

Outside the dyad.

An Ethnographic Journey Beyond
Attachment, with African-Caribbean
Families in London.

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Where information has been derived from other sources,
I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

For over one hundred years, Western Psychology has been preoccupied with developing an understanding of the dyad par excellence: mother and child. This thesis explores the cultural validity of attachment theory and the concept of the dyad in families of African Caribbean heritage in London, UK. This is developed through the juxtaposition of an ethnography of emic perspectives and experiences of Caribbean families in London, and a series of semi-structured interviews and group discussions with practitioners from fields of relevance.

The thematic analysis of the data collected puts forward conflicting interpretations, between practitioners and families, on three common themes: the meaning of being Caribbean, family bonds, and attitudes towards society. The discussion of these three themes, and divergent perspectives of participants, indicates that the key tenets of attachment theory (maternal sensitivity, quality of care and stability of attachment) are not representative of the experiences and perspectives presented by the families. Considering these results, I formulate a possible alternative theoretical framework to represent and theorise dynamics in Caribbean families: fluctuant attachment.

Whilst this new framework, based on three themes identified by families as central to their experiences, wishes to limit stereotypical interpretations of family bonds; it fails to recognise children's role in these relations. In my conclusion, following a

Foucauldian deconstruction of attachment theory, I argue for the necessity for Childhood Studies to be a field of critical theory, based on children's rights, and to develop new theoretical frameworks that recognise children as active agents.

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Introduction: Setting the scene

“Much of what we know authoritatively
about child development comes from observations
of Western bourgeois parents and children”

(Lancy, 2007)

Living in and understanding a multicultural society requires constant consideration and inclusion of realities previously unknown or unseen. Social sciences need to engage in this ongoing process of discovery and assimilation, by revising existing theories and producing new ones. However, this mechanism is not always straightforward; the critique of established theories that are considered universal has at times been seen as either unnecessary or unacceptable (Burman, 1997). In Burman’s words, this capacity ‘to pose questions about what is all too often assumed to be given or obvious’ (Burman, 2008:6) should be performed and celebrated as an act of enrichment and advancement of previous knowledge, which should not be denied, but rather considered as a starting point for reflection, questioning, deconstruction and restoration.

Research should advance social justice by questioning theories and techniques in our contemporary and globalised world. Feminism has promoted the possibility for a revised way to consider women’s role in society (Firestone, 2015). Queer and gender studies have challenged definitions and perceptions of sociality beyond

heteronormativity (Semp, 2011). Cross-cultural psychiatry and intercultural therapy have raised awareness of different cultural beliefs and understandings of illness and health (Littlewood, 2002). Similarly, childhood studies ought to promote interdisciplinary approaches and innovations to benefit children's lives, recognising children are not simply future adults, but also the "agents of political change and cultural interpretation and change" in the present (Bluebond-Langer, 2007). The theorisation of child development occupies a central role in influencing and shaping the practice-focused fields of relevance to children's lives, such as social policy, health promotion and education (Phoenix, 1996) (Woodhead, 2006). It is therefore essential to question and analyse existing theoretical frameworks in childhood studies to prevent cultural misunderstandings, prejudices and erroneous judgments from hindering children's lives and opportunities.

Congruent with this guiding principle for the role of childhood studies, the aim of this study is to explore and understand child socialisation and concepts of parenting in a BME community in London, particularly in relation to attachment theory. The main focus will therefore be the interaction between children and family members, as understood and conceptualised from inside families and communities. Ultimately, the wish is to create the opportunity to analyse critically and review, as necessary, the theoretical framework of attachment theory.

African Caribbean Families

*'If black women don' t say who they are,
other people will and say it badly for them.'*

(Christian, 1997)

The African Caribbean¹ community in London, the focus-population for this study, constitutes a poignant example of how preconceived ideas and misconceptions can become not only labels hard to remove, but can also jeopardise outcomes for a specific group. In her famous yet controversial investigation on West Indian children in London, Fitzherbert (1967) identified the instability of the family as the main cause of the developmental and behavioural problems believed to be effecting African Caribbean children. This negative classification is still present in more recent studies, as *'the problems of West Indian children are seen by white professionals not as in the transition from one culture to another but as located within the family they are born into'* (Littlewood and Lipsedge, 2005: 146).

Demonised by the media and social policies as undeserving or even pathological, the black family holds a 'problematic position' (Reynolds, 2005: 7). This is also the case within research, as either marginalised and silenced (hooks, 1989) or under scrutiny for its "faulty" elements (Phoenix, 1996). The lack of stability in these families

¹ See appendix 1 for further discussion on the use of this term.

has been frequently indicated as the origin of most of modern adolescents' issues, such as delinquency, gang violence and teenage pregnancy. The "broken" family structure and "poor" parenting have specifically been indicated as causes for antisocial behaviour and problematic events, such as the 1981 Brixton Riots (Scarman, 1982) and the 2011 London Riots (Lewis et al., 2011). The phenomenon of teenage and lone motherhood, although present in both white and black populations, is ascribed to and defined as disproportionately pathological in regard to black motherhood, with women labelled as "baby mama"² (Phoenix, 1988; Phoenix, 1991; Reynolds, 2005). The absence of the father figure is also considered a central element in the degeneration of Caribbean families (Reynolds 2005). Similarly, the figure of the father is also reduced to a stereotypical model: the "baby father" (Reynolds 2005). The image of the "baby father", closely associated with that of the "baby mama", indicates the lack of ability to provide care or economic stability for his children, exacerbated by the possibility that he will have additional children with other partners³. Additionally, as emphasised by Hylton (1996), the overrepresentation of African Caribbean men in the criminal justice system contributes to the demonisation of black fathers, whilst also underlining a process of stigmatization of this group.

Reynolds (2005) stresses the importance of considering how the formation and

² "Baby mama" is used to indicate young lone mothers on welfare support, as opposed to the image of "superwoman mama", older, educated and in employment lone mother (Reynolds, 2005).

³ Promiscuity and illegitimate relationships are frequently emphasised in the moral judgment of black families (Phoenix, 1996).

diffusion of these stereotypical images of Caribbean men and women impact directly on the life of Caribbean families. For example, a study (Butt and Mirza, 1996), conducted in the mid-90s, correlates misconceptions leading to the pathologisation of families to the over-representation⁴ of black children in social care. Children's educational achievements also have a negative correlation to existing stereotypes related to black pupils' capacities and behaviour (Mirza, 1998). In exploring the process which might have led to some of the misinterpretation of recurrent-typical features of the West Indian family, R.T. Smith (2001) has identified the use of statistical data as a key issue. This is mainly by inducing a superficial and uninformed construction of black families, described as alien to white standards and understanding. This sort of data enables a process of compare/contrast with the idea of the "nuclear family", which represents the "standard" family pattern in Europe/America, indicated as a triad in family systems theory (Marvin & Stewart, 1990; Byng-Hall, 1999). R.T. Smith has emphasised that this fixation on the need for the nuclear family, due to *'false functionalist assumptions that stable co-residential conjugal unions are necessary for the proper upbringing of children'* (1975: 368), has also led to the pathologising of other forms of family socialisation. Whilst family systems theory allows for changes in the concept of family to incorporate new forms and constructs outside the standard "triade" (Byng-Hall, 1999), other theoretical frameworks rely on a more fixed understanding of family, such as in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1968).

⁴ Black children under five are more likely than their white peers to enter social care (Butt et al., 1996),

Attachment Theory

Whilst African-Caribbean families represent an accurate example of stereotyped groups, attachment theory, based on the more rigid structure of the dyad, offers the opportunity to explore how unquestioned theories may lead to a process of “othering”.

In classical Greek philosophy the term dyad, twoness, was used to indicate the creation of matter through the combination of two elements by forces. This idea of close cooperation between two has remained in modern usage, particularly in sociology and psychology. In the former, for example, dyad is used to indicate the smallest, most basic form of social interaction, theorised by Simmel as the locus of determination of the individual (Pyyhtinen, 2009). In the latter the term is mainly, if not solely, correlated to its use in attachment theory to indicate the unique synergy between mother and child.

Bowlby postulated the concept of dyad in the volume ‘Attachment and Loss’ (1968), published ten years after ‘Child Care and the Growth of Love’ (1953). This was one of his first articles emphasising the essential role of the maternal presence and bond with the infant in the shaping of the self. At present, attachment theory is widely recognised as one of the key pillars of child development and a unique concept. It has been recognised by Peter Fonagy in ‘Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis’, as capable of *‘bridging the gap between general psychology and clinical psychodynamic theory’* (Ibid, 2001:5), a feature that secures the popularity of the

theory across schools within the discipline. In its clinical applications (Cassidy and Shaver, 1999), attachment theory has been adopted to address a broad number of issues, behaviours and circumstances connected to the sphere of human relations, all of which are understood to be directly influenced and shaped by the experiences within the dyad. To cite a few examples, attachment theory is adopted in schools to understand pupils' behaviour (Bomber, 2007), in assessments in social work (Schofield, 2002), in parenting programmes (Hughes, 2009) and in of Early Years practices (Penn, 1999). A number of simplified formulations deriving from the theory can also be found in self-help articles, blogs (Psychalive, 2014) and books (Heller and LeVine, 2012), all of which advocate the centrality of the bond between the infant and his/her primary caregiver; adding attachment to the list of the many 'psychomythologies'⁵ in the popular psychology industry. Rather than shaking its credibility or strengthening opportunities for critiques, the marketization (Burman, 1997) and vulgarization of this theoretical framework has expanded its reach and use, securing attachment as one of the commonly agreed pillars of child development. Attachment theory is indeed promoted and employed daily in the assessment of family dynamics, the exploration of children's well-being and the development of care services, in both the Global North and South (O'Conner and Zeenah, 2003; Golding, 2007; Penn, 2012).

⁵ See Lilienfeld, S., Lynn, Steven Jay, Ruscio, John, & Beyerstein, Barry L. (2010). *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology Shattering Widespread Misconceptions about Human Behavior*. Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell

In Anglo-American psychological studies on “family” and “parenting” the concept of attachment remains as a core element in the analysis and the construction of both the ideas.

As suggested by Bretherton (1985: 3) one of the main ideas expounded by Bowlby is that attachment is *‘grounded in a motivational-behavioural control system that is preferentially responsive to a small number of familiar care giving figures’*. Bowlby identifies proximity maintenance, separation distress, safe haven, and secure base as features that characterise attachment. These dimensions are directly related to the two key elements of attachment: the mother and the idea of secure base (Bowlby, 1988). In Bowlby (1951) the mother is defined as the child’s ego and superego. That is, as the object that introduces the child into the world, performing for him/her until the infant has developed the necessary skills herself. Bowlby (1988) emphasizes the centrality of the role of the mother as first and foremost supplying formative experience for the child. The way she relates and behaves with the child not only informs and causes immediate reactions, but also shapes the patterns of behaviours that he/she will perform in his/her attachments/relationships during his/her growth and in life in general. The centrality of the role of the mother and the specificity of this choice has lately been reason for some discussion and revision, and, although Bowlby recognised the possibility of *‘a substitute figure who plays a thorough maternal role’* (ibid, 1988: 18), he also stressed that *‘it is noteworthy that*

such behaviour⁶ is not displayed to the father or to other familiar figures' (Bowlby, 1988: 19).

The concept of secure base is equally fundamental to understanding the development of attachment theory and its applications. In his work "A Secure Base", Bowlby (1988) describes this concept as a feeling of security that results in a pattern of behaviours performed by the child in his process of discovery of the world. The awareness of the possibility of going back to a stable and safe environment enables the child to explore the outside world, feeling comfortable enough to discover and "float" in the unknown. In an example to further introduce this concept, Bowlby compares this sense of security with the dependent and safe connection between a military base and expeditionary forces:

'In this respect it is a role similar to that of the officer commanding a military base from which an expeditionary force sets out and to which it can retreat, should it meet with a setback. Much of the time the role of the base is a waiting one but it is none the less vital for that.'

(Bowlby, 1988: 11)

It is notable how, in this image, the element that creates a secure base is a collective one, rather than a specific and singular one. This idea of having a collective rather than an individual participating in the creation of a secure base has been further

⁶ Separation – reunion behavior

developed in cross-cultural explorations of the idea of attachment, through the concept of “alloparenting” (Ahnert, 2005).

Researching Attachment and (M)other Culture(s)

*‘As soon as a historian
desires a certain result,
he or she is likely to find it’*

(Darnton, 1995)

Second wave feminism (Firestone, 2015) opposed this idea of “maternalism” (Mezey and Pillar, 2012), the centrality of the role of the mother, which is at the heart of attachment theory. This initial push for revision, as suggested by Bliwise (1999), promoted the possibility to reconsider attachment as a more general theory of caregiving, rather than of mothering. This wider approach enabled the development of studies exploring the role of carers other than mothers, such as fathers (Weinfield et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2012), siblings and other relatives (Stewart, 1983; Kennedy et al., 2014), and care providers (Belsky and Rovine, 1988). Interestingly, rather than offering a revision of the theoretical approach, most of these studies appear to be an attempt to accommodate these additional variables within the core concepts of dyad and secure base (Bliwise, 1999).

Similarly, a relatively small number of studies have taken into account culture as a variable of importance in the analysis of the applicability of the theory (Grossman, 1985; Kazuo, 1985; Miyake et al., 1985). Most studies, although conducted in different cultural contexts, adopted the same tools developed by Ainsworth for her Baltimore⁷ project, which led to the formulation of the Strange Situation protocol (Ainsworth and Wittig, 1969). Researchers replicated the standardised methods used by Ainsworth in Baltimore and relegated of culture as a variable only in the analysis of differences in results. It could be argued that this approach reduces the investigation to an apologetic explanation for differential findings, rather than an opportunity for challenging the original study and exploring alternative ideas and experiences of attachment. For example, the study developed by Sagi et al (1994) on kibbutz-reared children did not focus on understanding particular Israeli rearing traditions. Rather than investigating the meaning behind the differences in parenting and socialisation, this study analysed the effects of this rearing tradition on Ainsworth's (1969) patterns of attachment. The variations from the original study are considered as a deviation from normal standards. The meaning of security and insecurity is one of the few concepts vaguely questioned in this set of studies (Sagi, 1985). The detection of deviances and the assimilation of multiple into few defined patterns of attachment do not seem to be the best method to consider the role of culture in child development. Rather than being explored and analysed in relation to

⁷ conducted in 1963 (Ainsworth, 1969)

their socio-cultural and historical meaning through a comparative process, these practices are represented and rationalised through elements of attachment theory.

To a certain extent, a similar process can be identified in a series of studies exploring critical aspects of African Caribbean families in relation to attachment: the problematic of loss and reunification (Arnold, 2006); the lack of paternal presence (Brown, 1997; Brown et al., 2012) and the peculiarities in the bonding between mothers and daughters, and mothers and sons (Clarke, 1999).

Methodological considerations: from theory to fieldwork

The core aim of this investigation is to question the universality and cultural validity of attachment theory, whilst exploring the related interpretations of child rearing and socialisation practices in the African Caribbean community in the UK. Mindful of the misconceptions associated with Caribbean families (Brunod, 1999; Plaza, 2000; Reynolds, 2006), and conscious of the limitations deriving from adopting attachment theory as framework of analysis (Bretherton, 1992), this study focuses on the practices and experiences of the participants. Additionally, conscious that *'interpretations and explanation of Caribbean and African American family life based upon aggregate statistics and economic explanations are, at best, inadequate and worst, grossly misleading'* (R.T. Smith, 2001: 52), the approach adopted is qualitative, interpretivist and based on emic structures. In this context, the term emic is adopted as an indication of the presence of convergent structures, being mindful that *'the intent is neither to convert ethics to emics nor emics to ethics, but rather to*

account for the divergence and convergence of both etic and emic structures.' (Harris, 1976: 333). In line with Harris' interpretation of these terms, emic here *'is concerned with both the content of elicited responses and with the structure that may be found to underlie that content at several different levels'* (Ibid, 1976: 339). This study is therefore concerned with local formulations and understandings of what the population would understand by bonding through the noting of the emergence of underlying patterns and structures that could be related to attachment theory.

The main data collection method consisted of two years of ethnographic fieldwork with a baseline of twenty-two family groups. During this period, I spent time observing, conversing with and learning from members of these family groups in various contexts (classified in the study as: household, school, church and street). Mindful of R.T. Smith's admonition on the risks that superficial results *'depend entirely on the assumptions and definitions used to collect the data on which they are based'* (2001: 55), throughout the study I strived to remain alert to both my personal and professional biases and to the power relation existing with participants, be it adults or children. In order to do so, I adopted three key theoretical approaches as reference and guidance: post-structuralism, black feminism and the children's rights approach. First, I engaged in a process of "deconstruction"⁸ of my theoretical

⁸the term 'deconstruction' in the sense of laying bare, of bringing under scrutiny, the coherent moral-political themes that (developmental) psychology elaborates, and to look beyond current frameworks within which (developmental) psychology investigation has been formulated to take up the broader questions of where these themes fit into the social practices in which psychology functions' (Burman, 2008:1)

knowledge of child psychology, following the Foucauldian mechanism of investigation and questioning described and adopted by Burman (2008) in her influential critique of developmental psychology. In the light of the cultural focus of the investigation, I gave particularly notice to culture-related misconceptions and moralistic views correlated to specific psychological theories. I also followed LeVine's suggestion to focus on emic formulations of psychological topics, mindful that '*when these theories [developmental psychology] lost credibility, so did the ethnographic accounts*' (ibid, 2006: 249).

Second, I adhered to research principles informed by black feminist thought, particularly with regards to reflexivity (Collins, 1989). Aiming to maintain awareness on possible gender-based biases and misinterpretations, I avoided reliance on my own assumptions and I acknowledged my status as an "outsider"⁹ (Collins, 1989). As a white researcher conducting research with a solely black population, I endeavoured to never speak for the participants, but rather to learn from their voices (Collins, 2000). This was achieved through a process of collaborative knowledge construction that aimed to innovate and question existing scholarship, as a reaction to exclusion and pathologisation (Cook and Fonow, 1985). Through this process, I sought to develop research based on '*an intercultural, synergistic, and unresolved conversation among a wide variety of players that has as central tenet multilogicality*' (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2008: 155). This second lens was at times difficult to

⁹ Collins positioned herself as the "outsider within", identifying herself as black female intellectual.

negotiate. Although vigilant and mindful of my “ethnocentric bias” (Barry, 1981), there were a few occasions (one of which I will discuss in more details in the second section of this research¹⁰) in which I “slipped” and assumed a stereotypical and moralistic approach with regards to a specific behaviour. In the final stages of my research, I developed an awareness of the importance of following a children’s rights based approach in conducting investigations with children (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000; Alderson and Morrow, 2006). The nature of ethnography as a participatory method of data collection had already placed me in a position of actively engaging children as knowledgeable participants, teaching me to make sense of their experiences and views (Agar, 1996). My heightened awareness of, and subscription to, a children’s rights based approach ultimately lead to considered reflection of the data collected and guided me through a final act of theoretical deconstruction of attachment theory.

Structure of the study

The layout adopted to present the investigation follows the research journey as I experienced it. In the first section, after having explored the research methodology in chapter one, I introduce the knowledge collected on childhood and family dynamics both in the Caribbean and in London. Whilst the chapters (two and three) which present scholarship on families in the Caribbean draw primarily from existing literature¹¹, the ones focusing on the narratives of families in London introduce the

¹⁰ See discussion on Leah’s “relaxation method” in Chapter 8

¹¹ for an account of my own fieldwork in Jamaica, see Appendix 2

data collected through my ethnographic fieldwork. The last chapter of this section shifts the focus to practitioners. The aim of this chapter is to introduce a reverse comparative element in the understanding and experiences of Caribbean families. Using the participants' accounts as a "benchmark" for correlation, I explore practitioners' perspectives on child rearing practices in the Caribbean community in London, and their beliefs about their impact on children's lives.

The data presented in this first section is further discussed and contextualised in the second. In chapter seven to nine, I focus on a deeper analysis of the three key themes emerging from my participatory investigation with families: the cultural specificity of bonds and socialisation, the nature of family ties and the fundamental role played by racial discrimination in the upbringing of children and in family dynamics. The juxtaposition of these themes together with the key tenets of attachment theory, maternal sensitivity, quality of care and stability of attachment (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991; Morelli and Henry, 2003) gave me scope to explore alternatives within the theoretical framework of attachment. I introduce the conceptualisation of "fluctuant attachment", an emic alternative to traditional attachment, in chapter ten. This theoretical proposition is augmented through a test-case study of a family outside the fieldwork. This aimed to explore the validity and applicability of "fluctuant attachment" outside the sample engaged in the ethnography. Guided by Mead's (1962) admonition of the reductive nature of causal thinking, the last chapter stands as a final exercise of deconstruction (Burman, 2008)

of the dyad and its theoretical framework through three different lenses (cultural relativity, feminism and children's studies).

Through this epitaph to attachment theory, I suggest that Childhood Studies develop new theoretical frameworks with the emphasis on children as active agents.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Contextualising the research question: culture and attachment

As highlighted in the introduction, the research proposition for this study is to investigate the cultural validity of attachment theory.

Over the last fifty years, a number of established bodies of knowledge have confirmed and reiterated the cultural validity of attachment theory. This was firstly validated by Ainsworth's study of Ganda infants (1967). At the time of the investigation, its cross-cultural significance was widely praised and not only within the field of child psychology. In a book review published in the *American Anthropologist*, Levine, fervent contemporary critic of the theory, described the study as a '*landmark in cross-cultural research on infant behavior and development*' (Levine, 1969: 123).

The original aim of Ainsworth's study had a strong cultural focus¹²; conversely the actual investigation conducted in Uganda relegated culture to a brief note on the minor variations in childrearing practices in comparison to mothers in Baltimore¹³. It is important to emphasise that the context of the study¹⁴ was not considered to be a variable with any relevance to the shaping of attachment patterns. In the following

¹² Ainsworth's original intention for the Ganda study was to explore the consequences of the abrupt separation of mothers and infants due to local child rearing tradition (Ainsworth, 1978).

¹³ After leaving Uganda, the Ainsworths moved to Baltimore, where Mary Ainsworth replicated the Ugandan study with American families and published '*Patterns of Attachment*' (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

¹⁴ The location was, in fact, dictated by the fact that Ainsworth followed her husband in his move to Uganda to pursue his career as a researcher (Bretherton, 2003)

exploration of the origins and growth of infant-mother attachment, conducted in Baltimore few years later, the element “culture” is completely ignored. In the Baltimore project Ainsworth and her colleagues focused on separation-reunion behaviours and patterns and were uninterested in elements related to the specificity of the context and of the individuals (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Once again, regardless of the lack of reference to culture in the publication, ‘attachment across cultures’ features as one of the twenty most frequent themes identified in articles citing ‘Patterns of Attachments’ (Ainsworth et al., 2016).

A prominent example of the forceful nature of the correlation between attachment theory and culture is Ainsworth’s contribution to the volume ‘Culture and Infancy’ (1977). In her chapter, Ainsworth introduces attachment as a theory of early social behaviour, characterised by behavioural biology and borrowing terminologies and notions from ethology¹⁵. The two-paragraph section exploring the ‘*value of cross-cultural research on attachment*’ fits within a mere page¹⁶. In the first paragraph, Ainsworth suggests the possibility that different child rearing practices might lead to variations in the nature of the infant-mother bond. In the second, and closing, paragraph Ainsworth reinforces reinforces the role of attachment theory in emphasising the role of genetic determinants in the sphere of social development. More specifically, Ainsworth limits the possibility of cultural variation by reminding

¹⁵ Science studying animal behaviour

¹⁶ Out of the fifteen-page chapter

the reader that biological factors '*place certain limits beyond which a society cannot push its efforts to mould the child*' (Ainsworth, 1977: 65).

Discarding the setting as a variable of investigation and reinforcing the underlying genetic derivation of behaviours and patterns contributes to what could be described as a systematic exclusion of culture in considering factors impacting on the formation of attachment (Edwards et al., 2014).

Three core principles reinforce arguments in support of the universality of attachment, thus ultimately hypothesising that security patterns are shared and universal across cultures. The first principle establishes attachment as an undisputable natural element in the formation of any individual, regardless of her/his upbringing, development and context (Bowlby, 1988). Indications of this shared belief of the *innatism* of attachment can be found in Ainsworth (1977). As also mentioned above, this has been extant in critical readings of the theory from cross-cultural perspectives (van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg, 1988). The second principle restricts the role of culture even further, by postulating the existence of pre-existing conditions and of unavoidable ramifications concerning attachment patterns and behaviours (Crittenden, 2000). The pre-existing conditions are also identified as the three tenets of attachment theory. These are: maternal sensitivity; quality of care and stability of attachment (Morelly and Henry, 2013). By restricting the experiences and features of care givers, the existence of pre-existing conditions is considered to be

far more controversial and problematic, at least in cross-cultural studies, than the unavoidable ramifications on children¹⁷.

Once again, the last principle precludes the possibility of taking cultural variations into consideration. With reference to this third point, the proposition is that the variation in prevalence and distribution of secure attachment is mostly shared across different cultures (Main, 1999). As directly related to the analysis and interpretation of results obtained in studies exploring contextual variations of attachment, this last principle has been predominantly adopted in cross-cultural studies as a key element in regard to the universality of elements in the theory (Crittenden, 2000).

The validity and legitimacy of this, the second and third principles were challenged in the pages of the *American Psychologist* in a controversial paper suggesting that these hypotheses are biased towards culture specific values and beliefs (Rothbaum et al., 2000). Most interestingly, in the closing recommendations of the article, the authors refer to a reflection that is of crucial relevance in the development of my fieldwork. That is, *'the underlying problem, we suspect, is the reliance on a paradigm (i.e., the Strange Situation) and measures (e.g., the Attachment Q Sort) designed by Western investigators for use with Western participants'* (ibid; 2000: 1100)

¹⁷ See chapter 11 for my argument on the deterministic nature of attachment theory

Interestingly another crucial point of influence in the design of my study derives from critical responses to this article. Amongst the numerous points of criticism¹⁸, Gjerde (2001) suggested that the arguments presented by Rothbaum et al. were based on ‘*essentialized and dated*’ (Ibid, 2001: 10) conceptualisations of Japanese culture and child rearing practices.

Most recent publications critiquing the universality of attachment theory have also questioned the reliability of the first principle discussed above. Most particularly, its innateness (Hrdy, 2009; Levine 2014). This exploration of the cultural validity of the theory also leads to questioning of the validity of this very principle.

Research paradigm and approach

In the opening essay of the edited volume on ‘Cultural Psychology’, Shweder (1990: 17) criticises cross-cultural psychology for ‘*its orthodox adherence to the premise of the psychic unit*’ whilst praising its interest in comparing ‘*performances between ethnic groups*’. Both these features characterise the majority of cross-cultural studies exploring attachment theory in different cultural contexts (van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg, 1988). These investigations not only adhere to the underlying principles of the theory, but also retain and replicate the specific methods and tools developed by Ainsworth and colleagues (1977). The unchallenged re-use of these tests and procedures upholds the insignificance of the role of culture in attachment theory and indicates a lack of understanding of the cultural relativism of testing tools

¹⁸ The other element critiqued is that the results are based on non-empirical and small-scale data collection

(Cole, 1999). In his work on the culture-bound nature of educational tests, Solano-Flores (2011) encourages the reader to recognise tests as socially and culturally constructed artefacts and to consider culture as essential element rather than a threat to validity.

Cultural validity in the process leads to ensuring a theoretical compatibility and relevance in a specific cultural context. This consists of *grounding* the theory's definitions, views, reflections and tools in the context of study (Kleinman, 1987; Jadhav, 2009).

As this study sets out to investigate the cultural validity of attachment theory, it is fundamental to ensure that the methodology adopted enables the investigation of views, perceptions, experiences, meanings and understandings of the population studied within the socio-historical nexus in which it is embedded. For this reason, the study does not apply *Western-bound* procedures to assess attachment, as related to culture specific conceptualisations of key elements explored, such as (among others) emotions, relations, family roles and child rearing practices. Whilst disengaging the use of these tools can be considered a first step towards meaningful investigation, the adoption of a clear paradigm to make sense of the knowledge collected is equally crucial.

The exploration of cultural validity requires the adoption of theoretical paradigms and methods that enable engagement with the knowledge and experiences of the

population studied (Kleinman, 1987). In Bruner's words (1990: 118) the final goal of this type of investigation is to create '*meanings in cultural contexts*'. Mindful of the culture-bound nature of meanings and experiences (Littlewood 1990) and aware of the legacies of colonial ties in the population and in the discipline investigated (Hook et al., 2004), I approached the study with an underlying paradigm informed by principles deriving from post-colonial theory and poststructuralism (Burman, 2008).

Guided by these perspectives, I aimed to remain aware and alert to the individual and temporal nature of knowledge and vigilant to examining the dynamics of relationships between identity, relations, meanings and power (Davies, 1994; Kenway and Willis, 1997).

More specifically, I followed poststructuralist principles to consolidate my exploration of family bonds and relations as dynamically constructed structures as presented by my participants. Whilst I asked about their views and understanding of *family*, I tried to steer away from imposing my expectations on patterns or presence/absence, inclusion/exclusion of certain figures (Davies, 1994). This decision came with some limitations, such as in the low/marginal presence of male figures in my study, which I shall discuss later on in this chapter. Similarly, in approaching settings such as the school and local authority lead services, I remained alert to underlying structures of power influencing not solely the interactions between participants and the settings, but also the processes of acquisition of knowledge that I conducted. The adoption of black feminist theory was particularly

important in ensuring the uncovering of these patterns of power and resistance (Foucault, 1980). I discuss this more fully in the findings presented in the second section of the thesis.

In the analytical process of the data collected, I was also influenced by the interpretive approach. This was evidence in my recognition of participants' voices as knowledge (MacNaughton et al., 2010). Mindful of post-structural principles, I engaged in a dynamic analysis of the data, in which any knowledge is considered to be one of many possible versions (Reekie, 1994). In considering the various sources and versions of *knowledge*, I remained aware of and reflected upon political and social structures that could be influencing the experiences of my participants. In this process, I found support and guidance in Black Feminist texts (bell hooks; 1989; Hill Collins, 1989), which offer a solid basis for reflection on matters such as the omitting of women's perspectives and experiences, the necessity of intersectionality and empowering practices in research.

Although different and unique in their views, each paradigm I approached as a frame for my investigation was infused with the centrality of the role of the participants and with the wish to collate data as offered by informants. In line with this key feature, I identified and selected the ethnographic approach as the most relevant and appropriate to conduct my study.

Seminal anthropological studies exploring child rearing and socialisation practices (Malinowski, 1929; Mead, 1931; Bateson, 1958), indicate the suitability of the ethnographic method for multi-paradigm research concerning children and families (Froerer, 2009). Aside from emphasising the peculiarity of every relationship as deriving from various interacting factors, such as gender, age, ethnic and cultural background (Whiting, 1988), “ethnographic evidence” (LeVine, 2006) has proven to be effective in confronting the idea of “ab/normality” in the child development discourse (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998; James 2007).

Mindful of the dangers and limitations of trivial adaptations of this approach which have been mocked by Ingold as '*ethnographic interviews*' and as '*modish substitute for qualitative*' (2014: 385), I considered opportunities and threats of conducting ethnographic fieldwork on an *awkward scale*¹⁹ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003). One of the primary benefits of conducting ethnographic research directly associated with its exploratory aim, is having access to everyday behaviours, views and life circumstances (Hammersley, 1999). This broad access to data gathering opportunities leads to engaging with different data collection methods, ranging from observations to informal conversations. A possible issue arising from this unstructured method, particularly in a formal setting (e.g.: school), relates to maintaining an ethically sound approach during the data collection phase.

¹⁹ An ethnography of 'awkward scale' is one that is not confined by clear geographical boundaries (such as a village or an island) and/or hard to circumscribe in terms of focus (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003) and does not comply with the ideas of local / close community

Specifically, one of the possible risks I identified related to the eventuality of observing data from people who had not given direct consent to be part of the research. In order to avoid this ethical dilemma, I focused my data collection moments solely on participants who had provided full consent to participation, and obtained from occasional participants (such as relatives and neighbours) their verbal assent to include data collected from our interactions.

As a key strategy to limit possible issues deriving from the unstructured nature of ethnography (Gobo, 2008), I identified four contexts within which I would gather ethnographic data. The focus on space and spatial awareness in other ethnographic studies with children (Christensen and James, 2008) also reinforced and supported this decision to actively include and consider various settings for the field. The first context, the school, emerged primarily as functioning as a recruitment centre for my participants. Providing me with a clearly identifiable gatekeeper and direct access to children, their families and related practitioners, the primary school in my study became the core context for the development of my fieldwork. As the investigation focused on family dynamics and experiences and congruent with traditional observational settings in psychology (Rustin, 2009), the second context settled on the families' households. As explored in the next chapter and in line with the post-structuralist approach I adopted, I refrained from confining this setting to the children's primary residences. This meant that, for some children, the context household corresponded to a number of different spaces to which my access was determined by various relevant gatekeepers. Both convenience and cultural

specificity determined the third context, which was church. Conducting fieldwork during the weekend frequently meant having to spend a prolonged number of hours in church with the families. In order to avoid ethical issues, such as not obtaining informed consent from relevant gatekeepers and risking losing access to useful data, I identified the churches as one of the four key contexts in my request for ethical approval (Angrosino, 2007; Gobo, 2008). Following this line of enquiry, I opted to include a more generic setting - the street which encompassed all the temporary contexts of transition that would take space in my time with participants. Rather than actually focusing solely on "streets", I included, in this setting, the interactions in contexts other than the ones contained in the other three groups. In some cases, this meant conducting research in the local park, but always focusing on the families that had given prior consent. Other sites were the supermarket and transitions between other contexts (e.g.: from school to home or vice versa).

Having a clear idea of the settings in which I would conduct my research added a level of safety, or boundary, to my research. This provided my participants with full control over the gatekeeping process and relieved them from any pressure to invite me to settings other than the agreed ones. This clearly constituted a form of limitation to my access in gathering data in the field, but this was a price I was prepared to pay to preserve an element of respect and empowerment for my informants. Moreover, this clear delineation of the settings for my research meant I could observe differences in behaviours and experiences across private/public contexts (Angrosino, 2007). Having the possibility to consider a number of '*learning environments*' (Whiting, 1977) allowed broader access to different perspectives and

enabled the possibility to examine influences and impacts of invisible contexts, such as socio-historical ones (Gobo, 2008). When considering the field of my study, as also suggested by my adoption of the post-structuralist paradigm, I included in my reflection socio-historical circumstances and underlying power relations deriving from these. These are described in the next section.

The study

The data collection period for this investigation stretched over two years of work, with limited data collection taking place in school holidays. During the first summer break, I visited Jamaica and in the second phase the level of engagement of the families and the frequency of observations was reduced and disrupted by the London Riots. The initial plan was to conduct two parallel fieldwork investigations in two different areas of London. As I struggled to identify a school willing to participate in the study in one of the areas, I shifted the focus of the study to the locality in which I had gained access to a primary school. Whilst conducting the fieldwork in the school and with the families, I also conducted ten thematic conversations with child practitioners from different fields and backgrounds. The aim of these dialogues was to better understand existing perspectives and experiences of working with Caribbean families and understandings of attachment, from a professional angle.

The field

The invisible field (Gobo, 2008) provided the wider context for my research; was a London context facing an increase in child poverty due to the freeze in child benefit and public sector pay (BBC, 2010). This was after two years of reparation work to contain the impact of the 2008 financial crisis (Joyce, 2014). There was also an experience in London of a drastic increase in the use of Stop and Search²⁰, with a disproportional ratio discriminating black people (EHRC, 2010). Another element of racial inequality contributing to the picture surrounding my fieldwork, derived from achievement and exclusion rates in schools. The 'How Fair is Britain' report (2010b) indicated that Black Caribbean pupils had the highest permanent exclusion and educational inequality rates. The report (EHRC, 2010b) also placed African-Caribbean people at the lowest level of functional literacy skills in the country (for the English-speaking population) and Caribbean women amongst the groups with lowest basic skills and qualification rates (ibid, 2010b).

As the aim of my investigation was to focus on the local experiences of African-Caribbean families in London, I approached two main areas as geographical fields for my investigation, using purposive sampling based on the local population (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). Both areas, located in different parts of London had a strong historical presence from the African-Caribbean community. The two localities were also rated within the top five in terms of deprivation in London and appeared

²⁰ Section One of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act

in the highest ranks of comparison with the whole of England (Census Information Scheme, 2013). As with many other inner London Boroughs, both zones had a mixed profile, with deprivation and affluence cohabiting in the neighbourhood. In the 2011 census, Black ethnic groups were the second most prevalent in both areas, after White ethnic groups (Census Information Scheme, 2013). In one of the areas the overall Caribbean population had dropped by 8% since 2001 (Census Information Scheme, 2013). This was a change that correlated to increased diversity and multiculturalism in the area (ibid, 2013). Nevertheless, in both areas the prevalence of Black ethnic groups was still above average, approximately five points above general figures in the London population. In both localities, the predominant religion was Christianity; over 50% of the overall population identified as Christian whilst other religions made up only 10-15% of the remaining population (Census Information Scheme, 2013). The large presence of churches of various denominations, reflecting the images of Jamaica I collected during my fieldwork in the island, stood as testimony to the strong presence of the Caribbean community in the areas. Aside from churches, the Caribbean community was visually present in both neighbourhoods; also in markets and social hangouts²¹. The work with the families and in the school focused only in one area. That being the case, I conducted fieldwork observations (primarily in churches) also in the second area, simply because of geographical proximity to my own residence. The data collected in this

²¹ For example, both localities had renowned street dominoes clubs, with small size groups gathering daily on the streets to play in the late afternoon.

second area functioned as an opportunity for further reflection and identification of common threads and themes.

Having focused the data collection mainly in one area, I constructed most of the fieldwork around one school, which functioned as the main context for my work and as a recruitment setting for my informants. In selecting it, I resorted to convenience sampling (Pole and Hillyard, 2016) as I was familiar with the school through work contacts. The community school, a one entry form, had a small cohort of students (of about two hundred) most of which were of Black Caribbean or Black African²² heritage (OFSTED, 2010). The school had a slightly troubled history of difficulties with pupil achievements and behaviour²³, and not long been place in Special Measures by Ofsted. The school was surrounded by large housing estates, where most of the pupils resided. Most of the staff also lived locally; the school seemed to have a strong community sense, with a significant number of local parents and residents employed within the school staff team.

Access to the Field & Participants

The school represented the perfect opportunity to gain access to children, families and practitioners alike. After an initial visit, I met with the Headteacher (Mrs X) and introduced my research and the ethical considerations and agreements I had identified in the research design process. Mrs X, a middle-aged woman of Caribbean

²² OFSTED ethnicity groups

²³ The first Headteacher in place had been employed after the school had been placed in 'special measures' a few years before

heritage, was enthusiastic and supportive of my study and agreed both for in situ observations and for the possibility to approach children and their families for home visits. During a second meeting, the Headteacher introduced my study to the school staff and left it to individual teachers and members of staff to decide whether to agree to direct involvement in the study. Only the Year six teacher expressed the preference for her class not to be included in participant observations; a decision explained through the possible impact my presence might have held on pupils' concentration. Families were informed via a letter that explained my presence in the school and indicated their right to opt out their children from my observations and of the possibility for them of further involvement in the study. This first attempt of recruitment of participants did not lead to much success. Whilst I had initially thought gaining access to the school would have represented the biggest challenge, I soon realised that was not the case. Obtaining the gatekeeper's permission seldom equals to actual recruitment of participants (Pole and Hillyard, 2016). After a couple of months of school based observations, I had still not managed to successfully recruit any family to participate in my study outside the school setting. Although I had met few parents during the post drop-off and pre-pick up periods in the school playground, few seemed interested in my study and I had not managed to secure any home visit and/or opportunity for data collection beyond the school setting. Discouraged, I considered the possibility of conducting fieldwork within the school only. However, this would have meant abandoning the ethnographic approach and resorting solely to observations and interviews (Ingold, 2014). Following Burgess' (1982), there was an indication that the research would have been instrumental in

the data collection process. This being the case, I revised and reconsidered my strategy to gain access. As Wall and Stasz (2010) explain, in relation to their own fieldwork, the introduction of both researcher and research to possible participants, not only determines the capacity of building rapport and trust, but also defines the quality and the outcomes of the subsequent investigation. I had missed my opportunity to connect with the actual gatekeepers of my population when the Headteacher introduced me to the school staff. As already mentioned, a large number of staff members were locals and parents of children attending the school. As the Headteacher introduced me as observer researching psychological aspects of the mother-child relation, I possibly passed as similar to other figures that had previously entered the school setting and caused “*problems*”, such as OFSTED inspectors and social workers²⁴. By presenting my study and my presence as stemming from a psychology-derived perspective, I was replicating the format of the very studies I was critiquing²⁵. In time, I repositioned and reintroduced myself as a researcher interested in learning from the participants about their experiences and views of family dynamics and bonds. “Abandoning” the psychological framework and terminology not only meant realigning my position to that of my paradigm of choice (Bruner, 1990; Jadhav, 2009), but also informing my role as a novice, who had been taught via situated learning (Hill-Collins, 1989; Wall and Stasz, 2010). The first indication of interest in introducing me to their family, experiences and views

²⁴ Throughout my research, as explained in the second section of this study, I will discuss in more depth my participants’ reservations towards social workers and professionals in general.

