reasons for which parents may be absent, such as death, incarceration, marital dissolution and separation, the literature suggests that there is little insight into parental absence as a consequence of migration. Migration may lead to the fragmentation of family units and in some cases, consequent familial disruption (Larmer 1996; St. Bernard 2003; Le Franc cited in Wellcome Trust Posting 2004) when one or more family members migrate, leaving others behind either temporarily or permanently. With Trinidad as its contextual framework, this paper aims to explore the dynamics surrounding the origins<sup>3</sup> and perpetuation<sup>4</sup> of one such pattern of migration that can directly affect family life, parental migration. In relation to the Caribbean, parental migration is not uncommon, as several parents may leave in order to improve their living standards, as well as to economically support those left behind, who comprise mainly children.

Parental migration may adversely affect the children left behind, especially when they are left in vulnerable situations, as not all are fortunate to attain effective substitute parental care (surrogate care giving) and guidance (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994; Smith *et al.* 2004; Jones *et al.* 2004; Pottinger and Brown 2006). Therefore, for some children the experience may foster healthy growth, development and strengthens kinship relations, while for others it may result in feelings of neglect, abandonment and loneliness (Brodber 1974; Senior 1991). However, despite the odds, the literature conveys that many parents continue to leave, ironically expressing the view that their actions are in the best interest of their children. Sadly though, the exploration of this social dimension of migration appears to be severely understated in migration literature despite its increasing global prevalence. In this regard, the paper recognizes the need to devote some attention to understand further, the nature of this phenomenon. Through an examination of related literature, it seeks to achieve the following objectives: provide a brief overview into the impact of parental absence as a consequence of migration on the family, particularly in relation to the parent-child dyad and its possible effects on the child left behind, uncover the

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<sup>3</sup>Tracing the patterns of parental migration and understanding the circumstances surrounding the emergence of such migratory patterns in relation to Trinidad

<sup>4</sup>Discerning factors that may contribute in facilitating the parental migratory process and thus, continuation of parental absence as a consequence of migration, resulting in parent-child separation with the child being left behind

circumstances underlying the emergence of parental migration and determine factors that facilitate its perpetuation. The preceding layout also indicates the structure of the paper.

## **BACKGROUND**

Most previous studies either have examined parental absence as a consequence of migration holistically, referring to the Caribbean region or have narrowed their focus to certain islands where the phenomenon appears most prevalent, notably Jamaica (St. Joseph's Convent (SJC) Young Leaders 1999; Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994; Smith *et al.* 2004; Pottinger and Brown 2006). In relation to Trinidad, little research has been done within this area, with just a few identified pieces of work addressing the situation locally (SJC Young Leaders 1999; Jones *et al.* 2004). This may lead to the assumption that while there are cases of parental migration in Trinidad, the phenomenon is not as prevalent in comparison to other Caribbean islands, which makes this an area that warrants further investigation. Therefore, this section seeks to briefly explore the nature of parental migration in relation to how separation from a parent(s) can affect the children left behind based on the findings of previous studies.

### **Physical Setting**

Trinidad is the larger of the two-island state of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the most southerly of the 2,000-mile arc of islands stretching from the coast of Florida along the eastern edge of the Gulf of Mexico all the way down to the mainland of South America, a chain of islands forming the eastern boundary of the Caribbean Sea, a region referred to as the Caribbean (Braithwaite 1975; Sharpe and Bishop 1993; Carger and Daniel 2005). Trinidad is the second largest within the English-speaking Caribbean with an area of 1,856 square miles (Newton 2004) and it lies just off the Northeastern coast of Venezuela (Braithwaite 1975).

Collectively, Trinidad and Tobago supports an ethnically heterogeneous, expanding population (*ibid.*; Gosine 1986, 1990) of roughly 1.3 of the approximate 250 million people comprising the Caribbean region (Sharp and Bishop 1993). Its highly diverse (multicultural, multiethnic) population draws from groups of varying ethnic backgrounds as well as combinations of them -

persons of “mixed” origins. However, despite its composite name, the islands vary markedly in relation to their ethnic compositions. In the case of Tobago, persons of African ancestry predominate (National Report of Trinidad and Tobago on Gender Violence against Women 1999), while for Trinidad, two ethnic groups constitute the majority in similar proportions - persons of African (40.6%) and East Indian (40.8%) descent (Sharpe and Bishop 1993; St. Bernard 1997; Jones *et al.* 2004; Chamberlain 2006).

In the case of Trinidad, ethnic variation makes the study of parental migration a bit more interesting. It facilitates comparison between the migratory practices among persons of African as well as East Indian descent. This is unlike most previous studies that explored the phenomenon mainly among persons of African origin, possibly since such persons constitute a majority within the Caribbean region and in this regard, may have been coincidentally studied the most (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994). Also, this may partly account for persons of African origin featuring most prominently in recent studies, as those who are likely to experience parental migration (SJC Young Leaders 1999; Jones *et al.* 2004; Smith *et al.* 2004). Therefore, studying parental absence as a consequence of migration in relation to Trinidad further informs whether this phenomenon is prevalent among persons of a particular ethnic group.

### **Deconstructing the Concept of Parental Migration**

The migratory process is a phenomenon that virtually all nations have experienced and continue to experience (Weeks 1986). Migration is not a recent occurrence, as for millennia persons have migrated in the process of settling new lands in search of a better quality of life (Held *et al.* 1999). In some instances, these migrants are parents and their movements are usually from developing to developed countries as Held *et al.* (1999) notes, migrants naturally tend to go where they perceive opportunities to be greater. In this regard, parental migration is mainly characteristics of Mediterranean countries (Pekin 1989), the Caribbean, Latin American countries and to a lesser extent, developed regions such as some of the more impoverished areas of Western Europe.

For purposes of this study, the term parent is used to refer not only to the biological caregiver, but also, an attachment figure, meaning any person(s) that cares for and nurtures the child and to whom he/she establishes a close, enduring relationship or is said to become attached (Bowlby 1979; Jones *et al.* 2004). Therefore, one can envisage the impact migration can have on the parent-child relationship, especially if it takes the form whereby parents migrate, leaving their children behind temporarily and at other times, permanently. The effects of parental absence and therefore, parent-child separation as a consequence of migration on the child(ren) depend on the circumstances surrounding the parents' movements – attributes of the migratory process.

In referring to movements across boundaries, after much deliberation, the decision has been taken to focus solely on external movements either to inter-island (regional) or international destinations, with or without return for at least three months<sup>5</sup>. The term 'migration' is used as opposed to 'emigration', which means permanent outflow for relocation to another country (Jones *et al.* 2004). The term migration is more all encompassing in that, it may not only suggest permanence but also 'temporary-ness' (*ibid.*). Temporary movement connotes return migration, which is an important and enduring intent among many migrants (Conway 1988; Thomas-Hope 1992, 1998; De Souza 1998, 2005; Chamberlain 1997; Conway *et al.* 2005).

Defining the nature of parental migration is not a simple task, which is partly the reason some attempt has been made to first clarify how the study perceives the terms separately, 'parent' followed by 'migration'. In their study of the impact of parental migration on children, Pottinger and Brown (2006) explain that migration from the Caribbean can take four forms, of which parental migration is one form. They define parental migration as when parents migrate for a defined time or indefinitely but have no intention of having their children live abroad. Therefore, their children remain in the Caribbean. For these children, the only hope of ever seeing their parents again will be through occasional visits to them or upon their return. Serial migration is seen to be a separate form that defines when parents migrate singly or together with intentions of later sending for their children. For Pottinger and Brown (2006), this pattern of migration

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<sup>5</sup>For purposes of this study a three months threshold helps differentiate across movements. Three months or more but not exceeding a year defines temporary migration, while exceeding a year defines long-term migration provided that return is expected. Permanent migration prolongs a year with uncertainty of return (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994; Smith *et al.* 2004; Jones *et al.* 2004; Pottinger and Brown 2006).

assumes a more permanent nature of family migration that occurs in stages. They see seasonal migration as yet another form that accounts for parent-child separation, as the parent will migrate for up to six months at a time to work abroad, returning upon the completion of his(her) work contract. Finally, the fourth form is family migration, which they define as when parents migrate with their family in one movement.