²⁵ See the opening section of this chapter for more details.

followed quickly. Desiree, Shanice and Leah, all three of whom were engaged in the school team at the time, became my first informant and helped me recruiting others. In this case, snowballing sampling (Mukherji and Albon, 2015) prevailed by necessity, rather than by choice. Whilst a number of parents/carers verbally agreed to participate in my studies, the fieldwork focused on twenty-two family-groups. In the first year, the cohort was twenty-seven families, however five families dropped out of the study. Two families initially agreed to participate and signed the consent form but cancelled during follow up meetings and observations. There was not sufficient time for me to engage them in an exit conversation. Whilst one mother indicated that her husband did not feel comfortable with the idea of a research in their house, the other family withdrew as their schedule was too busy to accommodate my presence. The other three family-groups withdrew after the first observation; two indicating the lack of available time as the reason for disengaging and one simply no longer wishing to continue. Out of the twenty-two family-groups²⁶ that partook in the investigation, two did not engage for both years of fieldwork²⁷. Although snowballing sampling functioned as the primary technique for the recruitment of the families (Mukherji and Albon, 2015), one obvious feature guided the selection of participants: Caribbean heritage. Whilst with most families this requirement was easily met, in two situations I had to discuss and review the possibility of participation to the study with my supervisor. Lorraine²⁸ would self-

²⁶ See appendix 3 for full a breakdown and introduction to the families

²⁷ When Naomi relocated to a new school, William decided it was best for her to start fresh, with no ties to the old school. Conversely, I met Nikkya and Joyce much later than the other participants.

²⁸ White Irish raised by Jamaican foster parents, three children with a Jamaican man.

define as 'mixed heritage' but was strongly interconnected with the local Caribbean community. Not including Lorraine in the study could have had possible negative repercussions to others' engagement. Moreover, Lorraine's status (as accepted other within the community) helped my understanding of the dynamics of assimilation and inclusion in more depth.

Data collection methods

As with the process for gaining access, negotiating the frequency of my presence and my data collection methods in the school was fairly straight-forward. Over the two years I spent two-three days a week in the school, dividing my time in different classes to observe interactions and participating with the children in conversation during lunchtime and playtime. Having experienced the limitations of the structured psychoanalytic infant observation (Rustin, 2009) in other studies, I opted to follow the classic British anthropology technique of participant observation (Brewer, 2000). In approaching the role of observer, I reflected upon the difficulties I encountered as a non-participant presence in the room, during my psychoanalytical studies. Whilst in the home environment and daily routines with families the participatory element meant I could ask for clarifications and explore meaning (Wall and Stasz, 2010). In the school it meant I had to negotiate my role by setting clear boundaries and expectations. Whilst in the classroom, I would primarily spend time observing children's behaviours and interactions, whilst in the more informal moments I could spend my time conversing with the children about their experiences (this would easily range from talking about a completely unrelated matter to something that had

happened with a sibling or a parent). When Mrs X stepped down as Headteacher of the school and I had to renegotiate my access to the setting²⁹, the only change in my presence was limited to a clearer stipulation of my role and boundaries in the classroom. Having limited knowledge of child-focused techniques, such as the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2011), my main data collection with children was the same as with adults: *'watching, observing and talking to them in order to discover their interpretations, social meanings and activities'* (Brewer, 2000:59). Throughout the two years, I also collected a small number of pictures of drawings³⁰ by the children. On these occasions, the drawing process would be initiated directly from the child or would be introduced by the moment/setting (for example during "wet playtime", during which children would mostly draw or play games).

The planning and managing of the observations and time spent outside the school setting were more complex, as it required parents to commit to and remember our agreements. During the first few months I attempted to follow a sort of planning routine, similar to that of a psychoanalytic infant observation, although not as rigid (Wittenberg, 1997). This consisted of pre-scheduling visits and rotas between the various families. However, I soon realised this process was unworkable and was leading to unnecessary stress for the families and, at times, increased expectations for the children³¹. Flexibility in the fieldwork, as described in depth by Pole and

²⁹ Luckily the Deputy Headteacher remained and supported the discussion with the new Headteacher in my favour.

³⁰ See chapter 4.

³¹ Calvin once got very upset as his mum forgot we had scheduled for me to visit them after school and organised an afternoon with his cousin instead. As a result of this situation, not only did I miss the opportunity

Hillyard (2016), matched particularly well with not only the busy schedules, but also with the element of dynamism in my participants. In many circumstances, flexibility meant I could make the most of the opportunities that presented themselves to me in my daily interactions with the families³². With the school as the centre of most interactions, I had access to almost all my participants on a regular basis around drop off – pick up times, leaving more flexibility for the afternoons, for home visits and spending time with families, and the weekends, when I would attend church with practising families. This flexibility had nevertheless some limitations and downfalls. Firstly, some participants felt more comfortable in having me around and, thus, some informants became more dominant than others (Brewer, 2000). This phenomenon is described as being a common artifact of ethnographic approaches (Marshall, 1996). In retrospective, I relied on the key-informants approach (ibid, 1996) more heavily than I had realised. This was a factor that could have both benefited and biased the outcomes of my study.

The flexibility as well as the duration of my fieldwork also had an impact on my method for data recording. My initial plan was to rely on a notepad in a non-intrusive way for field notes, being mindful of places and people, and to type up the notes digitally on a weekly basis. To date, there are various schools of thought on this matter. However, technological advancements have pushed the debate in favour of

of spending the afternoon with Calvin and his cousin, but Debara also avoided me for a brief period of time (possibly out of shame for forgetting?)

³² Such as party invitations, which would have been excluded if I had followed a more psychological approach to the observations

digital recordings of notes from the field. A few weeks into the fieldwork, I realised that typing up all my notes on my computer would have been unachievable, so I started noting my notes and my reflections on the fieldwork in different booklets. My substantive notes (Brewer, 2000) consisted mainly of narrative observations, enriched by some precis summaries and verbatim quotations from discussions (noted during the conversations). My analytical field notes developed instead as reflective opportunities to link different elements observed and thoughts with clarifications about which I wished to ask my informants. In these, I followed the idea of the recalling process, which I had learned through my earlier psychoanalytic infant observation, considering it as a tool to bring to light elements and interactions which had, for some reason, stood out in the session (Wittenberg, 1997). This twofold process helped me to record details in a non-intrusive manner and with a limited risk of impacting the *thickness* of the description (Brewer, 2000). Moreover, having reflections and queries to share with participants not long after the events³³ elicited more in-depth conversations and supported the development of my *emic* understanding. This process also inspired discussions with my informants of data collected in conversations with practitioners, with the aim to gain an *emic* interpretation of these perspectives.

³³ See for example in chapter 8 with regards to the analysis of the birthday parties

Thematic Conversations with practitioners

During the fieldwork, I also completed a total of ten thematic conversations with different child practitioners, providing different types of support and services to the children and families of the school and of the local area. Additionally, I observed a series of reflective discussions on follow up of cases³⁴ in which different services had cooperated. The ten thematic conversations were initially intended to be semi-structured interviews, exploring the practitioners' understanding and views on their work with Caribbean families. In the attempt to minimise the bias in my approach, and following the feedback received from the ethical committee on the possibly probing nature of some of my initial questions, I reduced the topics of conversation to three and kept them as open-ended as possible (Mukherji and Albion, 2015). Recruiting practitioners proved much harder than recruiting families. Once again, obtaining permission from the relevant gatekeepers, the Headteacher and the commissioner in the Local Authority, was the easiest element in the process and did not secure engagement and participation. Only two teachers and one nursery nurse from the school agreed to engage in conversation with me, although all three requested not to be recorded. These conversations proved to be the most complex, as I had to remind the interviewees to refrain from making direct reference to children from the school without breaching confidentiality (Brewer, 2000). Most of the staff in the school were motivated in their decision not to participate in the conversations by

³⁴ The children in these cases were not considered at risk and none of the cases had a safeguarding nature. These reflective discussions were opportunities for practitioners to follow up on cases shared across services and were presented as learning and supervision opportunities to practitioners. No confidential information was shared during these discussions and I was permitted to take notes on a notepad.

indicating that they were already contributing to my study via the fieldwork in the school. The other seven practitioners, although all recruited via the school, worked with a much broader cohort of children and families. This was a factor that limited the risk of confidentiality breaches. Overall, practitioners were asked to discuss their views and experiences without going into the details of the cases they discussed with me.

Another difficulty I experienced in the conversations was related to the use of specific terminology in my verbal prompts. In the original version of these, I referred specifically to attachment, when talking about children-parent relations. After a trial interview with one of the teachers at the school, I opted for a more generic 'child-parent bond and family dynamics'. The change of terminology allowed for a wider discussion, rather than one focusing primarily on mothers and risking adopting a Western psychology angle.

Fieldwork in Jamaica

In the first summer of my fieldwork, I also had the opportunity to engage in an associated study in Jamaica. The original idea emerged from having encountered a lack of literature on the impact and role of religion in child development in the Caribbean. At the same time, having experienced a very strong presence of the overseas relatives in the everyday life of my participants, the visit seemed like a good opportunity to meet family members of my informants. With the help of my participants, primarily Pamela and Tricia, I identified a suitable residence in the

household of a friend of a staff member of the school. Informants with family members living in Jamaica, near or in Kingston, provided me with contacts with their relatives and friends and I filled my bags with presents to dispense on their behalf. The study, an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the same four contexts as my study in the UK³⁵, focused on the role of religion in the shaping of identity, as well as socialisation and family dynamics in Kingston. Whilst the data collected and the analysis produced were not of direct contribution to this investigation, meeting close and distant relatives of my informants, exploring the local culture and experiencing the connectedness between the two realities were of great help. In fact, it could be argued that my visit to Kingston functioned as a tool promoting active engagement to my study in the UK (Pole and Hillyard, 2016). Firstly, the families seemed to interpret my interest and involvement as sign of my dedication to them, and their *cause*. Meeting their relatives, visiting their old houses or places that had significance to their memories, directly or indirectly, introduced me to a more depth meaning of their making process and experiences.

Ethical Considerations & Reflecting on my role as researcher

Aside from the technical elements and reflections on the tools and methods adopted in my fieldwork and in light of the sensitive nature of my research topic, it is of great

³⁵ As schools were closed for summer, I visited summer camps instead

importance to explore the ethical considerations that informed the shaping and the delivery of this study.

In the submitted version of my ethics application, I listed as possible ethical issues four points: confidentiality; parents feeling under scrutiny; encountering safeguarding concerns and disclosures and engaging in conversations regarding sensitive topics³⁶. Whilst these points and the key elements of questioning and reflection underpinning practice in ethnographic studies addressed important aspects of the study, they also failed to fully acknowledge children's contributions and the depth of the discussions I would have to engage with, especially with mothers. Approved in principle³⁷, my ethics considerations required further development in regard to the engagement of children in the study and to the nature of the topics explored with the families. My engagement and understanding with ethical considerations developed and expanded in the process of conducting this study and followed a similar journey to the different paradigms adopted in the three analytical phases of the investigation. Informed by cultural psychology (Shweder, 1990), I rephrased the brief introduction to my study in the informed consent forms, so that it would not contain possibly biased terms or jargon. I reflected on the

³⁶ In the section exploring the discussion of topics that could be 'sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting' (UCL Ethics Form) I listed as examples: abortion; children born outside marriage; divorce; single motherhood; adolescence and pregnancy; physical punishment; having somebody from the family in prison; issues at school.

³⁷ The ethics committee approved my ethics application in principle and asked for me to further explore seven points with regards to the participation of children. This was a revision of the topics I intended to discuss with practitioners and parents as a reflection on the possible risks I might encounter as a lone female researcher and the use of biased terminology (such as "misconception")

possibility that parents might have struggled to fully appreciate the meaning of ethnography, so I introduced the data collection methods rather than the approach used, that is observations and conversations. The right to withdrawal at any stage and the preservation of confidentiality (Mukherji and Albon, 2015) were indicated in the written forms and were reiterated verbally during the first few sessions and re-introduced in situations in which participants might present as distressed or in difficulty. Informants were asked to choose a fictional name (a pseudonym,) so that their names would not appear in any of my notes or in the thesis itself. Once I gained approval for conducting the study in the school, all the parents were informed of my presence in the school and invited to opt out of the study if they wished to (Brewer, 2000). When I approached parents to ask for permission to conduct fieldwork in their households and with their families, I clearly stated that the decision not to participate had no implications for them or their children. The forms and my introductory speech on the study, however, failed to indicate my genuine interest in working with these families and in expanding my understanding of their experience of family dynamics and bonds. Removing the biased terminology from the informed consent forms had secured a more ethical and fairer introduction to my study. Yet I had failed to preserve any indication of how this study differed from other psychological research on parenting. My background, as a white educated female leading a quite significantly different lifestyle from that of the women I was approaching as participants of my study, also did not help.

A number of participants shared their initial reservations with the idea of being observed. Observation as a tool was associated with the idea of assessment, in school, or investigation by social services (Burman, 2008). I was able to have parents agree participation in the study once I had confirmed that my role was not implicated in Ofsted or social service inspections and that my observations were not meant as form of appraisal, things changed.

This shift in power relations can be explained through ideas provided by the Black Feminist paradigm (Hill-Collins, 1989). First and foremost, time; my genuine interest and being accepted by key figures in the community (Pamela, Lorraine, etc) enabled the development of a unique element of trust and easiness in my presence in the family life through participating to a wide range of diverse “interactional encounters” (Goffman, 1961). I also benefited from my positioning as researcher in a status of “apprenticeship”, supported by knowledgeable participants (Agar, 1996) and open to discussion about their experiences. At moments, engagement with the study became almost a form of shared activist mothering; a passing of knowledge and experiences with the aim to promote social change (Collins, 1993). Whether done with intention, I believe this level of caring in the research enabled the creation of a space that promoted self-reflexivity not only for myself, but also for the participants (Yang, 2015). Additionally, it enabled the creation of a safe space for conversation. I was recognised not as a confidante or a counsellor (Pole and Hillyard, 2016), but as person genuinely interested in exploring and understand the meaning making processes and the experiences of the participants. I believe that this silent

understanding protected both participants and myself from entering conversations we could not resolve within the boundaries set by my 'apprenticeship' status³⁸ (Agar, 1996).

Whilst matters relating to the adults were mainly resolved, my limited understanding and knowledge of the children's rights approach determined the way in which I addressed ethical considerations regarding children. As indicated by Montgomery (2008) a sense of otherness has, and continues to characterise a large section of anthropological children-focused research, frequently featuring limited engaged participation, especially in the context of family/institutions. Asked to clarify the age of children for whom consent would be obtained, I suggested that this would be sought for children over the age of six. I then continued by indicating that younger children might struggle with the concept of consent and with understanding the topics discussed. Whilst I now appreciate and understand the importance of children's agency in research (Alderson and Morrow, 2004) and of the capability approach (Lansdown, 2010), whilst recruiting children for this study I struggled with negotiating the possibility of obtaining children's assent³⁹. Once I obtained the permission of the Headteacher and of the parents, I proceeded to explain the study to the children. As I did not diversify in my methods of communication, no use of visual prompts or other tools associated with the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss,

³⁸ I believe three factors contributed to the formation of this identity for me: my broken English, the fact that I too am an immigrant living separate from my family and relatives and the fact that I have no children (hence I am in no position to judge/give advices)

³⁹ see for example accounts of system undermining the role of children as participants (Balen et al., 2006; McNamee, 2016)

2011), I am not confident the consent obtained from children fully reflected their level of understanding of the study. Throughout the study I, however, ensured that children were fully aware of their right to withdrawal and confidentiality. Children had a clear understanding of my role as researcher and knew that I was not one of their teachers, although for some children this point was an element of confusion.

Whilst all the ethical considerations discussed thus far ensure the safeguarding of children as subjects of research, they also circumscribe the role offered to children as *informants*; providers of views, perspectives and opinions rather than contributors to knowledge (Mayall, 2008) as distinct from adults (Hill-Collins, 1989). This is an issue which I will further explore in my concluding chapter, both in relation to attachment and the theoretical framework of child development broadly.

Part I

*Childhood, Family & Dynamics in
Contexts, in The Caribbean and in the
UK*

Chapter 2: Family in the Caribbean

With over two hundred studies published in a twenty-year period (1940-60) the family, in association with kinship, is amongst the four most discussed topics in anthropological accounts of the Caribbean; alongside migration, heterogeneity of cultures and linguistics (Trouillot, 1992). In research on this theme in British Anthropology, historical connections with the region aligned with developments in the discipline and strongly influenced by structural functionalism, led to an even more emphasised preoccupation with this topic (ibid, 1992). In the post-war years, Anglophone scholars attempted to demystify the disparaging and limited considerations offered by the British administration (Smith, R.T. 1963; Clarke, 1999), whose agenda was to indicate a connection between the “unregulated” family structure and the “lack” of social stability in the region (Rowley, 2013). Conversely, scholars focused on exploring Caribbean family structures as either a representation of the encounter between different traditions, inherited from the African heritage of slaves and from the European domination, or as a reflection on social frameworks, such as socio-economic dynamics, gender roles and inequality in the region (Smith, R.T, 1963; Smith, R.T, 1975; Clarke, 1999).

Although this prolific production of writing on the subject aimed to promote a counter argument to that of British officials, it failed to enable much of a shift from a discourse predominantly based on the pathologisation of the unconventionality of Caribbean families. This failure to produce a counter argument was mainly due to research studies placing emphasis on aspects identified by British officials as pathological

(Trouillot, 1992). The traditional literature on families in the Caribbean focused on three areas of investigation, which will therefore be at the heart of my review in this chapter. These are: household composition; absent fathers and matrifocality (Rowley, 2013).

Traditional views on the concept of family

Before exploring the three core elements discussed in existing literature on families in the Caribbean region, I shall briefly review relevant debates concerning the meaning of family. A socio-historical overview of the changes and evolution in the understanding of this concept is beneficial in contextualising the premises of most of the studies discussed in this chapter, particularly as it is fairly distant in current debates. In contemporary discussions on the concept of family, it is mainly recognised that *'there is no definition of family that fits the reality of all cultural groups and historical periods'* (Coonts, 2006: 64). The diversity of function and composition in families, the key elements in the attempt at defining this concept, are open to discussion and analysis. McClain and Cere (2013) highlight the complexity of current debates on this topic, by emphasising the recognition of the impossibility to resolve existing arguments within competing models of the family. Whilst it is now more common to acknowledge fluidity in families (Hunter and Ensminger, 1992), traditional accounts of family and kinship in the Caribbean relied on more fixed terms of reference, deriving from sociological frameworks. As an example and informed by the functionalist school, Murdock's definition offered a very specific framework of family composition, *'adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially*

approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults' (ibid, 1949: 1). Similarly, its functions were delineated within fixed arenas, with the nucleus described as *'social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction'* (ibid, 1949:1). In Murdock's vision (1949) this social structure "family" ought to be divided in three sub-categories, depending to variations of its composition:

- Nuclear family: mother⁴⁰, father and offspring.
- Polygamous family: the union of two or more nuclear families through marriage;
- Extended family: the union of two or more nuclear families through *"parent-child relationship"*

Murdock (1949) suggested that amongst these forms, the nuclear family is the universal format, or, as also defined by Radcliffe Brown (1950), the basis for domestic groups. In these historical accounts, the universality of this format is equated to the universality of the concept of family, positioning the idea of the nuclear family as basic pattern for society (Ibid, 1949). As proclaimed by Anshen (1949: 3) *"the concept of family pervades all civilization, all human life- and the human family itself becomes manifest as the immediate substantiality of the mind"*. The attribution of universality to this concept was later argued by Spiro (1954), through

⁴⁰ When referring to mother and father it has also to be considered the differentiation between social and biological parents. Particularly in the case of fatherhood, it is relevant to consider that in some societies the social father is considered the legitimate father rather the biological one (for a complete discussion of this issue see chapter 4 in H. Montgomery "An Introduction to childhood" 2009)

his work on the Kibbutz. In his account of familial societies, Spiro (1954) indicated family as a universal requisite for the survival of society. This work (ibid, 1954) suggested that the family's main functions (sexual, economic, reproductive, and educational) could in fact only be met by the family itself or an enlarged version of it, which he defined as familial society. The centrality of the nuclear family as the pillar of social stability is also reiterated in Anshen's volume (1949). In debating the function and future of this structure, Anshen (1949) concurred with the suggestion that not only the concept of family universal, but also at the very heart of progress and in the promotion of social order.

These examples of definitions of family as a universal construct provide a sufficiently clear picture of the theoretical framework and system of beliefs in which the accounts on Caribbean families would have developed. These investigations on Caribbean social structures focused primarily on analysing and comparing family patterns and child rearing routines (Kelley, 2005). In order to understand the complexity of patterns of unions, scholars had to firstly identify and reconcile the different arrangements developed in response to the functions usually associated to the idea of the nuclear family. It is possibly through this process that the themes of household patterns, matrifocality and absent fathers became the main points of discussion.

Household composition

Whilst “family” was considered as the group of people bonded together and included a conjugal couple (Murdock, 1949; Spiro, 1954), the term “household” would be used to refer to a group of people sharing the same place and living together, with or without any particular bond. The term “household” would therefore usually be used in economic discourses, mainly in relation to property, income and the exchange of good, as in the definition used during the census in the West Indies,

“a private household is defined as one or more persons voluntarily living together and sharing at least one daily meal. In general, a household comprises a father, mother, children, other relatives, as well as other persons sharing their household arrangements...It is important to note, however, that a member of the household is not necessarily a member of the family, nor will all members of the family be members of the household. It is also important to note that a household may include more than one family.”

(Massiah, 1983:14)

As emphasized by Massiah (1983), the term household is here clearly differentiated from the concept of family; differentiation that is no longer adopted in such a strict manner⁴¹. The argument emerging from the literature is, however, that the concept

⁴¹ For example, in the Family Resources Survey (by NatCen and National Statistics, year 2001-2002) the definition of household was “a single person or a group of people living at the same address who either share one meal per day or shared the living accommodation”. Anyhow in the next few lines the

of household in Caribbean culture is not limited to financial arrangements. As indicated by Smith, *'limits of permissiveness are broader than English middle class society, but this does not mean that there is no moral constraint whatsoever'* (R.T Smith, 1956: 259). Throughout the years, the flexibility identified in Caribbean family structure was associated with different causes. Whilst the functionalist school described flexible residential arrangements as a positive adaptation to poverty and low social conditions (Clarke, 1999), other schools of thoughts suggested class and race as possible causes (R.T. Smith, 1975).

As slavery has been widely recognised as one of the crucial events that shaped Caribbean history, most papers investigating this feature list matrimonial arrangements and permissions as possible factors that contributed to and influenced the development of the concept of family. The conditions of “families” during slavery and post slavery ought to be considered as the basis for the process of the formulation of the concept of family in the Caribbean (Thomas, 2014). Slaves were not allowed the right to marry or to have relationships that could be classified as familial (ibid, 2014). The meaning of man-woman relations was circumscribed to the sexual encounter, whose aim was to increase the number of slaves to meet the demands of work. Parent-child relations were, therefore, not respected and considered only as a burden and a danger⁴². The slavery-family was then affected

concept of nuclear family is introduced and its connection with household is not so defined: “a household may have consisted of one or more benefits units. A benefits unit is a standard DWP term that relates to a tighter family definition...”

⁴² On one side land owners aimed to separate slaves due to their fear for the consequences of the coalition of slaves; on the other side slaves were afraid that the land owners would have used their relationships against them, to threaten and control them.: *'the ambivalence in the negro mother who*

by the continuous presence and menace of the master. This figure did not merely control everyday life of the slaves but also controlled behaviour and their feelings. As a result, as suggested by Morgan and O'Garro (2008: 8), the mother-child bond was infected by the presence of the master and by the '*displaced aggression and hatred for her* [the mother's] *slave masters*'. Every relationship lost its meaning due to the slaves' conditions of life; love and affection were not allowed and then almost not known as possible emotions⁴³ to express. Women became the work machine in the fields and sex tools in the bedroom whilst the men lost their role in the lives of their children as well as in women's lives. This process of emasculation of the male figure has also been considered as the main cause for consequent male behaviour in post slavery families (Morgan & O'Garro, 2008). Men became used to not having bonds and limits; they were *just-boys*, having lost the concepts of fatherhood and stable relationships (Thomas, 2014) and were allowed to demonstrate their masculinity only through their "sexual conquests" (Morgan & O'Garro, 2008). Moreover, in post slavery society women were considered less dangerous than men, making it easier for women to find employment and empowering their role as carers and head of the house. The alternative to this vision of family has then been offered by Christian missionaries and colonizers, who were presenting the Holy Family as the perfect and the only possibility of existence for the family: anything else could

saw her children as a burden on one hand and love for them on the other.' (Patterson, 1973 in Morgan and O'Garro, 2008:8)

⁴³ The discourse on emotions will be analysed in depth in the next chapter.

not be considered as acceptable. This discourse is prevalent even in the present day.

The theoretical position in the study of the African Caribbean family presented so far has been named the “social pathology approach” (Barrow, 1988). Authors belonging to this school agree on the main influence of slavery on the formulation of family in the Caribbean. That is, slavery and its prohibitions and the reorganization of roles have deformed permanently, or at least strongly, African Caribbean families, thus originating the various pathological behaviours that are attributed to this population. An interesting example is the work of Simey (1946). The author describes the main issues affecting the Caribbean territory⁴⁴ as the direct consequence of the “loose-family” pattern, characterized by lack of cohesion. In the attempt to eliminate such patterns of family, and the consequent social issues, the author suggested the necessity to improve “middle class comforts”⁴⁵ in the population; while Lady Huggings⁴⁶ initiated the Mass Marriage Movement. This approach has been assimilated (Mohammed, 1988) with Frazier’s studies on family-patterns deriving from the plantation system and the socio-economic circumstances implied by that situation.

⁴⁴ “*Juvenile delinquency, poor nutrition, and social ills*”

⁴⁵ “*...as poverty is removed and persons move to enjoy the comforts of a more middle class existence, then so will patterns of family life also change.*” (Simey, 1946: 159).

⁴⁶ Wife of the Governor of Jamaica in the mid 1940s.

A second approach considers differently the influence of the economic situation on the formulation of family patterns. The “structural-functional” (Barrow,1988) position postulates that Caribbean family patterns are nothing but the result of a process of adaptation/response to the difficult circumstances accumulated by the history and social conditions of the population. A third approach, the “cultural diffusion” (ibid,1988) position, relates Caribbean family patterns to their roots in different societies. Firstly, the mother-land Africa, then the conqueror Europe and the newcomer India. A prominent representative of this third approach is Herskovitzs⁴⁷ (in Barrow, 1988), who developed theories on the persistence of African cultural patterns on the generations deriving by African slaves. The concept of family, and its actualisation, would have therefore been characterized by the influence of the mother-land (i.e.: Africa, due to the retention of African cultures in the enslaved population) and adapted according to the parameters indicated by the colonizers. All the approaches presented thus far, shared the classification of recognised forms of household in the Caribbean region (Andrè 1987; Clarke, 1999):

- Single person (divided family) household: usually composed of the mother and the children, frequently with different fathers; the mother is the head of the household and the bread winner. This type of household can be both simple and extended (according to the description of the following pattern).
Visiting unions are usually considered as single parent households since, even

⁴⁷ Herskovits recognized particularly three patterns deriving from the African culture: matrifocality, extended family, and kinship terminology.

if the partner is frequently involved and present in the household, his/her figure is not considered in the composition of the household.

- Extended family household (cohabitation):
 - A couple with their offspring (also those deriving from previous unions)
 - A couple/single parent, offspring and siblings
 - A couple/single parent and a dependent parent
 - A couple/single parent and some kind of relatives
- Christian family: nuclear family. The marital union is the type of relationship usually correlated with this family pattern, but it must be considered also to include of the nuclear family characterised by common law union (in which the parents/partners, even if their relationship has not been legalized by the ritual of the marriage, share the household and conduct a life very similar to that of a married couple)

Household arrangements are determined by two key factors: financial possibilities and, consequently, the nature of the male/female relationship. Aside from marriage, couples were identified as engaging in “friending” or “living” arrangements (Andrè 1987; Clarke, 1999). Friending agreements are described as a temporary relationship based mainly on sexual intercourse, with the opportunity for the woman to receive economic support from the man. In this kind of union *‘the woman is expected to be sexually available to the man at his leisure’* (Rodman, 1971: 49). Within this arrangement, in case of pregnancy, the woman would be required to provide proof

of the paternity of the baby, since *'a man who supports a child that is not or may not be his own is ridiculed, and the appearance of the baby is carefully checked to see whether or not he looks like the father'* (ibid, 1971: 52). In “living” agreements the addition of socially recognised cohabitation included an element of reciprocity and partnership (the woman taking care of the household and the man providing for the household). In this kind of union the woman would have less freedom than the man, who would frequently be allowed to engage with outside “friending” relationships⁴⁸ (Rodman, 1971). This and other factors would determine the type of living circumstances. In faithful concubinage the relationship would be characterized by fidelity and cohabitation, but would not be legally recognized. Purposive concubinage was similar to friending, apart from the fact that the union was approved by the woman’s family, to whom the man would have to promise certain types of behaviour. Instead, in the consensual cohabitation, such as the matrilocal union, *'the woman performs many of the duties of the wife or concubine'* (Clarke, 1999: 72) in exchange of rights to the man’s land. Marriage was however the only legally recognized union. Women would aspire to marriage in order to receive respect this type of union derived, and from two symbols linked to it: the ring, and being addressed as “mistress” (Wilson, 1973). Due to the financial requirements of marriage, this would tend to be more frequent in more advanced age.

⁴⁸ Of interest is the fact that wild women are called “rats” while men “stars”, a differentiation explained by the sentence *“what is fame for the man is shame for the woman”* (Rodman, 1971).

As interestingly pointed out by Barrow (1988) these categorisations rely on common features in the idea of Western family, creating a system of diffused forms of misconception. The lack of recognition and validation of arrangements, other than marriage, limited the understanding of the inter-relational dynamics characterising Caribbean families. In the next two sections, I will explore studies that have attempted to understand family figures in relation to the dynamics they share, rather than pre-fixed and Westernised conceptualisations of family.

The male figure: boys and fathers

As a result of the lack of visibility of the male figure in the historical depictions of the Caribbean family, an increasing number of contemporary researchers have attempted to analyse and theorise not only the meaning of masculinity, but also the interaction between genders in society and the processes of acquisition of gender identities and roles. The latter areas of investigation are particularly pertinent to the aims of this study. I will therefore focus my review on literature on these themes.

According to Hare and Hare (1984 cited in Beckles, 2004) the concept of masculinity is founded on the role of provider and protector. Being recognised as '*a socially produced script*' (Beckles, 2004: 228) such a construct cannot be understood as unique and static. On the contrary, in the same society it is easy to find various typologies of masculinity, according to class, race, ethnicity and cultural background. Anyhow, it seems that in the Caribbean this concept has remained "frozen" in time. Firstly, the delineation of features of masculinity is mostly related to

slavery and to its consequences on male identities. The most commonly recognised expressions of masculinity are linked with violence, conduct issues and lack of fulfilment of the male role in the family. In studies of family concepts of composition, the figure of the male is therefore treated as an outsider; a corollary that emphasizes the centrality of women (Clarke, 1999). It is possibly for this reason that the clear majority of literature on “males” in the Caribbean region is related to the concept of crew, rather than family. Nevertheless, explorations of the male reality are of great contribution to identifying contexts and social structures that should be taken into consideration when thinking about family in the region.

In his psychoanalytical interpretation of this phenomenon, André (1987) developed a correlation of the maternal figure to that of the colonial motherland⁴⁹. In his theorisation, the absence of the male figure in the family connects to a matter of female physical dominance in society and the male expression of libidinal conflicts. In other words, as men had no business in the family context, they were forced to look somewhere else to find a social role⁵⁰ or fulfilment. Whilst women’s identity is formed mainly in the domestic context (as a carer but also as a breadwinner), men shape their identity within the group, the *crew*. Therefore, the only role the family has in the formulation of a man’s identity is to attest his virility and his talents through the exhibition of his female conquest(s) and his offspring (André, 1987). The

⁴⁹ As André’s study is developed in the French Caribbean, the colonial motherland is France

⁵⁰ “*La faible intégration de l’homme dans l’espace domestique, sa situation périphérique par rapport à la famille ne doivent pas masquer que l’homme existe positivement quelque part, ailleurs*” (André, 1987: 138).

psychological reason behind this apparent refusal and detachment from the family is located in the theory of the mother-child relationship. The group signifies a neutral area, a “no mother’s land” as called by the author; a place where the male can hide from his ambivalent feeling for the libidinous mother⁵¹ (Andre, 1987). Andre’s theory has many similarities with the Madonna Complex (Parsons, 1969), a detailed psychoanalytical analysis of the meaning and the dynamics of the mother-son dyad in Naples, Italy. Whilst in Naples the son identifies the mother with the asexual figure of the Madonna, in the Caribbean the son’s sexual desires for the mother are repressed through the distance from the family provided by the peer group.

The relevance of the peer group relationship is underlined also in the ethnographic work, on becoming a man, conducted by Chevannes (2001) in five different Caribbean communities. The author describes the interactions between various components of the group and the eldest figures. A strong sense of belonging and respect is at the basis of the group socialization. The example offered by the author is of a young boy buying rizla⁵² (ibid, 2001) and this provides good points of reference on the dynamics of the group. Chevannes identifies this act as an act of respect and honour: the young boy has been sent to the shop to fulfil his duty and “serve” the eldest in the group, but he has also gained a position, a role and a value within the group for his action. As the author underlines *‘the older, seemingly more experienced*

⁵¹ “The interposition (of the group) creates a space between the ambivalence of the mother-child relationship”. *“L’interstice fait une place à l’ambivalence de la relation mère-fils”*⁵¹. (Andre, 1987 p.170)

⁵² *“Ganja spliff wrappers”* (Chevannes, 2001).

members become role models and sources of authoritative knowledge for the younger members in the warm face-to-face circle of the peer group' (Ibid, 2001: 69).

The stage for these interactions is usually the street, and in the street itself we find some of the elements that constitute the Caribbean masculinity such as music, gambling, cards and other games, discussions, fights, and interaction with the other sex. The components of the street delineate the growth and the realization of the man. As underlined by Leo-Rhynie (1997) boys are allowed to spend time on the street while girls have to stay home and fulfil their domestic duties⁵³. Boys are almost encouraged to go out and taste/learn street life, to increase the chances they will have to survive and maybe also to dominate. To the contrary, girls are usually preferred to be under the “mother’s watchful eye” that will try to keep them safe and far away from the issues linked with the encounter of the other sex (such as early pregnancies). In Leo-Rhynie’s (1997) view young boys are kept away from the household from a tender age, not because of the lack of role for them in the family, but for the necessity of learning to survive the outside world. Lewis’ (1990) analysis of the male crisis in the Caribbean describes the end of the nineteenth century as a key moment of transition in gender roles and politics in the Caribbean. These authors suggest that male marginalization is related to the process of capitalist renovation of the country and not to a historical conspiracy against men. Lewis (1990:110) recognizes *‘the apparent aimlessness of young men, their high drop-out rates from*

⁵³ Leo-Rhynie (1997) interestingly suggests that this could be the reason for mother’s preference to give birth to girls. Even if the relationship tends to be marked by strong confrontations, girls are preferred for their utility in the house, and particularly in the lower-class where they are expected to take care of the parents once old.

school and their consequent high unemployment' as the consequences of a social and economical shift imposed by globalisation and the necessity to adapt to Western requirements of social dynamics. In exploring the consequences of the emphasis on the crisis of male identity, Lewis (1990) stresses the risks deriving from associating this matter with cultural beliefs. Amongst these risks, Lewis (1990) identifies a limited space to develop an interest in the impacts that the same social dynamics have on women. Whilst Lewis (1990) and Leo-Rhynie (1997) seem to suggest that the over-emphasis on the absence of male figure is simply an alternative expression of patriarchal hegemony, Mohammed (2004) encourages us to approach the issue as an opportunity to overcome imposed misconceptions of both male and female identity in the Caribbean region. Through the employment of a post-modern framework, the author (ibid, 2004) enriches the analysis of gender roles within the region, suggesting an exploration that places the two within a context of communal social struggle. This framework emphasises the need to challenge concepts and features conceived as natural, when in fact socially constructed. Secondly, it reminds of the importance to deconstruct and challenge previous knowledge and to escape from static stereotypes and preconceptions informed by other socio-historical periods and thoughts. Specifically, Mohammed encourages one to abandon *'the stereotyped notions we have inherited from our predecessors who wrote the anthropological script of the region'* (ibid, 2004, p.145). Under the considerations offered by Mohammed (2004), many of the studies and the concepts discussed thus far lose both meaning and authority. The promiscuity and irresponsibility typically associated with black males, the breeding role of black

female and mostly important the construction of the female household with the lack of trustable males are exposed once and for all as nothing more than biased preconceptions. Mohammed (2004) suggests that overcoming these beliefs creates the opportunity to develop investigations that allow for the re-inclusion of the male figure within the family. Brown, Newland, Anderson and Chavannes' (1997) findings with regard to male's views and thoughts on their role in families confirm that, once repositioned back into a family discourse, Caribbean men express interest, belonging and meaning. In this study (ibid, 1997), fathers share their wish to function as good presences in their children's lives, not just through financial support. Similarly, personal interpretations of fatherhood elude the idea of offspring as an opportunity to show off their masculinity to the community. Lastly, participants recognise and value the strength of the mother-son bond, its cultural value and its effects on their identity.

In a similar attempt to give visibility to positive narratives of the Jamaican male, Brodber (2003) offers a range of narratives from elderly men who would have been in the midst of their fathering experiences during the twenty years of prolific investigations of family structures in the Caribbean. The foreword to these stories emphasises the same points of resistance to stereotypical images of men as those advanced by Mohammed (2004), with the added hypothesis that the lack of male presence in those studies could also be due to the time and location in which the data collection sessions were taking place. Contrary to Clarke's (1999) suggestion that studies on the family should commence from the house environment, Brodber (2003) indicates how this might have disadvantaged men as, due to the strong

division of roles between men and women, they would have been either relocated elsewhere for work or be looking for a job.

The female figure: daughter, head of the household or sexual predator.

Whilst male mythologies erased the figure of the father from the family context (Chevannes, 2003), myths attached to the maternal counterpart have placed the woman at the very heart of the family, *'consciously or unconsciously he (child) learns that it is mother he must look for any security or permanence in human relationships'* (Clarke, 1999: 107). This position of favour, matrifocality (R.T. Smith, 1956; Clarke, 1999), did not elevate the role with any prestige or merit. High percentages of matrifocal families were identified as an indicator of lower economic and social status (Clarke, 1999) and connected with men's necessity to migrate or become temporarily absent due to the lack of employment in their local area (R.T. Smith, 1956). As Randolph (1964) emphasised, it is of interest to notice how matrifocality has been explored mostly in relation to the absence of men, rather than as opportunity to investigate the role and meaning of the female figure heading the household. Accounts of family would focus primarily on either the structure or the functionality of the system in place, rather than explore relations and dynamics. The female head was therefore mostly represented in reaction to male absences, either overcompensating for the missing partner or occupied in the search for a replacement (Clarke, 1999). Although criticised, this representation of motherhood via extremes of either over-sexualisation (e.g.: the promiscuous slave and the dance hall queen) or puritanism and full absorption in her children (saint) seems to fit

Western standards fantasies of women sexuality (Welldon, 2010). As in the Madonna Complex (Parsons, 1969), and Welldon's exploration of interpretations of female sexuality, it is explained that patriarchal societies allow women only three roles: saint, mother, or "puta"⁵⁴. It is possibly because of its origin that this classification, although in milder terms, persisted in the myths attached to Caribbean families (Reynolds, 2005).

On one hand, there is the image of the "superwoman"; the mother-worker able to administrate and conduct both family life and work life. Aligned with this stereotype the superwoman is educated, respectable (Wilson, 1973) and aspiring to a British middle class status (Clarke, 1999). On the other end of the spectrum is the "baby mother", a troubled young (usually teenaged) mother not able to provide a basic subsistence for her children and mostly interested in partnering with males (Reynolds, 2005). As mentioned before, both these stereotypical mythologies of motherhood derive from arguable observations of female re-action to the male figure, depriving women of identity and presence in social dynamics. Moreover, these representations have been adopted to explore and explain maternal relations with their offspring. Fitzherbert's (1967) description of the relational dynamics between mother-son and mother-daughter is not only shaped by the absence of the father, but also tainted by the inevitable connection between mother-sexuality. From the author's perspective, the relationship between the mother and the son is developed on the assumption that the son will replace the father in the role of

⁵⁴ A "sexual predator"

husband. *'[S]ons tend to... ask them [the mothers] for advice, allow them to wash and cook for them, up to any age'* (Fitzherbert, 1967: 21). To the contrary, daughters are expected, in the first instance, to become siblings of the mother, sharing their experiences and following their steps (mother-saint, puritanism). Both these relational pictures were considered as pathological or at least against the interest and the well-being of the child. For the son to replace the father means to take the controversial place of both a loved and hated person. For the daughter, the sibling role could become a reason for "conflicts of interest" with the mother. Throughout the duration of the "siblinghood" with the mother, the girl was supposed to follow strict behavioural rules of obedience and docility, as opposed to the male possibility to pursue independence and freedom. The daughter would usually live within the household walls, or in the yard and collaborate with her mother in taking care of the house. The supposed positive outcomes of this strict education are emphasized by Evans (1997:10) in the analysis of the process of gender role learning: *'...despite any feelings about unfairness that they might have, girls who carry out these household's tasks on a daily basis learn many things that boys do not-a sense of responsibility, discipline, a sense of process in getting things done. Such qualities make girls more disposed to adjusting to the institutional requirements, such as those of the school'*. These features appeared particularly valued by lower-class parents, who expressed a preference for female children, because they have more likelihood to succeed and care for them during their old age (Leo-Rhynie, 1997).