Further perplexing the conceptualization process of parental migration are notions other scholars have of the phenomenon. Instead of seeing it as a separate form of migration, it is sometimes used in an encompassing sense to refer to all migratory movements that involve parents leaving without their children regardless of the process involved - whether it is serial, permanent or seasonal (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994; SJC Young Leaders 1999; Smith *et al.* 2004; Jones *et al.* 2004; Le Franc cited in Wellcome Trust Posting 2004). Therefore, while acknowledging the usefulness of Pottinger and Brown's (2006) classification, it is evident that they have 'missed the tree to the forest' in failing to realize that all four forms of migration they specified with the exception of the latter, family migration, are all forms of parental migration. What they have used as their basis for distinguishing particular forms of migration are actually ways in which the parental migratory process may vary as some parents leave temporarily (seasonal), others leave their children behind indefinitely and do not send for them (prolonged, more permanent absence) and then there are parents who migrate with intentions of gradually sending for other family members (serial, chain or transitional migration).

In the case of family migration, Pottinger and Brown (2006) have seen this to be a separate form of migration and not parental migration. Family migration may assume a form of parental migration when it takes a serial, chain or transitional pattern, since the entire family may migrate but over time. Thus, parental migration can facilitate family migration, even though family migration is not parental migration.

Therefore, for purposes of this study, parental migration is viewed in its encompassing sense, which advocates that despite parents' intentions for their children left behind and their duration of stay abroad, the main factor is that parents have migrated and have been separated from their children. In relation to the Caribbean, serial migration is a prevalent and distinctive pattern of

parental migration (Smith *et al.* 2004), depicting the incomplete nature of the first movement, which is usually only the beginning to successive movements of family members left behind. The serial pattern may unfold in varying ways. It is often the case where one parent migrates first, leaving the children in the care of the other spouse, or both parents migrate leaving the children in the care of relatives and(or) family friends, promising either to send for them or return to them in the near future (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994; SJC Young Leaders 1999; Smith *et al.* 2004; Jones *et al.* 2004; Le Franc cited in Wellcome Trust Posting 2004).

In the study of second generation return migrants to the Caribbean, the children of parents who previously migrated from the region, observers have found that while some children accompanied their parents abroad they were later sent back to the region or were born abroad and later returned to the Caribbean basin without their parents (Potter 2005; Lee-Cunin 2005). Thus, while there is a great degree of flexibility in the way movements may occur, the process ultimately leads to parent-child separation. This may coerce the onlooker to question familial stability under such circumstances and the destinies of children who are caught in the milieu.

### **Migrating Parents and the Fate of the “Barrel Child”: For better or Worse?**

Often, migration is examined from the standpoint of its positive impact on the Caribbean's economy through remittances sent to improve family life of dependents left behind, its control of population growth and alleviation of the regions unemployment (Peach 1967; Bryce-Laporte 1979; Dias-Briquets 1983; Levine 1995; St. Bernard 2003). To some extent, this has meant overlooking how migration can directly contribute to family separation when it takes the form of parental migration (Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, January 19 2006). While its positive impact on many regional economies of remittances from Caribbean nationals living and working abroad cannot be denied, the possible negative social backlash of parental migration on its main dependents, the children left behind, cannot be ignored (*ibid.*). Thus, the human dimension as opposed to the economic dimension of migration, has received marginal focus (United Nations Economic and Social Council Report (UNESCO) 2005) and admittedly, while research into the experiences of migrants has mushroomed, little has been done in understanding the experiences of those left behind (Buijs 1993).

When one considers the propensity for Caribbean parents to practice serial migration and the intensity of their movements, it is not surprising that children left behind have been given their own identity. The trend is so prevalent in Jamaica, which is where the term ‘barrel children’ was actually coined and children labeled as such, are for obvious reasons (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994; De Souza 1998; Pottinger 2005). When parents migrate they often show some attempt to provide for their children’s material needs by sending them goods packaged in barrels from abroad, hence the association of the term “barrel” in describing this group of children. While this practice of remitting food, clothing and money back home is encouraged and appreciated, it signifies mere partial support (SJC Younger Leaders 1999) at the expense of the child’s psychological and emotional needs (Jones *et al.* 2004, which often proliferate with the his(her) desire to reunite with the parent as the “...material goods in a barrel can never replace the presence of a mother...” (SJC Young Leaders 1999, 1) and(or) a father.

While measures may be implemented to ensure that children left behind are well taken care of, the reality may reflect differently. There are many children who receive little or no physical or emotional nurturance from surrogate caregivers and experience a sense of abandonment by their parents’ prolonged absence (Senior 1991; Evans and Davies 1997). According to the Harvard Immigration Project conducted by Suarez-Orozco *et al.* (2002), as much as 85 percent of the children belonging to Caribbean migrant parents endure lengthy separation from their parents during the migration process (Pottinger and Brown 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising that negative behaviours can develop among some children experiencing parental absence as a consequence of migration, a situation that may deprive them of healthy interaction, love and attention from their parents (Leo-Rhynie 1993).

Clinical literature suggests that these children face issues of grief and loss that may also give rise to depression, emotional distress and behavioural disorders (Pottinger and Brown 2006; Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994; Jones *et al.* 2004). In their study of parent-child separation as a consequence of migration in relation to Trinidad, Jones *et al.* (2004) found that children separated from their parents represent approximately 10 percent of the referrals to the Child Guidance Clinic, Mt. Hope. Using a Children’s Depression Inventory (CDI) score, their findings suggest that children separated from parents as a consequence of migration tended to have a



higher CDI score and therefore, showed greater symptoms of depression than persons of the controlled sample. The results of the study provide strong evidence that suggests that among adolescents separation and loss have detrimental effects on their psychological state.

Some are left largely under-protected and unfortunately fall victims to abuse and ill treatment by those who they were left in the care of (surrogate caregivers). There is also the emergence of what Crawford-Brown and Rattray (1994) call the “parentified child”. In the event that a parent migrates, it is possible that younger children are left in the care of an older sibling (Senior 1991; Massiah 1983) who is expected to assume the “role of the parent”. According to Pottinger and Brown (2006), this usually involves assuming adult-like responsibilities prematurely, such as having to take care of younger siblings and managing large amounts of money remitted, which may become a way of life for some children.

Admittedly though, not all children are negatively impacted. Some children are fortunate to attain caregiving under a surrogate parenting system that effectively compensates for parental loss. Also, some are able to maintain contact with their parents through the virtues of postal, telecommunication and computer technology services. Even if circumstances are difficult, some children are able to build resilience and appear to not be affected (Daniel and Wassell 2002). Consequently, under varying circumstances, as well as depending on how those affected interpret the parental migratory process, some are able to effectively cope despite their experiences. Thus, there appears to be both negative and positive anecdotes on the possible effects of parental absence as a consequence of migration on the child left behind. In this regard, the study chooses to propose that even when experiences are similar, persons are likely to be impacted differently because of inconsistencies in the manner in which events may unfold.

#### *The Child's Perspective: A Case from Trinidad*

Benjamin (1995), now residing in England, relates her experience of parental absence when both her parents left for England from Trinidad, first her father and then her mother. She relives her experiences through her writing and remembers feeling devastated in learning that her mother had to also leave. She claims that in the absence of her father the “natural family” was

maintained as her mother took care of them (herself and three other siblings). She states that they had no grandparents and therefore, were taken in by godparents, but this resulted in siblings being separated, girls going to live with one godparent and the boys to live with another.

Under such circumstances Benjamin (1995) found it difficult to interact with others so she had fewer friends. Initially, she developed withdrawn, introvert behaviour and occasionally got involved in fights at school, often the one beating on others. She remembers how painful these experiences were to her at the age of eight and longed to see the day when she would leave to reunite with her brothers and parents, claiming that only then would she be able to retrieve a feeling of belongingness, love, gain proper guidance, feel confident and secure. This recall is possibly the experience of several other children in Trinidad. Luckily, Benjamin (1995) was able to cope and overcome her difficulties, which may not be the case for many others. Therefore, parental migration undoubtedly affects familial relationships, particularly between that of the parent and child, making this an area that requires further exploration.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Migration has played a pivotal role in Caribbean development and the burgeoning literature on Caribbean migration in relation to the economy, population studies and to some extent, social life lends testimony to this. In particular, Caribbean migration and Caribbean family life bear a special relationship, as for centuries Caribbean nationals have used migration as an economic tool for improving their families' living standards (Pottinger and Brown 2006). Therefore, the genesis of parental migration is embedded within the very fabric of the region's historical experiences, which according to scholars are largely migratory in nature (Harewood 1975; Marshall 1987; Hall 1988; Chamberlain 2001). To some extent, the historical experiences of Caribbean societies have dictated the circumstances facing Caribbean families, leading to the emergence of certain coping mechanisms from which certain migrating behaviours developed (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994).