The role of the daughter is nevertheless endangered by the eventuality of an early pregnancy. As pointed out by Wilson (1973) the passage between the state of young

girl and mother is an easy and quick one. The state of respectability⁵⁵ desired for every daughter is put at risk by the announcement of her pregnancy. This moment usually coincides also with the culmination of the mother-daughter conflict: not just for the possibility of the emergence of competitive feelings (particularly towards men), but also for the disappointment of the mother towards the daughter who has failed to follow her guidelines. In her study on the social dynamics of conflict in Jamaica, Kerr (1952) identifies this conflict as almost a ritual. The peculiar and conflictual bond between mother and daughter has been extensively analysed and described in the works of various Caribbean female authors. In the writing of Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Conde and Paul Marshall the mother-daughter dyad assumed the role of core topic (Alexander, 2001). The ambivalence of the mother-daughter relationship is assimilated with the ambivalent feelings towards homeland and motherland in the Caribbean population, coinciding with found similarities of the dynamics of power. In Alexander's examination of the imagery of motherhood in Caribbean novels, the mother becomes seen '*as an other mother, an enemy to her daughter, particularly when she appears to advocate colonial habits and mannerism*' (2001: 19). The nurturing mother of the infancy period is seen as replaced by a judging and controlling mother, who tries to impose her control on the daughter just as the motherland does. Literary accounts of mother-daughter relations can be of great help in exploring the nuances and complexities of this dyad. In the

⁵⁵ Andre (1987) describes the *respectabilite* as "*the occultation of the sexuality*" through the adoption of fine manners, polite language (opposed to the creole), nice and virginal dresses and fine adornments.

autobiographical account “Tales from the heart”, Maryse Conde (1998) describes a mother that had never been able to demonstrate her emotions and love for her children. Conde’s mother is an authoritative figure, but is still a loving mother particularly in relation to her youngest child (the author herself). This expression of control and discipline is seen by Alexander (2001) as the main cause of the fracture of the mother-child bond and of the passage from the caring-loving mother of childhood, to the detestable and controlling mother of puberty.

‘Similar to her daughter, who has undergone transformation from a young girl to a young lady, Mrs. John, once a loving and caring mother, has been transformed into a distant, hateful other, embodying the colonizer’

(Alexander, 2001:52).

The conflict arising from the entrance of the daughter in the “realm of womanhood” is once again connected to the sexualisation of the female body (Ibid, 2001). The girl will then infringe all that the mother had provided her with during her innocent childhood. In the terms of the colonial metaphor, the mother feels rejected and identifies the daughter as a traitor who has not been able to understand her control as a loving act. On the other side, the daughter associates the mother with the motherland, which *‘as a result of its colonizing principles, ...figuratively disembodies the colonized individual, leaving him or her soulless’* (Alexander, 2001 p. 19).

Rody (2001) identifies in the intervention of a grand-mother figure the possibility for redemption *‘symbolically declaring that the traumatic historical chain stops here’*

(Ibid, 2001 p.125). These older woman, frequently the grandmother, would function as representative of ancestral power and wisdom, interacting with the young woman to *'advance and preserve the oral African (ancestral) tradition. This preservation of the culture sustains the adolescent daughters on their respective journey to selfhood'* (Alexander, 2001 p. 48). The intervention of an external female figure as the solution to conflict is strongly connected to the centrality of the role of the extended family and wider community in family dynamics, themes that I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Caribbean Childhood in Context

The overview on the Caribbean family presented in the previous chapter focused mainly on its composition and components, as discussed by almost every researcher who has approached this field. To the contrary, the aim of this chapter is to widen the perspective on family dynamics, particularly in regard to children, within different contexts in which family life happens every day.

As Lieber (1981) points out in the introduction to his ethnographic fieldwork in Trinidad, it could be dangerous to limit research to a specific place, particularly if the *object* of the study is active on various levels, and in different contexts. The presence of some kind of boundary, as prescribed in psychological observation, could on the other side facilitate a linear development and create the basis for a more stable relationship with the object. In this case, the act of opening the study to various contexts, not just the household, implies the possibility to gain a wider and, thus, also a more realistic insight into family life and dynamics.

Different spheres⁵⁶ have been identified as places of interest and relevance for the family life and its components. This chapter will explore the household, the school, and the church.

⁵⁶ The term “spheres” is here used according to Lieber (1981) as the socio-anthropological analysis of institutions.

In the household

The household is usually considered the containment of the family nucleus but, as it has been already discussed in the previous chapter, in the Caribbean case this definition has to be revised. In reconsidering its containing role, it would also be necessary to re-evaluate the possible interactions taking place in such a location. The discussion of the male role in the household has pointed to the almost complete physical absence from the house. Even if women are considered the head of the household, the real main character, and consequently the principle focus of this passage, is the child, and her/his relationship to the other components of the house. The reason for this decision is related to the fact that children are the family members spending most of their time, particularly in their early years, in the household or within its premises. The main dynamic to be analysed is the one happening between parent/carer and child; an interaction that has been the source of much criticism against Caribbean families.

Most of the criticisms are related to the strict discipline imposed on children and to the related practice of physical punishment. This behaviour has been related both to religious beliefs and to the influence of British Victorian educational patterns. This issue has been criticized to the point that various authors have stated that in numerous cases it was hard to draw a line between abuse and discipline (Crawford-Brown, 1993 in Matthies et al., 2008).

In researching on the reasons behind physical punishment Arnold (1982 in Matthies et al., 2008) has discovered to his surprise that parents do not know any other way to raise their children, while Pantin (1992 in Leo-Rhynie, 1997) has discussed also in

regard to teenagers on the common belief that parents have the right to beat their children to save them from their badness⁵⁷.

These cultural beliefs seem to be applied differently according to the social class the family belongs to. While in lower class families discipline requirements are higher and the methods to meet them is tougher (not only physical punishment, but also verbal⁵⁸), middle class families seem to be less focused on discipline. Although this milder education seems to be preferred, not just by the population but also by the *public*, it has also been criticised as leading to a passive attitude worsened by a high level of permissiveness.

Madeline Kerr (1952), in her psychologically informed analysis of the close link between conflict and personality in Jamaica, describes a slightly different reality. The physical punishment becomes part of a ritual cycle in which it is rarely performed. In response to the child's misbehaviour the parent threatens the child verbally about the possibility of being beaten. The child, who is used to this kind of threatening attitude, responds to what Kerr calls a *phantasy* to a pattern that has never being actuated. The author assimilates this ritual cycle with the one that occurs during the unexpected pregnancy of a teenage daughter: the mother attacks her verbally, throws her out of the house, being sure that someone from the extended family will welcome the girl, only then to invite her back before the baby is delivered. Kerr describes this parental attitude as '*paradoxical*' (Kerr, 1952: 45), and recognizes it

⁵⁷ "The belief of this mother that she could "beat the badness" out of her child is a common one" (Leo-Rhynie, 1997 p.45)

⁵⁸ As noted by Leo-Rhynie the use of the imperative mode in dialogues with their children, was a prevalent more in lower class families (1997)

as one of the reasons behind the highly ambivalent mother-child relationship. In fact, even if the mother is usually the one who consoles the child after the punishment (verbal or physical), she is also the one who asks for that punishment to happen, calling out for help from the child's father. In the same way the mother has a strongly ambivalent position in the child's first year of life. On one side she is the nurturing loving mother, on the other side she is the cruel mother who makes her breast unavailable for the child by spreading it with lime or some other sour substance (Ibid, 1952).

Being a child in the Caribbean is represented as complicated, but there are aspects that could be understood by hypercritical authors. In describing the role of the family and particularly the relevance of the relationship between siblings, Kerr (1952) highlights the strengths of the Caribbean family. Even if the family dynamics seem messy and inconsistent, the family itself has a great meaning in the child's life⁵⁹, to the point that cursing one's family is the worst offence in the Caribbean. Siblings are important not just as play mates, but also as the primary experience of attachment and closeness, that *'in adult life seems to mature into a concept of neighbourliness'* (Kerr, 1952: 66). Moreover, the close interaction between siblings leads *'children [to] learn very early the value of reciprocal exchanges, not only of affections, but of the symbols of stronger interpersonal attachments'* (Sanford, 1975: 176). Older children

⁵⁹ *"emphasis on family ties satisfies the impulse to be with a lot of people which is very strong, and yet not to have to mix too much with others"* (Kerr, 1952: 62)

frequently look after younger siblings, helping the mother and occasionally also taking on her maternal role. When the family's situation is worsened by what *'the black community has long recognized (as) the problems and difficulties which all mothers in poverty shares'* (Stack, 1975: 183) this temporary remedy is replaced by *'shared parental responsibilities among kin'* (Ibid, 1975: 183).

As Gordon defines it, child shifting consists of the *'reallocation of dependent or minor children to a household not including a natural parent'* (Gordon, 1987: 427). The duration of this relocation is according to the mother's needs. The main determinant for this decision is the reason behind the act. Russel-Brown et al. (1997) point out that the practice happens either as a response to the mother's needs or to the child's needs. In the first case the typical scenario is a situation of economic difficulties, during which the mother is not able to provide for her child and has to ask for help to her family/friends or even to the child's father. The authors describe the mother's emotional survival as the possible causes for child shifting related to the parent's needs. Unfortunately, there is a lack of detailed research in the literature on the possible reason for this practice of reallocation. Goody (1975) has however differentiated two categories of reasons for child shifting: *crisis fostering*, the consequence of a critical situation in the family (such as death or the inability to take care of the child by one of the parents) and "purposive fostering", an informed decision for the benefits of the child. An example of the overlap of these two categories could be the mother's emotional crisis, related to her early age of motherhood, to a fracture with her family due to her pregnancy (particularly with her mother), or even with the father of the child. In this situation, the mother is usually

keen to ask for help in raising the child both as a solution to her own problems, and as an improvement of the child's standard of living and possibilities. The lack of data suggests the need for an insight on a shift towards a focus on the child⁶⁰.

If the shift is related to the child's needs, then it is usually a mother's attempt to improve the child's life and opportunities. Barrow (1988) identifies this practice as a good training for social skills. The author refers to a study on socialization in Trinidad that reveals that few mothers believed the experience deriving from child shifting would enhance the child's social abilities (ibid, 1998). On some occasions the shift is decided in order to keep the child safe from a complicated or dangerous family situation (for example domestic violence or abuse) or to preserve the mother's relationship with a new partner, to whom the child is just an *outside child*. Interestingly in this area of discussion we witness the inclusion of the father not just in the process of decision making but sometimes also as having an active role in the reallocation of the child. Russel-Brown et al. (1997) include the father and his family in the list of possible new/temporary caregiver for the child during the shift.

Another relevant figure in the practice of child-shifting is the grandmother. As pointed out by Brody (1978: 593) '*giving a child to someone else to rear tends to be correlated with having had more than one impregnator, as well as embracing the cultural belief that a grandmother's central role is indeed child care*'. Sanford

⁶⁰ It would be interesting to evaluate possible differences in practices depending on rationales. In order to have a better understanding of family dynamics it would be relevant to observe to whom the children are shifted according to the reasons of the shift.

emphasizes the grandmother's position even more, by describing her taking care of the daughter's children as a way to create *'their empires as mothers'* (ibid, 1971: 99) and by taking care of at least two generations of the family, if not three.

These statements stress the importance of the extended family in the Caribbean, and also the strength of the mother-daughter relationship. Moreover, it provides one of the explanations of the mother's decision to search for help within her family, rather than turning to governmental helps. Russel-Brown et al. (1997) examine in depth the reason why mothers do not rely on official services and the welfare system provided by the Barbadian government. The authors identify three main explanations: stigma; the wish to be independent from the government (or any outsider help) and the inadequacy of the services provided to women. These findings are of particular interest to the aims of this research since they provide an example of the clash between parent's needs and ideas and governmental services.

Researchers show a great interest and concern in relation to this practice, particularly regarding its possible consequences on child development and well-being. In one passage Russel-Brown et al. (1997) raise some concerns in relation to the possible discontinuity in the child's emotional life caused by the shift. Even so, the authors are more interested on the practical/functional aspects related to child shifting and to its use as coping strategy that benefits both the mother and the child. In fact, the parent has the opportunity to build a safer and a more stable circumstance for the return of the child, by solving or dealing with her financial issues, while the child is relocated to someone who is still part of the family and who

is trusted by the mother and might be able to provide better life chances for the child. To the contrary, Barrow (1988) emphasizes the issues and complications that may arise from this practice such as the risk that the child will not settle positively in the new accommodation; the possibility for the shift to become an act of abandonment, and on the possible consequences on the psycho-emotional well-being of the child (attachment pathologies). The findings of Russel-Brown et al. (1997) deriving from interviews with mothers on the effects of child-shifting underline the positive connotation of this practice on the population. Indeed, many mothers recognized mainly positive consequences, such as the improvement in the child's behaviour (being looked after by an experienced person), the increase on the child's possibilities for the future, and the creation of better circumstances for everyone who is involved (mother, child and new carer).

An interesting issue related to the practice of child rearing/fostering is the conflict between the biological mother and the *psychic* mother, as Sanford (1975) defines the chosen carer in her analysis on child lending in British West Indies. The author points out that *'for about a quarter of the population each person has two mothers, his genetrix⁶¹ and the woman who raised him'* (ibid, 1975: 173). The conflict between these two figures is related to their ability and will to share rights deriving from their roles. Once the child has become an adult, it is his/her duty to take care and provide for the parents. The issues rise around the choice of the parent eligible to benefit from these rights. The solution can be found in various ways: according to the

⁶¹ *Genetrix* derives from the Latin word indicating the biological mother.

agreements taken by the two carers; according to the degree of kinship of the two carers and finally according to the level of involvement maintained by the *genetrix* in the child's life. As described by Goody (1975) in British Honduras, for example, the fostering mother is the person who benefits from the grown-up child in the first place. Subsequently, if possible, the biological mother will have access to a *residual claim*. Even if the criticisms against this practice have been increasingly focussed on the psychological impact on the child's development, as many other child rearing practices diffused in the Caribbean have been, no research studies have been developed thus far of the consequences of this practice on the development of attachment patterns and behaviours on the children.

In the school

The relevance of the church in the Caribbean is increased by its close connection with the educational system. In the past, most of the schools were run by churches through state grants. Class separation is another shared feature between religious communities and schools. As presented in Thomas' narration (2004) of the society of Mango Mount⁶², the choice of the school depends on social class and financial restraints. Still, it is interesting to read in the author's accounts that education is perceived to be the best possibility for social mobility. Thomas continues by stating that education '*has become the functional alternative to race as the explicit signifier of class position*' (ibid, 2004: 104), and then specifies that such a movement is not

⁶² Pseudonym for the rural community focus of her ethnographic work in Jamaica

straightforward or easy to achieve. This is explained by some of her informants' access to *proper* education as it is jeopardised and/or defined by class and social status. Middle class children would not be sent to the local school. A great example is offered by a principal of a local school who decided to send his children to another school (Thomas, 2004) This increases hostility and induces resignation in the lower class/poor parents who recognize the impossibility for their children to attend a school good enough to prepare them to successfully move onto secondary school. Some parents also point out that the effort to provide an education to their children might be in vain since *'even if a "small" man could afford to send his children to good schools, prospective "white" or "chiney" employers would only employ people they already knew, no matter how qualified their child might have become'* (Thomas, 2004:105).

The picture provided by Proctor (1980) in the historical analysis of Barbadian education evidences the presence of hope for children from the lower class. A set of reforms enacted in 1869 enhanced the possibility for lower class black children to access good formal education and *"incorporated the principle that privilege was based in some way on merit"* (Proctor, 1980:194). Moreover, children were stimulated by the creation of positive examples of *'better educated blacks into visible positions of authority and influence'* (Ibid, 1980:194). The expansion of education has however caused a decrease in quality, as pointed out by the accounts of some parents collected by Thomas (2004). Thomas presents the results of a study on school drop out in Mango Mount, which indicates poor quality of teaching (that is,

not sufficient to prepare pupils for CEE⁶³) and “a lack of interest in children’s affairs on the part of the teachers” (Ibid, 2004:106) have contributed to this situation.

In the church

Church and religion⁶⁴ have always been designed as one of the solutions to the fragmentation and irresolution of the Caribbean family. The development of religiosity, and its implications, in the Caribbean seems to place the Church in the position of saviour of the masses from the corrupted and imperfect life of the West Indians.

The story of the growth of the Church as one of the main institutions in the Caribbean is complicated and cannot be summarized in a few paragraphs, and therefore it will not be discussed. Nevertheless, a few points need to be discussed since relevant to the aim of this discussion.

While the colonial governors supported the diffusion of Christian religions viewing them as a milder form of control, the missionaries introduced religion as form of purification of the infidel⁶⁵. In Moore’s paper exploring the role of Churches in the Caribbean this attitude is still widely supported, as pointed out in the statement *‘the negro in the Caribbean was not just an irrational being disciplined by the salutary*

⁶³ the exam to access secondary school

⁶⁴ See Appendix 2

⁶⁵ J. R. Middleton offers a great example of this attitude through the words of Peter Tosh narrating his experience within the Christian Church: *‘When I ask why I am black, they I was born in sin’* (2000, p.185)”.

severity of slavery, but a soul dangerously close to damnation because he was unexposed to the message of the gospel' (ibid, 1971: 25). Faith was supposed to help slaves survive the cruel treatment of masters since *'the converted slave would become a more willing slave; instead of the negative stimulus of fear he would have the positive stimulus of moral duty'* (Moore, 1971: 25). The author, in his brief overview of the history of churches in the Caribbean, emphasizes their role to forge a stable society, ruled by God's law. One of the main areas to improve and achieve a better society in the dysfunctional Caribbean was family life. Reverend Brown proclaims his concern due to *'the threat of annihilation from without and disintegration from within'* (ibid, 1971: 54) as the consequence of the loss of authority in the institution of the family for both social and economic reasons. By attacking the request of freedom by women, the diminished relevance of children care, the lack of fixed responsibilities and roles, the newly acquired centrality of the marital relationship, and other negative *devolutions* occurred in the family, the author underlines that *'marriage can no longer be regarded as the sole necessary and sufficient condition for sexual intercourse'* (Moore, 1971: 57). In the concluding lines of the paper the Reverend, however, incites the church to acquire a milder position and a more open minded view on the family situation in the Caribbean in order to allow the development of a constructive dialogue and the inclusion of the population's cultural heritage in Christian practice.

The existing religions, derived from the African heritage, were either not allowed or considered dangerous and inappropriate. Therefore people started to practice them in secret. An example of this behaviour can be found in Elizabeth Nunez's novel

“Behind the Limbo Silence” (2003) where, as pointed out in a critical reading by Mitchell, two characters share the experience of been *‘both raised in family circumstance where the traditional religious practices of their families were kept secret from them, camouflaged by overt adherence to the Catholic religion’* (Mitchell, 2006 p.88). The most common situation consisted in a fusion of mainstream religions, mainly Christian religions, with traditional religious practices (such as Vodun and Obeah). This is one of the reasons behind the popularity of *cults* such as Revivalism which expand the explanation for the high diffusion of this practice: *‘revivalism satisfied the people because it combined their deepest African beliefs with Christianity, as well as giving them a chance for leadership, for it was usual that a revivalist congregation would be dominated by a strong leader or prophet’* (Brereton, 1989: 105). Revivalism, and other so called “black religions” were experienced as form of relief and escape from the bitter reality, *‘participation in the cults has afforded emotional release from the economic, political, and social humiliations and hardships which have been the lot of lower-class Afro-Americans’* (Brereton, 1979: 159). The role of religion was, therefore, to offer an escape to Church members, and more importantly to offer a place to belong and to share experiences and friendship lightening the burden of social differences and exclusion. The birth of the Rastafarian religion is due to similar reasons, with a stronger focus on the political aspects of the discourse. In fact, while Revivalism’s strength is in the combination of aspects of both the types of religions (and hence in the opportunity to feel part of the society maintaining cultural roots without losing respectability), Rastafarianism focuses on socio-cultural issues, as proclaimed in the words of Bob

Marley *'we refuse to be/ what you wanted us to be/ we are what we are/ that's the way it's going to be/ you can't educate I/ for no equal opportunity/ talking about my freedom, people/ freedom and liberty'* (Babylon System)⁶⁶. Brereton describes the Rastafari movement as *'a functional alternative, or functional equivalent, for orthodox and Revivalist religions, political parties, and other social organizations'* (1979: 193). The difference is located in the role of *escape* from reality. While other religions provided a place for community and shared experiences, Rastafarianism contests the social and political reality of the Caribbean and supports and sponsors the exodus to the "Homeland". Once again, the role of religion is to provide a way to survive in the reality of the present world. Indeed, what is relevant to the aim of this study, in both cases, is the emphasis of the social circumstances on the importance of the community in Caribbean life. This discussion underlines the close connection between cultural and religious life, raising various questions concerning the role of religious affiliation on the creation of personal cultural identity and in particular in children.

The relevance of religion in the life of many Caribbean people is revealed not just by the strong socio-cultural value of a religious affiliation, but also by the several meanings and role that religion has assumed throughout the history of this country.

As pointed out by Barrett (1976: 102) *'there is no dichotomy between sacred and*

⁶⁶ An interesting study on Rastafarianism through the analysis of the lyrics of main reggae music authors can be found in J.R.Middleton (2000). "Identity and subversion in Babylon. Strategies for resisting against the system in the music of Bob Marley and the Wailers" in Gassai, Mune"Religion, culture and tradition in the Caribbean".

profane” since ‘religion in folk societies is the link between mundane life and the world of mystical powers and spirits’.

Once again, the centrality of the church in the development of the community is seen as fundamental and as a natural consequence of local traditions (ibid, 1976). While searching materials for this section of the research, it became evident that religion and religiosity encompass all the analysed contexts. From the household to school, to the streets, both in the private and in the public religion in the Caribbean is omnipresent.

Still it is noticeable that there is a lack of research in the field of religious education and affiliation in children’s life. Religion is associated not just with moral values, but also with class differentiation and belonging. Brereton (1979) stresses the differentiation in religious affiliation between the middle class, the established church, lower class and new revivalist cults. The church becomes a place for community and friendship. The reasons behind such a strict separation are evident and congruent with the Caribbean society. A good example is provided in the account of popular attitudes toward Rastafarianism. Members of the cult are described as belonging to two groups of people: *“illiterate or semi-illiterate, confused, poor, bitter urban dwellers”* (ibid, 1979: 219). The role of the cult has changed throughout the years, and the type of affiliation has changed too (mainly because of the “fashionability” of the cult in the post Marley era), but the label of lunatic-ganja smokers seems to persist.

However little attention has been given to the role of religion in children's lives, and in particular in regard to its contribution to the formation of the child's identity⁶⁷. In general, as pointed out by Csordas (2009) in the introduction to his account on childhood and adolescence in a charismatic community, despite the recent increase of interest around childhood in the field of anthropology, only few studies have focused on religion, spirituality and morality in childhood. This leaves a gap in the literature that, if filled, might help also understanding the influence of religion in other periods of life.

⁶⁷ See appendix 2

Chapter 4: Caribbean Families in London

In chapter 2 and 3, the reader has been presented with an overview of children's experiences in four different contexts within Caribbean settings. Each social space, and related experiences, has been examined through a review of the existing literature juxtaposed with the data collected during a brief fieldwork conducted in Jamaica. The following two chapters aim to provide indication of how these experiences translate within the British context, through the data collected during my fieldwork with Caribbean families living in London.

In the introduction to their discussion on childhood in social space, James, Jenks and Prout (1998: 38) provoke the reader's thoughts by stating that '*children either occupy designated spaces, that is they are placed, as in nurseries or schools, or they are 'conspicuous by their inappropriate or precocious invasion of adult territory'*'. The existing analysis and accounts of children's lives and experiences are, in fact, shaped around adults' lives and concepts. The life of a child is shaped and determined by the presence or absence of adults. In the attempt to present a different and less explored, perspective, children's voices and views have been given priority in the reflective analysis of the data.

In the household

*'If we start on the study of kinship with
preconceived notions about the basicness*

of the nuclear family

then we shall be lost before we begin'

(Carsten, 2000)

Originally adopted in anthropology as a mean to escape from the limitations of specific terminology such as kinship and residence, *household* is presented by Wilk and Netting (1984: 2) as '*a residual term to take up the slack between ideal family types and the actual groups of people observed in ethnographic situations*'. In the previous chapter the classification of household in the various subgroups was primarily informed by kinship ties and by the morphological composition of the household itself. The presence/absence of family members, most notably fathers, has been widely adopted in studies as key element in the categorization of households in the Caribbean (Berthoud, 2001). Existing literature has placed the emphasis on the male presence/absence in the house in order to delineate the variety of male-female relationships present in the Caribbean society and to indicate the role of women within the family system (Berrington, 1994). However, this type of categorization had led to harsh critiques and ultimately to the pathologisation of the Caribbean family (Goulbourne and Chamberlain, 2001). As family is considered as a factor influencing other variables in the life of individuals, sociological formations and categorisations of family are in fact widely used as the basis for most research on health, education achievements and employment (Sharma, 2013), it could be argued that the negative tone adopted in the classification of Caribbean families creates a

priori deficit to the populations studied. The following analysis attempts to group different family realities.

The basic distinction suggested by Leslie and Korman (yr?) is between family households and nonfamily ones. To fall into the former category, the household has to *'consist of at least one adult member who maintains a household and shares a common dwelling with a spouse, children or relatives'* (ibid,1989: 18). Such a definition excludes divorced, widows/widowers and unmarried couples from the family category, an option that could be seen as unacceptable in the present day and in some cultures. Moreover, in many cases it could be argued that the *label* imposed by this definition is in contrast to the perception of the members of the household. An example from my fieldwork could provide the basis for an argument against the requirements for a household to be classified as a family household. Desiree, a 48 years old Jamaican woman, and Jacob, a 55 years old Jamaican man, an unmarried couple with no children, would fall into the category of family household, but not in the way they consider themselves as family. During my years of fieldwork Desiree assumed the role of discussant for all of the questions and themes deriving from the analysis of the data. Despite having an opinion and a story for any topic deriving from the observations of family life, she never openly talked about the fact that she is, what in Jamaica is referred to as a "mule", a childless woman. On the contrary she has always been extremely vocal regarding her high level of involvement in her nieces' and nephews' lives, pointing out that with Jacob's help she had raised most of them and that they are effectively members of her family

nucleus with her now husband. Towards the end of the second year of research, Desiree and Jacob “finally” got married. However, before the wedding Desiree had clearly pointed out that it was simply a formality and an excuse for the family to celebrate, as they had always been a family and being married was simply the right thing to do and was following God’s will. The definition of ‘family’ within Caribbean families seems to evade commonly recognized boundaries and defined-static roles. When asked to represent and describe their family, many of the children observed during this research presented a picture that not just eludes conventional views on family but also highlights the need for a revision in the use of terminology related to family members and other relatives. Desiree and Jacob never considered themselves as just *partners*; they were a family before getting married and not simply because they were together but because they felt like a family and they had raised “their children”⁶⁸ as a family would. This discrepancy between how their household would be defined, and how they perceived it to be, reiterates the necessity to explore the construction of families through their members’ eyes, rather than through preconceived structures.

Throughout my fieldwork, I came across a multitude of types of households, most of which could be superficially grouped in any of these three variations: single mother-child/children; single mother, child and member(s) of the extended family and nuclear family. This sort of reductive exercise is what leads to statistics such as

⁶⁸ how Desiree would refer to her nieces and nephews, who in return would call her mama

those provided by the 1991 Census, which indicated '*Caribbean families tend to be small, but high percentage are headed by a lone parent, and many children live with a widowed or separated parent*' (Owen, 2001:91). The results illustrated in this investigation represents only one of the many layers of the complexity of the living arrangements of many families of Caribbean descent living in the UK. If we were to arrange the families participating in this study in different groups, according to whether the household is –apparently- single headed or not, many would possibly be identified as the former. However, once we move onto a deeper level of analysis by taking into consideration different aspects of the family life and the household arrangements, such subdivision it appears to be inaccurate, or at least too superficial to be considered reliable and definitive. The conventional subdivision between single headed households and other, could be described as obsolete and irrelevant. Outside this dichotomy, components of the households are usually forgotten or ignored to obtain a position of relevance. The recovery from a status of exclusion becomes possible once the members of the households are counted as effective members, not because of natural/blood ties or physical absence/presence, but because of their performative role in it (Butler, 1988). As suggested by Carsten relatedness and therefore kinship should be conceived as the '*articulation of social and biological aspects*' (2000: 40). In the same way, I suggest a more dynamic approach to the concepts of “family” and “household”. Central to this approach is the idea of “performativity” of the person. Family and household cannot be merely understood as determined by biological links or physical presence, or their absence. When considering the two concepts in relation to the child’s experience, the

boundaries imposed by physicality and biology should be overcome to include all the characters that contribute to creating the child's idea of "family" and "home". The result is not a schematic subdivision of families according to their detailed features. On the contrary, having spent a long period observing and interacting with the families, I encountered not a few problems in grouping them in categories. Most of these families do not fit in any conventional idea or representation of family unit or household. The answer to my doubts and what seemed like the most appropriate way to address my difficulties in identifying some guiding lines to differentiate types of family/household, came from a child participating in the study. During one of our recurrent conversations about his family situation, Tyrell explained that although he only had one family he had many homes. When I asked him to describe his situation in more detail, he replied that although his mum was his only family, he had many homes and felt like he belonged to all of them in the same manner. Although at first his words left me puzzled, I later understood what he meant and I believe he really felt what he said and that possibly he had unravelled my understanding of family life for these children. I then started looking at these complicated puzzles in a different way and what follows is the result of this.

What follows is then an attempt to group the households examined during the two years of fieldwork taking into consideration the multi-layered composition of the family and also trying to place the child as the centre rather than peripheral element in the family.

One family, many homes

The following families would conventionally be enlisted under the category of 'single headed household' according to the following definition:

'a single parent family consists of one parent and dependent children living in the same household. The resident parent may be single due to widowhood, divorce, separation, non-marriage, and more recently, single parent adoption'

(Orthner, 1976: 429)

Unsurprisingly, and in accordance with the results offered by the previously mentioned analysis of the census compiled by Owen (2001), out of several examples of households, only in one case is the single parent a father. In three cases the parent is not physically present and almost completely lacks any engagement with the offspring.

Having provided the words to define his family situation, Tyrell is the first example I will discuss in this section. When I first met Tyrell, he was living alone with his mother Malene in a shelter, whilst waiting to be allocated permanent accommodation by the council. Our first observation took place in his father's flat. I previously had an informal meeting with Malene, who had explained to me their current housing situation and told me that they were using the shelter only for sleeping as during the day they could use Tyrell's father's flat while he was at work. The few times I conducted the observation in his father's flat, Tyrell seemed at home and not simply

a 'visitor'. On the first visit, he took me on a 'tour' of the flat and proudly showed me pictures of him and his siblings. The father had in fact created a new family with another woman and according to Malene he seemed more involved in their lives than in that of Tyrell. Malene herself had two older children, a boy and a girl but they were both living in Jamaica. She had only managed to take Tyrell back to visit them once, which coincided with my fieldwork. On their return, it was easy to tell that the meeting with his his 'ghost-siblings' had had an impact in the boy's life. In addition to such a complex and widespread family network, Malene and her friend Trisha, mother of Leroy, were helping each other looking after the children, sometimes even for prolonged period of times. The two women met in London and discovered that their families lived nearby in Jamaica. They became good friends and created a network of support in absence of their extended families. The crucial gesture that sealed this linkage was, according to them, becoming each other's son's godmothers and, this, in a way created their own family link. The role of the godmother in Caribbean culture has a very particular meaning. The tasks that a godmother performs go beyond the boundaries set by its European definition. The religious meaning is still strongly present and central, but on a practical level being someone's godmother does not simply concern the spiritual field. Being someone's grandmother is conceived as both an investment and the acceptance of some sort of responsibilities. Godmothers, if not already part of the child's kinship system, become a member of the child's family and are frequently involved in raising the child. In most cases, they are referred to as aunties and they have regular contact with the child. In this particular case, the role of the godmother was going even further than that. Tyrell

and Leroy always referred to each other as brothers and the level of involvement of both women in their lives was almost equal. One occasion made me fully realize the depth of such family link. Tyrell and Leroy were attending the same primary school, Tyrell had been through some difficult times at school, mostly due to behavioural issues, and after years of struggles he seemed to have finally settled, particularly after his visit to Jamaica. After only few months in Nursery, Leroy had been demonstrating similar issues and his mother had been called in by the head teacher to discuss a plan to address on the situation. Rather than involving Leroy's father, whose presence in the household seemed to fall within the idea of visiting⁶⁹ father, Trisha had asked for help from Malene, who had then attended the meeting with her. After that occasion, I noticed that Leroy had started spending more and more time under Malene's care. When asked about the situation, Malene explained that as she had experienced this with Tyrell. Trisha and she had agreed that it was more convenient for her to deal with Leroy's problems.

A similar situation of what could be called co-operation can be found in another example. Calvin and his mother, Debara, were living alone when I met them. At first sight their family/ household situation was very simple: a single mother living with her only child. Their relationship was very close and exclusive and in many occasions Calvin had referred to himself as 'the man of the house'. After the first few observations it became quite clear that Debara was experiencing some sort of

⁶⁹ Trisha and Leroy's father were married; however, he was not living in their flat at the time of the study. Leroy would see him regularly and seemed to be on good terms with Trisha.

pressure to perform. At my arrival, I would always find an immaculately cleaned flat, freshly baked treats and a very well behaved Calvin, spending most of the time in his room leaving the adults in the sitting room to chat the afternoon away. The conversation would mostly revolve around the difficulties and the joys of being a parent and I perceived Debara's attempt to portray well all her hard work and devotion in raising her child. In the attempt to break such a circle, I once suggested joining them out of the house, in one of their famous 'reward-afternoons' out. Debara, initially not fully convinced by my proposal, was quickly convinced by a very enthusiastic Calvin. It took only a moment of non-perfect behaviour to set Debara off and to replace her palpable motherly performance into mothering. After having dealt with her son's *'unacceptable attitude'* (Debara, in conversation in her sitting room, March 2010), that had pushed her to compare her son to his father, Debara and I had our first genuine conversation about her mothering experience. She explained how she had quickly become depressed after finding out she had become pregnant with Calvin. She had always wanted a baby, but had not calculated the possibility that her then partner would have left her after becoming pregnant. Her partner's decision to leave her quickly led Debara into despair. She became depressed and considered having an abortion because of the fear of raising a child alone but mostly because she was ashamed of having an out of wedlock child. Her older sister, also a single mother to a child who was born just a year before Calvin, intervened and offered her help and support. Debara moved to a new house in order to be closer to her sister, who also helped create a wider network of support in raising her child, as the rest of their family lives in Birmingham and cannot offer help

on a daily basis. Once Calvin started attending school, Debara met the grandmother of one of Calvin's classmates, Abigail. The two women, both struggling in arranging their lives between jobs and looking after the children, initiated a sort of 'courtyard' agreement, as they named it in reference to the extensively studied and observed situation of communal help within courtyards in Jamaica. When they first explained to me the mechanisms behind this sort of agreement, I had wrongly thought it solely consisted in a technical arrangement of caretaking, not involving further involvement in the children's lives. I was then proved wrong as on one occasion, as Abigail's grandmother explicitly stated, she was counting on her granddaughter to rely on Calvin's mother to respond and look after the child's emotional needs, effectively acting like a mother, when she could not be present. However, what surprised me the most in my attempt to delineate this intricate family system was the persistent presence of Calvin's father. Although he had decided not to be involved in raising the child as a member of a nuclear family with Calvin and Debara, he had nevertheless been present in other ways. Aside from the economic contributions he had been providing since the birth of the child, he had offered additional support through his own family network in London and in more recent years he had been seeing the child on a regular basis. Particularly in the last couple of years, the father had granted himself the possibility of spending time with Calvin but, as described by Debara, mostly to take him out on fun days rather than looking after him as a 'responsible father'. On the contrary, the connection he had provided through his own extended family had resulted in yet another sort of courtyard agreement between Debara and Calvin's father's sister. This woman, who was already helping

her daughter by looking after her nephew (another classmate of Calvin), had become a sort of back up in situations in which Debara could not find help in her usual circle of support. As the relationship between the children had grown, the two women had slowly found themselves to be friends and reliable helpers. although. However, due to the link that had connected them, they appeared to be holding a less close connection in comparison to Debara's other networks. One element of relevance in this case is the concept of closeness, both emotional and geographical. Both types of closeness appear to be fundamental in the creation of these network systems. In the example of Debara and her sister, the connection had arisen both because of emotional links, being part of the same family and most importantly sharing the same circumstances of having to raise a child on their own and geographical nearness. In fact, once they had agreed to help each other in their task of motherhood, they also rearranged their lives by moving closer to each other, in order to belong to the same community and by simplifying their movements through physical proximity. By contrast, Debara's link with Abigail's grandmother had started off as being fuelled by their physical proximity and by the fact that both children were attending the same school, to then grow into a fully effectively family link, with the various members participating in each other's lives not just because of a mechanical agreement but also on an emotional level. Tracey Reynolds (2005) in her work on Caribbean mothers in the UK, discusses extensively the concept of community mothering as a form of extension of mothering tasks and responsibility into the wider community. In Reynolds' discussion, the extensive mothering takes place through being active participants in the community, through which the creation of more or less official

organisations where people of Caribbean heritage can find or offer support and help. As explained by the author, such a practice reflects '*a well-established, and cultural historical tradition of individuals utilising the community for support with family and care provision*' (Reynolds, 2005: 121). The examples provided by Reynolds are mostly portraying a shift from family networks into community networks, either through Saturday schools or churches or independent community centres. This will be discussed in the following chapter on British Caribbean childhood outside the household. Many scholars have theorized about the loss of the sense of familial networks, in favour of the creation of relationships outside the extended family. However, in the cases presented so far it appears that these families, rather than having dismissed familial ties and having turned onto '*Caribbean welfare based organisations*' (ibid, 2005: 123), they have created alternative links fuelled by both emotional and geographical closeness. Family, neighbours and members of acquired extended family all join in with the creation of a fluid network aimed at focusing on the child. The centrality of children in creating such connections is reiterated both by Sudbury (1998) and Collins (1991) in their works on Black women and motherhood. Children are not simply an investment for the future or a tool to preserve and maintain alive traditions. Children are the link that connects various elements in the social context that constructs community.

Children can also mean behind the reconsolidation of previously broken links, as in the following examples. I met Nikkya in a slightly different environment from the other mothers. She was a volunteer in an organization providing support to Black

women, where I interviewed some practitioners. Having heard about my study, she approached me and offered to take part by sharing her experience as a Jamaican mother and daughter living in the UK. Nikkya and Joyce, her six-year-old daughter were living on their own London having relocated there from the USA. Joyce's father had remained in the United States and could see the child only twice a year, but always for quite long periods and on a full-time basis.

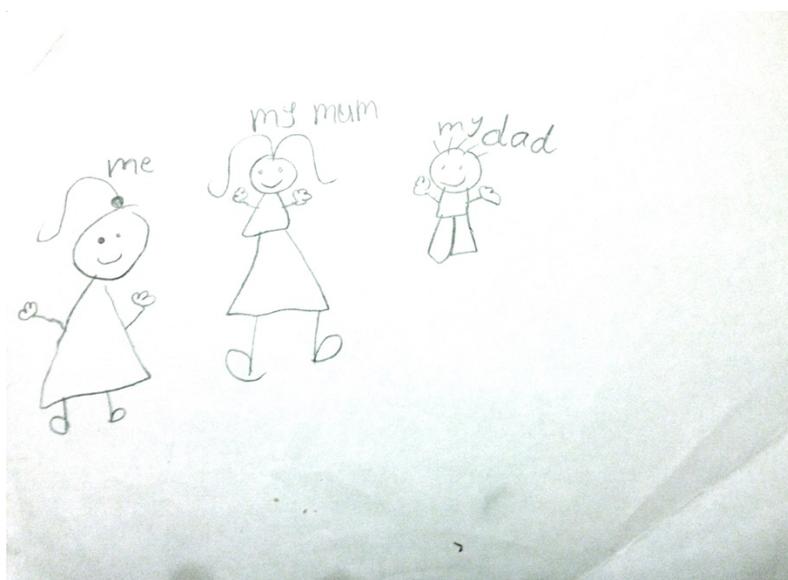


Figure 1: Joyce's family

Nikkya was born in London and had moved to the USA at the age of sixteen, when her mother had decided she could not cope with her bad behaviour and that the best person to look after her would be her own mother who was a much more experienced woman who would have been able to instil traditional values in the child. Nikkya explained me she had not reacted well to her mother's decision and had maintained contact with her while living in the States simply because her

grandmother had insisted. Despite her grandma's attempts to control her "wildness" (the term used by her mother to describe Nikkya's attitude when she had moved to live with grandma), Nikkya became pregnant while still quite young. However, what she thought would have been the beginning of a family, turned out to be the end of her relationship with her partner. Because of her pregnancy and the end of her romantic relationship, Nikkya's grandmother suggested she return to the UK to live with her mother. According to Nikkya, her mother and grandmother had already taken this decision without consulting her and she believed her grandmother's religious faith and the fact that she did not want to feel ashamed of such a situation were the reasons for her departure. During a fairly animated discussion I witnessed while at a dinner with the two women, Nikkya's mother confirmed that they had indeed agreed for her return. However, the decision had been taken because she was then feeling ready and able to take responsibility for looking after both Nikkya and Joyce. Nikkya shared that initially she had mixed feelings about returning as, after eight years the family in the US had become her family, but mostly because she was still angry with her mother for sending her away. However, through her own experience as a mother, she could relate to her mother's decision and found in her a great source of help and support in raising Joyce. Thanks to her mother's support she had the opportunity to return to school and finish her studies. At family dinners Joyce would loudly pride herself for being the reason why the two women had reconnected. Thanks to her, Nikkya quickly re-established the weakened connections with her British extended family.