Like its Caribbean counterparts, Trinidad is by no means an exception, as its migratory patterns are closely related to its historical experiences, which to a great extent have influenced family

life and movement of the island's people. Therefore, in deriving explanations into the origins and perpetuation of parental migration as far as Trinidad is concerned, the study provides a chronological build-up of circumstances surrounding the island's parental migratory trends, namely its changing migratory behaviours in relation to historical, economic and social experiences (macro-structure), the impact of those experiences on family life (micro-structure) and explanations into the perpetuation of parental migration. Using this approach is expected to provide some explanation into the origins and perpetuation of parental absence as a consequence of migration.

### **Changing Migratory Patterns: Historical, Economic and Social Experiences**

#### *Colonialism and Slavery*

Trinidad's rich history of struggle and resistance in the face of colonialism under various European powers, its experiences under slavery, emancipation and post-emancipation developments, such as indentureship are just some of the early pivotal landmark periods characterized by the movement of its people (Carger and Daniel 2005). Despite the island's close proximity to South America, the main determining future of Trinidad's economy and that of other English-speaking islands alike were instead their contact with Europe and European culture under decades of colonial rule (Braithwaite 1975; Hall 1988). While transforming Caribbean cultures and economies, such European influences also came to symbolize a continuing pattern of dependency between colonized regions and metropolitan centres (Hall 1988).

Recordings of the inflow and outflow of persons to and from Trinidad commenced as early as the late fifteenth century (1490s), the beginning of colonial rule with the coming of the Spanish colonials, followed by the French, Dutch and British (Rodman 1971). The Spanish were mercantilists as opposed to agriculturalists and perceived Trinidad to be poorly endowed. By 1776 they allowed the French and Dutch planters from other Eastern Caribbean islands to enter Trinidad, stimulating the subsequent expansion of a plantation economy. After 1787, agriculture expanded rapidly with sugar plantations, coffee, cocoa and cotton estates. The success of the

French and Dutch planters attracted the interest of the British, who captured the island in 1797 (ibid.).

By the early 1800s, then under British rule, Trinidad's agricultural economy was already diversified based on highly productive sugar, coffee and cocoa plantations. Therefore, unlike the smaller Caribbean islands, Trinidad was less dependent on solely sugar exports, as other export crops held important economic roles. Nonetheless, sugar was the island's economic mainstay at the time (Gosine 1986). Its pre-eminence within the Caribbean at that time was behind the idea that the region enjoyed 'comparative advantage' in sugar and should therefore concentrate and invest into sugar production (Braithwaite 1975). The island remained under British rule until 1962 when it achieved political independence (Gosine 1986). Since then, the migratory experiences of the island and the region alike have never ceased, though they may have abated at times.

For most of the colonial era, sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, the Caribbean region experienced the inflow of Africans in large numbers from the West Coast of Africa under a system of plantation slavery (Harewood 1975; Brown 2006). At the time, apart from providing labour on the sugar plantation, slavery created the basis of the social structure for most Caribbean islands (Braithwaite 1975), and it also explains the coming of Africans who now constitute a majority within the Caribbean region (Hall 1988). Under the plantation slave system, African men and women were largely restricted by harsh and brutal living conditions (Plaza 2000) that infringed to some extent, on their ability to successfully establish some rigid form of family life (Matthews 1973; Barrow 1996). Instead, slaves were the property of the planters who saw procreation as a cost effective way of increasing their labour force.

However, while family life was difficult to come by, research into Trinidad's slave family conveys that forms of family life did exist (Higman 1978). Within the family life that existed then there was no denying of the close mother-child relationship (ibid.; Craton 1991). This is not surprising though, since while a family system may have existed, little regard was given to maintain its structure, as that was not of major concern to the plantation owner. Families were separated as family members were sold to other planters, sometimes on other islands. While

children born into slavery spent most of their time with their mothers, the formation of a strong mother-child dyad resulted while a father-child relationship may have never existed (Matthews 1973), as African men were prime assets when trading in slaves and many of them were sold between plantations as well as islands. Thus, under the system of slavery, there is reason to believe that the migration of parents had existed in an involuntary form (forceful). According to Marks and Vessuri (1983), forceful migration is when the person who is moving has either no decision or hardly any say about the decision to migrate, which one could imagine was a major plight of the male African slave.

### *Immediate Post-Emancipation Era*

Marshall (1987) claims that with respect to the Anglo Caribbean, large-scale emigration was observed in the period after emancipation of the slaves in 1838. Migratory patterns were largely inter-territorial (inter-island movement), as mainly freed African males made their way from the smaller islands such as St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat and Antigua, to larger islands, namely Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, in the hope of attaining better wages on expanding plantations (Roberts 1981; Marshall 1987; Brown 2006). However, inter-island movements were also observed before emancipation. In the case of Trinidad, after abolition of the slave trade, while Africans were no longer entering the island directly from Africa, they were coming in large numbers from nearby islands mainly as a consequence of planters trading in slaves across islands.

The immediate post-emancipation period brought with it major uncertainties among the freed slaves who were eager to move far away from the plantation as possible to start afresh (Samaroo 1999). Their movements were transitional in that, internal movements to urban centres, as well as periodic or seasonal migration (some went back to the plantations temporarily during the interim) preceded external movements to other islands (Harewood 1975; Gosine 1990, 1986; Hall 1988). Their destinations were the larger Caribbean islands, usually those perceived to be most prosperous, which included Trinidad. Inter-island movement is relatively cheaper, fairly easy and frequently rewarding for most migrants (Reubens 1961). Thus, during the immediate post-emancipation period Trinidad witnessed a persistent inflow of persons as opposed to an

outflow, as experienced by the smaller Caribbean islands. During that period of inter-island migration approximately 19, 000 persons from the Eastern Caribbean moved to Guyana and Trinidad (Duany 1994).

The end of slavery marked a period of panic for sugar planters, especially on islands where sugar plantations were still very much in full operation such as Trinidad and Guyana. It was a time when the Caribbean witnessed waves of emigrating exslaves (freed Africans), as emancipation granted freedom of mobility, a freedom that they exercised at every opportunity (Marshall 1987). Such movements away from the plantation resulted in an acute shortage of labour on sugar plantations (Dabydeen 1995). In the case of Trinidad, planters sought to alleviate the labour problem by taking advantage of inter-island migratory patterns to find a reliable, yet cheap labour force to compensate for the loss of labour on sugar plantations, as some freed Africans were willing to take up such employment. At the time, Trinidadian sugar workers were receiving wages that surpassed those of their Caribbean counterparts, which was added incentive to attract persons from other Caribbean islands.

The migratory patterns witnessed in the post-emancipation era further explain the beginnings of parent-child separation as a consequence of migration. In the post-emancipation period freed Africans were on the move in search of a better life. The movements were similar to those observed during slavery, in that they were still heavily sex selective as males constituted the majority and it was possible that some were fathers leaving their families behind, wives and children. However, what has changed is what Philpott (1973) refers to as 'migrant ideology', meaning that African men as opposed to women were moving away in larger numbers from plantation life in the search of a new start and not as traded commodities. The movement in the post-emancipation era was largely voluntary, as freed African slaves mostly men, were migrating on their own free will, as Marks and Vessuri (1983) state, voluntary migration is when the decision to migrate is based on choice.

### *The Period of Indentureship*

The planters also sourced labourers from other countries under a system of indentureship, which meant that labourers were contracted for a period of five years after which they were free to return to their “mother countries” (Gosine 1994). By the early nineteenth century to the second decade of the twentieth century, alongside the inflow of freed African from other islands, Trinidad also witnessed an influx of immigrants from China, the Middle East, India and Portugal, under whatever terms they could most economically be obtained (Harewood 1975; Bishop and Sharpe 1993; Samaroo 1999; Jones *et al.* 2004). Among those migrants, East Indians from India were brought in the majority to Trinidad (over 144,000 East Indians) between 1845 and 1917, accounting for the present East Indian population in Trinidad (Harewood 1975; Ramdin 1995).