Similarly, in the following examples the child/children constitute the link between families and households as they are subjected to the attention of multiple carers and experience the idea of 'family' through various households.

Sami is a seven⁷⁰ year old girl living alone with her busy mother. As the mother has to juggle her time between two jobs, Sami tends to spend most of her time away from school either with her grandma or with one of her four older sisters. Sami is the last of five children, who were conceived by three different fathers and the age gap with the other siblings is considerable. Her definition of family includes also her father, whom is supposedly living in Jamaica, a motivation offered by the mother when enquired about the reasons behind the father's absence. Although the mother identifies herself as single mother, Sami clearly has a very a different concept of her family. Not only is her father part of it, even if she has never met him, but also her grandma, her eldest sister and her niece are key members. Every single person Sami includes in her definition of 'family' belongs to her social circle and is in some way involved in her everyday life. This includes the father, although he is not physically present. Due to the amount of time spent at grandma's house and at her eldest sister's house, Sami's picture of the household is complex and includes all the three households in which she resides and spends significant periods of time. During the second year of fieldwork, Sami was excluded from school permanently, and as a result her household/family picture expanded even more. Her auntie and her two

⁷⁰ age of the child at the beginning of the two years of fieldwork.

closest cousins came into the picture as she started spending the school hours with them, as none of the other carers could look after her as they were working. Towards the end of the fieldwork three households and carers compose Sami's family picture.

At first Shanice and Shai household might appear as a single headed household as mother and son live alone in a small flat. Shai's father has never lived with them and in the last two years he has seen less and less of his son as he has formed another family with a new partner and a new-born baby. Before the birth of the baby the father was much more involved in Shai's life. Then he slowly disengaged both emotionally and economically. Shai suffered a great deal at the birth of the half-sibling and struggled to deal with the disappearance of the father. During most observations she would mention him and recount episodes related to his most recent visit. When I enquired about the absence of the father in Shai's life, Shanice would instead point out that it was for the best, as his presence was mainly a source of new problems and he was never reliable enough to be helpful. Shanice continued by explaining that Shai's father was initially very engaged in the upbringing of the child, and that because of his departure, she had to rely on the help of her family to balance everything. In fact, a key element in the description of their household is that their flat was strategically located in respect to Shanice's extended family, particularly her mother and her older sister. Shanice had no reserve in admitting that her child had been raised within the three homes and that for this reason she had never really perceived herself as a single parent. One day, on the way home after school, Shai, Shanice and I were discussing their family unit and Shanice described

herself as *'a mother who is raising her son with help and under the guidance of her family (Shanice, in conversation, February 2010)'*, to which Shai responded *'there's mum and then big mum [Shanice's older sister] and grandma, they all tell me to do my homework (...) but I get to be the man of the house and I get so many presents for Christmas (...)'* (Shai, in conversation, February, 2010)

Destiny's family was slightly different. Contrarily to Shanice, Destiny would proudly call herself a single mother but also acknowledge that *'I ain't doing all the job on my own. Does it sound bad if I admit that my children are who they are not just because of me?'* (Destiny, May 2010). Destiny and her four children, the two eldest (sixteen years old girl and ten-year-old boy) who are from a different father to the other two, were living in a small council flat surrounded by friends and what Destiny would call her "London family". Neither of the fathers were involved in the children's lives and Destiny would rely on friends for help. The father of the eldest was living in Jamaica, whilst the father of the other two was in London, but were not talking to each. However, Destiny was still in contact with his mother, who would frequently pay visits to the children. At the beginning of the study Destiny had a new partner who had expressed the wish to be more involved in the children's lives; a situation that evolved during the ethnography and resulted in the two taking separate ways. Nevertheless, as with the previous partner, Destiny kept in touch with his family and his mother joined the biological grandma in the role of celebrant during one of the

girl's 6th birthday⁷¹. In this regards, the example provided by Chamberlain in her paper setting guidelines for 'Rethinking Caribbean Families' (2003) highlights how the figure of grandparents and other relatives can replace the void at times left by the so-called absent fathers. Opposing Henriques' (1953) view regarding the phenomenon, Chamberlain refused to recognize the extended family involvement in the child's life only as response to the parents' *'fecklessness'* (ibid, 2003:64) and suggested that *'culture may be a more enduring ingredient in family formation than (unstable) economic constraints'* (Chamberlain, 2003: 68). Comparisons between the Caribbean families in the islands and abroad constitute, however, a complex matter. Differences dictated by the contexts at times overtake the similarities existing underneath the surface.

The examples of single-headed households presented so far are a representation of the adaptation of Jamaican living arrangements in the population living in the diaspora. In Jamaica finding a single parent living on her/his own with the children would be a rarity, not simply due to economic reasons, but also for accepted cultural patterns of ways of living. Shared household or complex households, still remain of relevance in the British context, as illustrated in the following section.

⁷¹ See chapter 8 for narrative of this event.

Many families, one household

The editorial for the special issue on *'Caribbean families and communities'* synthesizes the living arrangements usually described as matrifocal or female headed households as:

'generalised situations where families are female headed (though not necessarily matri-focal) with one or more generations of relations (e.g. a mother's mother) and the woman's offspring, and with one or more male friends/partners having a visiting relationship with the woman of childbearing age'

(Goulbourne, 2003:4)

The families I consider in this section reflect this description. The case I encountered that best exemplifies this situation is that of Latisha, a ten-year-old girl living with her mother and baby brother, her auntie and her daughter. The two sisters moved from Jamaica together and created their household in London and now live as a family. They take turns in looking after the children and, although Latisha's auntie became pregnant during the second year of fieldwork, the two women decided to continue living together with the new-born's father only visiting the house. The other fathers were not involved in the children's lives and are rarely mentioned, although they provided some sort of economic support. The two women held very strong opinions about the lack of involvement in the children's lives by their fathers. Latisha's mum,

Fawn, explained how she had attempted to involve Latisha's father in her upbringing, but he was not interested as he was still very young and living with his parents. When she became pregnant with the second child she had no expectations that her partner would have been more involved than Latisha's father. It almost seemed as if she did not want him to offer what he was offering, which was solely economic support and occasional visits to the child. Although the two sisters had no other members of their family in the country, they had created their own family together with their children. On more than one occasion I heard Latisha calling her auntie 'mum' and when her biological mother moved to Jamaica for a few months to look after her sick mother, the sister completely assumed parental responsibilities for Latisha and her younger brother.

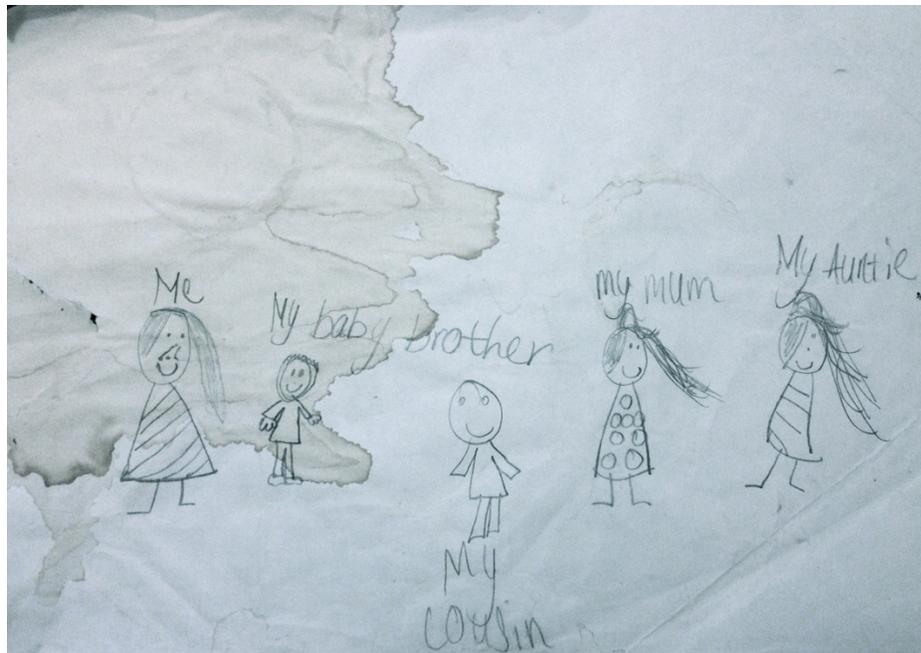


Figure 2: Latisha's family

During my fieldwork, I encountered two similar although slightly different situations of siblings or friends forming a sort of family nucleus by living together in the same household. In Terrel and Shandrice's situation the picture was more complex, as social services were also involved in the picture. The two children were living with their mother, a young woman afflicted by a degenerative illness and hence not fully able to look after the children and provide for their needs, particularly as Terrel required a lot of attention and energy. The mother's illness was affecting mainly her ability to deal with practical daily basic tasks, such as taking the children to school or taking them to the park. As the mother had demonstrated to be capable, if helped, but also willing to maintain the custody of the children, the social services had granted her external support provided by a carer. Luckily enough one of the woman's friends had offered to help and, after completing relevant training, had successfully being appointed as the children's carer. Melissa, the carer, had been present since the children were infants. They only had one year of difference, and for this reason she had always played a relevant role in their upbringing.

The children's father was never mentioned for quite a long period of time -, only towards the end of the second year Terrel mentioned him briefly and simply to complain of his lack of commitment to spending time together. According to the child, the father was too busy working and could not spend much time with them. When I asked him whether he was bothered by it, Terrel explained me that their father had never been very present, but in the last few months he had decreased the contact. I then tried to discuss the situation with Shandrice, after the mother's refusal

to comment on it, but the girl had simply assumed her mother's position and expressed no interest in talking about her father. In opposition, a topic that both the children were very keen to discuss was the fact that their mother's younger brother, John, had recently started spending lots of time at their house *'to be with mum and play with us'* (Terrel, in conversation at school, May 2010). Since working outside London, the uncle could only stay at the weekend and occasionally during the week. Nevertheless, he had quickly taken over as a paternal figure, particularly in regard to matters related to their behaviour at school and home. As the school was in the process of assessing both children for emotional and behavioural issues in order that they could receive specialized support through a statement. In the attempt to relieve his sister from some parental duties, the uncle had started attending meetings at school and, possibly as a consequence, was also enforcing discipline at home. On more than an occasion I witnessed the mother stepping back to leave her brother to deal with Terrel's difficult behaviour. Interestingly, after a few months from the arrival of the uncle in the house, the school staff started noticing a significant improvement in the children's behaviour. Desiree was one of the first to point out the possibility of a correlation between the two, but quickly informed me that she would have shared her views only once I had expressed mine.

Feeling challenged by my own informant, I started attempting to find a non-prescriptive explanation for the role invested by the uncle in the household. In an attempt to avoid falling into adult-centred explanatory models, I tried to consider the situation from a phenomenological perspective. I started observing Terrel's modes of interaction with adults and tried to identify routines, similarities and the factors

leading to them. While considering how he previously had behaved in similar situations, the understanding for such change was to relate it to the novelty of the situation. I remembered having observed Terrel becoming more “compliant” when introduced to the presence of a new adult figure in the classroom, so I had concluded that the unfamiliarity with the new authority figure in the household could have been the element that had favoured the improvement in his behaviour. When I presented my conclusions to Desiree, she commented that she had reached a different conclusion through a similar process. She suggested I started noticing how Terrel’s behaviour would modify around male figures. I was slightly surprised by the possibility that Desiree was suggesting that male figures had a more effective authoritative impact on Terrel and I rapidly discovered that this was not the connection she was trying to highlight. Desiree explained to me how she had been observing Terrel’s tendency to pay more attention to male figures of authority but mostly when some sort of reward was included in the deal. It almost seemed like he would trust men more when offering something in exchange for an improvement in his behaviour. I was admittedly intrigued but still could not fully grasp her explanation. Desiree had connected the role that Terrel’s father had played in his life; a mild authoritative figure that was mostly around to offer fun activities, to his response to male figures as opposed to female ones. In a way, she was assuming Terrel was associating male authoritative figures with his father’s as a constant but sporadic presence devolved more to providing good times rather than exercising authority, a circumstance that would mainly happen on the mother’s request. In the same way, the uncle was in the house and in Terrel’s life only for specific periods of

time and, although he had taken responsibility for the children's discipline, he appeared more accommodating than their mother - more patient and open to some sort of dialogue. Desiree continued by offering me a comparison with her own experience growing up with a working father and a mother who was the effective head of the house. Her mother's manner was considerably stricter than her father's, partly because once home he was too tired to engage in any sort of exercise of discipline, but mostly because her mother was the one expected to deal with those sorts of issues. Unfortunately, she was expected to deal with any sort of issue within the household. Hence when it was a matter of disciplining the children she would have always chosen the quickest and most effective way, which unfortunately for the children was also the harshest. Desiree also pointed out that Terrel's mother had many unfavourable circumstances that were effectively making her life harder, leaving her with less energy and patience for the children. Nevertheless, she had to be admired as, although ill, she had always kept working –even if just part-time- to avoid falling into the stereotype of the undeserving welfare-profitier.

Desiree's point reminded me of the *Welfare Queen* stereotype mentioned by Reynolds (2005) in her chapter on differences in understanding motherhood. Interestingly the exact same label has been mentioned in an article discussing the coalition government's decision to declare war on such a category of welfare-users (Sayeau, 2010). The author highlights the foundation of the concept of Welfare Queen, specifying the label derives from the returning belief that '*poverty is due not to embedded social inequalities but to the moral failings of individuals*'(ibid, 2010: NA). The stereotype easily becomes a "script", and Terrel's mother ticks all the

boxes to play along the narrative script of Welfare Queen. That is, a single mother, claiming benefits for her children, in need of help with parenting and for maintaining some sort of discipline in her children. That is, all the elements that together create nothing more than the perfect standardized description of the Welfare Queen. A deeper analysis of these elements would offer, however, a different result: single mother but with a strong networking system, claiming benefits but also working part-time to be able to provide for her children, in need for help in looking after the children but mostly because of her limited mobility deriving from her degenerative health condition. These levels of deeper and more insightful analysis offer further elements to understand the uncle's impact in the household dynamic, avoiding for possible prescriptive gender related explanatory models and enabling a more child-centred model to unravel the situation. Terrel's behavioural changes appear, then, not related to a male presence for being male, but rather for the child's responsive patterns to male figures, apparently linked to his previous experiences with his father. Moreover, this level of analysis dismisses possible judgmental positions in regard to his mother's parental mode.

This interpretation of the impact of an additional male figure in the household does not apply to another family, although at the first impression the two situations could be perceived as similar.

Nelson and Otis, seven and five-year-old boys, were living with their single mother and an older brother, in his late teenage years. One of the first families I approached

during my fieldwork and, contrary to my first impression, one of the most interesting cases as invaluable source of material that would constantly challenge my ideas and offer new points for reflection. At first, the family appeared to fall in the normative script of female single headed family: an unemployed single mother looking after her three sons, by appearance possibly born from different fathers and lacking a male figure in their lives. Janice, a quiet and fairly solitary woman in her early forties, did not seem to relate much with the group of Caribbean mothers from the school. Rarely taking part in the loud conversations happening in the schoolyard once the children had gone to class, she would frequently wait in a corner, hiding her face underneath a baseball cap, to ensure her children had joined their class group, and leave without socializing much with others. Janice never had a bag, a haircut or any accessory to display. Her clothing was very essential and never comparable to the flamboyant outfits frequently exhibited by other mothers. Never relying on anyone else for the care of her children, she could always be found outside the school gate five minutes before the beginning and end of school. In a context where communal help seemed to be at the basic of everyday life, Janice and her children appeared to be almost outsiders. When I approached her to ask permission to observe her family in their household I was expecting a firm negative response. However, she accepted without any hesitation and invited me over for tea. Slowly the picture of the family that I had created in my head started to be replaced by a series of short narratives provided by Janice and her children, disclosing a completely different reality from the one I had created through first impression and assumptions. During my first home visit, Janice welcomed me into what I would have later recognized to be a

typical Jamaican front room. Nelson did not appear to be bothered at all by my presence, whilst Otis quickly lost the quiet mask he would wear at school to become a happy lively boy attempting to gather as many as possible of his possessions to make a small display for me. Both the boys were extremely quiet and polite at school, the kind of children that risk being forgotten in a corner as neither causing troubles nor excelling. In the safety of their home, their real personalities started to appear from behind the coat of invisibility. As Janice was busy making tea and preparing a quick snack for the children, Nelson surprisingly took charge of the responsibility of dealing with the guest, and offered me a guided tour of the room. Whilst Otis was still busy gathering his favourite toys, Nelson talked me through every picture in the room, introducing me to a very large family and intricate network of relatives and siblings. The most relevant discovery from the tour was the existence of an older sister, in her twenties, who had given birth to her first child. Nelson talked me through the whole album of pictures dedicated to his precious niece. He then explained to me that they had just spent the weekend at his sister's house so that his mother could help her with the baby. He continued by informing me of his fantastic uncle-skills, which he had inherited from his own uncle, Janice's brother. The more we talked, the more I came to know secret members of what seemed to be a very large family network. The husband had left Janice after giving birth to Nelson, and Otis was not her natural son. She had taken over his custody once his mother, a close friend of Janice from Jamaica, had been arrested and deported for issues related to her visa. Having grown up close together, Nelson and Otis had found it natural to behave like brothers according to Janice and my further observations validated her

statement. The older brother, at first sight not very affable. He was attending college and working to help the mother's difficult monetary situation. As for Janice, she would mostly talk about her dream of going back to Jamaica to live with the family close to her mother and siblings; a dream she could not realize because of Nelson's need for good medical care. Nelson was effected by sickle cell, a common blood disease for Jamaican descendants. For this very reason, Janice had never been able to hold a job, as there was a constant need for time off to look after her child and take him to doctor's appointments and treatments. Although occupied sufficiently by her son's condition, she immediately stepped in to look after Otis when his mother, a member of her extended network in London, was in trouble. All these factors had contributed to a quiet life looking after her children and dreaming of Jamaica. As a result, her children had grown up with a mythological image of a sort of perfect land and would frequently talk about it as the place they would have moved to once adults. Nelson and his older brother did not seem concerned about the complete absence of their father in their life, and their sister only mentioned him once when showing me her wedding pictures and pointing out that her uncle had walked her down the aisle. In the same way, Otis did not seem to be affected by the sudden disappearance of his mother. On the contrary, he seemed very much integrated in family life as an original member. Although the older brother would act as main male figure in the household, Nelson would also step into that role, addressing himself as the man of the house or pronouncing great plans of looking after his mother once older. After few months of observation an additional male figure appeared and started acquiring a more defined role in the family. Janice's

brother, the same uncle who had walked her daughter Brianna down the aisle, had moved to Bristol for work and had started spending his weekends in London with Janice and the children. Friday afternoons quickly became the moment in which the children would go out to do some fun activity with him. For the first time, someone else rather than Janice was taking parental responsibility for the boys. Uncle Max's presence could not be connected with any major change in the family dynamic, but Janice and the children were benefitting from it as their mood was clearly uplifted by his presence and their world seemed to be opening up to the outside, rather than being confined to the plastic perfection of the front room.

Intergenerational household

Siblings and friends are not the only contributors to the complicated formation of households hosting members of more than a family; as common in Jamaican tradition, grandparents would often hold a relevant role in the upbringing of their grandchildren. However, as beautifully described by Dwaine Plaze (2000) in her research on Jamaican grandmothers in Britain, a shift in the role of the elderly is evident in families now residing in the United Kingdom. Plaze referred to grandmothers' 'safety net role' in the Jamaican reality, referring to their main contribution to family life. As anticipated by the label, this role includes a large umbrella of possible tasks: from being the breadwinner, to being head of the household; from looking after the children while the mother was working to being the recipient of a child-shift. Exposure to British family systems, the lack of geographical proximity and the widespread presence of alternative services offered

by the State forced a change in the role originally occupied by grandmothers. Both the newly acquired roles suggested by the author, “international flying grannies” and “returnee grannies”, are related to becoming an element of connectedness rather than safety. The shift is then from the front line, where they would actively be part of the family dynamic, to a secondary role, behind the scenes, where they would operate to ensure the maintenance of some core values such as a sense of belonging and of family. Plaze (2000) specifies that where proximity and circumstances would allow it, grandparents were still involved in their grandchildren’s social life, but more as spectators and visitors rather than as main actors.

In many of the families I observed and encountered during my fieldwork this was definitively the case. Nevertheless, I also came across other circumstances - three particularly noteworthy. In all three cases grandparents had to step in to take parental responsibilities and were therefore looking after the child/children on a ‘full time’ basis and not just occasionally, although at times with some additional help.

The first case I will discuss is that of Dangelo, a five-year-old boy living with his grandparents and uncle and auntie. My initial understanding of the household situation was proved wrong after a year of regular observations and to my complete surprise. I first met the family through Millie, my co-worker at the school and mother-or at least I originally thought so- of Dangelo (a pupil at the school). Millie, an incredibly caring and reserved person, had impressed me from the very first time I met her for, in my mind, she represented the ultimate product of the fusion of

Jamaican heritage and British culture, although most Jamaicans would consider her British and dismiss her Jamaican roots. Millie, born in Jamaica but raised in England from tender age, had a clear British accent, mildly middle-class. In the three years, I have known her I have never heard her speaking Patois or with the trace of a Jamaican accent. Although closely connected with her Jamaican heritage, she had chosen to embrace more evidently the style of what she would refer to as her African ancestors. Guided by naivety and superficial assessment informed by her clothing and appearance, I had always assumed she was referring to the African Ancestors most Jamaicans refer to in connection to the Rastafarian movement. I had wrongly assumed that the use of the head-wrap and food restrictions were connected to that. I was however soon to discover that she belonged to a very different type of religious community: Jehovah's Witnesses. The part of the narrative that is relevant to this section is strictly linked to the composition of her family. Millie and her husband Delroy, both first generation British Jamaicans, were proud Londoners who had given birth and raised all their children in the same area, as they strongly believed in the importance of community life and network with the extended family. Millie's sister was also living in the neighbourhood and their church was located at a walk-able distance. All the children had attended the local primary school where both Millie and her daughter Pauline had ended up working. At the age of twenty-four Pauline, the pride of the family, was working as a teaching assistant at the school to save money and gather some experience to then continue her studies to train as a teacher. Her younger brother Andreas, eighteen, was less committed to studying and, at the time I started observing the family, was looking for a job while

occasionally helping Delroy with his plumbing business. Possibly as reaction to Andreas' lack of academic interest, Millie was extensively committed in ensuring Dangelo's performance at school by enforcing a rigorous studying regime with extreme success, as the boy was highly praised by all teachers for both his achievements and behaviour. Nevertheless, Dangelo would occasionally abandon his aura of the perfect student and get engaged in little fights and more sporadically unexplainable outburst of rage. It was after one of these moments of anger that Dangelo informed me about his actual family circumstances, leaving me completely speechless. Millie was in fact his grandmother, although he would always refer to her as 'mum', even while disclosing her actual connection to him. He had no memories of meeting his 'other' mum as she had died while he was still a baby. I never openly asked Millie about the family situation, as I always felt as if this was not a topic I could have raised without upsetting her or leaving her feeling violated in her privacy. She had decided to open a door on her family life for me to observe and discuss, but had also decided for this side of the story to be kept away from me hence I did not feel comfortable enquiring about it. After the brief discussion with Dangelo, as I had to write a brief outline of it for his school file, I had the opportunity to gather more information about the family situation through other members of staff, who seemed both knowledgeable and comfortable enough to disclose the full story without involving Millie or Pauline in the conversation. Dangelo's mother had not died, in fact she was a drug addict who had abandoned him after his birth. His father, Millie's natural son, had always been a troubled boy and had willingly passed the custody of the child onto his parents. As the story unravelled in front of my

astonished eyes, the 'perfect family' picture I had created in my head after the first few observations started being replaced by a tangle of complexity and hidden stories. My perception of the family dynamic quickly changed during the following observation; what had seemed like a loving nest perfectly designed for the children to grow up in with the allowance to fully develop their skills and life path before leaving became a sort of controlled environment that no one was allowed to leave before having secured a stable future. However, Dangelo seemed really happy to embrace the family narrative he had created for his family. Delroy and Millie were dad and mum, auntie Pauline was his big sister and Andreas his cool brother to play video games with. Rather than being an exceptional case in his class for living with his grandparents, he was in fact a rarity for living with both his parents and siblings in the same household. Even the random and unexpected appearance of his biological father at school, who had come to meet Millie to pick up something from her, did not seem to have any effect on him. When a classmate enquired about the man he had gone to see at the school office, he simply dismissed further questions by disclosing straight forwardly that he was his other daddy; the one living elsewhere. Only towards the end of my fieldwork did the opportunity arise for me to ask him about his perception of family without feeling as if I was imposing the question, as he had unintentionally opened the topic by asking about my family. He was not very keen on the idea of drawing his family for me, in fact he did not seem particularly eager on listing for me the members of his family, as I already knew them all. To convince him I challenged him about whether he could remember the birthday of all his family members. After having successfully told me the date of birth of mum

Millie, dad Delroy, Pauline and Andreas, he once again took me by surprise by adding he had forgotten his auntie –Millie’s sister- and cousins but that nevertheless they were clearly part of his family.

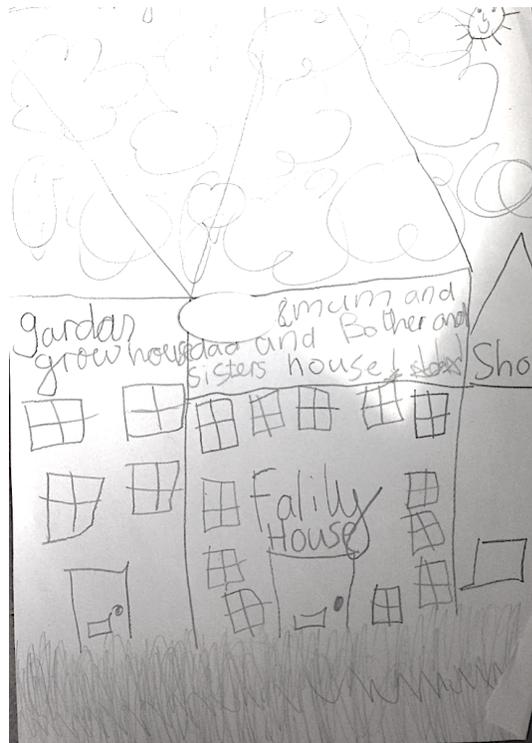


Figure 3: Dangelo's family

I did not ask about the absence of his 'other dad' from the list, but I later found out that it might have been connected to the fact that Millie did not like him to talk about his 'other dad', and that all the family members had stopped considering him as part of the family after his period spent in prison for theft. Pauline had suggested that I not raise the topic with Millie after one of our chats about family and siblings.

A similar level of disengagement with biological parents seemed to be shared also by Abigail and Jodie, two sisters, respectively five and three years old, living with their grandma (introduced when discussing Calvin and Debara), a first-generation Jamaican who had migrated to London when only a child but who had clearly never forgot her origins and was highly keen to ensure no one in her family would ever do.

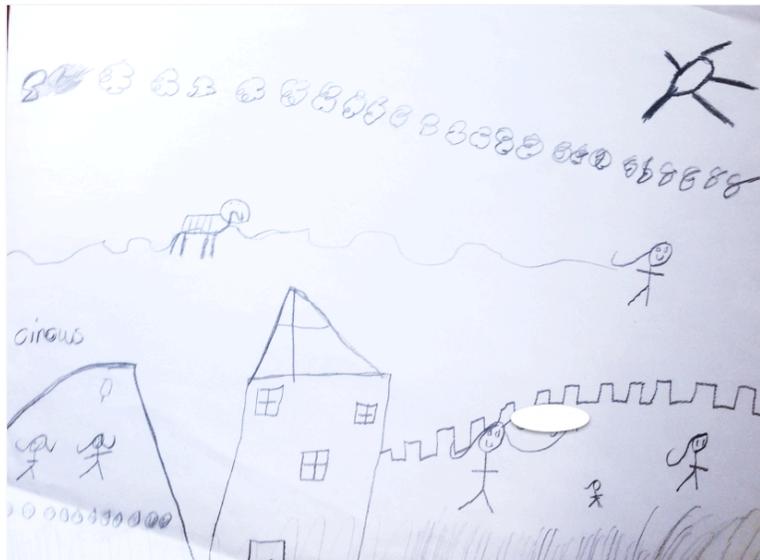


Figure 4: Abigail's family

(mum – with the dog, baby cousin and auntie-near the circus, Abigail, Jodie and grandma)

My first interaction with the family occurred through Abigail, as she was attending school in the same class as Dangelo. The two children had caught my attention during my first session in their classroom for their quiet and polite attitude, quite a rarity in what had become famous as the untameable group of children. Abigail

quickly lost her shyness and became one of my preferred interlocutors. It is important to note that the reflections developed from the observations of this child and her family situation functioned as a tool in the formulation of my theoretical perspective on attachment theory, as discussed in chapter ten. For the purpose of this section and, in order to avoid pointless repetition, I will here simply delineate the formation of the household, without discussing it in detail. During the first year of observation, this household was solely composed of three members: grandma and the two girls. As one of grandma's daughters, she had three daughters (including the girl's mother) and a son and became pregnant with her first child when the household opened its doors to this other family nucleus for almost a year, from the seventh month of pregnancy almost through all the baby's first year of life. The door was, however, always open for the other daughter, who would occasionally drop off her children for a few hours or days when needed. As previously mentioned, grandma also had a special agreement with Debara, Calvin's mum. The girls' mother remained excluded from the picture for the first year and a half of my fieldwork. She then suddenly appeared, without much announcement but to much surprise. The level of connection, and reliance and support between the various families convening in the formation of this household is difficult to explain in words without losing key features in the description. However, in my opinion, this brief delineation is sufficient to introduce the reader to the depth and intricacy of this household composition.

The last example of the household with a child looked after by a grandparent is that of Talicia, an eleven-year-old girl living with her paternal grandmother and

occasionally her father and an uncle. Talicia had lost her mother when very young and, since her father was unable to look after her on his own, his family had stepped in to help. Her grandma, although advanced in age, was still able to take care of most of the parental responsibilities on her own without needing external help. Talicia would often express her thankfulness to her grandma for looking after her and point out she would have looked after her once adult. Talicia was in fact already looking after her grandma. She would help her with grocery shopping, cooking and keeping the house clean. On many occasions during my observations, we would spend the time with Talicia teaching me how to take care of the various chores around the house, something she was proud of and that she would do so that her grandma could rest. Talicia's father was not a constant presence in the household as he was frequently away for work and when around would spend most of his time away from the flat. In a way, his contribution to the household was mostly monetary and he was not very involved in the everyday life of his daughter. His brother, Talicia's uncle, was staying at the flat rarely but was contributing to looking after Talicia through his wife and daughter's presence. Cantrice, the aunt, was very much involved in the girl's life. At times, Talicia would spend her weekends with her younger cousin Wilma, a seven-year-old lively girl attending the same school, and auntie. Cantrice was not particularly close to Talicia's grandma, whose flat had become a sort of hideaway base for her husband when in need of 'a break' from family life. Nevertheless she believed both her little girl and Talicia would have benefitted from each other's company and had therefore offered to look after Talicia whenever grandma was in need for some help. Although her time was spent more

and more between the two households, which were becoming more and more intertwined and dependent, Talicia would refer to grandma's as home and see time spent with her cousin as the place she would go when she could not be with grandma.

Nuclear family household

I have always wondered whether Talicia's preference for grandma's house over her uncle's was related to a sense of not-fully-belonging to the latter, which from an outsider's point of view would have appeared as a normative nuclear family with both parents and a child living together. Although Wilma's father would spend brief periods away from home, mostly to stay at his mother's as mentioned earlier, their family life seemed solid and established. To my surprise Cantrice revealed the existence of another 'side' of the family; a side that I had heard being mentioned by Wilma on few occasions at school but that I had never had the opportunity to meet during my observations. Only when Cantrice introduced me to their family album, providing a full explanation of the story, did I understand the reason why I had never met her older daughter. She had remained in Jamaica and was living under the supervision of her mother and extended family. The apparent conformity of Wilma's household to the idea of the nuclear family is soon replaced by a picture of families and generations fluidly developing together and apart, correlated and held together by solid points that still allow the dynamicity of the picture.

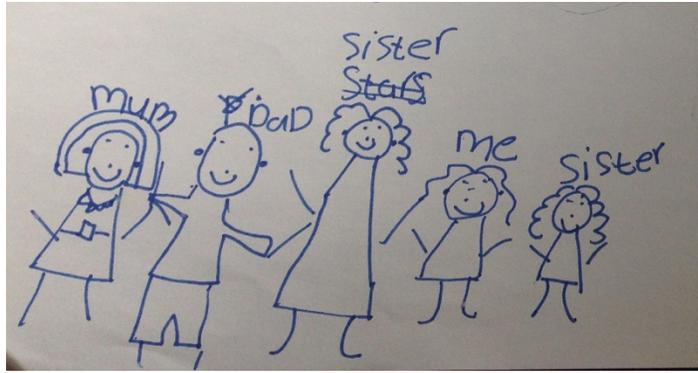


Figure 5: Wilma's family

(mum and dad, my sister and me and Talicia)

In her review on literary understandings of Caribbean kinship and lineage, Mary Chamberlain mentioned the concept of '*polivocality*' (2000: 124) as a term to indicate the multiplicity of selves that incorporates all the different roles and selves that a person impersonates as an individual and as part of society. The apparent simplicity of Wilma's household, if looked at as *nuclear family*, dissolves in a series of polivocalities in which each member assumes a different role and a different status of belonging, according to the strata or layer of family considered. For example, Wilma could be viewed as an only child of a married couple, or as the younger offspring of a woman who has two families in two different realities that coexist and are aware of each other and very much influence each other although rarely, if not ever, crossing.

In the same way, the other case of the *nuclear family* offers an example of how the dynamicity of Caribbean families, at times existing even aside from migratory

movements, enables the presence of a multi-layered reality that should be understood in order to have a more meaningful picture of the family itself.

Leah, her husband Jerome and their five children, warmly welcomed me from the very first observation in their small but cosy three-bedroom flat on the eight floor of a tower block part of a large social housing complex. An incredibly interesting family, offering food for thought on several topics around individuality and social dynamics. It is once again hard to describe in a few lines of description their family life as Leah's household could easily fall into the category of nuclear family. Favoured by solid roots in the local community and an extensive and well-organized extended family system, Leah and her husband had raised their children as part of a nourishing and stable household. After being left raising her first child and only boy on her own, Leah had created a new family with Jerome, who had happily embraced parental responsibility and a sense of fatherhood for Michael, a seventeen-year old boy who would never miss a chance to assert himself and give voice to his desire to one day have his own family. The stability of the household would at times be shaken by Jerome's need to take short periods away from family life. After few months of observation, I came to realise that throughout all the years of marriage (fifteen) Jerome had kept his own personal flat. I approached the subject one afternoon during one of my observations, with the intent of further exploring the rationale behind this living arrangement. Jerome explained he considered his flat as a place where he would go to *'deal with his own business'* (Jerome, in conversation in Leah's flat, June 2010), but in Leah's words this corresponded *'to be a boy, running away from life responsibilities'* (Leah, in conversation in Leah's flat, June 2010). Toward

the end my fieldwork, the tranquillity of the family would have been considered at risk again by Michael's decision to move to live with his grandma (Leah's mother, who was already contributing to the family life by frequently looking after the younger girls). Although his decision was dictated by his desire to 'be his own man'⁷², Leah would interpret it as a sort of emulation of Jerome's brief runaway and responded to it harshly, by shutting off the boy for few months.

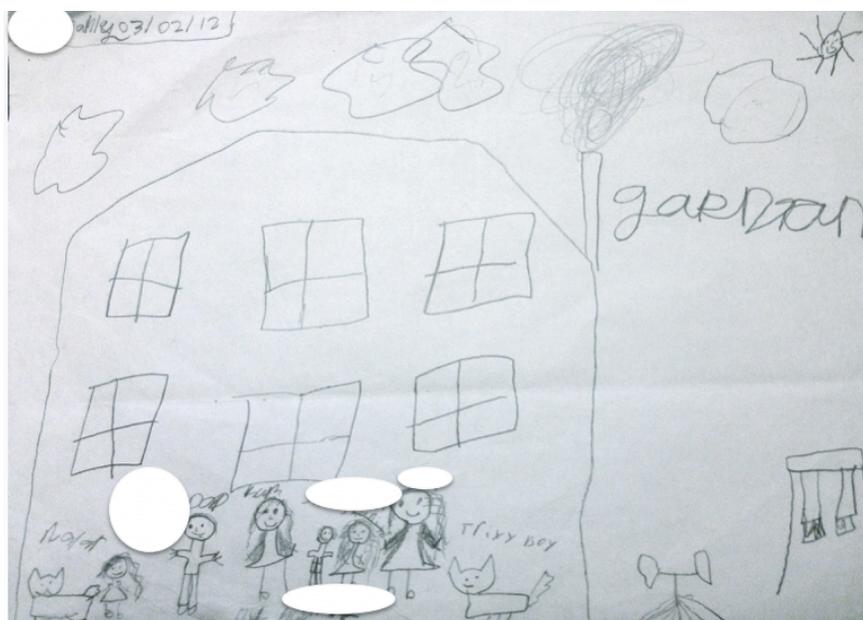


Figure 6: Maya⁷³'s family

(one of the sisters is not in the picture as at the time of the drawing they had had an argument and, because of that, Maya had expelled her from the family)

⁷² These are the words that Leah would use when discussing the situation with her friends and family

⁷³ the youngest of Leah and Jerome's children

The need to maintain a sense of freedom and independence was held as fundamental part of their family life also by Keisha and Derrick. A slightly different example from the previous two as more congruent with modern British middle class ideas of family, the couple had decided not to get married until they were ready to buy a house and have secured a stable future for their newly born daughter. Their decision had been the motif for several discussions with both their families who were first generation immigrants from Jamaica and devoted churchgoers who would see in their actions a lack of commitment and a source of dishonour for both families. Although not fully accepted as family by their own families, Keisha and Derrick proudly talked of their household as just the beginning of a big and stable family, that would have grown throughout the years, with or without external approval.

The need for approval and status of recognition was instead what pushed Michele and Rob to get married after more than fifteen years of living together, and after having raised their first daughter, Tanya, together. When Michele fell pregnant with their second child, she confessed to Rob her desire to be part of a family in the most conservative sense of this. Both fully ascribed to 'white-middle class British' moral beliefs and customs and with the announcement of their second child came also the need to be accepted and seen so by their extended family. From a discussion with Michele on the topic I realized the connection of this need with an imminent trip to the Caribbean to meet extended families and relatives for a cousin's wedding. Although Michele lost the child during the third month of pregnancy, Rob and she

decided to continue with their plan of getting married and create a more 'solid and secure' environment for their daughter.

Social stability VS Biology

In his response to a paper suggesting that social anthropologists should take into consideration biological factors, Beattie emphasized the nature of kinships as the study of '*a set of social interactions*' (1964: 101). As highlighted by Carsten (2000), in her evaluation of pre-existing approaches on kinship, such core concepts considered as formed by social interactions, would be traditionally connected to the idea of social stability. Genealogy and biology lost the battle against social meaning, but what if social acceptance and conventions are given up for individuality?

In Dangelo's example, social conventions and shared meaning/labels of motherhood, and family in general, are given up by the boy in order to preserve his own meaning and sense of reality, as a sort of adaptation for the sake of psychological and emotional wellbeing. I have previously discussed how the concept of household could at times be too reductive to embrace the fluidity and dynamic variations and adjustments found in some of the families I have observed, if not all. I suggest connectedness as a more appropriate term to consider the interactions taking place in the families observed. Family dynamic is not just defined by the nexus and interactions between members, but also by the possibility of these. Family members become social capital for the child, and vice versa. Bourdieu defined social capital as '*the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which*

are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (1986: 248). Many of the children taking part in the study, when asked about his/her family, included figures that *normally* would not be considered as such. In the same manner, relatives and neighbours are invested in roles and meanings usually given to members of the close family.

The analysis of household composition from the child's perspective offers an insight into the value of every element contributing to the formation of the social capital for each member of the *family*. Relations are not reduced to the Western formulation of *family* and elements previously discarded as not fundamental to the development of the child regain meaning and functionality. We obtain a dynamic presence by allowing and acknowledging the value of these elements and concepts such as 'absent father' and 'single mother' when diminished to simple descriptions of a network, rather than a means for pathologisation of imperfect families. This shift in the conceptualization of the family creates space for questioning whether the rigid description of family composition and the demonization of imperfect families is itself the origin of a sort of culture-bound syndrome were not fitting within the prescribed ideologies of family immediately results in pathology.

Chapter 5: Caribbean childhood in context in London

In the previous chapter I discussed the various patterns of household I encountered throughout my two years of observation based fieldwork. By introducing each family through the composition of their household, as presented to me by the children and as perceived through the analysis of multi-layered narratives and observations, I have provided the reader with a preliminary image of family life as I observed it. However, as discussed in chapter three, family dynamics cannot be fully understood as embedded solely in one context, for socialization is experienced in several settings and each one of these contributes to the formation and the development of the child.

Although the scenarios in which people interact varies and assumes different meanings and relevance from Jamaican reality to life in the city, the contexts I consider in this comparison between the two worlds seem to be of relevance in both circumstances, mostly because of the customs and social knowledge held or inherited by the population in the Diaspora.

In the church

Toulis pointed out that *'the equation of religious participation with ethnic identity is particularly acute with regard to the diverse religious practices in the African Diaspora'* (1997: 165). The narratives I collected during my fieldwork lead me to the conclusion that for the Caribbean Diaspora religiosity was open to various interpretations and meanings. For most of the families I observed having a

community appeared to be an important element of their family life, as they would often describe themselves as part of a complex network that would include elements outside their extended family. Being part of a community appeared to be an important factor contributing to the development of the family within and outside the household. As described in many previous studies, religiosity is considered a main feature of family life, even in the Diaspora. Although first generation immigrants have been perceived as the main actors in the maintenance of such custom, second and third generation Jamaicans in London still hold some sort of connection with their religious community, whether local or not and whether performed in actual congregations or at home.

Church as community aggregator

Durkheim defined religion as *'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them'* (ibid, 1915: 62). Caribbean people living in London prescribe to the idea of religion as *community* at best. Historically, first generation migrants founded Black Churches after having been either rejected or made feel unwelcome in mainstream white churches.

Attendance at church functions is a community aggregator, although the level of involvement is not as high as in the Caribbean. Many families still rely on their Church as the centre for meeting friends and holding some sense of community. Religious experience is accepted on a more personal level than in Jamaica, but the importance

of communal moments of aggregation and the importance of religion as source of moral values is recognized and valued in families in Britain.

I witnessed a particularly strong example validating the idea of the church as an entity aimed at *'bringing people together and helping them in times of need'* (fieldwork notes, after church visit, August 2011) towards the end of my second year of fieldwork, when Caribbean Londoners found themselves in the midst of what many defined as a case of racism following the 2011 August riots in London, an event that I will analyse in further details in the last section of this chapter. During the Summer of 2011, many religious congregations became a place to gather together and share experiences and ideas around the issues effecting the local communities. Many of the families participating in my study expressed the importance that their religious community had in their lives, particularly in moments of difficulty or isolation from the wider society.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Saturday and Sunday schools are, together with other unofficial group gathering, a fundamental element bringing children together offering parents support in the moral upbringing of their children. While other children would attend after school clubs or scout meetings, many of the Caribbean children I observed would spent hours if not full days in Church, taking part in a variety of activities and being part of a community that would provide them with social interaction and a sense of belonging. In many cases, the sense of belonging to the Caribbean community would go beyond British borders and reach out to family members and friends in Jamaica.

My first encounter with the reality of the transnational church took place when I first started asking the families participating in the study for help while looking for accommodation in Kingston for the duration of my fieldwork there. Two participants provided me with contacts through their local churches, both belonging to the Pentecostal denomination. When discussing the meaning of such connection with these participants, they both clearly stated that having such a bridge with life on the island was making them feel more connected with their family reality and more rooted in their Jamaican life.

When the first migrants from Jamaica arrived in the UK, the unwelcoming reception received from British churches promoted the quick development of local informal congregations, which then led to the foundation of Black Churches. The newcomers were looking for warmth and sense of community, with expectations deriving from their experience of religious communities back in the Caribbean. In one respect it could be argued that being excluded from the mainstream churches allowed the expression of a higher need: the need to recreate a familiar space where to do more than meeting God. A place to socialize and be part of a bigger family. Millie, Dangelo's grandmother, was only a little girl when she was reunited with her parents in London, after having spent months living with her grandma in a parish not far from Kingston. In her stories around her first memories in the UK, the most vivid was the one about the day she and her mother took her to the local *Black* church in South London. Millie's experience of arriving in the UK was not a very positive one,

yet a very common one shared with many other children of her generation. She had been left behind by her parents who had come to London to find a better life for them and their children, but to do so they had to embark on a journey that would separate them from their children and would have forced them to face adversities and discover that the Mother Country was not what they expected it to be. I never managed to get Millie to tell me this story; she did not like talking about that side of the family history. We briefly discussed it as a late afternoon observation, when the topic of immigration came up on the television and Dangelo pointed out that his family was a family of migrants. Millie reinforced his point by recommending him never to forget what her parents had to go through to ensure her and his future in the UK. On the contrary, her passion for remembering family history would emerge loudly in her stories connected to the first time she felt she belonged again: the time she had joined her congregation. After arriving in London her parents had joined the local Black church, *'a group of people who had lost their Mother⁷⁴ and were trying to find it again'* (Millie, in conversation in her sitting room, January 2010) as Millie described it the first time she told me this story. She never specified the denomination, in a way that did not seem to be relevant to her story. The service was held in someone's front room, it was not in a fancy building and the congregation was small but everyone was dressed impeccably: Sunday dresses; hymns sung with passion to reach the Lord and reach back home and sweet potato pudding. It was there that Millie felt at home for the first time and felt like she could

⁷⁴ Capital M is my own emphasis. During this conversation Millie explained how she would consider the religious community as a sort of maternal figure, hence Mother.

belong to this country that had not welcomed her as she had expected from what she had read in her textbooks.

I understood Millie's story once I had stumbled upon a Pentecostal Apostolic Church, is this a quote from Millie? one of the many, on a Sunday morning. During the second summer of fieldwork, after having spent the previous one in Jamaica, I dedicated many Sundays exploring congregations unrelated to the core group of participants to my study. Map in hand, wearing my Sunday clothes (just as auntie Pam⁷⁵ had taught me) I entered the building and in an instant I was transported back to Jamaica: the singing, the dresses, the warmth and the patois. Soon after my arrival, as the congregation was listening to the pastor I had opted for a seat at the very back of the church, a young woman approached me and invited me to join her and her family in a seat closer to the front. I went back to the church for few weeks, having a chance to observe and discuss with members of the congregation the many roles the gathering together had in their lives. In her analysis on Pentecostalism in England, Toulis (1997) identifies the quick diffusion of this particular denomination above others as it offered a solution the burning problem of lack of social identity in the new country. Belonging to a denomination that combined the incorporation of "local" values with the expression of those elements linked with more traditional forms of religion, offered relief from the experience of segregation and "sufferance" and a place to belong to. Young professionals and working-class families would seat

⁷⁵ My host during my fieldwork in Jamaica – see appendix 2

together to listen to the words offered by the Pastor and the frequent guests visiting from the homeland and sharing stories similar to those dear memories of long-term expatriates and the second or third generations.

Whilst I attended this particular congregation, I had the opportunity to observe the whole community gathering together at times to celebrate with pride the culture of their mothers, and some other times to discuss burning social issues deriving from that very belonging. The church was effectively functioning as a safe space where to reclaim belonging, embrace and discuss a sense of identity deriving from the acknowledgement of both communality between members and otherness with the outside world. Mol's (1976) interpretation of religion as identity claim, as tool for *'asserting both sameness and difference a matter of both identification and dis-identification'* (Woodhead, 2011: 129) seems to serve the purpose of this example. By gathering in the church, the members were not solely creating a sense of community but also enabling the formation or reaffirmation of their own self.

Religion would cover the function of a powerful aggregator and also in smaller scale example, such as families. Following the baptism of a member of the extended kinship residing in Jamaica, Leroy's family visited his mother's country to participate in an event that had been organized to celebrate the occasion and bring together the family, dispersed between a multitude of countries. Even the simple act of attending church on Sunday exemplifies the role of religion as a bond making and strengthening tool. Abigail, Jodie and grandma would cross London every other

Sunday to visit the congregation to which grandma's sister belonged to. The reaffirmation of these bonds mediated by religious acts functioned as both an aggregator and a celebration of family connectedness and identity.

Church as cultural habit

During my fieldwork, it became evident that the search, recognition and display of communal *original* values was a fundamental part of this process of claiming a sense of 'Caribbean' self/identity. In Talcott Parson's (1979) view, religion becomes a means to set, regulate and share a specific set of values, aimed at regulating interactions and society at broad. In a variety of occasions, several informants referred to the role of church in transmitting "good Jamaican values", as Michele would put it to her children.

After the imprisonment of her eldest son, Lorraine decided to re-embrace her religion to ensure her two younger children would grow with better and stronger values-fundamental tools to avoid their brother's situation. In the period between the incarceration of her son and her Christian call, Lorraine was tormented by the difficult decision of what religious path to follow. On one hand, she was considering to embrace her Irish roots, long forgotten after having been abandoned by her biological parents, and to approach the local Catholic Church. On the other hand, she had the possibility of joining the Pentecostal church attended by most of her neighbours and friends, and most importantly conforming to the teachings of her beloved adoptive Jamaican family. During that period, we discussed at length the

two options, as my own Catholic origins were for her a sort of source of terms for comparison. Ultimately the choice was whether to estrange herself and her children from the community that had warmly welcomed her and in which she alongside salvation which offered a chance to reinvent her life and possibly offer her children a “way out” of what she feared as an almost inevitable future. As depicted in several case studies discussed by Reynolds (2006) in her research on family and community networks, when faced with the decision of leaving or staying within their local area most Caribbean young people opt for the latter. A similar pattern had previously been suggested by Orr (1999) as a factor contributing to the absence of social mobility within generations. In Lorraine’s case, embracing the Catholic church would have also corresponded to the possibility of transferring her children to the school run by the church. Rather than a geographical relocation, as the ones discussed in Reynolds’ (2006), examples of graduate students opting for the university closer to their local community, it was a matter of socio-cultural movement. The Catholic school was “just” across the street, but it represented the “better option”⁷⁶, as often described by mothers comparing the two realities. Lorraine’s choice of religion was openly determined by these factors and was simplified by the fact that she was able to maintain her connection with *her* community by being employed in the local free school, heart of the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, her choice to embrace Catholicism was not taken lightly by her adoptive family, and she identified a decrease in the level of family support as a punishment for her betrayal.

⁷⁶ words Lorraine would use in conversation about these matters with friends (field work notes, 2010)

The element of most interest in this specific case is that Lorraine, although undoubtedly seeking her family's approval or acceptance, was mostly concerned about the reaction of her local network. As proof of her willingness to remain part of the local community, following her children's baptism within the Catholic Church Lorraine threw a yard party for friends and neighbours. One of Lorraine's good friends, a Jamaican mother of three also employed at the local free school, assisted her in the organisation of a most successful barbeque filled with delicious Jamaican food, rum punch and music. Although she was not attending the local congregation, Lorraine found a way to ensure her family's space in it; although not seeking or embracing the guidance and values of her family and network through the church, she had demonstrated that she still valued them, and had found other ways to ensure that her children would have remained embedded in that local context, absorbing and living within those same values and manners.

Lorraine's abandonment of the religious element as an enabler of social and cultural belonging was hence overcome by other forms of social integration with the community, other ways of belonging.

In another family I observed, subscribing to a specific religion and most importantly the performative act (Butler, 1988) of attending church and being part of a community provided a source of tradition and memory as mean to belong. Michele and her partner who, although not religious themselves, relied on the local religious community to ensure her daughter would absorb those values and the cultural

identity which she was struggling to offer her family not being nearby but back in Jamaica. Aware and worried for the lack of close kinship that could offer guidance and belonging to her only child, Michele made the decision to provide her with the best surrogate: the community's church.

In Sami's family, I observed a multi-layered conjunction of functions and reasons behind their religiosity. While her mother had found in religion a guide, a source of strength deriving from both the values and the beliefs and the practical support of the community, her older sister had found a way of reaffirming her identity and her cultural belonging, in order to be able to provide it to her young child. For Sami, as her behaviour was worsening as were her circumstances at school, being part of the religious community and accessing the services provided had several meanings: from her mother's hope, she would have absorbed good values and learned the right lessons to the respite provided to her family in a moment in which they were struggling to cope with her behavioural issues even at home, to the opportunity of a space to socialise away from her "naughty girl" label. Moreover, the fact that she was being able to attend Saturday school without exhibiting behaviours as extreme as at school, had provided her mother with relief and hope and relocated in the school or system some responsibility for the child's behaviour.

In some other instances, I observed what would possibly fall between the definitions of religion as ritualization (Bell, 1997) and that of "lived religion" (Hall, 1997). In the following examples, religion is deeply embedded in everyday life, in simple acts and

situations in which the subject that does not *perform* religion as religion, is simply incorporated and lived through these. During an early observation in Janice's house I noted that in a corner of the front room she had displayed a series of pictures of family members mixed with religious pictures and writings. I later enquired after the function of that area and she initially did not seem to understand my curiosity. The functionality of such a "shrine" was not present or thought through; she had simply followed her mother's example and arranged pictures of her loved ones with bits and pieces she had brought back or received from Jamaica. Janice was not practicing any religion, she believed in what she had been taught whilst growing up and some of those teachings would at times surface through small acts, such as having her child wearing a cross. Malene, similarly, was not religious and she did not want to be actively involved in the congregation but would still always make sure her child was wearing the cross that had been given to him by her mother. Like Janice, in her front room one could easily find a dance hall flyer left near the pictures of her family and a small frame with a prayer in patois aimed at protecting the house.

Most families I observed exhibited or performed a connection with religion⁷⁷, whether through church affiliation or symbols or words (whether felt or not is irrelevant). Although I never experienced the same overwhelming presence I experienced whilst in Jamaica, the intrinsic link between Caribbean culture(s) and religion was undeniable. It could be argued that it is not religion itself that is present in Caribbean

⁷⁷ see appendix 2 for more on performativity and religion in Jamaica

life. In truth, the persistent and resistant element is the purpose served. Religion, religious elements and traditions function as elements concurring in the shaping of both individual and shared identity(s).

Church as support for families

Aside from addressing the spiritual and social needs of the members, churches provide more practical services to the congregation. As described by Reynolds (2005) in her section on community mothering, churches have continuously offered a respite service to parents, no matter what their household circumstances might be, through groups and activities for children. It might appear to be less of a case nowadays but, in the observations I conducted in the several congregations I have visited, I have observed that this sort of service is still very much present and utilised by the community; if anything, they are now simply shaped differently from how they were in the past. With a higher level of organization and formality, a large number of churches offer various forms of support aimed at both families and individuals.

During my two years of fieldwork I observed a great variety of gatherings and groups offered to the community by the church or other members of the congregation. Two are the types of services that appeared to be most valued by the community, according to the data I collected through informal conversations and interviews with pastors and members of the church. Most members of the congregations I visited predominantly valued family-focused services. These would not simply be related to childcare, but also to parenting groups and focused groups for children and

adolescents struggling at school or in the general community. The parenting groups, although different in shape throughout the communities, mostly had the aim of providing help to inexperienced young parents in their childrearing and also of supporting parents who were struggling, or just wanting to share their experiences. The teachings were mostly taken from passages in the Bible or reflections on the scriptures. The strong reliance and emphasis on moral and religious values was the principal difference I noticed in comparison to “mainstream” parenting courses delivered in children’s centres. However, through conversations with parents attending the groups and observations of some sessions, it became evident that the informality of the courses and the sense of security offered by familiarity together with sharing experiences with the other participants as members of the same congregation, were key features for the success of these courses over mainstream ones. One mother pointed out she was feeling more confident in sharing her home difficulties within a group of people who shared her values and cultural heritage. This point became more evident and central in the period following the 2011 riots. As parents were feeling judged and accused by media and society in general, the church represented a safe space where they could feel heard and understood and where they would express themselves and deal with shared views and difficulties. The main topic of discussion during the first post-riot session was the difficulty of raising children whilst being restricted by guidance that clashed with traditional child rearing techniques. Many parents were feeling frustrated because they were unable to instil discipline in their children to the extent that they believed necessary and which followed the techniques that had worked so well for them. A large part of the

conversations taking place in these sorts of meetings would revolve around practices still strongly present in Jamaica and not allowed in the United Kingdom. As pointed out in my previously discussed role of the church in Jamaica, physical punishment is still enlisted and is considered to be one of the most effective practice to impart in *an education*. Before taking part in a post-riot discussion in one of the churches I visited in the UK, I had heard an open suggestion to opt for physical discipline. On August 14th, 2011 I was witness to a sermon delivered by Mother Lawrence, a “sister” visiting from Jamaica. Her message was clear and loud: *‘Chastise before it’s too late! What we have seen happening in the last few days is the result of the weakness of parents and governments. If you love your children, don’t spoil them.’* (Mother Lawrence, Sermon delivered in Pentecostal Church, August 2011). Her sermon stirred an animated discussion between the members, however even someone who was against the actual implementation of physical discipline appeared to recognize its value and effectiveness. The only argument raised against it was in support of the use of alternative methods, and was not received positively by the congregation. Mother Lawrence’s response to such opposition of views was simple and direct: *‘Nobody no play with fire and no get burnt. Your child must be in school; your child must receive a proper education. That is your job and no government can tell you how to do it.’* (Mother Lawrence, Sermon delivered in Pentecostal Church, August 2011).

The themes of physical punishment and state involvement in the care of children were recurrent ones throughout the individual interviews, but before this occasion I

had not observed them to have been addressed within such a large group of people. Following the sermon, I discussed these topics with some members of the congregation, all were in agreement with what had been said and all believed that most of the difficulties experienced by BME families and children were linked with these. Therefore, aside from practical services such as children's playgroups, Sunday school and parenting groups, the church would often provide moral support for families, parents in particular. Many interviewees said that they were feeling safe and understood in the congregation, which was often identified as a sort of extended family.

The idea that somehow the church could *replace* or fill in the space left by family and/or extended family could be expanded in the possibility of it providing what in Jamaica would be defined as life in the yard.

In the street

'In some case, because of family structure and the absence of parents or parent surrogates, as well as the lack of emphasis on guidance, supervision, or instruction of the young, peer groups and the immediate neighbourhood or community may assume a more influential role in socialization than the family'

(Evans, 1997:3)

In the movie 'Bashment: Fork in the Road'⁷⁸ street and church are the two options presented to the protagonist as possible life styles. Common representations of Jamaicans in London often emphasize the two extremes as defining features. It is interesting to note how the two share an element of belonging to a sort of family inspired group.

A few years ago, the British Army based a recruitment campaign in various deprived inner London boroughs on the "family-like" emphasis and dynamic offered once enlisted. The emphasis on the need to achieve and preserve a sense of belonging is of relevance when understood as similar to that which is experienced normally through the vast presence of the extended family. Being scattered across the country or the city, members of different extended families appear to seek that same level of closeness and connection through other meanings and other agglomerations. Just as religious congregations offer refuge, shared experiences and beliefs, so the *street* ensures a level of belonging and structure at times lacking elsewhere, not necessarily at home. When I refer to *the street* I do not particularly think of the widespread gang culture, currently prevalent in the streets of London. I refer to any sort of socialization offered by spending time and congregating on the street outside the households, whether in a market, or a park or an actual road.

During my two years of fieldwork the time spent on the street was a small portion in comparison to that spent in the other contexts. Unlikely in Jamaica, where

⁷⁸ Directed by Steve McAlpin, 2007.

socialization happens mainly in the street, Caribbean families in London spend a diminished amount of time on the street as it is mainly associated with the gang culture. There are, however, examples of *acceptable* usage of this background, mostly in situations that are more controlled and contained or with a specific and recognized function. The best examples of these acceptable forms of street socialization in London are street markets. Several of the observations I conducted *on the street* were based in three large and renowned markets, both with strong Caribbean tradition and flavour. I experienced the reality of the markets as both passive observer and as fully engaged member of the community behind it, walking around with members of the families I was observing and even spending some time behind a stall. During my second year, Wilma's mother had managed to secure a clothes stall in one of these markets and had invited me to spend some time there with her. While sitting behind the stall in the busy market I suddenly realized that a very large portion of interaction and socialization, whether with peers or parents or other family members would happen for many children in the street context. However, I had never really considered this sort of interaction as of relevance as it appeared to lack structure, routines and roles. Segall et al. (1998) defined how *'behaviours, beliefs and identities are created daily through interactions between individuals and their surroundings'* (ibid, 1998: 104), a statement that confirms in its fullness the value of every interaction and socialization happening in non-structured and informal settings such as markets, street corners, playgrounds and parks. The question to be asked is whether these settings are not considered adequate or relevant exactly because of that lack of structure or because of the difficulties linked

with assessing and evaluating their influence, or because of social control and recognition of appropriate and inappropriate contexts for socialization.

Chapter 6: The Caribbean childhood in context, practitioners' perspectives

The previous chapters focused on presenting and analysing images of Caribbean families from both an academic perspective and through the narratives derived from the observations and conversations conducted during the two-year ethnographic fieldwork. The juxtaposition of these two viewpoints provided an overview of their differences, identifying and deconstructing preconceived notions and interpretations of family, to re-construct the image of childhood as embedded in its specific social context. The difference, and at times incompatibility, between some existing literature and the experiences of my informants, mainly concerned the perception, description and definition of family bonds, values and beliefs related to childhood and child-rearing practices. Aiming to enrich this picture of juxtaposed perspectives, this chapter will introduce the views and beliefs offered through the lenses of practitioners directly involved in the care of the children and families previously introduced. For this task, this chapter is divided into three sections, all contributing to the analysis of the role of personal constructs, normative expectations and lay knowledge in the shaping of practitioners' views and beliefs. In the first section I will introduce my reflections on three case studies, as presented in a group discussion. The reflective analysis will then move on the data collected through a series of open ended thematic enquiries conducted with ten practitioners. This section will focus mainly on presenting opposing views and beliefs on child rearing practices and their impact on children's lives. Finally, in the last section, I will

provide analysis of the themes that emerged from the review of the data collected in both the work discussions and the thematic enquiries. These three areas will then be further developed and explored through the experiences and narratives of my informants in the following chapters.

In the school

Soon after the initial period of immersive ethnography at the primary school, a line of shared narratives emerged from more informal conversations with and between staff members. A key factor surfacing from the analysis of these communal constructs was the net separation between beliefs expressed as practitioners and the actions performed as lay individuals, in the realm of their private lives.

During the first eight months of fieldwork, the case of Sami occupied a central role in discussions on family formation and its impact on children's development and well-being. Sami's behavioural difficulties and poor school attainment were frequently discussed as consequentially related to her family situation, which was described and criticized as lacking stability and firm boundaries. Over the first few months of close observations and work with Sami, I collated views and beliefs on the context surrounding the child within the school and in the broader community.

Sami was living a few blocks away from the school, in one of social housing blocks where many other pupils and a small number of staff also resided. This meant her household composition was well known and at times discussed openly in meetings

regarding her schooling experience. On one occasion when her mother failed to attend a review meeting organised to explore ways to support Sami's participation in the classroom, Sami's class teacher voiced her concerns with regards to the child's family circumstances. The teacher referred to having met the child unsupervised a few times at a local corner shop and at a local market and stressed the presumed gravity associated with lack of parental presence in the child's life. The colleagues attending the meeting all appeared in agreement with the importance of the issue and connected the mother's incapacity to attend the meeting with a possible, if not evident, scarce maternal involvement in the child's everyday routines. Sami would usually be collected from school by her grandmother and at times by one of her three older sisters but never by her own mother. Although it was almost the norm for children at the school to be picked up by members of their family, or family network, other than their parents, in Sami's case this was seen as an indication of poor parenting. The reasoning behind these concerns would however vary according to the staff member engaged in providing an explanation.

The class teacher, one of the few white middle-class members of the team not residing in the neighbourhood, would express frequently her worries in relation to the presumed instability of Sami's family. In several circumstances, she had voiced her concerns with regards to the grandmother's suitability to look after the child for several reasons. Above all the woman, unemployed and living in a council flat with Sami and her mother, was frequently seen during the day hanging around corner shops nearby the school, often supposedly drinking and in the company of not

entirely trusted figures. If approached when collecting the child, to share information on the pupil's aggravating behaviour, she would either not engage *sufficiently* or shout at the child and threaten to send her back to Jamaica.⁷⁹

The teacher was therefore concerned about the grandmother's parental skills and of her possibly negative influence on the child's behaviour. Although it was common knowledge that Sami's mother was incapable to attend school meetings or look after the child during the day because of her work schedule, this teacher would frequently express her belief that the parent could have tried harder to be involved and responsible. During an informal conversation on this specific case, the teacher revealed her belief that the mother had given up on Sami, the youngest of four children, because she was too difficult to manage and was not "wanted". In his work on parental involvement in children's education, Hornby (2011) identifies race and ethnicity as one of the key factors impacting the relationship between school and home. First, it is of relevance to consider how mothers are the parent expected to be involved in matters regarding the education of their children. Several studies reflect on issues related to pressures on the maternal figure to act as key connector between school and home (Dudley-Marling, 2001; Reay and Mirza, 2003). Shifts in family composition and dynamics are highlighted as elements impacting on maternal capacity to engage with the education of the child: '*mothers face the issue of working with schools, increased workload, and participation in the labour market*' (Hornby, 2011: 16). This literature offers the opportunity to question the teacher's belief that

⁷⁹ This phenomenon has been discussed in chapter 4 and will be explored also in chapter 9

unwillingness was the reason behind the fact that Sami's mother could not attend what the school viewed as an important meeting. Mismatched hierarchies of values emerge as a core factor hindering the relationship between home and school. The teacher's comment was very likely based on society's expectation that the mother should and would want to prioritise her child's school circumstances. As Hornby states *'those largely involved are, as defined by the teachers, the "good parents" who typically are white, middle class, married and heterosexual'* (ibid, 2011: 14). Sami's mother possibly never had the chance to be a *good parent*, and her work arrangements simply confirmed her unfit parental status. The concept of *bad parenting* in correlation to children's poor achievement is reiterated in the interview based study conducted by Dudley-Marling (2001) in the Boston area (U.S.A.). The investigation conducted by the author identifies the mechanism by which *'poor parents – often immigrants, single mothers, and people of colour – come in for the largest share of the blame'* (ibid, 2001: 184).

Sami's difficulties in school were frequently associated, both in informal and formal conversations, with issues concerning her supposed family life and to her mother's lack of interest, or insufficient presence, in her life. Lorraine, a teaching assistant, living in the same block as Sami's family had, interestingly, a very different view of the situation. White working-class and raised by Jamaican foster parents, Lorraine shared a very different point of view on Sami's circumstances over a series of conversations with Shanice, a teaching assistant who is second generation Jamaican and was specifically allocated to the child. Their concern about the fact that the mother had softened with regards to discipline, partly because of her

reduced capacity to spend time with the child and partly because Sami was her youngest child and the only one still living with her. In a way, their thinking was indicating the opposite of the teacher's. That is, Sami's mother was too loving and therefore not in a good position to exercise control over her child. The presence of the grandmother was mainly overlooked in their discussions, as her role was simply that of collecting the child and walking her home after which she would either spend time with neighbours or her siblings and their children. The eldest sister was considered as the source of discipline and was frequently mentioned as the one who could have "straightened up" Sami's behaviour.

This very simple case study exemplifies two opposed positions on parental roles and responsibilities of childcare. On one side, the teacher's preoccupation with the inadequacy of the maternal figure represents what Dudley-Marling defines as '*the doctrine of personal responsibility*' (2001: 184), a Western phenomenon that shifts the blame and turns '*the victims of poverty, discrimination and poor schooling into irresponsible parents who are solely responsible for their children's educational failures*'. On the opposite side, the two members of staff closest to the family's cultural background and embedded in more similar socio-economic circumstances, were less focused on identifying a figure to blame and more interested in the concept of discipline and roles within the wider family network.

In group discussion with practitioners

Whilst conducting the fieldwork in the primary school, I observed a series of group discussions with child practitioners. In these sessions, professionals would alternate in presenting their reflections and observations on a case of their choice. The members of the circle were interacting with children in various roles, either in education or social care. Whilst also representing an opportunity to improve my analytical and reflective skills, the group discussions helped me to engage in practice based conversations about practitioners' opinions around themes of relevance to my study. From these data two case studies, focusing on families of Caribbean descent, provided me with the opportunity to expand my comprehension of practitioners' views and experiences.

Jalyn

At the time of presenting this case, the practitioner had been working with Jalyn's family as a key worker for more than a year, through a scheme offered by an organisation supporting children and young people in need. Jalyn, an eleven-year-old girl of Jamaican descent living with her mother and a younger brother (aged nine, from a different father), had been referred to the service to receive support with her school performance. The practitioner selected the case to be presented to the group as he believed Jalyn's difficulties were linked to her relationship with her mother, and

he felt he was struggling to obtain the child's trust and create a 'safe bond'⁸⁰ (my notes on the discussion) with her.

The group would mainly focus on the lack of connection between the worker and the child and contextualise this within a concatenation of 'missed connections' (my notes on the discussion) revolving around the maternal figure. The mother and the practitioner were struggling to work in partnership, the woman and the child appeared disconnected and, as a result, Jalyn and the worker were struggling to create a space of trust. Throughout the first few discussions the practitioner voiced an increasing discomfort towards the mother who, in his view, was 'doing a very good job at creating a space of uncertainty and conflict around' (my notes on the discussion). The worker had limited information on the relationship and interaction between mother and daughter, aside from what was received through communication with the school and brief moments of observation of them during the handovers. As in the previous case, it seemed that the practitioner's preoccupation was founded on the perception that the mother was not fulfilling her role. In her summary on functionalist views of families, Burman (2008) discusses how one of the widespread recognised values of families is co-operation. The lack of this, noted by professionals in both the cases presented so far, is the key in defining the unsuitability of the parental figures involved. To aggravate the mother's position, during the handover prior to the sixth group discussion, the woman shared with the worker her strongly negative views with regards to his professional performance.

⁸⁰ The group adopted a psychological framework and would frequently refer to Attachment Theory

The group discussion focused initially on the woman's attack on the worker which was viewed as an attempt to prevent the formation of any bond with the child (symbolising the mistrust of men coinciding with stereotypical assumptions of male hatred among single mothers). The second focal point of discussion revolved around the fact that the mother's anger derived from her disappointment with the worker for *'being unhelpful'* (my notes on the discussion). This was because, during the previous session, the worker had decided to discuss with Jalyn her father, whom she had mentioned, rather than assisting her with the completion of her homework. Whilst the group seemed to interpret the maternal reaction as lack of sensitivity, it could be argued that being more interested in her child's achievement was an indication of her caring. This has also been explained by Burman, who wrote *'sensitive mothers are not only better mothers in the ways that they respond to and look after their charges, but they also maximize their children's learning'* (ibid, 2008: 299).

'... she started saying that her dad had told her he would have got her a phone for her birthday and that for now he had got her that one (phone). The practitioner shared his confusion as previously Jaylin had said that the phone came from her grandma. The child explained her dad had given the money to the grandma, who had ordered it for her.'

(my notes on the discussion)

In the worker's view, the fact that Jalyn had mentioned her father needed to be discussed to explore the emergence of a figure that had not previously arisen in their conversation.

'Jalyn's mum told me I am crap at my job as we had not completed her homework during the session. She said Jalyn got in trouble for not finishing her work'

(my notes on discussion)

Whilst the practitioner appeared interested in the impact of the phone in the child's life, the mother was mostly preoccupied with the fact that the session had not focused on improving Jaylin's academic achievement. In a paper on "practice wisdom" in social work, Sheppard reminds the reader that *'to a considerable degree, what one 'sees' in social life is dependent on particular perspectives'* (1995: 266). The emphasis on the content of the sessions differed between the mother's view and the worker's one. Although their aims appeared to be similar (they both wanted to help the child do better at school) their routes to achieve the goal did not match. Both parties were working on the basis of their set of beliefs and understanding of the situation: the practitioner would base his intervention with the child on the teachings imparted by his psychological background whilst the mother would view the situation from a more pragmatic position. In her analysis of the concept of *best interest of the child*. Burman (2008) reflects on the misalignment in focus between

practitioners and families with the former preoccupied by the analysis and exploration of family dynamics and the latter seeking functional solutions to tangible everyday problems.

It is interesting to note how, a few sessions later, after a CAHMS worker had become involved in the care of the child and the mother had been reported for child protection concerns for allegedly hitting Jalyn, the interests of mother and worker swapped. During a session, the practitioner reminded the child:

“This is time for your homework’ the practitioner told her he was not going to force her as it was not like in school, yet her mother had said if it’s not for homework, then for spelling or maths⁸¹”

(my notes on the discussion)

The mother instead telephoned the worker to discuss, not solely Jalyn’s difficulties at school, but to provide her version with regards to the allegations made against her by the school.

‘The mother phoned the practitioner and explained she was feeling tired with the kids sometimes but still trying

⁸¹ meaning that, even if Jalyn had no homework to do, they should still spend the session focusing on learning

to be the best mum she can be and that her own mother did the same (she was also a single mother). She said she never abused the children and she never brought a man around the house, and also that she never went out partying. She is around the children 24/7'

(my notes on the discussion).

The practitioner's thoughts around this conversation with Jalyn's mother expressed the worker's beliefs about the mother:

'quite extreme and change her mind easily. Previously she had complained that the children were not receiving sufficient support, however she had cancelled previous week's session as they had gone to visit the grandmother and this week she would have forgotten the appointment the practitioner had with Jalyn without the phone call to remind her'

(my notes on the discussion).

It could be argued that the trade of interests, or to better say priorities, is in this case strictly connected to child rearing and protection strategies on both sides. The practitioner was, possibly unconsciously, lessening opportunities for the mother to get upset, or punitive; or even more so his response was an attempt to compensate

or replace the maternal figure incapable of providing a “good enough” situation for the child. The woman was defending her maternal capacities and avoiding the possibility of her children being taken away. In both circumstances, the actions would be highly associated with the concept of caring, as part of mothering. Turney (2000) explores in depth the historical development of the correlation between caring and mothering and the eventual and socially constructed overlapping of neglect with mothering (or lack of). The author continues by providing an overview of the elements and expectations towards mothering as seen in Western theoretical frameworks and policies, for which *‘the mother is the epitome of selfless care’* (Ibid, 2000: 50). Jalyn’s mother’s attempt to convey her understanding and conforming to this requirement is, however, not recognized, or valued, by the worker and she is thereby judged negatively.

The cases presented in this chapter will enable a deeper analysis of the impact and meaning of the apparent failure to recognize the concept of motherhood as socially and culturally shaped.

Mayra, Nick and Samantha

The other case study presented in the group, had been selected by a practitioner working in a refuge for victims of domestic violence. The family, composed of a young mother (Mayra) and her two children (Nick, five, and Samantha, three), had been residing at the refuge for over ten months at the time of the presentation and was waiting to be allocated to a new temporary accommodation. The case worker

had been following the case to provide support to both the mother and the children. During the introduction it was, however, highlighted that most of her work revolved around two specific worries: the safety of the children and the maternal capacity for parenting. The introduction to the family offered by the worker contained limited information about the children and focused mostly on the figure of the mother, depicted chiefly as source for further concerns and worries.

'There is a history of domestic violence and community violence, Mayra explained having been involved in drug-related crimes, possibly through association with her ex-partner and other acquaintances, and that her house was raided by the police in the past.'

(my notes on the discussion)

'Mayra wondered in the past of being depressed, for which she elicited medical treatment in the form of antidepressants'

(my notes on the discussion)

'Mayra presented as generally chaotic upon arrival, and with main difficulties in understanding and relating to her children'

(my notes on the discussion)

When discussing Mayra's issues, the worker appeared to be referring to a "troublemaker", rather than to a victim. Humphreys and Absler (2011) discuss the widespread phenomena of 'mother blaming' amongst social workers and children's practitioners; an issue described as *'an attitude of scrutiny, evaluation and judgment [that] pervades the workers' interactions with women where domestic violence is present'* (Ibid, 2011: 466). The authors continue by highlighting the tendency for workers to focus their intervention on matters and needs other than the ones directly related to the experience of domestic violence. In several studies aimed at exploring women's experience of motherhood after domestic violence, Lapierre suggests the need to reconsider child welfare practices encouraging *'focus away from men's violence on women's failures as mothers'* (Ibid, 2010: 343), in favour of a more holistic consideration of the issues effecting the child-mother relation in such a complex context. The notes from the group discussions contain further indications of this tendency to label the mother an inadequate parent and to focus mainly on this issue, rather than exploring the factors impacting the woman.

'Although the situation appears calmer now, some of the original concerns about her ability to parent the children remain. Workers still experience some difficulty in fully engaging, and debate her ability to commit to a programme or service, such as family therapy, to address her parenting needs.'

(my notes on the discussion)

Due to her newly allocated persona of perpetrator, rather than victim, Mayra's reliability was scrutinized and her actions acquired different meanings. During a discussion, the worker shared her worries concerning the worsening of the children's behaviour as, in the absence of their mother's attention, they would find ways to seek it from others. On another occasion, the worker lamented that the children would wander around the house without their mother supervising or being with them and that this would pose further demands on the team. The group picked up on Mayra's absenteeism and the discussion was furthered as the group leader suggested exploring the worker's feelings towards the mother's absence. It was through this more detailed conversation that we later found out that Mayra had in fact been very busy attending meetings to solve their very unstable housing circumstances; an arguably legitimate reason for spending time out of the refuge and away from her children. Nevertheless, the practitioner and her manager seem to attribute no value to these meetings and, rather than offering Mayra support, they started planning strategies to ensure parenting responsibilities were returned to the mother, particularly in light of the possibility for the family leaving the refuge. This intensified when the mother received notification that they could move to a more stable and long-term accommodation.

*'The family will be moving out within a month or two,
having had additional difficulties with the Housing*

Department (...) Mayra is still described as neglecting the children. Practitioners worry things would only deteriorate if the family was to leave more suddenly'

(my notes on the discussion)

Interestingly, the concerns raised on the mother's parental capacities seem to have been unfounded once the family moved into a more stable accommodation. A few weeks after their move, the practitioner visited the family and, to her surprise, noticed that Mayra was calmer, more approachable, more engaged with the children and more in control: *'the meeting had gone very well and Mayra had been able to verbalise her concerns and hopes for the children'* (my notes on the discussion).

The remainder of the session with the family offered further reassurance to the worker and seemed to shed some light on the distress caused by the housing situation on the mother. In fact, contrary to previous expectations, the current hostel was temporary accommodation and, most importantly, did not meet basic needs such as hygiene and appropriateness for the children. For the first time, the practitioner seemed to recognise Mayra's distress with regards to this issue as an indication of adequate parenting skills. The practitioner asked Mayra how she was and she replied in her *"calmer demure"* (my notes on the discussion), saying that she was 'alright'. The practitioner however noticed that her tone implied a certain level of discontent with the place. Another point that was also noted by the practitioner

was the fact that Mayra's reply reflected her ability to better hold her negative feelings together.

Aside from an implicit analysis of Mayra's manner of expressing emotions (a point which will be further elaborated in the discussion of the emerging themes from the interviews with practitioners) the worker associates the mother's acceptance of difficulties as an indication of her interest and capacity to care for the children. The practitioner suggested that Mayra's discontent with the new hostel could be an indication of caring. Describing Mayra as *'taking the initiative'* and *'more in charge'*, the worker felt more confident towards Mayra's parental skills. Several interesting themes can be extracted from the shift in the worker's view due to what appears as a change of attitude in Mayra. The key point revolves around the fact that the mother started behaving in a way that resonated with the worker's expectations. Mayra was no longer upset, maintained a calm demeanour and was capable of expressing her feelings in a controlled manner. Her focus was no longer on the housing situation but had shifted to the children and she was ready to accept adversity and prioritise her children above all. In an article exploring teenage motherhood as an issue of otherness, rather than a scientifically evidenced matter, researchers identify the origin of stigma and marginalisation of certain approaches to motherhood in *'perceptions that are historically and culturally specific'* (Wilson and Huntington, 2005: 61). The specificity of this case appears to gravitate around a few core clashes between the worker and the mother's understanding of motherhood. The worker expected Mayra to engage, communicate and prioritise certain children's needs over

other issues, these expectations were, however, embedded in a context familiar to the practitioner and not to the mother. The worker appeared preoccupied as the mother prioritised finding accommodation as an alternative to the refuge, rather than spending *quality* time with her children and, in general, appeared to demonstrate a low level of interest and control when interacting with the children. These two observations possibly reinforced, or contributed to, the creation of a narrative differing from that of the mother as the victim of domestic violence and in need of support. Lapierre (2010) discusses this shift in narrative in his paper exploring the struggle experienced by many mothers in the aftermath of domestic violence. He exhorts practitioners to '*acknowledge the fact that these women often do the best they can in order to protect and care for their children under very difficult circumstances*' (Ibid, 2010:354) and most importantly to carefully consider and be aware of their expectations towards women as mothers as '*this particular context exacerbates the burden of responsibility that is placed on women and complicates the work involved in mothering*' (Ibid, 2010:354).

This second case provides yet another example of circumstances in which the tendency to normalise the experience of motherhood risks to obfuscate practitioners' capacity to assess and provide the relevant support to families in need.

In conversation with practitioners

The case studies presented thus far have offered an initial analysis of the role of lay and professional knowledge on practitioners' perceptions and attitudes when

working with Caribbean families. In order to expand this process of investigation, I conducted a small-scale series of open ended thematic enquiries with child practitioners from different fields.

A total of ten practitioners⁸² took part in individual thematic conversations exploring their beliefs and understanding on three main areas: Caribbean families; attachment and parenting. The aim of this series of interviews was to produce a theoretical exploration of the professionals' perspectives and experiences of Caribbean families. In the elaboration of such an investigation, I attempted to balance the awareness of my critical stance with the necessity to engage with '*disruptive transformation*'⁸³ of the discussion of the topics (Fine, 2002: 207). The themes emerging from the conversations are dictated by both the similarities surfacing in the narratives offered by the participants and emerging shared attitudes and approaches. In the following section I will introduce the core themes deriving from the data. A more thorough exploration of these will be developed in the following chapters with the support of existing material on the subject as well as input from discussions with members of the Caribbean community during my ethnographic study and material deriving from my own observations.

⁸² A full list of the interviewees is provided in Appendix 3

⁸³ Fine (2002) refers to the necessity for feminist researchers to expose social injustices, the role of power and the danger of objectivity at all costs.

African Caribbean(ish?)