They came under the impression that they were heading for the ‘promise land’ and a better life in escaping India’s harsh socio-economic and political conditions (Gosine 1990; Dabydeen 1995). They were found to be best suited to climatic conditions, less resistant in comparison to other groups and were also skilled agricultural workers (Gosine 1986; Ramdin 1995; Dabydeen 1995; Samaroo 1999). They were largely responsible for boosting Trinidad’s sugar production during the nineteenth century, a time when other English-speaking islands were suffering declines (Gosine 1994; Ramdin 1995). Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Trinidad’s population was already highly heterogeneous, mainly as a consequence of immigration.

Initially, the East Indian labourers were considered to be transients, as upon completion of their contracts they were expected to return to India (Ramdin 1995; Chamberlain 2006). Planters living-up to the plan, repatriated some East Indians (Dabydeen 1995), but then found the venture to be quite costly and so they enticed the ex-indentured workers to settle for parcels of land instead (Richardson 1975). Many Indians willingly acceded to the alternative of land after envisaging the hardships that they may face upon returning to India such as social, economic and political unrest, a reality of many repatriates who themselves later returned to Trinidad to rejoin their relatives who they had left behind (Gosine 1990, 1994; Dabydeen 1995). The “return-trip substitute” decision meant a change in Trinidad’s migratory flow and social structure, as

alongside the persistent inflow of persons at the time, there was also an outflow of persons as some East Indians were repatriated, but the majority remained permanently (Chamberlain 2006), establishing roots and for some it meant completely abandoning the idea of ever returning to India (Gosine 1990, 1994; Dabydeen 1995). Therefore, the period of indentureship brought with it, the massive influx of Indian immigrants in the majority, supposedly sojourners but turned out being settlers (Ramdin 1995).

When compared to slavery, life under indentureship was different to some extent. For some observers, indentureship was nothing more than an extension of slavery. However, some of the major differences include that it led to the introduction of a new ethnic group, the East Indians, whose population grew to proportions similar to those of African ancestry. Under indentureship workers received wages and a system of family life emerged (Klass 1961). The indentured labourers tried to maintain the same patriarchal structure of family life they were accustomed to in India but conditions under planters' rule made it difficult. In comparison to the freed Africans, the East Indians were less likely to leave the island with the exception of the few who were repatriated after indentureship. Instead, they remained largely in the non-urban areas of the island as agricultural workers (Chamberlain 2006).

Unlike the Africans, the East Indians had an advantage in having received parcels of land and some had accumulated savings, which gave them a head start in establishing a way of life on their own after indentureship. Even after indentureship several East Indians remained working on the estates. Instances of parents migrating in search for work leaving behind dependents were uncommon of among the East Indians. They mainly engaged in internal family migration, with everyone moving together. At least during the immediate post indentured period, venturing externally to other islands or abroad was not a means through which the majority of East Indians chose to re-establish their lives.

#### *Migration to Destinations beyond the Region: Latter Nineteenth Century*

The movement of persons substantially within the region characterized the earlier part of the nineteenth century, while the latter half of the century (1880 to 1921) experienced the movement



of persons outside of it, a major shift in migratory movements (Roberts 1981; Brown 2006). By 1885, inter-territorial migratory patterns abated with the downfall in the sugar industry. That gave way to movement beyond Caribbean destinations, as many saw it as an opportunity to escape harsh economic conditions mainly due to depression in the sugar industry and the effects of disastrous hurricanes, which was an added incentive to emigrate beyond regional boundaries (Roberts 1981). External migration persisted into the beginning of the twentieth century. Those leaving were in search of higher earnings, better living standards and even held intentions of establishing permanent family life abroad (ibid.). External travel took the form of movement to countries such as Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and the United States of America (USA) - largely to the Hispanic Caribbean and Americas (Harewood 1975; Brown 2006).

Opportunities for external migration presented themselves especially with the construction of the Panama Canal and the expansion of sugar and banana plantations in Central America (Duany 1994). The construction of the Panama Canal attracted several Caribbean islanders, including Trinidadians but the majority of persons leaving the region were from Jamaica and Barbados (Hall 1988; Newton 2004). Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic were likely destinations at the time with the establishment of their banana industries that attracted labourers from neighbouring islands for railway construction to ensure swift transportation of the perishable fruit (Roberts 1981; Hall 1988). It was also during that time when the United States (US) became interested in Cuba's sugar industry, which resulted in the US also welcoming Caribbean immigrants (Roberts 1981).

Although, indentureship had already ended those migrating out of the region at that time were predominantly male contract workers of African descent. Women were still invisible in migration studies and were likely to be left behind along with the children, while the men who had left to seek employment were the ones they depended on and awaited the return of (Gordon 1990; Buijs 1993). During that time, the pattern of parental migration was heavily sex selective and assumed the form of "male absenteeism", as the father left but he was expected to return on completion of his contract and so, he was not accompanied by his wife or children and did not have to later send for them. The movement was mainly seasonal and therefore, temporary. At the

time, the sex selective nature of the movement meant that children were being deprived of their father's influence and as expected, the mother-child relationship grew stronger. While many male contract workers did return when their contracts were finished to reunite with their wives and children, there were cases where some never returned and discontinued all familial relationships with those they had left behind.

All the movements, prior the arrival of the East Indians and even during the post indentureship period largely involved persons of African descent or, so it seems upon examining the literature on Caribbean migration. In this regard reference is made to Samaroo (1999) who expresses the view that the outflow of Indo-Caribbeans is a vast area of darkness, as basic information and exploration into the migratory patterns of the East Indians to external destinations from the Caribbean has not been widespread, partly because such patterns of migrations has not been pronounced in comparison to movements involving those of Africans decent. This may result in misleading assumptions, particularly that persons of a particular ethnic group are more mobile (ibid.).

### *Twentieth Century Trinidad*

The period from 1920 to 1940 was a time of reduced out-migration (Roberts 1981; Duany 1994). It was the period of the Great Depression and many destination areas enacted restrictive immigration laws that increased opposition to continued labour migration from other countries (ibid.). This period marked a reduction in emigration but witnessed an increase in return migration, as thousands of migrants were repatriated from Cuba and Panama to Haiti, Jamaica and Barbados. The return migrants were those who had left in the latter nineteenth century and had completed their contracts. For the majority of these migrants the move overseas was being done for a specific time period and purpose (De Souza 1998; Brown 2006). In comparison to massive previous outflows only 100,000 Caribbean people emigrated during that period (Marshall 1987).

A similar pattern of migration was observed in relation to Trinidad. From 1920 up to the 1930s, the island experienced only intermittent migrant outflows, as internal (from rural to urban areas)

and return movements (migrant inflows) were substantially greater. The period marked the development of the oil industry and Trinidad was seen to be the expanding oil centre of the region. The discovery of oil in the early twentieth century changed Trinidad's patterns of economic development and further differentiated it from other English-speaking islands in the Caribbean. As anticipated, the island witnessed an influx of migrants. Persons from St. Vincent and Grenada came in search of employment opportunities and better living standards (Reuben 1961). Within the island, the newly ex-indentured sugar workers as well as freed Africans were migrating to the oil producing areas.

The economy was thriving mainly on fortunes of the oil industry as the period saw the decline in sugar<sup>6</sup>, disease of the cocoa crops, severe droughts, and drastically increased rural unemployment. Thus, to a large extent movements during the 1930s were as a result of major economic hardship - fewer jobs, poor health conditions, low wages, increasing disparity between the rich and poor and foreign ownership in the oil and sugar industries. In cases where persons opted to go abroad prior to the 1930s, the major destinations at the time were to Venezuela, Curacao and Aruba, as those countries were establishing oil refineries that created new economic opportunities that attracted migrants from nearby countries such as Trinidad and Barbados (Duany 1994). There was also some movement to Europe, particularly the United Kingdom (UK) as opposed to the US. Movement to the US had ceased by 1924 due to legislation restricting the inflow of immigrants, resulting in the UK becoming the only major industrial country to which large-scale migration from the British Caribbean was possible (Hall 1988; Brown 2006).