My first question to practitioners was simply an attempt to engage in a conversation exploring their own understanding of this term⁸⁴. The broad nature of the themes allowed the respondents to address the topic almost through “free association”⁸⁵, with only one practitioner offering an answer strictly focused on a discourse of ethnical or geographical origins:

‘People whose families came from the West Indies; lots of children are born or brought up seeing themselves as African Caribbean because their parents or possibly even grandparents came from there. They would usually identify with a particular island.’ (p2)

Another respondent also touched upon the topic of ethnic derivation, with a shift towards the idea of cultural belonging:

‘Families who come from the Caribbean and the next generation are usually described as Black British and they tend to feel very in touch with their culture even if maybe they have never been to the Caribbean’ (p3)

⁸⁴ See appendix one for more notes on this term

⁸⁵ I asked practitioners to share the first thought that would come in their mind on this topic.

The remaining respondents provided answers exploring mostly perceptions and beliefs attached to the population identified by them as African Caribbean:

'There is a sort of stigma around these families mainly about underage sex and the parents not being very caring' (p7)

'Our school has a high representation of Caribbean pupils; this might be the reason why the majority of the difficult children we deal with are from this background. The families of this children tend to be more chaotic, at times harder to engage with' (p6)

The nursery nurse (p9) echoed the reflection provided by the primary school teacher (p6) with regards to the large representation of Caribbean children in the 'problematic' group of pupils in the nursery.

The refuge worker (p8) also provided a brief narrative related to her recent workload in response to this question. The immediate reaction to my query was 'homophobia', having possibly noticed my puzzled expression the respondent expanded on this point by explaining she had recently been working with a lesbian couple that had fled Jamaica as victims of homophobia. They had travelled to the UK as tourists

initially and then tried to apply for refugee status to avoid going back to their village as one of them had been raped and beaten by her family.

Pamela (p4), my only respondent from an African Caribbean background, also decided to reply to the question with a brief, very personal narrative, equally emphasizing a stereotype frequently associated to the group.

'In 2010, they (the police) photographed my son because he fitted the description of a black boy, an African Caribbean boy, throwing stones and bricks at the cars of local people. I asked the policeman what he meant by African Caribbean and he could not answer.' (p4)⁸⁶

Pamela continued recounting this significant moment in her and her son's life in more details, the analysis of which will be discussed in the last theme presented in this chapter and in more detail in chapter 9. Thus far, the point of interest in the narrative offered by Pamela, is her strong association between the group and racial discrimination inflicted by the authorities. Additionally, it could be argued that in her narrative we encounter how the concept of African Caribbean loses its specificity when presented as a component of the wider image of Black people as the *other*. Mindful of the fact that *'a Black person is six or seven times more likely to be stopped*

⁸⁶ Pamela referred to this incident on numerous occasions and this event will be discussed in more depth in chapter 7

under police stop-and-search powers than members of any other race living in Britain' (Yesufu, 2013: 282) and in the light of recent critical events in the USA which have led to the formation of the group Black Lives Matter (2013), Pamela's story appears to be a highly appropriate reiteration of the issues related to the existence of the over-stereotypical conceptualisation of Black people as the "enemy of authority". In his analysis of the racial issue related to stop-and-search practices in the UK, Yesufu described this phenomenon of grouped stereotyping by stating:

'it is somewhat problematic to distinguish between Blacks of African and Caribbean origin in terms of which group complains more against the police. Race statistics provided to us by the Home Office and other statutory agencies in Britain rarely make this distinction, as evidenced in previous studies'

(Yesufu, 2013: 291)

Pamela's point enabled a process of self-reflection on my own study. In an attempt to verify the appropriateness of my own positioning as researcher investigating the other cultural realities, I sought comparison with existing literature on the population. It appears that most studies focusing on the African Caribbean community in the UK also contains an element of definition, reflection and admission of awareness with regards to the limitedness of using such term:

'It is acknowledged that these socially constructed ethnic categories mask the complexity of experience and perception within and between groups and will be examined further in the discussion.'

(Adamson & Donovan, 2005: 37)

'While we do not discuss the problem here, we recognize at the outset that definition of an ethnic group and the choice of a label by which to refer to them is a difficult and sensitive matter.'

(Curtis and Lawson, 2000: 366)

Can't buy him love

The analysis of the case studies presented earlier in the chapter highlights workers' tendency to compare what was observed in families to what constitutes the acceptable as the reference for normality. Specifically, in Mayra's case study, I explored the Western conception of motherhood as a circumstance in which the child becomes the absolute priority, with the mother being responsible for addressing the child's needs. An interesting diversion from this norm was discussed by almost all the respondents participating in the series of interviews. Practitioners shared having observed a tendency in parents to prioritise material goods at the expense of other needs that would normally be considered more important for children, as indicated by these quotes:

'Why would you spend money for a seven-year old on such a fancy haircut, that is what the hair is about... and he comes to school with a broken bag.... (p5)

'For me I'd say a lot as to do with inconsistency, they sometimes are very loving. You see parents spending a huge amount of money on new trainers and outfits and lots of other material goods, as a way of expressing (their love) and the child sees that as love; and the child with no material goods or who doesn't get another member of the family attention' (p2)

'They almost equate that (material goods) to love more than other cultural groups do' (p10)

The family support worker suggested a more elaborate explanation of this apparent materialistic take on love. Firstly, through a comparison between different generations and, secondly, via the cliché that correlated buying goods with buying closeness and peaceful interaction.

'The third generation is where parents are more laid back, they appear to be more focused and interested in

appearance- for example the attitude towards fashion brands and gadgets' (...) 'The mothers are less into discipline and just tend to hide their children's issues with the appearance' (p3)

One of the primary teachers noted a similar issue with some of the boys in his classroom:

'It's almost as everything revolves around having sneakers, the haircut, the birthday party. Then when you call their parents in to talk, they have no time' (p6)

In a study aimed at exploring the possible correlation between anxious attachment and materialistic views, a group of psychologists emphasised the possible connection between disengaged parents and “greedy” children, by indicating *'teenagers who highly value material success report having less nurturing mothers'* (Norris et al, 2012:667). In accordance with the practitioners' responses, the high value *attached* to material goods is not an act solely related to children but also to the parents themselves. Once again this could be interpreted, if aligned with psychological research in the area, as an indication of poor emotional health in relation to unsatisfactory family bonds: *'if materialism is associated with a decreased emphasis on meaningful relationships, anxious attachment may be part of the explanation.'* (Norris et al, 2012: 667). The inappropriateness of certain family

relationships is identified in several of the interviews with practitioners, most of whom appeared preoccupied with the lack of stability and the apparent continuous dynamism in families:

'I have another couple of children, siblings, where mum and nan live together. Mum has an alcohol and drug problem and at times she is not capable of taking care of the children, so then nan really becomes the responsible one. Sometimes the auntie is involved, but that is more occasional. Eventually I had to discuss with the nan about taking full responsibility of the children as it was becoming too much for them to always move around, you see?' (p2)

The concept of child shifting appears to be at the core of this cultural clash. Although this practice has never quite been deemed acceptable in Western societies, certain specific actualization of it are viewed as more harmful than helpful:

'Godmothers can play a very important role in some children's lives. I have worked with several children who were unhappy in their homes and their idea was to go live with their godmothers. Actually, I know of a godmother almost raising one child I was working with. I guess it

could have been good for the child but really it was just her way to get away from her life' (p8)

Above all, the impact of the shift is what appears to concern the practitioners:

'Sometimes children are sent off to visit their father in West Indies and that is nice in a way because they get to understand their roots but then on their return everything is more complicated.' (p5)

'I went to pick up a child I work with in church and once there I realized they spend their whole day there and the adults are not paying much attention to them, they are just left to the side or in a different space with some other adults. How are children meant to learn then?' (p7)

'Again it's about shared ownership of children and leaving your kids with somebody else whilst you go out and do your things. That's very valued in the community, but not always has a good effect on the child' (p10)

⁸⁷ Whilst discussing a specific family

Once again, the discussion with Pamela on the same topic offered a different perspective on the matter and one that I will elaborate further in chapter 8:

'There are a lot of very good women within the Caribbean community. When my children were little. I couldn't even go shopping. At time, I was so jumbled up in the life I was living, I almost lost my boy. I was fed up and stopped going anywhere and then I ended up being a size 20 as I would only eat ice cream and junk food. Then one of my neighbours started coming around and suggested she could look after the children sometimes and then a friend from church also offered. Suddenly something changed, I realized I wanted something more and that I could with the support of the community.' (p4)

Rely or Resist

Pamela's story featured a broad number of characters and each of them had a specific role in helping her obtain what she had achieved and be the person she was. Nevertheless, there was a strong element of self-reliance in her narrative; she allowed *them* to help her. The stories presented by the other practitioners share a certain level of emphasis on the difficulties encountered when attempting to collaborate or offer support to some families.

'She now has a house with her husband, they have children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. We have been talking a lot about the difference in upbringing between her children and her great-grandchildren strangers, for example about some difficulties her daughter had been encountering with her children. She was clear she did not want help from outside, from strangers; she was going to sort out her family on her own' (p2)

In another example, it was the father that was refusing to be helped in reconnecting with his children:

'For whatever reason his confidence has been knocked though society, and I know it has been hard because I am first generation Black British, I know it is hard but he did not let us help him' (p7)

A family worker shared, for example, her perception of the lack of understanding of the importance of education by some parents:

'She was finding it very difficult to take the child to nursery, she did not understand its importance and for

her it was much more convenient and also provided her with a sort of peace of mind to leave the child with the sister in law.

You get that kind of reaction and opinion; he is better off with family. But they will either place him in front of a TV all day or left to do whatever he wanted. I tell them the child needs to be in a structured environment where he can learn discipline, rules and develop academically. (p1)

Both the primary school teachers had also experienced similar attitudes towards support in education:

'Older parents and grandparents are very hard working people; they get the importance of this. Then you get the younger parents and they are all about dancing and singing' (p5)

'Some families don't see school as a place where to obtain lifelong skills, school is either a form of free child care or just a way for the kid to get a job.' (p6)

The issue discussed appears different from the initially described tendency to resist receiving support. Aside from a shift in priorities and what is perceived as

unacceptable views on education, parents are described as more reliant on a type of support that is neither offered nor requested, but simply expected:

'The parents are very laid back; they work and all but they need to be wearing the latest trends, even small children with £30/£40 pair of shoes but then they think it's expensive to be paying a pre-school £5 a day, so I question them about their priorities, is it a matter of priorities? 'he would get a free one through the system' you usually get that kind of attitude. I don't know where it stems from, as their grandparents wouldn't do that. I am not sure whether it is because they grew up here and got together with the rest of the community or if because they were born here' (p8)

Sometimes, between reliance and resistance sits what is perceived as indifference, lack of understanding and a sort of *nothing to lose* attitude:

I have seen a lot of underage mums from Caribbean background, I have seen lots of girls in trouble because they are sexually active. These girls are more assertive, they are not afraid to talk to you and tell you what they think. They are very open and they fear nothing (p3)

This attitude is sometimes recognised to be more of an indication of the lack of points of reference to aspire for better:

'I have a couple of parents from Jamaica. The father was born there and he really wants for his son to go to the best school, so I explained him he needed to support him (this was for secondary school) so he started photocopying books and ensure he was doing his work well. The mother instead was of the idea that any school would do, she really was not getting it. They had very different backgrounds, as he was from a wealthy family and professional, whilst she was not and she really could not relate to this. But then again I have seen people from very poor backgrounds wanting the best for their children, they put all their hopes in a child to make sure he gets out.' (p10)

The lack of interesting alternatives is also discussed by Wilson and Huntington (2005) in their analysis of teenage pregnancy. In this article, the issue is explored as being the consequence of social exclusion and disparities which is an issue I will investigate in more detail in chapter 9.

Part II

Beyond the dyad; the experiences of
children and families in the UK

Chapter 7: How to spot a Caribbean, pride in cultural specificity

Not long after returning from my fieldwork in Jamaica, one of my local informants sent me an email entitled ‘This might help you with your research’. I opened the email hoping to have received some sort of revelatory information that would have unlocked once and for all my understanding of the dynamics of Caribbean families. The message contained instead a hilarious guide on ‘How to Spot a Jamaican’, commencing with the following statement:

‘if you have a particular interest in Jamaicans and are finding it difficult to spot them outside of their "natural habitat" here are a few pointers for spotting Jamaicans in the "wild".’

(How to Spot a Jamaican)

In the previous chapter I presented the data collected through a series of interviews and discussions with practitioners, all of which began with a dialogue concerning the participants’ understanding of the term ‘African Caribbean’. The same dialogue also took place with family members who were taking part in my ethnographic fieldwork. The themes arising in these conversations were, however, very different from that offered by practitioners. Whilst the latter, as explored in chapter six, provided “definitions” through examples deriving from professionals’ working and personal knowledge, the former produced what could be summarised as a list of

features that define participants' experiences of being African Caribbean. The comparative analysis of these two sets of data appear to highlight that practitioners offered a series of stereotypical behaviours frequently presented that indicated deviance in illustrating 'African Caribbean'. On the other hand, African Caribbean participants appeared to be adopting these very stereotypes as points of pride and on the other hand, as discourses of resistance against the underlying attacks embedded in the practitioners' views.

Through this reading, the very weapons of attack become pillars that build protection, a sense of belonging and of communal struggle against the act of outing and othering performed by practitioners. Queer theorists describe a similar defence mechanism as being adopted in the creation of what has been defined as the '*homosexual identity*' (Grindstaff, 2014:58)⁸⁸. The very features that distinguish this group from others becomes a tool to develop membership and belonging, as explained in Tajfel's social identity theory (1981). With regards to West Indian societies, Wilson (1973) identified *reputation* as a phenomenon bringing members of the community together on the same level, regulating their socialisation and social behaviours and creating homogeneity and equality. This concept of reputation was, however, specific to the time and place relevant to Wilson's study and would require some adjustments to maintain relevance in the context here discussed. I here argue that, transposed into a scenario of immigration and exposure to stereotypes and

⁸⁸ see Paul Sartre's (1948) similar reflection on Jewishness.

racism, *reputation* seems to become part of a series of connective elements promoting belonging – safety and status. The points presented in this chapter can therefore be interpreted as an act of *resistance* performed by the participants and counteracting the *attacks* articulated by practitioners in their discourses on African Caribbean families. These acts of resistance produce a counter narrative to that created by the responses offered by professionals. I therefore suggest for the reader to approach what follows as a series of examples of strategies for survival, re-appropriations of a cultural identity and living that is impacted daily by the socio-economic context in which participants live.

Pride in identity

Since the 1970s, the concept of identity has been mainly associated with psychological investigations and theorisations, pushing its correlation to the idea of the *self* at the forefront of the discourse on identity (Leary, 2011). Other disciplines have, however, progressed with an exploration of identity informed by the recognition of the role of contexts and relations, reassigning the concept within the broader discourse alongside other *social constructs*. A broader representation of identity has therefore emerged, not only in the academic and professional discourse, but also in people's experience and understanding of their own personal identity. In an exercise, exploring what is understood to be "identity" outside specific theoretical frameworks, I asked a group of students of mine to identify three words that in their views were indicators of their identity. The guidance was intentionally vague, as my wish was to verify the theoretical proposition suggested by Barth (1969), who

postulated the configuration of identity as a matter of space and boundaries. Whilst only a few students picked gender⁸⁹, the majority described their identity through (in order of popularity): their ethnicity; an adjective to describe their physical appearance; their religion and marital status. The idea that identity is partially determined by the context in which it is explored is proposed also in the edited volume on 'Diaspora, Identity and Religion' (Kokot et al., 2003). In the introduction, the authors offer a generalised summary of anthropological views on identity, defining it as *'the content of an ongoing process of boundary construction, being constantly re-invented and shifted according to the requirements of the situation'* (Ibid: 2004: 4). This dynamic definition of identity, as a continued reconfiguration of the self through a dialogue with the surroundings, resonates with the notes from my ethnographic fieldwork. The data emerging from participants' views indicate a tendency to adapt to the prevailing identity traits in accordance with the settings. This opportunity for dynamism was, however, missing from the practitioners' accounts, mostly defining identity through stereotypical behaviours.

Ethnicity per se is not an "obvious clue". Christian (2002: 197) reminds us of Fanon's (1952) conceptualisation of being trapped by the "obvious", defined by him as the *'racial epidermal schema'*. In a recent event exploring the role of practitioners in the safeguarding and promotion of children's rights, a member of a panel addressing the need to recognise the meaning of identity for children in care, stressed the undeniable role of culture and ethnicity in correlation to identity. To my surprise, the

⁸⁹ Possibly as the group was in fact composed almost exclusively by female students

speaker indicated culture as a dynamic aspect of a person's identity, whilst ethnicity was an undeniable and unchangeable reality that one cannot choose but has to live with daily. These statements on the static nature of ethnical identity initially left me baffled but subsequently led to an important realisation supported by the reading of Mary Waters' 'Optional Ethnicities' (1990) on ethnicity in America and confirmed by reflecting on the experiment with students mentioned earlier in this section. Waters' study revealed how a surprising majority of second, third and further generation immigrants exhibit a strong connection and sense of identification to their ancestors' ethnic group. This discovery convinced the author to postulate ethnicity not just as a social construct but also as a matter that can be chosen only to a certain extent and under specific conditions. Most importantly, Waters explained how '*certain ancestries take precedence over others in the societal rules on descent and ancestral reckoning*'. (Waters, 1990:18). Certain *obvious clues*, therefore, limit a person's choice of ethnic identification, as with Fanon's quote presented by Christian (2002:197): '*I am the slave not of the idea that others have of me but of my own appearance*' (Fanon, 1952: 112).

In the opening to her chapter titled 'Colour Matters, Race Matters', Tate (2002) offered the view of one of her informants with regard to the difficulties experienced in identifying as either British or African-Caribbean. The respondent shared the view that in both cases the person is being disadvantaged as not fully accepted as a member of either one or the other *group*. During my fieldwork, I had a similar line of conversation with Nikkya, one of my key informants. In 2011, her daughter spent the summer in the USA with relatives and this initiated a series of discussions around

Nikkya's experience of being sent to the USA as a teenager as a form of punishment by her mother, who could no longer tame her behaviour. Nikkya had very positive memories of living in the US, particularly as the move had distanced her from the difficult circumstances she had found herself caught in as a teenager in London; an event that was never fully covered in our chats. Nevertheless, moving to the US had come with some difficulties, mostly related to adjusting to a different way of living and losing a sense of familiarity and belonging. In the attempt to blend in, Nikkya had intentionally lost what her cousin defined as her *'posh British accent'*, in favour of one more resembling Jamaican. The reason for favouring a Jamaican accent over the American was justified by her attempt to blend in with the other members of the family and the wish to please her grandmother, who had maintained strong links to her origins and was ultimately reluctant to leave her roots behind. According to her narration, Nikkya and her cousin would frequently joke about their grandmother's refusal to be recognised as American, verbalising her worry that she might have lost her wisdom had she learned to talk like the "*chupid*"⁹⁰ American women. This strategic choice had, however, not been welcomed at school and Nikkya recounted getting into trouble with one of her teachers for providing her grandma's theory in support of her choice of being identified as Jamaican, rather than British or American. Nevertheless, even as a grown-up woman, Nikkya justified her grandma's choice for two reasons. Firstly, maintaining strong and evidential links with her culture functioned as reminder that at some point in the future the family would return

⁹⁰ *stupid* in patois

to Jamaica. Secondly, conforming to using the local language would have reinforced the locals' sense of superiority and conveyed a sense of denial of her own roots. Contrarily to the last point, Nikkya's grandma and extended family in the USA were very proud of their origins and their houses matched perfectly the description of her mother's home back in Jamaica. The element of resistance pervading Nikkya's stories of her family in America resonates with my previous suggestion that the performative exaggeration or accentuation of stereotypical behaviours and features could be interpreted as a response to an act of othering enacted by the *majority other*. Tate concluded her chapter by postulating that *'the struggle we [African Caribbean heritage communities] are faced with is how to claim Blackness and Britishness simultaneously without asserting assimilation to whiteness as a necessary part of our future'* (2002: 210). I believe that Nikkya's stories about her grandmother and her family in the USA encapsulated this very struggle and were an attempt to be proud and present at the same time; an attempt to remain loyal to their roots whilst also fitting into their new lives.

This conflict between roots and present living became very alive and obvious during an event in 'cultural awareness week' taking place in the school. Each day of the week pupils from different classes were expected to be taking over the assembly to introduce a celebration of the many cultural heritages of students. Whilst the older children engaged in presentations of national heroes, notable figures and histories, KS1 pupils prepared a showcase exhibiting points of pride in their culture. The large number of children with African-Caribbean descent presented three reasons to be

proud to be Jamaican⁹¹: One group showcased the various sports in which Jamaicans excel, a second danced to a Bob Marley song and the last walked on stage with a fake jerk chicken and a grill. Whilst most parents and children seemed to appreciate the performance, a few members of staff with Caribbean heritage expressed their disapproval in a team meeting and voiced anger towards what was classified as a carousel of stereotypes and reductive representations of their vast cultural tradition. Other colleagues expressed, however, a contrasting view, reflecting on the importance to be able to identify *'what's us people famous for, what's with you and Bob Marley? Don't you sing 'One Love' on August 6th⁹²'* (Destiny's intervention in the discussion, staff room, October 2010). The conversation continued with an animated exchange of points of pride and celebration for their country. The argument ended in silence after Millie calmly reminded the group that *'none of it matters anyway, better being proud of what we are celebrated for than nothing at all, stop causing such a fuss'* (Millie's intervention in the discussion, staff room, October 2010). Millie's comment reintroduced the suggestion of capitalising on and originating resilience from within the *attacks* of mainstream culture. However this type of resistance appears different from that of Nikkya's grandmother which was more based on celebration of traditions rather than acceptance of recognised features.

In a follow up conversation, Pamela introduced me to the edited publication *'Black Success in the UK'* (McCalla, 2003) which is a collection of essays and case studies

⁹¹ All the children were of Jamaican descent

⁹² Jamaica's Independence Day.

tracking examples of effective resistance and “authentic pride”. Although recommending the whole book, Pamela insisted that I read the chapter investigating specifically the success stories of pupils attending a ‘*Black British, Inner-City, Community Nursery*’ (McCalla, 2003: 125). A section of this unique case study focused on the beneficial impact of staff and children’s ‘*positive sense of self*’ deriving from what the founder described as the awareness that ‘*we have our own culture and although you don’t think much about it, it’s our culture and when you lose your culture, you lose yourself and I don’t want my children losing themselves*’ (Ibid, 2003: 139). In Pamela’s views this sort of attitude was the missing element in most children’s experiences both at school and at home, for only a small portion of parents and teachers were in the position to provide this level of authentic pride and self-respect⁹³, as most of them would also be affected by an underlying sense of self-doubt. To counteract this lack of individual capacity, one of the many projects available at the children’s centre, managed by Pamela, at the time of my ethnography, focused on offering parents an opportunity to reconstruct their sense of self-pride, through work experiences, group support and mentoring.

In her paper on ‘Ethnic Identity of Display’, Richards (2014) introduced a series of reflections on aspects of society supposed to enable exhibitions of ethnic pride, such as those described in the examples of Nikkya and of the school assembly. The author (Ibid, 2014) indicated the status of the ethnic group, within the social context and popular culture, as a key element conditioning the social value of recognising

⁹³ As described by Pamela

and accepting one specific ethnic identity, as opposed to another. This study focused particularly on second/third generation youngsters with the aim of exploring the mechanisms facilitating a sense of preference towards open expression of belonging to an ethnic group. According to the author, perceived social status of the specific ethnic group and its correlation with desirable traits are the perfect combination promoting ethnic alignment and recognition of belonging. The paper (Richard, 2014) poisted the thesis of symbolic ethnicity, through the example of New York, Water's (1990). This term is used by Water (Ibid, 1990) to indicate the process by which second and third generation offspring benefit from the possibility to regard ethnicity as an elective status that can be chosen and tailored to their own choice and convenience. Richard's (2014) case study relied, however, on the acquired status of social acceptance by the ethnic group in a specific context in which being Jamaican are believed to carry a 'cool-commodity' or a power to increase social status of other ethnic groups sharing commonalities⁹⁴ with Jamaican culture. This does not appear to be the case in the United Kingdom where comparisons to the black population seem to bear negative meaning. The most striking example of this negative association is linked to the 2011 riots, when the historian David Starkey remarked *'the problem is that the whites have become black'*⁹⁵. Despite these negative associations, the conversations and observations with my informants highlighted a strong sense of identification and pride in being Caribbean, as in fact Leah reminded me: *'I know lots of kids born and brought up here who say they're*

⁹⁴ see Richards' paper for example on Haitian pupils

⁹⁵ These remarks were made during an appearance on Newsnight on August 12th. 2011

African Caribbean because it's where, possibly not even their parents, but they're grandparents came from and that's what they identify with. No matter what people thinks, most are proud to be who they are, makes more sense' (Leah, in conversation in her flat after the discussion in the staff room, October 2010).

In discussing matters of pride in association with their ethnic background, most informants would refer to three sub-factors related to their definition of identity: appearances; attitudes and values. In the next sections I will explore the associated meanings and relevance for each of these elements through a series of vignettes.

Pride in appearance

When I started discussing stereotypes associated with West Indian identity the majority of my respondents mentioned facts related to physical appearance, similar to that indicated in this first section of the spoof what do you mean? guide:

The first thing to do is to look for the obvious clues. If you're on a New York subway going out for a late-evening drink, it should be obvious that the Jamaican in the crowd is the young lady with the low-cut blouse who has covered her entire chest, from cleavage to neck, with baby powder.

And if you're on a street in Brixton and spot a lad strolling confidently down the street in a knee-length, red, green and gold mesh marina, with nothing but his scrawny, bare chest under it, then this gentleman is quite

likely a Jamaican. Similarly, if you spot a man, anywhere in the world, with a white rag wrapped up and stuffed into his back pocket (where a person of any other nationality would have placed a handkerchief) then this person is a Jamaican. No question. But these are the obvious physical clues. ‘

(How to Spot a Jamaican)

After reading this section, both Destiny and Shanice could not stop laughing and Leah announced triumphantly that the clues all fit her dad perfectly. Whilst these exaggerated features did not bare actual meaning, as they meant more as a caricature than a proper description. Sharing them with my informants started a conversation about image and its role in their lives. Not long before that one of the children in the nursery, Kaja, the younger of three siblings of mixed heritage, had lost her beautiful dreadlocks after the sudden departure of her father from the family's life. Whilst everyone agreed that the mother's reaction might have been slightly over the top, Leah's remarks focused on the fact that Kaja's new hairstyle would have been welcomed by the school's new head-teacher.

I firstly came across the discussion around the changes in standards of acceptability of appearance, an issue that had been raised at the school not simply in relation to staff members but also with regards to the pupils, when a group of staff members complained about the change of character in the school. Whilst the previous headmistress had shared her vision of creating a family-like setting, the new principal had instated a more formal environment, both for staff and pupils. Most of the group

would agree on the importance of appearances to fit in society at large. In Leah's opinion, however, the issue resided in the fact that the choice of the new headteacher seemed to reinforce society's internalised racism against women and men of colour. Whilst the former head, Mrs X, was a first-generation Jamaican woman with long dreadlocks and mostly wearing traditional clothes, the new principal, Mr B., was a white middle-class man wearing suits and sporting an impeccable British accent. The choice of the new headmaster, indeed, appeared as a strong movement away from the environment that had been created under the previous and, whether intentional or casual, the striking difference between the two sparked many conversations of internalised racism and racial discrimination. According to a rumour that arose amongst staff one of the OFSTED inspectors, whose visit had led to the sudden resignation of the prior principal, had commented negatively on the lack of ethnic diversity in the school. Whether this story was fabricated or real it resulted in many changes regarding staff and pupils' taking place under the new management. Staff were provided with a revisited and reinforced dress code policy, whilst children were subjected to intensified uniform checks and were discouraged from wearing ornaments to avoid distractions and to promote children feeling equal in terms of appearances. The views of staff members on this policy varied. Whilst most appeared concerned by the new standards, some approved of them; a situation that would lead to several disputes in the staff room. In most cases, these arguments would spark from situations experienced in the classroom. One day, for example, Michele and Leah had an argument in relation to whether it was acceptable for a Year 3 child to have beads in her braids, after the

teacher had sent a note home requesting for these to be removed. Michele viewed the beads as a source of distraction and possible conflict with other children and she believed that the new requirements were positive and as instrumental in teaching children how they were expected to appear in society. Contrarily, Leah thought these rules simply reinforced the imposition of white standards on other cultures and that the child should be allowed to wear beads at school. In my view the specific argument, as much as the broader discussion on appearance, seemed to be mostly a reaction to feeling deprived of the capacity to formulate, negotiate and express one's own identity. Leah's views on the importance for children to be able to embrace publicly their ethnic and cultural heritage were strongly supported by most of my other informants. Pamela, for example, believed that her children's closeness to their roots had equipped them with a stronger capacity to resist injustice. Shanice thought that learning about his home country had inspired her son to pursue his dancing career and Sherell had shared with Destiny her pride in being a beautiful black woman. The strength of ethnic pride in African-Caribbean young children and adolescents in the UK was confirmed also in Lam and Smith's study (2009). The data collected indicated three core points of interest: the strong identification with the ethnic background; the change in main identification (between British and Caribbean) depending on the context and a more stable and durable identification as Caribbean in female participants (ibid, 2009). The location determined the nature of ethnic and cultural identity could be used in support of arguments against the new policies in the school which were viewed as reinforcing the necessity to adhere to white middle class standards to succeed. Some of my informants seemed resigned

to this need to conform and would, in fact, expect their children to do so without complaining. Michele's daughter, who was attending a private Catholic school, was allowed to get her hair braided only during school holidays; similarly, Pauline had learned to follow her mother's practice to just keep her hair straightened and in a bun, to the point that her nickname was '*coolie hair gal*' as no one had ever seen her natural hair. The connection between being respectable and physical appearance is highlighted in Ashe's (1995) exploration of hair, beauty and identity in Toni Morrison via the words of Erica Hector Vital (1994:11): '*don't let your slip show, don't sneak off with the neighbourhood boys, don't forget to do your lessons, don't be a fool with your hair*'. The strong association between hair and character was also noted by Nigerian-America writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her suggestion that Michelle Obama's subdued and mainstream hairstyle had a positive impact on her husband's election⁹⁶. The significance of the relation of hair-colourism to discrimination is explored in depth by Robinson (2011) who presented data from interviews covering a whole variety of aspects of the matter, such as the meaning of hair length, texture, colour and eventually reminded the reader that '*what is bad about bad hair is its reflection of African ancestry*' (Ibid, 2011: 372).

At that point, my observations across the four contexts indicated the school as the setting mostly emphasising the clash between my informants' representation of their

⁹⁶ on August 9th, 2016, during an interview for Channel 4, the author stated '*I've often said that if Michelle Obama had natural hair when Barack Obama was running for president, he would not have won (...) because her natural hair would have signified certain things to people. It would signify that she's some sort of militant, neo Black Panther, frightening.*'

identities and social or mainstream expectations. In my notes, I reflected on how the children, identified by teachers as most problematic, would have at least one strong feature associated with their heritage and cultural background. Sami's hair was mentioned in many situations as a cause for concern. On one occasion in which Sami came to school with only half her head braided, a few teachers suggested it was an indication of her mother's limited capacity to look after her, whilst Leah sympathised with the mother imagining how difficult it must have been to tame both Sami and her hair. Naomi's fascination for her beaded braids had been indicated as a distraction and even as a health and safety hazard. Finally, Leroy's insistence in wearing his Jamaica vest⁹⁷ under the uniform polo shirt had been deemed unacceptable and resulted in a series of notes home to ensure this behaviour would stop. These situations have as a common denominator the visibility of being African-Caribbean, of being black and providing material to reflect on the discrimination deriving from "colourism" (Robinson, 2011). In a comparison between being African-Caribbeans in London and New York in the eighties, Foner (1985) reminded her readers that black Jamaicans in Britain would mainly be associated with dangers, ill behaviour and poor morals. In another paper, comparing Irish and Caribbean experiences of migration to the UK (Brannen et al, 2016), a Caribbean migrant revealed that the key to his success was the fact that he would complete all his business on the phone, rather than in person, benefiting from his polished English

⁹⁷ According to Leroy the vest had been sent to him by one of his brothers living in Kingston.

accent, his British-sounding name and the fact that no customer would imagine he was, in fact, black.

The issues linked to appearance and, more specifically, being black are also discussed by Crozier (2006), who listed specific physical features of being black as impacting on teachers' perception of children in the classroom. With regards to this very issue, during one of many conversations exploring her engagement with the local community, Pamela explained to me how she had become a member of a police community-consultation group in her local area.

'My son on his way back from school in 2008, March, was stopped in his uniform and photographed by plain clothes police. They photographed my son because he fitted the description of a black boy, or black boys, throwing stones and bricks at the cars of local people. They asked to empty his pockets to check if he had any bricks, he said he had nothing to do with it. So they called the corporate cause, there were some boys around the corner from the library and as a result of that what they was to say 'right, now we got that out of our way, you are all going to get your photographs done'. So they took a picture of my son, but they could not find him on the system as he has never been arrested or being in trouble.

(Pamela, in conversation in her office, November 2011)

Stop and search was presented as an issue by most of the parents I talked to not just as a problem affecting their children, but also to themselves. Millie's son, Andreas, shared experiences of having been stopped on several occasions: *'I am a big guy, I play sports so I wear hoodies all the time. Ma tells me off because of that but I ain't care, not gonna change my life for the pigs'* (Andreas, in conversation at home, August 2011). Jerome laughed at me when I asked if he had ever been stopped. *'[c]ourse I have, no boy or man in this neighbourhood hasn't – or else they posh or whitey'* (Jerome, in conversation at Leah's home, September 2011). The situation presented in these two statements translates in real life experiences to the idea that *'people whose skins are not white have typically been seen as a problem for the social order, their very presence giving cause for concern'* (Philips and Bowling, 2002: 18). Yesufu (2013) provided a thorough and reflective examination of this issue, offering an overview of the lack of improvements since the '80s with regards to the prejudicial treatment of black man in the UK by the police. Rather than improving, numbers indicate that the situation is worsening (Ibid, 2013) which is the possible sign of a widespread and incremental level of intrinsic racial discrimination in society.

I fully comprehended the gravity of this issue one morning on my way to work when I met Destiny in the underground. Whilst walking to the school, Destiny made a comment about the look of the policeman in the station but I could not reply to her point as I had not noticed him. The issue was not my lack of attention but the fact

that I had not taken notice of the police officer's presence in a classic stop and search location, as if this was something not concerning me at all. I was embarrassed to share this fact with Destiny as it almost seemed rubbing in my white privilege. Her reaction was, however, the usual - she just laughed at me and shrugged her shoulders lightly. This moment helped me reflect upon the underlying significance of the changes in the school's approach to appearance and the reasons behind the, mostly private, outrage shared by some of my informants. Considering these facts, the arrival of the new headteacher in the school could easily be interpreted as a way of dismissing the local ethnic diversity; a reminder that the locals were not good enough for society. The OFSTED report had clearly indicated that the school was not preparing pupils for employment nor for a future of success. The high level of absenteeism and lateness were mentioned as indication of poor parental engagement and the involvement with the community had been judged as too inward facing. Whilst going through the report I could not help think that it read as a subtle suggestion to be more in line with white, middle-class standards (Crozier, 2005). Unsurprisingly, whilst on paper the shift meant that many school aspects improved in efficiency, it did not directly translate to a better quality of pupils/parents' experiences.

Pride in attitude

These difficulties encountered with regards to appearance were directly interlinked and somewhat intensified, in the exploration of what my informants identified as “matters of attitude”. Following the arrival of Mr B., the new principal, the shift in physical expectations and demands in the school was also accompanied by a shift in the views and acceptance of certain behaviours in staff, pupils and parents. Dealing with behavioural issues had been identified by OFSTED as one of the key areas needing severe improvements within the school and the new policies in place functioned as a clear indication of a drastic shift, which had serious consequences for a large group of pupils. To represent the extent of the changes put in place, I will compare two situations in which behavioural difficulties had been dealt with very differently under the two principals. The first incident directly involved the previous head-teacher and Naomi. On her way to her seat for lunch, the young girl had been stopped by the principal, who would always eat in the refectory with the children. Naomi was being told off for being rude to one of the dinner ladies. Rather than listening and apologising, the child loudly kissed her teeth and mimicked spitting on the floor. The head-teacher initially ignored the child and, only after having finished her meal, informed Naomi that, given her behaviour, she would have to spend her play time helping the dinner ladies with cleaning the hall after everyone’s lunch. As Naomi started complaining about the punishment, the head teacher informed her she would have to assist with the cleaning for the remainder of the week. The second vignette, which took place almost two years later, involved Talicia and the deputy

head-teacher. Talicia and her classmate were lined up and waiting in the corridor. The deputy head-teacher walked past and instructed Talicia to tuck her shirt into her skirt and stand straight. The girl, most likely convinced she would not be seen, turned to a classmate and pulled a funny face whilst sucking her teeth. The deputy head-teacher might not have seen her facial expression, but clearly heard the sound she made and proceeded to instruct her to go to the principal's office to discuss the incident. Talicia angrily refused and complained. Quickly the situation escalated and the pupil was sent home for the day.

The research focus, around the impact of racial discrimination in educational settings, has expanded from pupils' achievements⁹⁸ (Coard, 1971; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Mirza, 1992; Crozier, 2005) to the analysis of the over-representation of BME children in Special Educational Needs (SEN) referrals (Lindsay et al, 2006; Strand, 2012; Harry and Klingner, 2014). These studies have observed a tendency for children and young people from African Caribbean backgrounds to be over-represented in referrals for behavioural, social and emotional difficulties (BSED); with a rate of 1 in 20 for African Caribbean as opposed to 1 in 40 for White British pupils (Strand, 2012). As expounded by Tomlinson (2014), the mainstream explanation for this situation continues to associate pupils' difficulties to learn and behave with parental difficulties, unsuited family dynamics and troubled communities, all of which are in line with the widespread deficit model. A more in-depth examination indicates the most probable causes of this overrepresentation are: class, teachers' intrinsic

⁹⁸ see chapter 9 for more on this topic

beliefs in racial superiority and misinterpretation of customs (Cooper et al., 1990; Tomlinson, 2014). In a more recent reading of this issue, Harry and Klinger (2014) proposed the use of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to comprehend the roots of this problem. In explaining the proposed theoretical framework, the authors break down the concept of 'cultural consonance' as 'a comfort level that does not require one to change one's accent, one's language, one's tone of voice, or one's laughter or as an environment where language preference, customs and interaction style are shared and implicitly valued by all' (Ibid, 2014:51). The writers suggest that to overcome racial discrimination in the assessment of children's needs, it would be necessary to reach a level of cultural consonance between assessor and assessed. With this point in mind, imagine a white middle-class British teacher reaching cultural consonance with the following scenario:

Another easy way to identify a Jamaican is to observe persons when they are angry.

(Now, let's be clear here. We suggest you watch them when they are angry. We don't suggest that you make them angry.) A Jamaican, when angered, will invariably launch into an extended verbal tirade. Such tirades have been known to last for as long as 45 minutes, during which time the Jamaican will not pause to take a breath, will not let you respond and every other word will end with "claat". (There are approximately 317 versions of "claat" so don't be surprised if he never repeats himself even once). This outburst may also be accompanied by frequent beating of the chest, "lapping of the frocktail" and frequent requests that onlookers "hol' mi back before mi do 'im supm". (i.e. "Restrain me before I do some serious

bodily harm") Please also note that it is not unknown for Jamaicans, when irate, to resort to violence. So, as fascinating as it may be to watch, we don't suggest that you stay to observe the outburst. Having established that your subject is Jamaican we suggest that you leave the scene with as much haste as you can possibly manage. Collateral damage is not an uncommon occurrence when a Jamaican "kick-off" with somebody.

(How to spot a Jamaican)

Although this vignette is clearly a caricature and an exaggeration of stereotypical features, it contains some useful tools to start deconstructing and analysing Naomi and Talicia's behaviours and, most importantly, the reactions of the two principals. Before her resignation, I had the chance to interview the first head teacher⁹⁹ and discuss her views in terms of children's behaviour and education, alongside her vision for the school. During this conversation, I asked about the incident with Naomi; here is her response:

'Which one do you mean? (laughs- I specify the occasion I mean) Naomi is a clever girl and she will be fine in life, she needs to understand the consequences of her behaviour but also to have an outlet for her anger. I could

⁹⁹ It was through this head teacher that I gained access to the school for my ethnography

have sent her home but what would that achieve? She was disrespectful and needed to learn that comes with consequences, she will remember cleaning the hall and missing out.'

(Mrs X, in conversation in her office, January 2010)

The rest of the discussion focused on the importance of keeping children at school, ensuring they perceived it as a place that would not reject them, where they could try things out and learn about the consequences of their actions. Mrs X shared her memories of being a pupil in Jamaica; above all the teachers' gaze and demand for respect, the fact that everything had a consequence and that punishments were 'real' (Mrs X, in conversation in her office, January 2010). Mrs X revealed that she had not reacted immediately to Naomi's actions because she wanted to take some time to think about what those might have meant for the child and to detach herself from an emotional response to them.

'The toughest part is understanding they are not doing this to you, they are communicating something through their actions and if you just take it personally then it's a losing game for everyone.'

(Mrs X, in conversation in her office, January 2010)

In comparing the reactions to the two incidents I felt that Mrs X' punishment was an attempt to address the behaviour, rather than the child. Naomi always seemed to need to demonstrate her strength and dominance above all and with everyone. She would frequently get into fights with other children and she would always mention this as her reaction to being mocked. On several occasions, I wondered whether this was the case and whether her outbursts of anger were her way to keep people at a distance and under control. Similarly, Talicia was an easy target for her classmates as she was awkward, too tall and developed for her age. Additionally, her hair was messy and her clothes frequently patched up, not fitting well and with stains. Like Naomi, she seemed in need to find a way to be in charge. Her actions were, instead, interpreted solely as an attack on authority and as an unnecessary lack of respect. In discussing the stop and search issue, Yesufu (2013: 285) reminds the reader that *'black people are more likely to feel the strain of society, resulting in a build-up of anger and frustration arising out of not being given equal access to opportunities in Britain'*. The argument presented by the author extends to pondering whether the continuous rejections, refusals and verbal attacks could be blamed for the anger and even the wrongdoing, *'Sometimes Black people may resort to crime because they have got nothing to lose in a society that does not treat them fairly as citizens, and they may get involved in crime as a means of registering their protests against the unfair treatment they have had to put up with over the years'* (Ibid, 2013: 285). Similarly, Rosseau et al. (2009: 758) attempted to consider the consequences of the ongoing ill-treatment of children and youngsters, *'deskilling, stereotyping, and subtle forms of racism are denounced by young people and parents alike. Keeping alive the*

hope of a better future appears to be difficult'. In their research exploring experiences of mainly recent Caribbean migrants to Canada, the authors (ibid, 2009) also noted two possible negative effects of the continuous exposure to racial discrimination in African-Caribbean adolescents. The first outcome could be to be resigned to: the impossibility of success; the accomplishment of what their parents wish for them and societal standards of life achievements. A possible alternative to withdrawal is conforming, *'success however comes at a cost for the interviewed youth: adaptation to the host society is a must, but it is linked to loss, especially in terms of self-image, because of negative social mirroring* (Rosseau et al., 2009: 758).

It could be argued that both Naomi and Talicia fell within the first category as neither of them fitted the required standards and their way of dealing with this failure was anger, confrontation and resistance towards the authority (represented by school staff). Similarly, yet differently, Michele and Millie could represent a form of adaptation. Michele's rules for her daughter could be viewed as an attempt to conform and to fit within the standards, as much as Millie's. Collins (2000) offers an analysis of the classic idea(l) of *female* that positions whiteness and blackness at the opposed extremes: at one end the feminine, delicate and subdued woman (whiteness) and at the other the aggressive, angry woman who emasculates men. In explaining the necessity for intersectionality, bell hooks (2000) provided a similar image of a continuum with female/white on one hand and male/black at the other. Arguably Millie and Michele's attitudes and behaviours would conform to the features associated mainly with this white/female construct, representing

conformation/adaptation to middle class standards and selective acceptance of permitted black traits. The clear majority of my informants and, more broadly, of people observed during the ethnography, would however not fit within these standards of white acceptability. As a result, the children had a high representation in the group of problematic pupils and similarly, practitioners' views indicated that African-Caribbean parents were mostly perceived as difficult to handle.

An interesting phenomenon, suggesting an alternative to the resignation/adaptation scenarios and related to Richard's (2014) idea of the "cool-commodity", has been observed in forms of integration of Caribbean culture in the UK. An example is the adoption of Jamaican slang by teenagers, as captured through an ESRC funded a three-year study, conducted in various areas within, and in the proximity, of London (Kerswill et al., 2007). Whilst this investigation aimed at documenting the levelling and diffusion of dialects and the evolutions of language into '*Multicultural London English*' (Ibid, 2007), representations of the phenomenon in the media emphasized the raise of "Jafaican", a youth-speech drawing generously from Jamaican patois and slang (Independent, 2006) and its connections with gang culture¹⁰⁰ (Evening Standard, 2010). This negative correlation, a predictable one as we are sarcastically remarked by the Guardian's writer Muir (2015), further diminished the value of an already weak opportunity for "cool-commodity" and is in fact identified as prejudice, hindering a number of opportunities. In discussing the type of roles the academy

¹⁰⁰ I believe that, although the article presented a few positive views in relation to the use of slang, its title and the connections made with the killing of a young gang member clearly emphasized negative connotations of this phenomenon

predicted would be offered to Shai, if he was to pursue a career in acting, Shanice was informed that Shai's best chances would have been in the role of a gang member or similar. Shanice shared her frustration at the irony that, after dedicating all her energies at insuring Shai would never join a gang, if he wanted to have a chance at his desired career, he would have to accept a role as gang member in a small TV production. The heaviness of the conversation was then broken by Destiny's comment: *'you clown'¹⁰¹, when he's famous me get a new couch for teaching you how to make him a gang boy'* (Destiny in conversation with Shanice, Shanice's house, 2010). This taking advantage of the stereotypes suffered through discrimination resonates with the processes identified in queer theory in the re-appropriation of language (Grindstaff, 2014), and provides the craft of *'creative negotiation of racism'* (Branne et al, 2016: 1767) as an alternative to the resignation/adaptation dichotomy.

Pride in values

A fair number of my informants shared the idea that part of their pride was linked to the recognition and emphasis on certain values, described as passed on by family members or special figures within the community. A phenomenon also observed by Rousseau et al. (2009). As Michele would frequently remind children at school *'manners tek yu thru' di worl'¹⁰²*, and the best way to secure good manners was by staying true to the values passed on by the elders. In trying to convince me to join

¹⁰¹ idiot – in gang slang

¹⁰² good manners will benefit you wherever you go

her church, Michele cautioned me that the one thing no one can take away from you is your faith and the teachings of your ancestors. This sort of belief, although in a less dramatic form, was present in conversations, events and actions. The three core values mostly mentioned across generations were discipline/respect, religion and closeness (mostly expressed towards 'family' in the wider sense, as discussed in chapter 5). On many occasions, these three values would melt, interchange and work together in what seemed to be the communal aim to make a person respectable.

In my observations, the most salient reiteration of the importance of these three values took place not long after the 2011 riots, when I attended a service in a local Pentecostal Apostolic Church at the invitation of the pastor, excited for the visit of a Sister from Jamaica¹⁰³. The church was busier than usual; the pastor seemed pleased and thought that most people were attending to participate in the advertised workshops¹⁰⁴ in support of people affected by the riots. The recent events were specifically named as a focus of the function and the visit of Mother Lawrence was introduced as a sign of God's will to show his children the way forward. The Sister's sermon, reminded the congregation of the three pillars of society: God and its community, discipline and family:

¹⁰³ Previously discussed in chapter Five.

¹⁰⁴ On the day, and over the following weeks, the church was offering a series of special events to reflect on the riots and learn how to handle difficulties with their children – see chapter Five.

'What can you say to a mother when her own child is brought in by police? (...) they are not ringing the bell to let you know, they are just kicking them out (...) but nobody is lost in the Lord, the Land of the Lord will accept all his children. Stop playing about, you have to make a choice in the name of the living God'

(Mother Lawrence, Sermon delivered in Pentecostal Church, August 2011)

At the end of the sermon, the whole congregation stood up and joined in, singing:

'I need more power Lord, power to live right, I need more power Lord, power to love right, I need more power Lord, power to give right, (...) I need you Jesus, I need your power to pray it right. Power from Heaven, your power Lord (...) I will make things right.'

(Mother Lawrence, Sermon delivered in Pentecostal Church, August 2011)

After the singing, an elegantly dressed lady in her fifties walked to the stage and shared that she had *'seen the light of the Lord'* and decided to take action with her youngest daughter, aged nineteen: *'whatever she does, she ain't ever satisfied. Her father was a gambler; I shall show her the way to the Lord. When she has no work,*

'don't spoil them.' Praise the Lord' (churchgoer, intervention during service, Pentecostal Church, August 2011). Mother Lawrence replied to the woman *'Haad ears pickny nyam rockstone'*¹⁰⁵ (Mother Lawrence, Pentecostal Church, August 2011) and the whole congregation started singing again.

The following week, the conversations with my informants had a similar focus. Michele and Keisha were comparing sermons and the congregation's reaction to the riots. They later explained that, although neither were regulars in their church, they had felt the need to be in the community. Destiny invited me to a group her mother had organised with other members of their church Women's District which was open to anyone from the local area and was focused on building positive relationships in the community. Pamela emailed most school members to check if anyone was available to help run some workshops in the children's centres for local parents. Shanice and Leah were busy organising a barbeque for family and friends to keep everyone together. The level of engagement and organisation reminded me of Davis and Cooke's (2002: 1) indication that most forms of organised support and services by Black Women in Britain refer to a 'hidden history'. These acts of gathering, organised closeness and shared support almost seemed an exaggerated reaction to the events linked to the riots. Parents keeping their children close, showing them care, communities being reformed and strengthened - although for how long? A similar situation is presented in an historical overview of black women at church in

¹⁰⁵ Bad children learn the hard way

Britain, in which Alexander (1996) described the church as a form of resistance through involvement and unity, through the creation of available support and services. The author emphasized the role of the Black church in the life of the first generation of African Caribbean migrants to the UK, '*for those feeling disorientated and alone on their arrival to Britain, the Church was able to offer identity, and a sense of belonging*' (ibid, 2006: 88). Moreover, Alexander suggested that the impact of the Church extended to keeping people out of trouble by providing, not just spiritual, but also practical support in their everyday lives.

Interestingly, it appears that the common element in the situations described so far, is that they are all manifestations of resistance against racial discrimination and prejudice. The response to these attacks seems to aim at reconnecting with those elements most recognised as points of pride and strength and as a way of boosting self confidence. Broadly speaking, all the representations of pride and identity presented thus far appear as in reaction to, or the result of a situation of cultural hegemony at the hands of British society (Harry and Klingner, 2014 referring to Gramsci, 1929¹⁰⁶). The three core values identified by my informants seem to work because they are embedded in beliefs and contexts that can relate with the issues, the challenges and the obstacles. Mrs X's punishment for Naomi's lack of respect could be viewed as a way of modelling the behaviour of the child and by indicating the consequences of choosing the wrong mode of action. Contrarily, Mr B.'s decision to send home Talicia for the day seems more of a reproduction and

¹⁰⁶ Prison Notebooks

reinforcement of the power relations in society. To achieve a status of cultural consonance, understanding and sharing cultural (and related) elements cannot suffice; a broader analysis and reflection of contexts and relations at play is necessary to explore identity and ways of being in more depth. Whilst the scenarios presented in this chapter are of relevance and contribute to the analysis of family dynamics, they also emphasize the need to push forward in the exploration of informants' deeper realities and views. This is a process which I shall continue in the next chapters with a stronger focus on giving voice to my informants' thinking:

'America's measurement of me has lain like a barrier across the realization of my own powers. It was a barrier which I had to examine and dismantle, piece by painful piece, in order to use my energies fully and creatively. It is easier to deal with the external manifestations of racism and sexism than it is to deal with the results of those distortions internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another'

(Audre Lorde, 2013: 147)

Chapter 8: Family ties and dynamics

A few months into my fieldwork I discovered that celebrations, domestic crises and special events were the most suitable occasions to understand the laborious, at times intricate, ties within these families. The suggestion came from Leah, one of my key informants throughout, who very convincingly argued,

'the best way to understand their role in the child's life is to go to the child's birthday party. You will meet the godmother, you will talk to all the cousins, the aunties, the relatives that matter in their lives, in a way or the other. The men will be there too, secure a place near the grill and you will get to talk to them.'

(Leah, in conversation, February 2010)

Three birthday parties in particular confirmed Leah's suggestion regarding the importance of having opportunities to discuss themes outside the boundaries and the confinement of the reality of the "household". These events represented a window not only onto the intricate network of relationships, but also an opportunity to observe realities and discuss themes outside the constraints dictated by the specificity of the contexts which I developed in my fieldwork. Another advantage was the general inclination of participants to reflect upon and discuss moments,

memories and conversations that had taken place during the events in discussion, giving me with the unique opportunity to revisit meanings and discuss interpretations. Most importantly, these conversations repositioned the objects of my observations as participant subjects producing and directing the narratives as well as the interpretations and uses of the data collected (Tomaselli, 2003). My previous attempts to negotiate and discuss meaning deriving from interviews with practitioners had solicited fairly flat and somehow “unauthentic”¹⁰⁷ responses from the informants. In the process of discussing themes related to their own experiences, most informants became participants in the production of knowledge. In my fieldwork, engaging in these conversations and reflections became an opportunity to avoid, or at least try to debunk misrepresentations of Caribbean families. Most importantly, these moments were not simply opportunities for the participants to speak up, but also for them to comment upon, deconstruct and re-appropriate stereotypes, taboos and mythologies associated with them; a chance to create ‘*new ways of impacting prevailing assumptions*’ (Tomaselli, 2003: 865).

This chapter collates, therefore, a series of *events*, and related discussions, presented in juxtaposition to the thoughts shared by practitioners on Caribbean families, as in Chapter Six. The key themes that emerged from the interviews with practitioners, in relation to what they perceived to be common beliefs, stereotypes

¹⁰⁷ The lack of authenticity in the discussion could be associated with the fact that maybe the issues presented for discussion were not felt as personal or sufficiently close to the informant’s personal experience.

and mythologies attached to ‘Caribbean families’, are here presented through a series of brief narratives, attached to a lived moment in the families I met during the fieldwork. The fieldwork notes¹⁰⁸ on these events, here presented through the narratives, constitute the basis for the conversations that brought to light the themes discussed (Tomaselli, 2003).

Can’t buy him love; materialistic affection

The main connection between most of the celebrations I attended related directly to one of the core themes emerging in the interviews with practitioners: “materialistic”¹⁰⁹ love. Extravagant and elaborate birthday parties, requiring months of preparation and involving large sections of the extended family and of the community, were identified by practitioners as the most prominent exemplification of material love within the families they had encountered. Practitioners singled out this behaviour as negatively impacting on children’s wellbeing and most importantly as an indication of parental inadequacy. Rather than confronting participants directly with the negative association practitioners drew between *tangible* demonstrations of affection and parenting capacity, I opted for exploring, at first, the parents’ arguments behind the “grandiosity” of these events.

¹⁰⁸ As discussed in Tomaselli’s (2003) paper on methodology, participants seemed to recognize the validity of my observation because of my level of daily involvement with most of them and, possibly most importantly because of the openness established in our dialogue, particularly when discussing passages on which we would disagree.

¹⁰⁹ In this context, my use of the word is simply a signifier for a material expression of love/affection, rather than a strong orientation towards possessions.

Shanice's initial response to whether she felt the party was a bit extravagant was straightforward. She explained that it was the first time she had had the chance to celebrate his birthday properly as usually it was his father's responsibility. This first reply could be interpreted as revealing a sort of sense of duty. Shanice had not been in the position of celebrating Shai's birthday before and on this occasion she might have decided to make up for the previous years. This first interpretation seemed fair and, at the time, Shanice was too busy for any further discussion. In a quite unique investigation exploring the significance of birthday celebrations in low income families in the United States, Lee and colleagues (2008) reveal the wish to offer a normalising experience for the child as one of the most common reasons behind the presentation of these events. The research, however, also suggests that, due to the high intensity of resources required for these celebrations, it is very likely that families with financial difficulties would opt for larger parties to address these difficult circumstances (Ibid, 2008). The week after the event, I met Shanice for coffee and asked if Shai had enjoyed the party, with the intent to re-open the conversation on the purpose behind the party. The discussion brought to light a much more elaborate reasoning than the one offered originally. Shanice explained that she felt it seemed the best moment to celebrate him. During the last year, many changes had affected their family life. Shanice's new partner had moved in with them and the boy's father had a new baby with his new partner, hence his incapacity to provide the birthday fun. Shai had also started training with a prestigious dance academy, in the hope of becoming part of their team. This multifaceted explanation allowed for a more complex analysis of what, at first, could have been mistaken for a regular ritual.

Shanice's words seemed to be shielding a sense of guilt, a sort of need for reparation and a recognition of the need of Shai to be rewarded for enduring hardship whilst still achieving positive outcomes. The parental wish to provide the child with a normalising experience, as identified by Lee and colleagues (2009), is therefore accompanied by a wish to celebrate the child's achievements and remind him of his importance. In more complex circumstances, a simple detail, such as the birthday cake, can become a powerful tool to reinforce the child's confidence and self-worth (Otnes et al, 1995). The mother's explanation unravelled two more crucial factors associated with the decision to throw the party. Shanice shared being worried about the impact the new-born baby would have on the level and quality of the paternal presence in Shai's life¹¹⁰. Inviting the whole extended family and re-establishing connections with the wider circle of friends and relatives, seemed to Shanice to be the most astute move to secure Shai with caring presences (Lee et al, 2008) and for her, the necessary support in looking after Shai. Knowing Shanice, this second point seemed of no particular relevance at the time, as she had a well-planned strategy for ensuring Shai's and her own schedule would coincide (resulting in the limited need for child care). A more in depth exploration of the reasons behind the birthday revealed the perspective of "entrustment"¹¹¹ as an enticement for the mother (Coe, 2011). Shanice considered the party more as a sort of incentive for Shai to focus and thrive in his work at the dance academy, a great passion of his that could also result

¹¹⁰ Coe (2011) identifies shifts in caring presence/responsibilities as possible circumstances in which material love replaces warmth.

¹¹¹ *'being cared for creates a responsibility or debt for the child to reciprocate in future'* (Coe, 2011:14)

in a certain level of income and fame. Invitees at the party had been asked to contribute to the academy fees, or to purchase a gift bearing some relevance to Shai's new commitment. Shanice had effectively organised an event to support her son's dream and possible future career. By articulating the planning, strategizing and the amount of caring hidden under the apparently superficial act, Shanice provided a narrative diametrically opposed to that shaped in the practitioners' words.

The Monday after the party, everybody at school was discussing the extent to which the event had impressed them. In the staff room, Desiree and Millie were nodding in agreement to Pauline's observation that Shanice had overdone it. Desiree kissed her teeth and, now shaking her head, reiterated that the party was too much for such a young boy and pondered whether it was necessary to make such a big fuss for a birthday. At this point Millie, who had so far been quiet, joined the conversation by firmly stating *'he's a lucky boy, he's loved'*. The tone of the discussion suddenly changed and the focus shifted to the importance of Shanice's act in providing comfort and happiness to her son, particularly considering the events related to his father's new family. After this exchange, I asked Millie if she could expand on her statement regarding Shanice's actions. At first the explanation provided was broad and generic, making reference to the importance of parental presence in children's lives and the relevance of making them feel loved and protected. Once Pauline, her daughter, left the room Millie's statements became sharper, more specific and started making clear reference to Dangelo's father, her son, and his lack of contribution both in financial and emotional terms to the boy's life. After clarifying

this was not a complaint nor an attempt to badmouth her son, Millie emphasised her views on the hidden value of material support exchanged in family networks. In this talk, her experience as the daughter of immigrants featured as a sort of baseline for comparison and/or understanding; Millie's speech lessened the financial value of her parents' material contributions, emphasizing the centrality of their symbolic significance. In her view, the monetary element had no comparative power against what she described as the feeling of being taken care of, looked after and of being someone that mattered to others. In Olwig's (1999) paper on transnational Caribbean families, the narrators (children left behind by migrant parents) described the value of parental contributions in a similar way to Millie. In these accounts, the provision of goods and money is charged primarily with emotional value. Some participants indicated how parental '*remittances*' (Ibid, 1999) would contribute to the formation of a sense of self-worth, would facilitate the understanding of their parents' decision and motivation for migrating, and would even secure a stronger social value within the hosting household. Several scholars (Clarke et al, 2014; Richins and Chaplin, 2015) recognise the possibility for materialistic gestures to be identified as indications of warmth, caring and love in the parent-child relation. Interestingly, a study focusing on Caribbean children's views on childrearing,¹¹² Brown and Johnson (2008) provide evidence of a certain correlation between *happiness* and materialistic gestures (such as purchasing presents and being in employment to sustain offspring). In this article, the role of the family is clearly delineated by all children 'as

¹¹² set in the Jamaica

important for providing food, shelter and clothing, and school supplies' (Ibid, 2008: 34). In Dangelo's circumstances, Millie, Delroy, Pauline and Andreas had been primarily sharing parental responsibilities and, therefore, as Millie proceeded to clarify, nothing had been missing in the boy's life. Nevertheless, Millie expressed a certain level of anxiety due to her son's almost complete disengagement with Dangelo. Her wish was for him to maintain a minimum level of presence to avoid the child feeling unwanted. When I asked her what she would have liked her son to do to demonstrate his care for Dangelo, Millie cited as example the child's last birthday, for which the father had sent him a card and a small present. The fact had become a sort of family story used to highlight that Dangelo's father had a very short memory¹¹³ but also served to remind everyone that at least he had tried.

The indication that a parent could at least express presence and warmth by providing for his/her child/ren via small gestures, as expressed in Millie's views, was echoed in a conversation with another participant to the study, Malene. As discussed in Chapter Four, Malene and Tyrell were living in a shelter during most of the ethnography. During the day they were, however, frequently staying at Tyrell's paternal apartment which was located just next door to the school. One day, whilst walking towards the flat, Malene informed me that Tyrell's father had finally agreed to provide them with a small cabinet to store a few things in his house so that they could feel *at home* whilst there. Tyrell already indicated the flat to be his "home" yet, on that specific day, he was particularly excited and had asked to go home straight

¹¹³ Due to their religious belief, the family did not celebrate birthdays

after school, rather than stopping at the park as usual. When asked about his decision, the boy triumphantly informed me that he and his mum had to sort out the new furniture in his flat and ensure all their things were sorted out before it was time to leave. Malene's reaction to this explanation was a smile and the observation that it did not take much for Tyrell to be happy and satisfied. This remark reminded me of Rodman's concept of the '*lower-class value stretch*', a phenomenon by which '*the lower-class person, without abandoning the general values of the society, develops an alternative set of values*' (Rodman, 1963:209). If adopting this lens, Tyrell's behaviour and excitement could be perceived as a normal indication of a positive response to a demonstration of affection; to an act of being taken care of, although most would not share such a thrill for this small gesture. This reading of the situation appears, however, over simplistic and containing hazardous assumptions. First, as highlighted by Small et al. (2010), the thinking proposed by Rodman can easily fall into the trap of '*blaming the victims for their problems*' (p. 7) which is a widespread issue across many scholarly publications from the 1960s and 1970s.

In Shandrice and Tyrell's reaction, what would *normally* constitute an average event can be considered as unique or *over-the-top* only once extracted from their context and as stand-alone behaviours detached from a social structure. Embedded in their social reality, both gestures appear more as effective and constructive acts of social interaction with family members.

The circumstances discussed in this section, that is Shandrice's choice to express her affection via materialistic means, Millie's longing for a small gesture to realize a

fragile connection and Tyrell's appreciation for a small offer of space (both physical and emotional), seem to indicate that what superficially appears as materialistic affection once contextualized, bears greater meaning and value in family interactions.

'As long as she knows where to go', floating responsibilities, shifting roles.

The second criticism, and recurrent theme in practitioners' views, concerned what was perceived as the instability of family composition and the unreliability of points of reference within the household. The socio-psychological attempts to define and stereotype structures and arrangements within Black families have been discussed and denounced as an act of social aggression and pathologisation (Shimkin et al, 1978; Cheatam 2009). Whilst it is expected for scholars in the field to acknowledge the shortcomings of prior research and reconceptualise these families taking account of cultural specificity, it is also recognised that several practitioners might struggle in embracing these, or might not be exposed to the advancements in theoretical formulations. The practitioners interviewed were asked to draw their reflections from their ongoing practice. Therefore, it could be argued that this second criticism derives from direct observations processed through personal and working knowledge. Most practitioners focused on the unreliability or lack of presence of certain members, rather than on the composition of families; yet the snapshots presented below will indicate the necessity to further investigate connections and

links to gain better understanding of what could be defined as a system of *floating responsibilities*¹¹⁴.

As explored in Chapter four, Destiny's family composition was far from nuclear or linear and in one of our conversations she had clearly stated that, although she would vulgarly be identified as a single mother, the upbringing of her children was an act of shared responsibility and care across her family. Since her mother had always been very active in the church, both Destiny and her children had grown up being looked after by neighbours and friends and supported through '*care, prayers and love*'¹¹⁵. I came to realise what Destiny meant when referring to their family network only after attending Siobhan's birthday party which was a great occasion to meet the extended family and to further explore roles and links within it.

Siobhan's birthday had a princess theme, and the invitation asked for dresses and dancing shoes. I was not familiar with the venue and, as I needed to be there early, I helped with the decorations. I decided to take some time to explore the area which was not dissimilarly to Shai's birthday venue. The ballroom (as described in the invitation) was the community hall of the estate where the family was living. The estate was a large one, possibly built in the sixties and surprisingly quiet for a Saturday late morning. I remembered Destiny explaining she had decided not to work too close to home, so that people from their estate would have known her only

¹¹⁴ The concept of floating and fluidity will constitute the core of the theoretical movement presented in chapter 10, The italics are here utilized for emphasis.

¹¹⁵ As Mrs D., Destiny's mother, would say to the children

as her daughter's mother and nothing more; this way she could be scarier¹¹⁶. The small brown building had very little in common with a ballroom and even less with a regal one. Leah and Destiny were joking about the fact that at least all their kids would soon be teenagers; an age, according to them, much easier to please in terms of birthday parties. The conversation quickly moved onto Sherell, Destiny's eldest daughter, with Leah asking after her and wondering why she was not helping. Destiny burst out laughing and explained Sherell was at the hairdresser to get her hair fixed. I was soon to find out that during the previous weekend the girl had failed to follow her mother's rules for clothing/make up outside the house and that the punishment for which was a special homemade haircut by Destiny, aimed at reinstating some humbleness in the 'chick'¹¹⁷. I must have looked quite shocked as Destiny continued with the story, as if trying to provide more context in defence of her decisions. Sherell had got new hair extensions applied few weeks before and, according to her mother, the novelty of this had given her too much confidence - a feature that Destiny considered to be dangerous.

It is important to recall for a moment an exchange I had with Destiny a few weeks before on our way to work. This conversation provided an interesting contextualisation of the circumstances with Sherell. As both Destiny and I were not locals, we would frequently meet at the station by chance and walk to work together; an opportunity that would secure me fifteen minutes of great entertainment and, at

¹¹⁶ Destiny's fascinating take on discipline is possibly the most unique I encountered in the fieldwork.

¹¹⁷ Destiny's nickname for Sherell

times, interesting points for the research. On that specific occasion, Destiny decided to enrich our morning walk by providing me with a detailed description of the design and the process she had picked for getting her new “Vajazzle”. Destiny and her partner, Jojo, were on a break and she was determined to celebrate her womanhood in a special way. On the same occasion, Destiny had taken Sherell and Siobhan with her to the beauty shop. It was then that Sherell had applied the new hair extensions which were at the heart of this problematic situation. As the conversation between Destiny and Leah continued, several thoughts started distracting me from their talking. Here is an account from my fieldwork notes.

'I can't help but thinking about the correlation I immediately made between D. getting a Vajazzle and Sherell getting into trouble for playing up and pushing the boundaries set by her mother. I guess what I feel is a sense of confusion due to the irreconcilability of the two stances exhibited by Destiny. On one hand, the openness about her sexuality, and on the other the harshness in rejecting and punishing that same sexuality, but exhibited in her daughter.'

(my fieldwork notes, May 2011)

The birthday party did not constitute the best environment for me to engage Destiny in an exploration of her thinking around her own and her daughter's sexuality.

However, we had the opportunity to return to the topic later that week and the conversation provided me with an interesting insight in relation to the concept of role fluidity and floating responsibilities. Practitioners' positions raised the instability of the key figures in children's lives as a core issue affecting development and well-being; fathers and mothers not behaving as such were somehow identified as the heart of the problem in Caribbean families.

As suggested by Friedman et al. (1998) being sexually active is frequently seen as diametrically opposed to good mothering. Following this thinking, Destiny's openness about her sexuality posed a threat to her capacity to be a good mother. Expanding on this correlation, Kaplan (1990) identified an interesting link between sexuality and employment, both represented and identified in Western culture as a threat to the concept of motherhood. In her article on popular representation of mothers, the author (ibid, 1990) recognised that, although scholarly endeavours have produced and promoted a more progressive and "liberated" vision and understanding, conceptualisations of motherhood in the wider public remains very loyal to *'those in the 1950s, (which) have insisted first that the only good female sexuality is that within marriage, and second, that woman's sexuality is dangerous if freely released'* (Kaplan, 1990: 422).

The preoccupation expressed in the interviews with practitioners shifts, therefore, from being a worry linked to lack of stability and/or reliable carers, to one of examination and possible judgment against a family system that does not conform to "normalised" categorisations of it.

Destiny's surprise in hearing my thoughts concerning what I perceived as links between her own expression of sexuality and that of her daughter, highlighted my personal bias and her own division between the roles she impersonated in the two different situations. Both Destiny and Leah agreed on the fact that a mother's sexuality and relationships, if not invasive or abusive, had no link with her parenting skills and capacity. This conversation led to a longer reflection on behaviours that in mainstream reality are not perceived as *'responsible'*, *'positive'* or generally in line with what is expected of parents. Allen and Taylor's paper (2012) (also discussed in chapter six) provides an insightful analysis of the gap existing between what the authors define as *placed* parenthood, *'which locates [itself] in the right moral and material terrain'*, and *'the other, excessive, mis-fitting, working class and black mothers [who] are positioned as deficits, responsible for social, cultural and economic crisis'* (Ibid, 2012:1). In this paper, the framework suggested to investigate the participation of mothers in the public and private sphere is based on the awareness of various intersecting aspects impacting on the experience of motherhood. Allen and Taylor (2012) focus primarily on the dynamics behind the intersection of gender and class, identifying the correlation between labels existing within the two categories. In this scenario, a person on benefits who is also a mother (woman) falls outside the area of social acceptability and is therefore singled out as *'excessive, destructive and out of place'* (Ibid, 2012: 18). The authors suggest this sort of policing determines the creation of a more consolidated *hierarchy of motherhood* (Allen and Taylor, 2012: 18), which intensifies inequalities and pathologizes diversity. Destiny and Leah's conversation contained a very similar

thinking to that presented in Allen and Taylor's paper. The two mothers recalled having to mediate their own mothers' ideas and standards of womanhood and motherhood to then be able to find a balance that would work for them, in their context. The example, brought by Destiny, was with regards to the initial theme, sexuality, and in general with the idea of *'having fun and keep being me'* (Destiny, in conversation with Leah, May 2011). Alongside other friends (including Shanice, Michele and Keisha) and, at times, also their siblings, Destiny and Leah would go out dancing and partying. Being active in their social life, not just as mothers but as women, was something they all described as not just normal, but also healthy. Nevertheless, Destiny recounted having several discussions on this subject with her mother, who believed this behaviour was not acceptable and not respectable. Because of this disagreement, Destiny initially opted not to rely on her mother to look after the children when she was going out. The situation, however, changed when another member of her church told Mrs D. that her daughter would also go out dancing with her friends and that she was making the most of those opportunities to look after the children to ensure they would grow to be respectable Christians. The knowledge that someone else's daughter was also being "social", just like Destiny, immediately normalised the behaviour and transformed it into an opportunity to further influence her grandchildren. On the other side, Destiny believed that having the opportunity to be herself and dedicate time just to her contributed positively to her mothering. *'I just can't be a mum, you know? If I go out, get to be myself and chill then I have more patience and more energy for them.'* (Destiny, in conversation walking to school, October 2011).

Leah's example reinforced what was suggested by Destiny with regards to not being able to always be a mum but also needing to decompress and chill. Leah started explaining that her favourite way to recharge was to have the home to herself and send all the kids to her mother or Jerome's¹¹⁸. She then suggested that I knew what she meant as I had been present on a few occasions. Of course, I remembered - I had at least three instances in my notes discussing Leah's "relaxation method", because it was on the boundary of social acceptability, if not legality¹¹⁹.

"While discussing with Leah about her laptop's issues, she invited me to go to her house so that I could both complete an observation and help her with it. I decided to accept as it will be interesting to observe the kids getting ready to go to their grandma (as they will be spending the night there) and Leah getting ready for a night with a "much less crowded flat" (as she put it). As we walked away from the school we met Shelley who came to inform the mother that a friend of hers might be staying over for dinner. Leah seemed fine with it, and while we walked towards the house, asked Shelley to go

¹¹⁸ Although Jerome and Leah were married, he was not living at the flat with her and the children – see Chapter four.

¹¹⁹ This *behavior* was never witnessed in the presence of the children, nor was considered as placing them at risk.

get some cash for her and to buy some fish and chips for everyone (as she was not in the mood for cooking and feeling very tired). As we got into the flat Leah told the children to get ready to go to Grandma, she gave instructions to the younger daughters (who share a room), mentioning the fact that they will need to pick up their toys from the carpet, before being allowed to get changed to go to Grandma. While the girls tidy up their room, Shelley left the flat to get the food for everybody, Leah gave her her card to go to the ATM and tells her to be careful, at which point Shelley responded by saying she was not a child and she knew how to behave – Leah then shouted at her ‘no point in trying, you are going to Grandma’s tonight’. When Shelley came back, Leah asked her to get the girls to sit in the lounge and to give them some food, but to save some for her. Leah and I moved into the kitchen, as Leah suggested we smoked. Ofcourse she does not smoke cigarettes when the children are at home. I have no idea of what to do. Leah informed the kids that we are smoking and therefore she would close the door and no-one could open it until she said so. I sat at the kitchen table; Leah, busy looking for tobacco, left for a moment and found some in her room.

She returned to the table with a small blue box, she picked it up and started rolling. I started wondering whether the box is always sitting on the kitchen table, or if it moves around, and whether is always so easily accessible for the kids. I felt like I did not really know what to, as I found the situation quite complicated. On one side, I wanted to maintain a calm and relaxed attitude towards this kind of event as I wanted Leah to keep feeling safe and natural with me observing them; on the other side, I started thinking on the implications of her actions. Many questions popped up in my mind, while Leah was busy puffing her cigarette and recounting me of a friend of hers who infested her house with ticks. I also wonder what the kids make of this smoking moments.”

(My fieldwork notes, after home observation, April 2010)

Having had the opportunity to discuss my thoughts and feelings with Leah I, very apologetically, shared my initial reaction to the situation and asked if she would not mind talking about it together. Leah confessed being surprised by my response to her action (that is, smoking) and proceeded to discuss with Destiny whether she should have refrained from smoking in my presence. Mortified and unimpressed with myself, I embarked on an attempt to explain how my thinking had been mainly

guided by a sort of professional-ethical concern. Leah's response reasoned with much of the discussion developed through this study:

'Would you have felt the same if I was someone else ...

a White middle-class mother?'

(Leah, in conversation in her flat, June 2010)

I had known Leah for almost a year and, in that period, I had never questioned her capacity to care for her children, nor I had doubted her professionalism and working skills. I explored with Leah and Destiny the possible source of my thoughts and remembered a time in which a pupil's relative had picked up a child from school smelling of cannabis. The situation had initiated a series of discussions on whether the child should have been sent home with the relative or not. Destiny loudly kissed her teeth and, with an expression of relief and dismissal, reminded me that the situation was very different as it had taken place in public and under inappropriate circumstances. Whilst the man in discussion had exposed himself to the public gaze by being careless and inconsiderate, Leah had acted within the safety of her own home, within the secure boundaries of an organised series of events and in the presence of trusted individuals. The aforementioned dichotomy between public and private¹²⁰, links also with the idea of respectability, identified by Wilson (1969) and Austin (1984), as shared values in Caribbean culture, and the expectation to behave

¹²⁰ Previously addressed in chapter three and four

within agreed social boundaries. The solution provided by Destiny, highlighting my incapacity to discern between the two situations, pointed once again towards the observation that parents *'are often forced to produce and regulate themselves through dominant, ideologically charged discourses'* (Gillies, 2006: 4). Whilst cannabis is widely present within Caribbean society and largely recognised as a "cultural practice" (Chevannes, 2004), in Euro-American society its consumption is still highly critiqued and only in recent years had there been a more open discussion that has sparked a change with its levels of social acceptability¹²¹. Whilst a Guardian piece (Spencer and Popovich, 2014) provide middle class parents with a suggested etiquette on how to consume cannabis around their children, a series of alarmist articles remind one of the dangers of cannabis and associate it with a list of anti-social and criminal behaviours perpetuated by parents on their own children. Gillies' (yr?) account on the pathologisation of marginalised mothers, remind us *'from New Right to New Labour, tabloids to the broadsheets and daytime television to documentaries, working-class mothers who do not conform to standards grounded in middle-class privilege are vilified and blamed'* (Ibid, 2006: 1).

Both Leah and Destiny's examples, although different and raising diverse issues and reflections, challenge the mainstream concept of good parenting as morally defined

¹²¹ An Ipsos Mori survey on public attitudes towards cannabis indicated that 53% of the population agreed with the legalisation of cannabis (Ipsos Mori, 2013)

within the boundaries of “placed parenthood” (Allen and Taylor, 2012). In both cases, the behaviour presented lies outside the reign of motherhood sanctity (Welldon, 2010) and questions the requirement for parents to act as role models guiding their children through life. Practitioners identified this very issue - the misplacement of parental responsibilities- as one of the core problems affecting children’s outcomes in Caribbean families. The picture painted by practitioners is one of parents not behaving as parents, children being raised by various figures, some of which are only temporarily part of the family network, and therefore lacking the safety and containment of reliable adults in their life. On the other hand, the picture painted by families is a very different one. One of which parents are present in their own way (determined at times by external factors such as employment, housing, relations, etc.), extended family networks providing ongoing support and offering alternative presences as and when needed. The dynamics I observed during Siobhan’s birthday provided an excellent example to this second depiction.

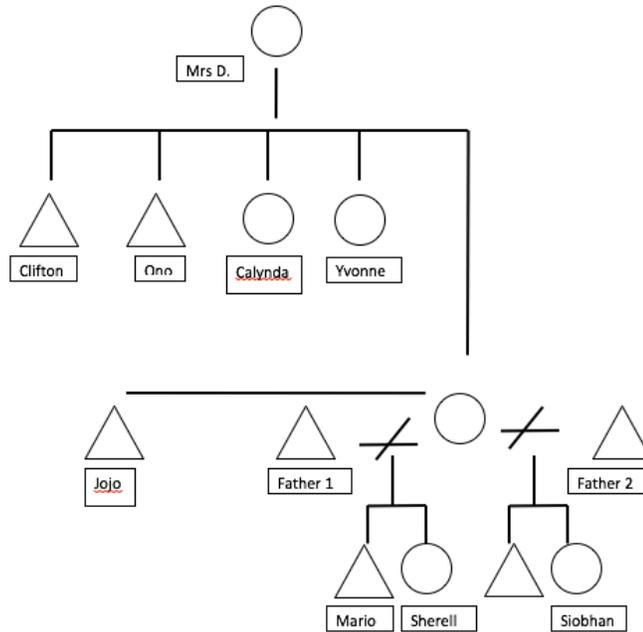


Figure 7: Destiny's family group
(My assumption from conversations)

As illustrated in my first attempt at defining Destiny's family group (figure X), a superficial identification of relevant figures in the circle would provide a picture containing two broken links, an unstable relationship and a single mother raising four children on her own.

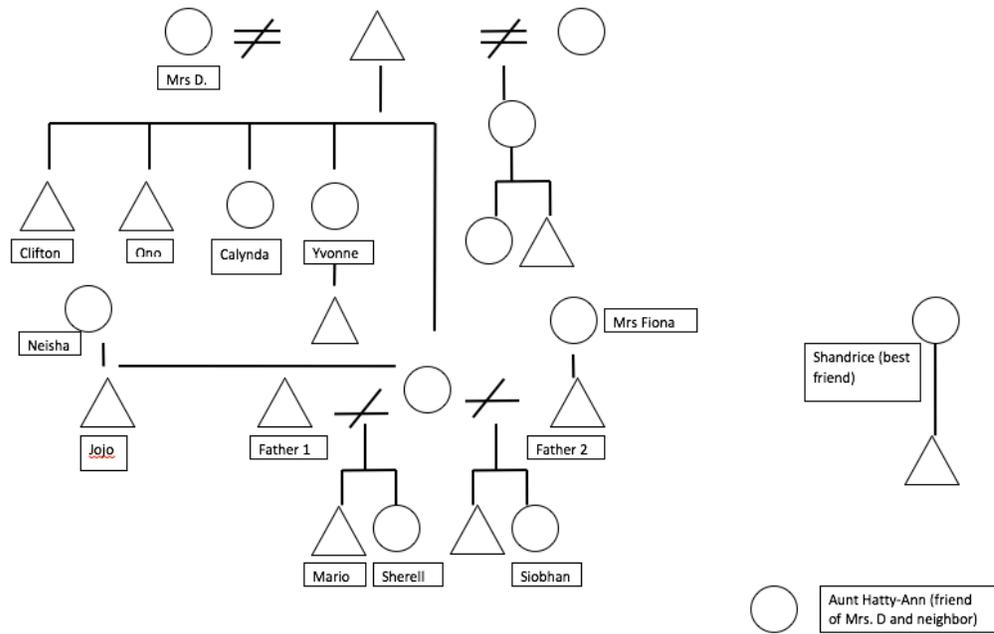


Figure 8: Destiny's "actual" family group

The occasion of the birthday party offered the opportunity to view a different reality, in which many co-operating and co-existing realities gravitated together creating a functional and equilibrated system of connectivity. Although the connection with F1 (father of Mario and Sherell) did not offer any alternative link, the absence of F2 was filled by the presence of Mrs Fiona, who supported Mrs D. in the blessing of their granddaughter and in maintaining a high level of respectability for the family. Clifton and Ono, Destiny's younger brothers, had taken responsibility for the music and the barbeque (which was taking place outside the venue in proximity of the kitchen). Marcelle, Destiny's half-sister living in Jamaica, had organised for some food specialties to be delivered in time for the party. Shanice had planned and scheduled the activities to keep the children entertained, whilst Aunt Hatty-Ann and Neisha

oversaw fun for the older generation, with the bingo being the favourite attraction. Destiny was self-appointed as the main hostess. She spent the day welcoming guests, moving around the room, offering a word to all the invitees and ensuring everyone would express their compliments about the party. Yvonne, her younger sister, oversaw looking after the children, Siobhan in particular. Sherell was also present, who, sporting a “chiney bump”¹²² hairstyle, was helping with the younger ones. At the time of the blessing of the cake and of the child, Mrs D. asked for the whole family to congregate around the child. The visual impact of this moment can hardly be described in words: a room full of people, mostly not related by blood, gathered in silence around Siobhan wishing her the best for her future and committing to offer guidance and support in her journey through life. Reynolds commented on the power of the concept of community mothering, emphasising how

‘Caribbean women feel and share a collective responsibility for children and other vulnerable members of the Black community, to whom they are not biologically related’.