Movements to the metropolises in larger numbers was observed predominantly from 1940 and abated to some extent by 1969 (Duany 1994). Primarily, movement was directed to North American and European metropolis (ibid.). By the middle of the twentieth century (1950s), the drive to rebuild Europe after World War II led to the drastic movement of many Anglo Caribbeans mostly to the United Kingdom (UK) and later to other regions of Europe. This marked a respite of almost two decades before external migration resumed substantially (Brown

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<sup>6</sup> Fall in the sugar industry was mainly as a consequence of termination of East Indian indentureship and demands for higher wages in the agricultural sector

2006). The rebuilding process called for manpower that was not available in those countries so outsourcing was necessary (ibid.). Those trends persisted until the early 1960s, as while many left to go to Europe prior to the 1960s, the passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962 restricted movement into the UK (Hall 1988). Once again migratory outflows were diverted to North America, mainly to Canada and parts of the US, especially since those countries were recruiting immigrants at the time and so immigration regulations were relaxed in 1965 (Roberts 1981; Hall 1988). For some migrants intentions were to return but for many it led to permanent migration, as overtime other family members were sent for, others returned after a long stay abroad (sojourners) and some returned on accumulating monies after brief visits abroad (Brown 2006).

Most migrants leaving Trinidad at the time were still predominantly males but the movement of women had started to gain momentum. The mother is by far the most significant person in the child's life (Rodman 1971) so one can envisage what it meant for a child to learn that his or her mother had to migrate. The sex selective nature of migration abated to some extent and movements were mainly to the UK and later to Canada and the US. The returning migrants at the time were those who had migrated at the beginning of the twentieth century and completed their contracts. They were now reuniting with the families they had left behind.

Among the Trinidadians leaving for the UK the persons of African ancestry were in the majority and according to the Arnold (1997), they envisaged their stay to be temporary and so had no plans to have their families join them. As years passed the vision of returning home faded and they stayed. The pattern of migration observed was largely serial as men migrated first to secure employment and housing before their partners followed. The latter would later arrive with one or more or no children (ibid.). Children were mainly left behind with relatives. Estimates show that during peak migration periods of West Indians to Britain 1953 to 1956, 162, 000 individuals came to Britain of whom 52% were men, 40% women and only 8% children (ibid.).

A major factor during that time period (1960s) was that East Indians had started migrating in larger numbers. In Trinidad, the movement of the East Indians coincided with major social, political and economic turmoil. According to Gosine (1990), because immigration laws were in

effect, migrants were mainly go to the US and Canada. The East Indians were going largely to the US and they did so predominantly during 1965 (ibid.). Many East Indians were leaving with their entire family as intentions were largely to stay abroad after the first (permanent migration) movement (Gosine 1982). It was also during that time when women were migrating in larger numbers in search of employment, but largely women of African descent. The movement was no longer as sex selective as before, men as well as women were migrating. By the latter twentieth century East Indians' outflow increased as economic hardships as well as social and political tensions increased.

There were several historical events surrounding movements to developed countries, mostly issues related to the refurbishment of immigration laws and other politically motivated events. A major issue at the time was passing of the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962, which according to Marshall (1987) and Duany (1994) effectively halted the movement of Caribbean migrants to Britain and redirected them towards the US. Also, during the 1960s several Caribbean countries gained their independence such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago that allowed for the establishment of diplomatic relations with the US and for measures to be taken to facilitate direct migration to that country. For Duany (1994), this was further reinforced with passing of the US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that liberalized the US immigration policy and permitted large numbers of Caribbean immigrants to enter the country.

The movement of persons is also influenced by their perceptions on societal stability. Violence and conflict are pervasive aspects of all societies and Trinidad experienced two major acts of violence, both during the latter part of the twentieth century - the 1970 uprising of the masses under the Black Power Movement and the 1990 Muslimeen parliamentary hostage revolt (Duncan 1990). Both events took place against a background of severe economic hardship and growing political hostility. Government policies were perceived as favouring the middle and upper classes with minimal concern for the working class people, the masses. Thus, twentieth century Trinidad witnessed events triggered by economic hardships, distrust, growing suspicion and hostility towards the government of the day and its policies. The latter twentieth century was riddled with problems—unemployment and underemployment, poor living standards among the masses (working class) and stark inequity that led to divisions within the society with respect to

class and ethnicity. With heightened political and social upheaval, persons were leaving the island.

Events that led to the 1970 protest were largely against governmental policies that directly resulted from the implementation of “industrialization by invitation,” by which the government provided incentives to encourage foreign investment (Stewart 1995). The programme was expected to stimulate economic development and reducing unemployment, instead the initiative largely failed to achieve its major objective, reducing unemployment as employment creation was disappointingly small (ibid.; Harewood 1975). There was also increased suspicion of government policies that appeared to favour the foreign multinationals as opposed to locals, which only resulted in increasing disparity among the people (Harewood 1975). The lack of economic opportunities led to an increase in the number of persons migrating both Afro- and Indo- Trinidadians (ibid). Referring to Government’s Statistics (1976), Stewart (1995) compares across three years : in 1960, outward migration stood at 100, by 1965, the figure had increased to 3,100 and by 1970 had peaked to 17,400.

The Black Power revolt attracted many protestors, particularly working class persons predominantly of African descent. They voiced their concerns over rising unemployment, perceptions of inequality and injustice. Although the East Indians were facing similar concerns their participation was minimal as they felt partly threatened (Gosine 1986). They saw the movement as not reflective of their experiences as indentured plantation workers and they refused to identify with the term ‘black,’ which they associated with persons of African ancestry and felt the same was about the 1970 movement (ibid). Therefore, it was also a period marred by heightened suspicion and turmoil between the Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians (Ramdin 1995) that triggered the movement of the East Indians in larger proportions (Gosine 1990). Some left with intentions of not returning, leaving with their entire families that largely involved all leaving at the same time as opposed to serial migration, a pattern of migration found to be of prevalence among those of African ancestry. Thus, the latter twentieth century witnessed events that forcefully drove the East Indians to leave the island (political violence and ethnic clashes).

After the Black Power Movement, Trinidad reaped great fortunes with the rapid increase in the price of oil between 1973 and 1979 (ibid; Reddock *et al.* 1996). Overall, the government was able to regain some control of the economy and they also planned to diversify the economy so as to be less dependent on the oil industry (ibid.). They did so after embarking on a spate of borrowing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Despite hefty monetary gains from the oil industry, the government had to borrow in order to diversify the economy since the initiative came on stream just as the price of oil was plummeting (ibid.). With the drastic fall in oil exports, Trinidad was facing an economic crisis in its balance of payment account and an inability to meet debt servicing that led to full implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) by 1990. Under structural adjustment external debt drained financial resources, the government reduced expenditure in the social services that increased human suffering and economic contraction resulted in a rapid increase in unemployment. In addition to the widespread increases in poverty, homelessness and criminal activities, a significant effect of that period of economic crisis was large-scale migration (Reddock *et al.* 1996). Referring to the 1990 census it is seen between 1980 and 1990 over 300,000 Trinidadians left mainly to the US and Canada (ibid.).

With tensions flying high and several attempts made to attract government's attention, mutiny and retaliation at the extreme was experienced in 1990. The government of Trinidad and Tobago received its second major 'wake up call' within the same century, when members of a religious group, the Jamaat Al Muslimeen, held the country under siege (Duncan 1990). Over the six days ordeal about 40 people died and there were millions in property losses due to looting (ibid.). The event brought with it bloodshed, religious friction and heightened concern for the island's future, all critical issues that led to increase external migration of persons, both East Indians and Africans.

#### *Contemporary Migratory Patterns: Twenty-first Century Movement*

The world has undergone dramatic changes since the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries that undoubtedly have affected migratory patterns. According to Held *et al.* (1999), the lowering of national boundaries as a consequence of globalization has resulted in the establishment of a global job market, resulting in the free flow of persons from one destination to another where

there is demand for their skills. Such migratory trends eliminate the need for persons to permanently relocate. Instead, movements are increasingly back and forth between destination and island of origin. These contemporary migratory patterns are direct results of the growing global labour market as persons are migrating, returning, migrating and returning again (Thomas-Hope 1985). Thus, contemporary migratory patterns in relation to the Caribbean are no longer simply single and final departures and returns but most often imply a continual process of departures and arrivals (Stouck 2005).

This continuous, seemingly circular pattern of migration is seen to be largely transnational in nature, as migrants maintain home bases in two countries (Thomas-Hope 1985; Stouck 2005). For Chamberlain (1998), fluidity as opposed to fixity characterizes the contemporary migrant, for whom allegiances are both portable and elastic. She elaborates by stating that this migratory trend is an area of central concern with respect to Caribbean migration not only because of its longevity but also because of its impermanence. Conway (1988) reiterates the temporary nature of contemporary migration by stating that it is associated with a pattern of continual contact with those back home and terms such regular visits, return, re-migration, bi-furcated migration and circular migration have all become part of the lexicon in explaining contemporary Caribbean migration.

Caribbean families continue to actively use migration as a coping mechanism as it provides persons the opportunity to live and work in one country, while simultaneously supporting their dependents in the country of origin (Thomas-Hope 1992). Once effectively managed, transnational migration enables Caribbean families to take advantage of opportunities abroad without having to permanently sever familial ties back home and as such, these families are referred to as transnational families (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994).

This change in migratory patterns was observed across all social classes and increased the prevalence of parental migration, which usually assumed a temporary nature with the expected return of the parent. It also further perplexed the migratory experiences of children left behind. In some cases, the child accompanies the parent but later sent back to the Caribbean, left behind from the very onset or reunites with the parent abroad but due to the child's inability to effectively adjust, he/she is then sent back to the Caribbean (ibid.; SJC Young Leaders 1999).



Amazingly though, despite how confusing and disorderly this arrangement may seem it has been perpetuated for quite some time within the region.

In the case of Trinidad, transnational migratory patterns largely characterize movements within the twenty-first century. For many Trinidadians it meant elimination of their traditional notions of permanently leaving or returning. It led to a “one foot in, one foot out” migratory lifestyle (De Souza 1998, 248). Recent migratory trends are not as unidirectional as before with distinct periods of migrant inflows and outflows. Instead, it has assumed diverse patterns of movements all taking place simultaneously. One may think that transnational migration would have helped to alleviate the problem of parents having to migrate for prolonged periods and those of East Indian descent may consider such movements. Largely though, the pattern of serial migration still perpetuates itself among the Afro-Trinidadians. This was also found in a twenty-first century study into parent–child separation as a consequence of migration in relation to Trinidad in which more children of African descent had a parent or parents who had migrated than children of Indian descent within a ratio of approximately 5 children of African descent to 1 child of East Indian descent (Jones *et al.* 2004).

## **EXPLANATIONS INTO FAMILY LIFE AND THE PERPETUATION OF PARENTAL MIGRATION**

Now that there is some understanding into the macro events (social, political, economic and historical) surrounding movements of the people, it is possible to examine the particulars underlying such movements. In this regard, an attempt is made to explore the family life of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians, the extent to which the family facilitates and is accepting of migration and ultimately, provide some explanation into the perpetuation of parental absence as a consequence of migration.

### **Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians: Cultural Attitudes towards Parental Migration**

The islands comprising the region are relatively small, also resources and opportunities are extremely limited (Marshall 1987). Therefore, the continual movement of persons to destinations

of perceived betterment is not surprising and so, migration is expected to be a never-ending process (Pastor 1985). Thus, understanding Caribbean family life in relation to its cultural attitude towards migration may help to uncover some of the factors that are likely to facilitate parental absence for migratory reasons, factors that may have partially contributed to its origins but central to understanding its perpetuation.

Before attempting to understand the dynamics surrounding migration and the way of life of these two ethnic groups, Afro- and Indo- Trinidadians, it seems relevant to briefly examine the context within which they have been studied as far as the Caribbean family is concerned. The literature suggests variations in the extent to which studies on family life between these two ethnic groups have been conducted. It is observed that the way of life of Afro-Trinidadians largely parallels that of the Afro-Caribbeans, a group that has gained momentous attention with reference to family life within the Caribbean. Persons of East Indian descent are predominant in merely two of the islands within the Caribbean, Trinidad and Guyana and have attained in-depth assessment mainly by researchers focusing on family life on either or both islands. Thus, while studies into the Afro-Caribbean family emerged during the earlier part of the twentieth century (See Frazier 1939; Simey 1946; Herskovits 1947; Matthews 1953; Henriques 1953; R.T. Smith 1956; Clarke 1957), research into the East Indian family mainly gained momentum during the latter half of the twentieth century (See Klass 1961; Niehoff 1960; Gosine 1986, 1990; Jha 1974; Nevadomsky 1980; Mohammed 1986; Vertovec 1992).

For much of Trinidad's history, Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians have lived distinct, separate lives. Gosine (1986) referring to Basch (1978) provides a possible explanation in stating that the historical peculiarities underlying Trinidad's plantation and later oil economy largely have accounted for each ethnic group gravitating towards their own socio-cultural and economic niches by the twentieth century, a time when heightened political, economic and social tensions drew groups further apart. As time progressed, the ethnic bifurcation only expanded as the sense of competition for scarce economic resources in urban areas increased (Gosine 1986).

Upon emancipation the Africans fled to the urban centres and monopolized the urban labour force, while after indentureship the East Indians remained largely on plantations and dominated

the non-urban agricultural labour force (Richardson 1975; Chamberlain 2006). By the turn of the twentieth century, the acquisition of education led some East Indians to urban centres with the hope becoming part of the urban labour market (Gosine 1986; Ramdin 1995). This resulted in the rise of ethnic tensions as those of African descent felt threatened that the East Indians may take their jobs. Many of these urbanized East Indians were able to move away from plantation employment and distinguished themselves mainly in the professions and business sector (ibid.), which also enabled them to achieve social mobility.

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most of the freed Africans as well as ex-indentured East Indians and their descendants (Afro- and Indo- Trinidadians) constituted the masses at the lower stratum (working class) while those of “mixed” ancestry (coloureds) and the multinational expatriates as well as plantation owners constituted the middle and upper classes respectively. Most observers found that the migration of persons in the search of work and better living standards emerged as a coping mechanism mainly among persons of the lower stratum, Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians alike.

However, while both ethnic groups took advantage of opportunities to leave the island and engaged in family migration, further research conveys that their migratory patterns tended to vary. Among the Afro-Caribbean migrating family, it is often the case where a parent or both parents leave first and later send for their children and this serial migratory pattern of parental migration is also reflective of the Afro-Trinidadian migrating family. In the case of the East Indians, this “step by step”, chain or transitional migratory pattern is less prevalent. Instead, family migration whereby the entire family leaves together is mostly observed. However, it will be misleading to believe that children of East Indian descent are not likely to be separated from their parents as a consequence of migration as there are instances when the intent of the parent is to return, for example if they left for seasonal employment or contract work and if the entire family migrated but due to coping difficulties abroad children are sometimes sent back.

## **Socio-Cultural Factors Enabling Parents to Migrate**

There are various aspects of Caribbean family life that facilitate parental migration and largely account for its perpetuation. These socio-cultural factors greatly dictate the circumstances that people endure, which in turn influence the migratory behaviours of Caribbean families (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994). They also convey how Caribbean societies have evolved to accommodate and perpetuate a culture of migration (Thomas-Hope 1992), a widely accepted phenomenon and thus, sometimes even expected of family members.

Some of the most common socio-cultural factors that accommodate parental migration are kinship networks reinforced through particular familial structures, the practice of child shifting, intergenerational migratory practices, social networks and also land tenure practices. While these factors are not in any way unique to Caribbean societies, their presence and wide acceptance have contributed to a more fluid way of life within the region that facilitates a form of migration whereby the child can be left behind while the parent migrates.

### *Familial Arrangements*

The Caribbean family has attracted much attention from as early as the third decade of the twentieth century largely over concerns for what classical researchers' claimed to be its "deviant" nature (Frazier 1939; Herskovits 1947; Henriques 1953). This traditional perception of Caribbean families continued well into the twentieth century (Plaza 2000). The attempts of the early British-based researchers were to study what they perceived to be the pathological family organization of Afro-Caribbean families and come up with solutions (Barrow 1986; *ibid.*). It was not until 1956 and 1957 that more reliable studies came on stream in an attempt to understand the nature of the African family within the context of its historical underpinnings that in turn, influenced a certain way of life among the persons of African ancestry (RT Smith 1956; Clarke 1957). The more recent writers have revisited the Caribbean family, adopting a more realistic outlook, theorizing on its emergence and reinterpreting the roles and responsibilities of its members (Barrow 1996; Black 1995; Massiah 1982; Mohammed 1986; Reddock *et al.* 1996).

Though not a unique feature of the African family of low socio-economic status, as it can be found across social class, the fluid nature of familial forms enables family members to quickly adopt coping mechanisms and adapt to adverse, unpredictable socio-economic circumstances (Chevannes 1993; Barrow 1996). This may lend itself to explaining the diverse range of familial forms observed within the region. The East Indians also bear testimony to variations in familial forms but to a lesser extent in comparison to those of African descent. In relation to both ethnic groups, the extended family and its various extensions are quite instrumental in facilitating parental migration, through its immense support in child-care activities (Victor 1986; Gordon 1990). The extended familial arrangement also acts as a 'social buffer', to the extent that it provides a source of assistance and support be it emotional, economic or even social and a variety of services inclusive of nurturing and protecting the children of migrant parents, especially if both parents are employed and absent for some time (Gordon 1990; Gopaul-McNicol 1993; St. Bernard 1998).

However, in terms of its emergence and purpose, the extended family is found to vary in relation to ethnic background. Unlike the system which obtains in the wider Caribbean among persons of African descent whereby the extended family persists mainly as a "survival strategy", among those of East Indian descent, the genesis of the extended family is embedded in formalized family rituals and is therefore, part of East Indian tradition and not merely established as a coping mechanism to deal with financial difficulties (Victor 1986). The extended family structure is a critical pillar that demarcates the traditions of East Indian family life (Klass 1961; Niehoff 1960) from other ethnic groups.

It assumes a structure that is male dominated with the men assuming leadership roles while women assumes a more subordinate, supportive role (Williams 1986). Thus, if the need arises for a parent to migrate, the pre-existence of such a family makes it possible for the child to be left behind. Family life for many East Indians has often been this way but with agents of social change this custom is disappearing (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, the benefits of maintaining this familial arrangement is widely acknowledged among persons of African and East Indian descent for its child-care services, financial, emotional support and in the case of the East Indians, it enables them to perpetuate customary family life.

Variations in extended family forms have also emerged. Although not unique to the Caribbean or among persons of a particular social class, or ethnic group, the extended family, formed along matrilineal family ties is found to be a common support system among persons of lower socio-economic status. Although extended in nature, this familial arrangement has been distinguished as the 'mother-headed, matrilineal or matrifocal family', to signify the central position of the mother and maternal kin as the main-caretakers.

In the case of Trinidad, it is more likely to be observed among persons of African as opposed to East Indian ancestry. On comparing the proportions of female headed households across the Caribbean, Massiah (1982) found that among the East Indians of Trinidad it is a mere 27% when compared to its prevalence in Jamaica (33.8%), Barbados (42.9%) and Grenada (45.3%), all islands in which persons of African descent predominate. Among those East Indians who head households they are more likely to be widows than single mothers (ibid.). Explaining such variations escapes this study, but the major point here is that the extended family form along matrilineal family ties provides a central support system that can assist mothers in providing and caring for their children (Robertson 1987; Chevannes 1993; Barrow 1996; St. Bernard 1998).

In relation to migration, the matrilineal family arrangement greatly provides the social and economic support that made and continues to make it possible for mainly Afro-Caribbean women to emigrate in large numbers. The very nature of this familial form accommodates the periodic absence of the female caregiver, as children are left in the care of their grandmother and other maternal kin who provide emotional, mental and physical support (Thomas-Hope 1992). This practice is perceived as being acceptable and necessary to ensure survival and therefore, such perceptions largely accounts for its perpetuation, which in turn also helps to explain the perpetuation of parental absence as a consequence of migration.

Additionally, it is also common for individuals to deliberately establish unions that require minimal commitment so as to provide them sufficient leeway in taking advantage of opportunities as they arise. For instance, Rubenstein (1980) who examined the family forms in St. Vincent advocates that persons choose extra-residential unions (multiple partnering) instead of

marital unions because it affords some level of independence and lacks well-defined obligations, thereby allowing one to terminate a relationship at will. In turn, this enables the individual to take advantage of labour and migratory opportunities to better provide for themselves and support their families. Thus, the conjugal relationship in association with the form that the family subsequently assumes may certainly help to foster parental migration.

### *Child-shifting*

In several instances, reliance on kinship networks results in the child being moved intermittently from one relative to another. This practice is well known within the region and is referred to by several terms: fosterage, passing-on and the most commonly used, child-shifting (Philpott 1973; Brodber 1974; Gordon 1987; Evans and Davies 1997; Senior 1991). Child-shifting can be seen as the informal adoption of children by members of the kinship network (Jones *et al.* 2004) in an adaptive response that provides parents the necessary time free of child caring responsibilities (Reddock 1986; Ellis 1986; Russell-Brown *et al.* 1997). Scholars researching Caribbean family life have found it customary for children to be looked after by the wider kinship group in the event that their parents are unable to do so effectively (Clarke 1957; Rodman 1971; Gordon 1987; Arnold 1997; St. Bernard 2003).

In this regard, child-shifting can also afford parents the opportunity to migrate and improve their abilities in providing for their families. Reinforcing this claim Plaza (2000) states that child – shifting makes “shift migration” possible, in that the child is left in the care of a relative, customarily the maternal grandmother, while his(her) own mother migrates and overtime sends for him(her) and other siblings left behind.

Child-shifting is a system which has been handed down over time, it is widely accepted within the region and practiced largely among persons of lower socio-economic status (Senior 1991) and in the case of Trinidad between both persons of African and East Indian descent. In his study of the lower class Afro-Trinidadian family, Rodman (1971) he found child–shifting to be a widely common practice. The family is largely matrilineal and with uncertainty of financial assistance from the father, the mother often leaves to seek employment leaving her child with her

own mother, her sister or some other female relative (maternal or paternal) or with a friend (ibid.). This practice of turning the child over to someone else is a common one and to a large extent, it is permissible in Trinidad's culture.

### *Social Support Systems and Family Kinship System*

The migrant social network could be conceived as a web of reciprocal relations among individuals in a migrant source community and even other migrant host communities (Pessar 1990; Thomas-Hope 1992). Pessar (1990) expresses the view that migrant social support networks are conduits for the transfer of people, services, funds, goods and information across geographical and economic space. This social support system may comprise a host of members including relatives (extended kinship ties), friends, teachers, religious leaders and even professionals specializing in social support systems, such as welfare workers (Leo-Rhynie 1993). Thus, the system may comprise of anyone who is willing to provide support, whatever the form, when called upon to do so (Ellis 1986; Wellcome Trust posting 2004). Ellis (1986) expresses the view that this sharing and interdependence not only helps women to cope with their family responsibilities but it acts as a buffer in times of emotional stress and strain, especially during periods of economic crisis.

Kinship systems are well-integrated components of the social support system that make parental migration possible through its 'reciprocal system of obligations', whereby children are left in the care of neighbours, relatives and friends (Thomas-Hope 1992; Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994). Reliance on kinship networks has always been common among Caribbean families and this helps to somehow elucidate findings that convey the propensity for Caribbean parents to migrate. The kinship group acts as a 'buffer' in being the surrogate caregiver, tending to the needs of the children left behind in anticipation of the parents' return (Gordon 1990; Bonnett 1990; Thomas-Hope 1992; Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994). A strong kinship connection is common for both Afro- and Indo- Trinidadians and it has often facilitated the movement of parents. Between both groups strong kinship relations are vital and often create the basis on which family life is conducted. Such relations have stood the test of time, from slavery to indentureship and beyond.



Further, Olwig (1993) elaborates by stating that many migrant women are strongly indebted to their wider kinship groups for facilitating their emigration not only in providing childcare services in their absence but also financial assistance in funding the trips. Also, through kinship ties extensive networks of friends and relatives help to make arrangements for receiving the one migrating, whether it be in finding employment or finding a place to stay and the act of sending of occasional remittances enables the migrant to remain a vital member of the network (ibid.; Thomas-Hope 1992). Thus, assistance from the kinship group undoubtedly facilitates long-term parental migration and partly accounts for the prevalence of parental migration within the region (Gordon 1990; Bonnett 1990; Thomas-Hope 1992; Crawford-Brown and Rattray 1994).

### *Caribbean Land Tenure Practices*

Thomas-Hope (1992) proposes that Caribbean land tenure practices make it possible for one to consider long-term migration. In explaining this factor she postulates that inheritance practices are based on a system of descent, whereby children of either sex inherit rights to land from both parents and so there is some security of tenure in the absence of the parent. Consequently, the effect of inheritance-related land tenure patterns and a strong familial kinship network allow important family members such as mother and(or) father to leave their young children for prolonged periods with some assurance of return. Land tenure symbolizes 'family land' that bestows on family members a sense of belonging, identity and solidarity (Chevannes 1993).

In relation to Trinidad a similar culture exists among persons of African and East Indian descent. However, unlike the African-Caribbean family, within the East Indian family, it is not customary for girls to inherit and so, land is passed from one generation to the next from fathers to sons (Klass 1961; Niehoff 1960). Like the Africans, the East Indians share a close bond and through 'family land' (ibid.). Another commonality is the great deal of pride and honour that surrounds the ownership of such land and it is widely felt that the land should not be sold, but passed from one generation to the next.

### *Intergenerational Migration*

According to Evans and Davies (1997), there is some validity in the intergenerational nature of the parental migration as parents may resort to considering means of survival, practices that their parents used, which includes migration. It may be a case where from one generation to the next family members have migrated and will continue to migrate (Chamberlain 1997). Even if migration may have occurred as a coping mechanism - a means of survival, over time one may realize that despite economic improvements or better living standards parental migration may perpetuate itself. In this case, the reason behind migrating is no longer as a means of survival but that the individual is expected to migrate (ibid).

In Trinidad's context this is not largely the case, as migration has often been surrounding with the need to flee political unrest, economic turmoils and a move to seek a better way of life. Nonetheless, there are instances where it may exist, as Pottinger and Brown (2006) speak of the Caribbean people being cultured into accepting migration as a way of life. A mother who leaves her children behind to seek paid employment could be lauded by society and the family greatly accommodates such a practice (ibid).

Transnational kinship networks can also largely influence an intergenerational nature and therefore, persistence of parental migration. Some migrants are coerced and lured by friends and family who migrated before. The SCJ Young leader (1999) conducted interviews with children from various Caribbean islands and found that a common intention was to migrate when they got older and they spoke of the numerous family members who have migrated with pride and adoration. Chamberlain (1997, 2006) speaks of a Caribbean migratory culture, explaining that it seems as if migration has achieved major acceptance and has been largely institutionalized within the region. In exploring the meanings migration held for Barbadians who migrated to Britain and elsewhere she found instances where persons admitted that life in Barbados was not all that bad but because of the migratory culture of the island and how their family perceived migration, they were expected to migrate.

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The decision to migrate usually involves great thought. Weeks (1986) states that some people migrate because they have been attracted to someplace else which they perceive provides them with greater opportunities to get ahead and to improve their standard of living. Some places abroad are held in high esteem for Caribbean people (Thomas-Hope 1992). Of these, the metropolises of Europe and North America are the most common destinations for one in pursuit of realizing personal objectives and goals (*ibid.*).

More often than not, people choose to migrate for a combination of reasons (Breinburg 1989). Some have left in the hope of escaping social ills such as increases in criminal activities and poverty. For others migrating has meant economic fulfillment, in that even though things are not all that bad at home, persons migrate in search of a better life to improve conditions of family life and more than any other reason, this characterizes the movement of several Caribbean people to the metropolises (Breinburg 1989; Levine 1995; Jones *et al.* 2004).

Thomas-Hope (1992) and Carnegie (1987) have shared similar views in their discussions on the “latent consciousness” of migratory behaviour that actually involves immense planning and deep thought that are likely to precede migration. In a similar vein, Philpott (1973) examines what he refers to as “the migrant ideology”, meaning that every migrant carries ideas as to the nature and goals of his migration, which in turn influences migratory behaviour. Further, the way in which persons are socialized and cultured determines how they are likely to perceive migration, which helps to institutionalize the phenomenon (Chamberlain 1998), resulting in the establishment of a culture of migration and the development of certain migratory behaviours.

According to Thomas-Hope (1992), understanding the complexities of this phenomenon requires an analysis of the role individuals’ perceptions, images of migration and the socio-economic and cultural factors play in the migratory process. Therefore, it is from the particular temporal, spatial and social position in which people are located that mental images are formed and migration has meaning (*ibid.*). Similarly, Levine (1995) claims that the first step to understand

Caribbean migration is putting it into context with respect to what it means for the actors themselves, the Caribbean people.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study has attempted to achieve two major goals: to understand the origins of parental absence as a consequence of migration and to explore factors that are likely to contribute to its perpetuation. Admittedly, undertaking such a task was not only quite intriguing but also quite cumbersome at times to dismantle. Further perplexing matters has been the unavoidable highly comparative nature of the study. This section seeks to highlight and evaluate some of the most critical observations.

Setting out to explore the nature of parental absence as a consequence of migration, in this case with respect to Trinidad, first required having some appreciation for the nature of the situation within a wider context, particularly the Caribbean region. Since the islands share much in common in terms of their historical, economic and social experiences, it is not surprising that the patterns of migration mainly responsible for parental absence and parent-child separation span the region. However, variations in the process are evident.

Understanding the nature of parental migration within the context of Trinidad has conveyed that the parental migratory process can vary in relation to ethnic background. The literature suggests that both Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians engage in family migration practices. However, serial, shift or sometimes referred to as chain migration, is more common among Afro-Trinidadian families than East Indians families who are more likely to migrate together in one movement. The serial nature of parental migration results in parental absence and findings from previous studies suggest that the duration of absence in many instances is prolonged.

The genesis of parents being absent due to migration traces back to the period of colonialism and every historical landmark period thereafter, witnessed some form of migration that directly affected family life. The movements of family members were either forceful, as seen during the period of slavery or voluntary, as seen during the post emancipation era. To some extent the

movements, which unfolded during the post-independence period were of a mixture, both forceful and voluntary. The reasons behind leaving across both groups are quite similar with certain reasons resonating above others - the need to seek employment, attain a better quality of life, to improve living standards for themselves and their families. However, their migratory behaviours tended to vary with their experiences at the time and their perceptions of migration.

With regards to the perpetuation of parental migration, it is realized that a major facilitator of the process is the family and its socio-cultural characteristics. Some may argue that there are also macro instigators to the process, such as government interventions that sometimes encourage persons to migrate, immigration laws that control the inflows and outflows of persons, economic difficulties, political, cultural and social tensions. However, these factors are likely to influence migration in general but they do not explain the persistence of particular forms of migration.

The literature reflects that within the region there is undoubtedly, a culture of migration that largely governs the way of life of its people. Therefore, while persons across all social classes engage in migration the phenomenon is likely to be perceived differently. In the case of family migration through serial movements, this is seen to be characteristic among persons of lower socioeconomic status. However, for most of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century persons of African and East Indian descent in Trinidad were at the base of the social ladder but yet serial patterns of parental migration were less common among the East Indians. A common explanation behind serial movements involving family migration is the exorbitant cost of everyone migrating together but among the East Indians circumstances were different. If one would recall, under the terms and conditions of indentureship, the East Indians were paid wages unlike the Africans under slavery. Thus, during the post-independence period, when East Indians were leaving in larger numbers maybe they were in a more favourable financial position, and so could have afforded entire families migrating together as opposed to the Africans.

The literature conveys that largely within Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Trinidadian families alike, there are systems in place that help to accommodate serial migratory patterns and hence, contribute to the perpetuation of parental absence as a consequence of migration. These systems are mainly based on strong family ties both at national and transnational levels. Parental

migration is largely used as a coping mechanism (a survival strategy) and the “strategic flexibility” of the Caribbean family (Carnegie 1987) helps to facilitate the movement of parents, as systems are put in place to provide child care services in their absence. There is also the factor of intergenerational migration. The initial explanation for movement may have been as a survival strategy but as the strategy is relied upon across generations, it soon becomes intergenerational to an extent that it loses its previous purpose and is perpetuated more along lines of a person being expected to migrate as his(her) parents, grandparents and their parents migrated. This conveys a shift in migrant ideology, as parental migration becomes a tradition and not seen solely as a mean of survival.

## **CONCLUSION**

The phenomenon of parental absence as a consequence of migration is alive and well incorporated into contemporary lifestyles. However, while this widely adaptive response taken by caregivers of engaging in external migration may well serve its intended purpose, there is reason to believe that this practice is riddled with possible adversities and can backfire if not properly managed. Nonetheless, despite negative possibilities, the perpetuation of this pattern of migration reflects its deeply rooted significance to the region. This research paper has examined some documented sources in an attempt to address, explore, elucidate and unravel the origins and perpetuation of parental migration in relation to Trinidad. In summary, both the genesis and perpetuation of parental migration are closely related to the island’s historical, economic and social experiences (macro structure), which have affected family life (micro structure) and led to emergence of particular migratory behaviours, which vary between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. In closing, having provided information within an area where there has been little consideration, it is hoped that this paper increases awareness and stimulates further research within this area.

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