(Reynolds, 2003: 87)

Cohesion is frequently identified as a factor contributing to the promotion of strength and positive outcomes in families at risk¹²³ (Orthner et al., 2004). Alongside the

¹²² Traditional Jamaican hairstyle

¹²³ If we follow Allen and Taylor’s (2012) thinking around the stigmatization and pathologisation of otherness deriving from *placed parenthood*, it could be argued that all the families not fitting the

importance of social cohesion in lowering the risks associated with economic hardship (McLoyd, 1990), participating in a close-knit community network is believed to benefit children and young people through the formation and provision of what Reynolds (2003: 93) defines as '*a collective racialized identity*'. This idea emerged also in the conversation with Destiny and Leah, both of whom recognised the importance of feeling safe and staying within their group. This point highlights what could be an interesting dichotomy within the life of Caribbean families as observed in this section. On one hand there is the presence of a strong freedom of movement, fluidity and interchangeable roles within the network. On the other is the closure towards the outside world; a reality that is possibly deemed as dangerous or simply foreign. Sutherland's (2006) paper on the legacy of racial disadvantages faced daily by the African-Caribbean population in the UK, highlights the risks and stress factors experienced by this group daily. All of the main contexts of British society (education, employment, health) are recognised as promoting an environment for racial discrimination against West Indians. Yet the author (Ibid, 2006) indicates a widely recognised lack of organised resistance and opportunities for empowerment and change in the group. However, bell hooks (1990) identifies nourishment and growth of the sense of community, shared responsibility and engagement as the most powerful act of resistance against racial discrimination. Practices such as sharing basic knowledge, holding direct impact on daily experiences and promoting survival are identified by the scholar-activist (ibid, 1990) as fundamental to the advancement

prescribed standards could be viewed as at risk.

of resistance and change. A study conducted on Caribbean adolescents in Canada also confirmed the strong link between the self and social group: *'family pride and cohesion appear to be strongly linked to collective pride and collective self-esteem'* (Rosseau et al, 2009). Small acts of daily cohesion are identified by the author as core to *'build new black communal feelings and black community by returning to the practice of acknowledging one another in daily life. (...) these looks were affirmations of our being, a balm to wounded spirits'* (hooks, 1990: 39).

Is this exercise of strengthening the circle and creating coalition also creating a further separation with society? What happens to those opting out of the circle?

'You can't pick your family, but you can make it'

This last section will offer a series of reflections on the queries posed above, whilst looking at the consequences experienced by families not sharing the reality of extended family networks and expanding their social circle outside local boundaries. The following two cases describe the experience of families moving away from the local close-knit community and experiencing a sort of exile or extradition for their actions.

Angela was employed at the children's centre attached to the school during the first year of my fieldwork. Under Sandra's guidance, her status advanced from administrator to family worker; a change that many saw as one of the causes for her

U-turn. When I first met her, Angela was renting a flat near the school with her husband and her one-year-old child. She had been working as an administrator for a while and Sandra had been helping her completing her NVQ to enable her to engage with the families at the centre. Not long after her promotion to family worker, Angela became pregnant and started looking at the possibility of moving to a different London neighbourhood. Although she had grown up in the area, she did not appear to have the same connection to the other workers or to the community at large. Angela would partake in events and occasions, such as birthday parties. However her church was based near where her older sister resided and, whenever her husband was working at the weekend, she would stay at her sister's house as she felt safer in that area. After becoming pregnant, Angela announced that she had decided to resign and move nearer to her sister's, where they could afford a bigger home and access to better schools. Angela was very vocal about her feelings regarding the local area - something that had always caused a certain level of animosity between her and the other staff members, who were living locally. The move to the new home happened swiftly, so for a few months Angela kept working at the school whilst commuting to the new neighbourhood. The final fracture happened with the local community when Angela decided not to invite most of her colleagues to a party to celebrate her baby shower in combination with her child's second birthday. The key element in the story is the fact that Angela's invitations seem to be a not so elegantly orchestrated for a selection of invitees. With only Sandra and some teachers attending from the school, the criteria to receive an invitation seemed to be the person's job and social class. When I received my

invitation, Angela suggested the party would be a good opportunity for me to see how she had planned the environment in which her children would grow.

The birthday party was very different from the ones I had previously attended. Firstly, the party took place in the back garden of Angela's new home. In Destiny's words '*a show off opportunity for life in suburbia*' (Destiny's comment in response to Angela's invite card). The entertainment for the children consisted of a bouncy castle and a clown and parents had been encouraged to dress their children comfortably. The age and the gender of the birthday boy possibly determined the fact that there was no disco, no nails and no beauty area; still, it was interesting to note that the entertainment was sourced not from her friendship group, but from outside professionals. Her husband was busy tending the barbeque, whilst her mother in law¹²⁴ was pouring soft drinks for the children and a very light rum punch for the adults. The church choir, of which Angela's sister was a member, was responsible for the blessing of the cake, served with tea. During the party, Angela approached me to introduce me to her children's future life by providing a quick brief on most of the attendees at the party, consisting of an indication of their area of employment, church affiliation and level of respectability. Rather than sourcing support and help from within her social group, Angela, with the help of Sandra, had planned a move that would have enabled her to be part of a very different surrounding. This strategy resonates with Vincent et al' s (2013b) idea of the middle-class Caribbean invention of "status-based" identity; a technique to limit race related difficulties through the

¹²⁴ Angela's parents had returned to live in Jamaica after retiring

benefits of class status. The author explains how this strategy requires '*long-term planning, an active choice of school, careful monitoring of the child's progress and teacher actions, enrolling children in extracurricular activities, seeking to establish a dialogue of equals with teachers, and using their dress, accent and knowledge about the education system*' (ibid, 2013b: 940). Respondents to Vincent's study also highlighted the inevitable role of work, pressure and psychological distress experienced by parents opting for this survival strategy. In another paper, the authors describe a process of '*disidentification*' (Vincent et al, 2013) through which respondents attempt to learn to cope with the necessity to break away from their family roots to embrace multifaceted identities that changed according to the context.

Although not too dissimilar, Lorraine's case had a much bigger impact on the local network and created a stronger reaction from both colleagues and pupils. Lorraine¹²⁵'s foster parents had instilled in her a very strong sense of cultural belonging to their homeland or, as she would call it, "Jamaican Pride". With a child, aged nineteen, in and out of prison and a not so reliable partner, Lorraine developed a strong sense of worry about her two younger boys, Nat and Dario, particularly as Nat (the eldest of the two) had started getting into trouble at school. Ball et al. (2013) explore the concept of *good mixes* in accordance with parental views informing school choice: '*a 'good' mix meant ethnic diversity, a good proportion of Black*

¹²⁵ After being abandoned by her mother, White British, Lorraine had been taken in by a local Jamaican foster family who later adopted her. After the death of her adoptive father, her adoptive mother returned to Jamaica to live with one of her biological daughters.

children, but with no single predominant ethnic group, and a significant presence of children from families who place a high value on education, which was usually related to social class' (ibid, 2013: 268). In line with these indications, the new school of choice offered a broad variety of pupils in terms of racial and ethnic backgrounds, and a strong sense of commitment to respect, teaching, learning and sense of duty. These values did not however derive from the class of the school population, but from their religious background: Roman Catholic. Lorraine's betrayal of her social network had a bigger impact than Angela's because it implied and required a deeper level of rejection of her "Jamaican" origins. For her children to be accepted at the local Catholic school, Lorraine had to reconnect with her Irish family, join the church attached to the school and baptise her children. Whilst on the surface this sudden change had left no scars on Lorraine's relations with most colleagues in the school, it had created a sense of division. Lorraine's hubris, usually referred to by a more colourful vocabulary had, however, left a scar on the ones remaining as their sense of pride and cohesion had been attacked and left battered. The worst offence, in the eyes of the ones left behind, was that Lorraine had not chosen a school that was significantly better than the local one. This was significant as the two schools were quite close and there had been clashes and misunderstandings in the past, not just between the children but also the staff members. The last in this series of incomprehensions, as the head teacher would define it, had seen staff members from the Catholic school complaining at the local farm about the level of noise caused by the other pupils. In her process of '*disidentification*' (Vincent et al, 2013),

Lorraine had broken away from her *family network* by joining a group that had previously acted as the perpetrator of social violence against her own.

This chapter has explored the views and experiences of informants with regards to a set of shared misconceptions/mythologies about Caribbean motherhood and family dynamics. The emerging common thread of narratives of survival, resistance and success is the close correlation between family dynamics and social environment, be it the extended family, the place of employment or simply a public space. In his Editorial to the special issue on '*Caribbean Families and Communities*', Goulborne (2003) emphasizes the necessity to explore these intertwined realities to obtain a fuller, more reliable picture of Caribbean lives in the UK. The following chapter will therefore continue in an exploration and analysis of the life experiences of informants within the social structure, with a focus on acts to overcome struggle and promote resistance/resilience within the family network.

Chapter Nine: ‘Like boats sailing in adverse weather’¹²⁶

The third and last theme emerging from the interviews with practitioners presented in chapter six, relates to issues of reliance on and resistance from external support, mainly in the form of service provision. In the analysis of the data collected during fieldwork, the first step consisted in the identification of moments and stories that would relate to the two concepts under scrutiny. The comparison between the professionals’ accounts and the experiences shared by participants brings to light an interesting difference in terms of their understanding of *reliance* and resistance. This distance between the two perspectives emphasises a significant divergence that highlights a lack of effective communication and shared goals in service provision for children and families, such as evidenced with reference to mental health services (McClean et al, 2003).

Rely

In the interviews with professionals, the experience of (*over*)-reliance on services is described via the stories of parents, predominantly lone mothers, seeking a level of support or provision of services deemed unreasonable; a behaviour frequently associated by workers with parents being unorganised and having imbalanced priorities. Mayra’s unhappiness with the hostel provided, Jalyn’s mother being unhappy with the support offered by the case-worker, a young mother being unable to resolve her incapacity to pay the electricity bills - these are some of the

¹²⁶ Pamela

examples¹²⁷ discussed by practitioners with regards to (over) reliance on the support provided. In most examples, whilst narrating these type of circumstances, practitioners seemed to fall into a sort of “I have done all I could/whatever we do it’s not enough” discourse, with some workers sharing a sort of resentment towards their clients for not getting better. A similar type of bitterness was observed in the late 80’s by Asrat-Girma in a study conducted in a London day care centre ‘*there was an undercurrent, almost of envy, that black mothers were apparently obtaining a whole range of benefits without earning them*’ (Asrat-Girma, 1986: 45). Similarly, in more recent times, a similar attitude was discussed in the analysis of the links made between the 2011 riots and parenting (Allen and Taylor, 2012).

From a clients’ perspective, the situation appears significantly different. With regards to their children, most parents would mention school, including nurseries, as the most important and effective source of support received. The combination of children being looked after, fed and engaged was recognized as one of the most important services available, although not exempt from issues. The other area mentioned as core, in terms of support to families, was housing; an issue of direct relevance for most of my informants and identified by existing research as directly impacting children’s wellbeing and school achievements (Stewart and Rhoden, 2006). Fifteen families out of the twenty-two participating in the study, were living in council flats, mostly located in one of the large estates nearby the school. Most of

¹²⁷ see chapter 6 for more details on Mayra and Jalyn’s case studies

the parents, in discussing their living arrangements, would share a level of discomfort with the conditions and the safety of their flats. Interestingly, a study conducted in the 80's evidenced that Caribbean families in England were more likely to be assigned to the worst social housing available (Harrison, 1983).

Above all, Malene's story is the most representative of the issues faced by families with regards to housing and the most poignant and contrasting with professionals' views. A series of unfortunate events, never fully disclosed to me, had led Malene to lose access to the place where Tyrell and she were staying. After placing mother and son in an emergency bed & breakfast, the council had identified a small flat in another local authority, which was offered to the family with an emphasis on the fact that this was the only option available. Malene had refused to move and with the help of Pamela, via the children's centre and of other friends, had managed to provide evidence that neither she, nor Tyrell, could afford to relocate elsewhere nor would have benefited from it. This decision had cost their position in the waiting list and subjected them to a prolonged period of living in temporary accommodation¹²⁸. Malene tried on few occasions to appeal and regain her spot on the waiting list and she also explored the possibility of getting a flat with Trish. Eventually she resigned herself to living in the hostel for fear of being moved out of borough. When Tyrell's teacher became concerned by the impact of these living conditions on the boy's behaviour at school, Malene sought support from Pamela and other staff members.

¹²⁸ The situation remained unchanged throughout the whole period of my fieldwork, with Malene and Tyrell moving twice over this period.

However no one seemed to be able to help. The issue of housing was, in fact, impacting not only on pupils and their families, but also on members of the staff team; Leah in particular.

In the first year of fieldwork Leah, Jerome and their five children welcomed me into their three-bedroom council flat. The apartment, located within a large estate almost entirely dedicated to social housing, was on the tenth floor of a tower block in degraded conditions. Throughout the numerous visits, I paid to the family, I started noticing the recurrence of issues impacting the safety and quality of living offered by the building. Following an extended period of severe malfunctioning of the lift and under pressure exercised by the numerous complaints filed by residents, the council eventually agreed to invest in some basic refurbishment work. A few days after the start of the works during a lunch break at school, when Millie asked Leah whether she was happy with the refurbishment, Shanice almost choked on her food to quickly exclaimed '*don't even get her started!*' It was too late as Leah commenced listing all the issues attached to the works, emphasising the lack of hot water and the noise. Millie was not impressed with Leah's reaction and asked for further clarification. As the supply of hot water and electricity was not fully guaranteed for the duration of the works, residents had asked for access to hot water either in the morning or the evening. Instead of agreeing to the time suggested by the residents, the council opted for a different slot. This was followed through by the construction company and caused significant difficulties to working parents with school age children. Additionally, the council had agreed to carry out only basic repairs, leaving a few

structural issues unresolved. Leah shared how, in her opinion, these factors represented the council's lack of interest in the well-being and living conditions of residents, whilst also reinforcing the existing dynamic in which the former would agree to provide the bare minimum. This then enabled the council to suggest that any issues were not due to lack of effort but because of unreasonable requests from tenants. In support of her theory, Leah explained having experienced a similar issue a few years before whilst trying to be relocated to a more suitable accommodation. With five children and a partner¹²⁹ living elsewhere, Leah was considered as a single mother with a full-time job and a three-bedroom flat. These factors, however, did not contribute towards the possibility of gaining access to a more suitable property. Moreover, in Leah's opinion, the wish to live in a bigger flat was perceived as an act of entitlement and greediness, rather than as a necessity. The last time she had tried to relocate, she was offered a slightly larger flat but in a completely different area of London; a condition she could not accept as it impacted on her job, her children's schools and the access to her support network. According to Leah, her refusal had not been well-received. A comparative study exploring the number of years needed by mothers from different ethnic background to exit benefits, Mokhtar and Platt (2010) observed that African Caribbean mothers, who are more likely to be unmarried and in employment than mother from the other backgrounds, spend a significantly longer period on benefits. The authors identified the stigma against single mothers and the likely combination of discrimination and inequality in the work environment

¹²⁹ Eventually I was informed that Leah and Jerome's marriage was not legally binding but "symbolic"

as key factors hindering the capacity to exit from benefits (ibid, 2010). Although not directly validating Leah's theory with regards to the council's attitude, this article highlights the underlying difficulties that were more likely to impact these families' living conditions. Vincent et al (2010) describes the liminal position of mothers living on council estates by exploring the narratives and the conceptualization of ideas such as "respectability" and "betterment". In this study, the authors push beyond what they identify as the *'traditional division into rough and respectable'* (ibid, 2010:127), highlighting the intrinsic difficulty for lone and working-class mothers to overcome the label of *'state-dependent'*. The attempt to reposition themselves within normative standards of family life¹³⁰, at times supported through validation stories¹³¹, is ineffective against the power of the mainstream discourse and is further propelled by the media and political figures. Leah's resentment towards the council's lack of interest/commitment towards its tenants combined with feeling let down and criticized and the wish to not always have to ask or fight for something to happen. The conversation between Leah, Shanice and Millie highlighted a few differences in their life experiences and views. Millie appeared almost annoyed by the complaints raised by the others and left the room with a remark: *'we had it much harder than you, yet we kept our heads down and worked'*¹³²(Millie, in conversation). Leah and Shanice waited for Millie to leave the room to comment; Leah explained

¹³⁰ The authors refer to Reynolds' chapter on *'Re-analysing the black family'* (2002)

¹³¹ Vincent et al (2010) refer to Patterson's (2004) definition of validation stories, described as an attempt to make sense of their circumstances and counteract negative discourses imposed on personal experiences by media and mainstream views.

¹³² I failed to note down her precise words and only captured here the essence of her closing remarks.

that her mother had a very similar approach to Millie's and that in the past this had caused tension and arguments. In debating these supposed intergenerational differences, the range of topics in discussion broadened as other matters related to family life were mentioned as examples. Leah acknowledged that her parents' generation *'had it much worse than us, doesn't mean that we have it easy. Things move on, my mum still moans about Jerome [living arrangements] and tells me off for going out and not going to church. But it works for us, we are trying to make things work for us but ain't ever good enough. The face of the woman at the council when I say I have five children, I know what she is thinking, I am not stupid.'* (Leah, in conversation 2010). The interpretation of respectability seemed to be at the heart of this generational gap, *'I work, I look after them children, I am good I am here, what else do they want?'* (Leah, in conversation 2010). The conversation between Shanice and Leah continued along these lines, with both women narrating examples of friends and family members struggling to make a decent¹³³ living and having been accepted rather than labelled. Shanice's experience with regards to this struggle related to her decision to allow her son to focus on developing a career as dancer; a choice that had been criticized more or less openly by a large number of family members as not "respectable". The mother's response to this opposition to her and her son's decisions was a very frank one, highlighting what could be perceived as the factor at the core of the whole problem, *'don't matter what we do, what we*

¹³³ Definition of which would vary significantly amongst participants.

achieve. Ain't gonna make a difference, it will never be good enough. So I said to myself why not, he is happy and so am I' (Shanice, in conversation 2010).

The narratives shared by many other women in the fieldwork reflected a similar level of complexity and conflict, positioning them and their children in a limbo of inadequacy and judgment. From Malene's feeling of impotence for not been able to secure a stable accommodation, for not wanting to leave her local community, to Debara 's shame for difficulties in dealing with motherhood, to Keisha's guilt for leaving her baby girl at home to return to work soon after her birth. The discourse emerging is congruent with that encountered by Vincent et al (2010) and indicates a burden deriving from several connected issues preventing the fulfilment of the promise for *betterment*: *'they are set within a field of struggles – material and ethical – to be a particular sort of person, despite material difficulties, setbacks and discouragements'* (Ibid, 2010: 130). In addition to these struggles, African Caribbean people are subjected to institutional racism (Sutherland, 2006), an issue which encompasses all the different areas of relevance to a person's well-being and achievement: education; health; housing and employment to name a few.

Nevertheless, research has suggested a lack of organized, systematic resistance in the Caribbean population against this level of discrimination and inequality (Goulborne, 1991; Sutherland, 2006). The choice to highlight insufficient engagement, rather than focusing on the existing realities or other forms of resistance, seems a perpetuation of the inadequacy discourse and, yet again, a

return to the deficit model. In fact, as highlighted by Davis and Cooke (2002), there seems to be a lack of interest in the recording of acts of resistance that are not in line with mainstream ideas of resistance. Leah's anger for her housing troubles was very present, yet was eventually overcome by a sense of exasperation; after a series of failed attempts at trying to obtain what her family needed, she had simply lost the strength to fight but maintained the hope for a change. Leah believed the actual anger would surface again in her children's generation. According to her theory, high levels of confrontation and resistance could not persist across generations and there had to be a sort of moment of rest. When I suggested her theory sounded opportunistic and providing her with an excuse not to try and change the situation, she explained to me the full circle of unrest. Here is a representation of my interpretation of this cycle:

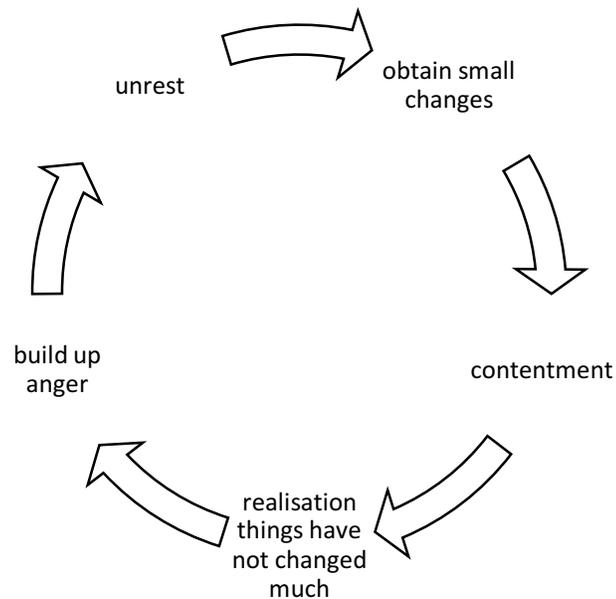


Figure 9: Leah's cycle

When I showed Leah my scheme of her theory, she positioned herself somewhere between “realisation things have not changed much” and “built up anger” and envisaged that at least one of her children would have lived the unrest moment. Leah’s theory had many flaws, yet it was also incredibly interesting. Through Leah’s theory, Millie’s disapproval of her anger at the council was because many of the older generation believed it was best to keep quiet and to accept and maintain a certain level of decorum and this was because they were positioned within “contentment”¹³⁴.

Although coming from different points of reference, Leah and Millie’s positions appear to be a way to prevent certain issues becoming uncontrollable or attracting unwanted visibility. Just as Malene had opted for living in temporary accommodation, rather than risking being moved out of the borough, Leah and Shanice agreed that at most times it was best to keep quiet and not “make a fuss” to avoid drawing attention to their family, hence their positioning on the cycle. In the attempt to unpack why both mothers, who had frequent contact as colleagues with social workers and other professionals through their job in the school, wished to keep away from these services, I realised to my surprise that the issue was nothing more than fear and mistrust of these services and the potential dangers attached to being involved with them. When I questioned their beliefs regarding social services, the response I obtained was a list of examples; some of which were from the direct

¹³⁴ See appendix 5

community, in which their intervention had worsened the situation for both the children and the adults involved. Research appears to support this belief, identifying institutional racism as one of the major issues behind this problem (Roberts, 2002; Hines et al, 2004; Harris and Hackett, 2008). In an article exploring challenges faced in involving Afro-Caribbean families with child services in Toronto, Clarke (2011) there was a discussion of a case of a mother who, having contacted child welfare for help, saw her child being taken away from her. Although this case does not represent the norm, in the past it has been used as evidence that in Britain *'statutory agencies were much more likely to exercise a coercive role in the referral of Caribbean families'* (Barn, 2001). The issue of fear is frequently accompanied by the perception that professionals either do not care or cannot really make a difference. In his study exploring family members' views on the provision offered to their relatives with learning disabilities, Hubert (2006: 264) shared that *'their perception of social services is that they are not interested in their predicament'*. Fear, impotence and mistrust seemed to be keeping Leah and other informants stuck in a place of awareness that things needed to change, yet there was an incapacity to push forward for this change to happen. In an attempt to unlock the reasons for this unwillingness to fight for a change, I started considering the various factors at play and how these influence the person's positioning on Leah's cycle.¹³⁵

In Millie, like in Desiree, I had noticed on many occasions a sense of thankfulness and indebtedness to British society for being allowed to be here. Was this due to

¹³⁵ See appendix 5

their background? There were both first generation migrants, doing well for themselves and intending to honour their respectable families. In Leah there was more of a sense of entitlement, not in a negative connotation but as an awareness of what she could want and demand. Pamela's situation was the most complex as she was born in the UK but had spent most of her childhood in Jamaica. Her parents were educated middle class people and she was most aware and ready to fight for her rights. Although this reflection is very superficial, it helps considering the role played by factors such as identity (does the person feel British? Jamaican? Both?), religion, sense of duty towards family (respectability), living arrangements and status. Highlighting the importance of these elements and their significance within the social context analysed, is of fundamental contribution in considering the differences in practitioners' and parents' views on the use of services. In a way, it could be argued that this situation reflects the concept of cultural hegemony, discussed in chapter 7; practitioners hold the authority and determine standards of acceptability in the interactions between clients and services, and this situation is exacerbated by a faulty communication system and poor level of shared understanding. There is no shared vision between the two ends. Clarke (2011) identified difficulties in navigating the system and the incompatibility of ideas as one of the main obstacles in engaging Caribbean families in social services in Toronto. Alongside this issue, the author noted that many mothers had shared a sense of distrust towards practitioners, perceived as controlling and judgmental, because they felt *'caught in a system in which they were presumed guilty and had to prove their innocence in order to get their children back'* (Ibid, 2011: 278).

Resist

The antagonism towards authority and services also featured as one of the core themes in the interviews with professionals. Clarke (2011) noted that many mothers had shared a sense of distrust towards practitioners, who were perceived as controlling and judgmental, as they felt *'caught in a system in which they were presumed guilty and had to prove their innocence in order to get their children back.'* (Ibid, 2011: 278). Throughout the numerous discussions with my respondents, I encountered several examples in which this resistance to services had surfaced and prevailed. The following accounts provide an overview of some specific situations I either observed or discussed with participants in the fieldwork.

Not Good Enough

One of the key narratives I witnessed during the fieldwork involved Abigail and her grandma¹³⁶ who had been approached by social services for her disciplinary practices. This case, which evolved throughout my study, led to several important, yet difficult, conversations and considerations. The most interesting aspect of this situation was not the narrative itself but the fact that, during the investigation led by social services, two different factions were created: one in support and one against the grandma, both with the school staff and the parents. This left me with a sense of relief at my necessity to keep neutral. The one element that seemed to unite the two sides was the concern for the future of the family, not simply the two children.

¹³⁶ See chapter 7 for details on the case

Destiny and Millie both concurred that Abigail and Jodie had a good environment in their grandma's home and that taking them away from her would have not benefited them. Some of the teachers were equally concerned about a possible removal of the children. However, their motivation was the possible trauma deriving from the fracture of what they perceived as an already fragile emotional arrangement. For the duration of the investigation, the two girls stayed firstly with their biological aunt and then with Debara, so that they could continue attending school and so that they would not have noticed what was happening in their home. This decision had come from the grandmother herself as she did not want to expose the children to the stress and disruption caused by the investigation. As explained by Debara, the wish was for the problem to be resolved without having to further expose the girls to '*so many strangers asking questions, snooping around and minding their business*' (Debara, in conversation 2011). Grandma did not appear worried about the investigation, nor upset by it; her main concern was the invasion of their family life and the possibility of the equilibrium they had built within their network and households being destabilized unexpectedly by outside forces. A few months after the incident, which had been treated as such and resolved via parenting classes and regular meetings, I managed to discuss the experience with Grandma¹³⁷, who agreed to engage in the conversation only if I was prepared to listen and not ask questions. Throughout and after the investigation, I had developed the idea that Grandma's resistance to the presence of social services in her house was due to the fact that

¹³⁷ I never learned her name as everyone would refer to her simply as Grandma

she viewed them as a threat, as discussed in Wyness' (2014) paper on the state/family dichotomy. As we sat in the park, watching the girls playing with Calvin after school, Grandma explained that her daughter (their mother) had been through issues with substance abuse and domestic violence when the children were very young. She had left home to follow the type of man Grandma had always told her to stay away from; mother and daughter had lost contact and when she finally asked Grandma for help, the situation seemed to be out of their hands. Social services were involved and Grandma had to fight for the custody of Abigail and Jodie. After a period in foster care, the family regained guardianship of the girls and their mother moved to Birmingham to, as Grandma would say, "sort herself out"¹³⁸. Grandma justified her resistance to the involvement of social workers through this experience. In conversation, she shared how she had felt powerless and unfairly judged, even before being given a chance, because of the context, of her daughter's issues and of her limited awareness of what was expected of her (see Clarke, 2011). Grandma's lack of trust in professionals echoed the experiences described by Roberts (2002) in a collection of stories in which prejudices seemed to prevail in the exploration of viable solutions.

Another parent, William, shared similar feelings, to those experienced by Grandma as described in Clarke (2011) and Roberts' (2002) research, whilst discussing the difficulties experienced in his role of a single father for his younger daughter, Naomi.

¹³⁸ Grandma never revealed what this meant specifically

For the first time in a very long time¹³⁹, the girl's behaviour had been cause for concern and, after a change in the school's policies, William had been faced with the suspicion that his care had been failing Naomi's needs. In a meeting with the school SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator), the class teacher and the occupational psychologist, the father had been informed of the school's concerns with Naomi's care arrangements. Due to the father's employment during the week the child was being looked after by a network of family members - predominantly his aunt and a paternal cousin. Although the concerns did not appear to have been explored in depth, a suggestion was made for William to attend parenting classes to further understand his child's needs and for Naomi to be statemented to secure additional support in the class, as the teacher had deemed Naomi disruptive to the other children and a hinderance her own learning. William requested a follow up meeting, which he attended with the child and the aunt who was primarily caring for her during the week. As much as the teacher had raised concerns with Naomi's behaviour, the child had mentioned being singled out by the teacher for reasons she had not understood, a situation that had instigated a level of anger and frustration she was struggling to manage. As in Reynolds' (2003) accounts of the effectiveness of mothers monitoring their children's experiences at school to fight racism, William and the network around Naomi had overlooked the girl's school experience and had identified an alternative cause to her sudden misbehaviour. As the teacher, with the support of the school, refused to explore his own responsibility in Naomi's anger

¹³⁹ Naomi had exhibited behavioural difficulties in the past

outbursts, William decided to enrol the child in a different school. Whilst several publications highlighted the overall impact that race, gender and class can have on education (Gilborn and Mirza, 2000), Crozier (2005) focused her research specifically on the views, hopes and fears shared by African Caribbean parents with regards to their children's experiences. The study brought to light parental doubts, not only in the willingness, but also in the capacity of staff members to work effectively and in a positive manner with their children (Crozier, 2005). Another study focusing on the views and experiences of middle class parents gave voice to the concerns that staff members almost seemed to be *'trying to break their spirits'* (Gilborn et al, 2012:132). William's decision to transfer Naomi was similarly dictated by his concerns around the cause of her behavioural problems. Naomi was, in fact, regularly attending a supplementary Saturday school, in which one of the staff members was also volunteering and, in this setting, she was not exhibiting the sort of behaviour that had been cause for concern at school. Gillborn (1990) and Crozier (2005) reported a tendency in teachers to perceive African Caribbean girls as feisty, as in Naomi's situation. This sort of issue had impacted on other children in the school¹⁴⁰ and had lead to various reactions from parents. As documented also by Reynolds (2003), some parents had developed the notion to relocate their children *back* (Ibid, 2003:92) to ensure they would receive a more appropriate education, *'free from racial discriminations and other constraints and reinforce[ing] an educational ethos that is commonly accepted in the Caribbean'* (Ibid, 2003: 93).

¹⁴⁰ See chapter 7 for more examples and discussion on attitudes and expressions of emotions

In Leroy's case, it almost seemed that threatening to send him back to Jamaica functioned as much as a reminder for him of this possibility to re-open communication with the teacher, who would get nervous and worried about the child and ask for a meeting with his mother, Trisha, to discuss different ways of working with her son. Trisha's strategy demonstrates a different aim in resistance to external interventions: the mother strongly wanted for her son to succeed in school. She was his greatest advocate, and had found a unique manner to engage the teacher in conversation. Meeting and talking to the teacher would grant her the possibility to mediate and "translate" Leroy's attitudes and behaviours. Gillborn (1990) explored the possible impact of the physical appearances of teacher's views on children, indicating the possible correlation between certain pupils' features and the teacher's need to feel in control. Unfortunately for him, Leroy fitted perfectly all the stereotypical ideas listed in Gillborn's book: he was bigger; stronger and louder than most other children in his class.

Issues around misinterpretation and poor interaction between service users and providers were not experienced by families solely in the school environment; a few examples shared by participants evidenced that this sort of difficulties were also of relevance in health practices. Although usually very contained and calm, when discussing her child's health, Janice would quickly get upset and complain about the inadequacy of the care provided for him. Nelson was effected by sickle cell (SCD), a condition particularly common amongst the Caribbean population (Ahmad

and Atkin, 1996) and requiring an intensive level of care that relies on the patient following specific guidance and taking certain precautions to prevent the worsening of the condition. For Nelson, this meant that he had to be careful about what he was eating, wearing and doing generally. Janice had prepared, with the help of a health worker, a book containing all the information necessary for those in care of Nelson (i.e.; school, after school club, etc.) and had established effective communication with the school nurse and the teacher, providing updates and reminders as and when necessary. All was fine throughout Nursery and Reception, mainly because the staff remained consistent. When Nelson started Year 1, his condition worsened. As the class had direct access to an outdoor space, Nelson had wandered outdoors without appropriate clothing on many occasions. Additionally, the time available for him to eat had decreased and, being a slow eater, at times he had been sent out of the refectory without having finished his food. In a study exploring the intersection of various issues effecting parents of children with sickle cell disease, Burnes et al (2008:212) emphasized that *'parents' ability to cope with their child's chronic illness is associated with the availability of adequate systemic support resources'*. The authors also identified that many parents had to take full responsibility for the medical care of their children outside specialized settings, causing an increased level of stress and anxiety and leaving them feeling unsupported. In a similar way, Janice expressed her concerns with regards to the quality of care provided to Nelson within the school environment. She complained about the lack of understanding of his condition and the poor attempts to cater for his needs. Effective support for both parents and children has been identified as of relevance in pain control and

management for this disease (Chakravorty et al, 2004), meaning that these situations were not only impacting on Janice's mental health but also on Nelson's well-being. The issue continued for several weeks, until Janice decided to call for a meeting to review Nelson's educational plan, as she was considering home schooling as an alternative. This option was not ideal for either the child or his mother; Nelson became very angry during this period of home schooling, particularly towards his mother, who was at this point overwhelmed by the situation. During one of my visits, which had become less frequent as their days had become busier, Janice burst into tears and stated, *'I am not a bad mother'* before proceeding to justify her decision to keep him home from school. The mother correlated the lack of understanding and care with an overall dismissal of Nelson's condition and felt this sort of treatment was linked to the fact that it was children like Nelson that would be effected by this illness. This correlation between class/race and poor care for the disease is encountered also by Burnes et al (2008: 216) *'all of the mothers believed that racism is a salient factor contributing to the poor quality of SCD health care in mainstream settings and the lack of resources allocated toward SCD in the health system'*.

The idea that a person's background would affect the quality and the effectiveness of the care provided, echoed also in another mother's narrative. The notes from my first home-visit to Debara clearly indicated her reluctance to seek professional support whilst experiencing what appeared to be post-natal depression. As

explained previously¹⁴¹, Debara had relied on the support of her sister to overcome the feelings experienced after Calvin's birth and subsequently had created a network of support with neighbours and other family members. The low figures in the number of Caribbean mothers accessing dedicated services for post-natal depression has been linked to a series of factors, such as lack of awareness, tendency to normalize the behaviour and fear of stigmatization (Edge, 2006). However, Debara was motivated by her decision that this was the only safe way to ensure 'they' would not take away her child. The concern felt by Debara echoed what has been described as a "circle of fear" (Keating et al, 2002). That is, an entrenched reluctance to trust services due to first hand or even remote knowledge of negative experiences or unfair treatments. In the specific case of peri-natal depression, most Caribbean mothers are said to have developed effective coping mechanisms without needing the intervention of professional help (Edge, 2011); a fact that, although not justifying or condoning the failure of services, could obscure the urgency and derail attention from the gravity of the issue.

Not just a matter of balance

The examples discussed thus far provide an initial picture of the vast number of strategies, coping mechanism and acts of defence enacted daily by parents, neighbours, relatives and friends to provide and protect their children, or as described by Reynolds (2005: 74) '*conscious and deliberate acts of resistance*'

¹⁴¹ see chapter 4

requiring compromise and negotiation (Collins, 1994). At the time of the event, I had thought that Janice's affirmation of her maternal skills was directed to me as an outsider, as a possible source of judgment. It is, however, very likely that Janice was reminding herself that she was a good mother. Collins (1994) explored and discussed this internal conflict, sense of doubt and the need for ongoing negotiation that black mothers experience in relation to their daily choices regarding their children's lives. During one of our many trips to the supermarket, I noticed Calicia's mood had suddenly changed at the till. I asked her what had happened and she explained that the woman at the till kept looking at us in a funny way. I apologized for not noticing and she said it was fine and that it was best to ignore this sort of things, if possible. Calicia explained that, a few days before, whilst at the till to pay, her card had failed to work and the cashier was refusing to run it again and kept looking at Wilma and Talicia as if to check they were not stealing anything. Upon noticing that Wilma had opened a juice, the cashier had asked Calicia to pay for it in cash immediately. Calicia continued '*I was there in shock, what did she think? I wasn't going to pay? But you must think of what you do, the kids and all. I could have been the angry black lady and started making a scene but I paid [for] the juice and asked to run the card again. I was burning inside!*' (Calicia, in conversation November 2011). In talking of *strategies* for child-rearing, Reynolds justifies the use of the term to emphasise the importance of the outcome, rather than the process, in the decision-making experience of black mothers (ibid, 2005). Trisha's threats to Leroy functioned as an instigator for the teacher to communicate with her and be more prone to co-operating to avoiding the child being sent home. William's decision to

move Naomi to a new school aimed at providing the child with a fresh start and, a new opportunity for her and also for him. Pamela had supported him in the process; she believed his choice had been wise as he had burned his bridges with the teacher and there was no going back. Gillborn et al. (2012) provide examples of educated middle-class parents successfully fighting back, yet the outcomes are not the same. In describing a situation like that of William and Naomi, the authors commented *'fortunately, Jean's personal networks and understanding of the system (her middle-class cultural capital) helped her to secure an alternative school for her son; but the damage was done and continues to be done to other Black children in the same situation'* (ibid, 2012:134). Although William had no contacts, his choice to resist and oppose what he believed to be a damaging situation for his daughter was described as a brave act by some members of the staff. The following year, Sami's mother followed his pattern and, instead of continuing fighting for the child to remain in the school, she accepted that it was best for her to relocate to a different school. A few months later, I received the following message via a member of the staff who had bumped into Sami and her mum:

'I bumped into Sami and her mum at the shop and she asked me to ask you to email her. I also met them in Sainsbury's. Sami was much taller and older looking. 11 or 12 maybe. She said she likes the new school, her mum said she'd doing well.'

(personal message from school staff)

These acts of resistance, possibly, achieved their short-term outcome. Through these fights, the parents re-negotiated their role in the situation, removing themselves from a position of guilt and deficit, imposed on them by society, and prioritized their benefit, by asserting their decisions, as described by Audre Lorde in the following passage:

*'As Paulo Freire shows so well in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships.'*

(Lorde, 2000: 544)

'Like boats sailing in adverse weather'

Whilst analysing the data for examples of reliance/resistance, one case stood out as an example of organized opposition, contrarily to the observations shared by Goulborne (1991) and previously discussed in this chapter. As described in Chapter 4, when Terrel's mother realized she could no longer provide her child with the care he needed, due to his behavioural challenges and her work commitments, the social worker suggested that finding a support worker or carer was the only viable solution. Terrel's mother, initially unsure about the recommendation, explored the existing alternatives to having a stranger looking after her children, as Shandrice was also to

be under the care of this figure. Terrel responded very differently to situations depending upon who was with him. He could easily become overexcited and anxious. Additionally, he was very close to his sister and would have not accepted lightly a separation, even if just for week days.

At the time, individualized budgets were starting to be agreed by Local Authorities and, whilst the alleged underlying aim of such allowances was to create competition between providers, this level of freedom would enable the service to be significantly more personalized and mindful of the needs of the child. Having exhausted all other avenues, Pamela and the school SENCO suggested that Terrel's mother consider the possibility of employing a member of her network; someone she trusted and who would have been also approved by her children. In a way, the arrangements suggested were no different from a formalized example of temporary child shifting¹⁴² (Best, 2014). One of the family's neighbours, Melissa, was available and willing to care for the children during the week; her duties included collecting them from school, helping with the homework and putting them to bed until their mother's return. As part of the agreement, she was also to attend school meetings and conduct the exercises prescribed to Terrel to help with his attention and behaviour.

By Year 2 he had been diagnosed with ADHD and further investigations were conducted. Leah, who moved to work in Terrel's class, became a great advocate of

¹⁴² See Chapter 3

the arrangement alongside several other staff members. The discussion in the staff room focused on considering that the carer was paid and on her closeness to the family. Millie was the least convinced by the idea of paying someone to look after her children whilst the younger mothers perceived the act as a form of validation of parenting as a valuable service; as Shanice commented '*we get paid for the work in schools, why not at home too?*' (fieldwork notes). The real focus of the conversation, however, was related to entrusting someone with the full care of the children - an act that Chamberlain (2003: 67) describes as requiring '*acceptance that children could be as adequately reared by another as by their own kin or mother*'. In exploring international scale child-shifting, Reynolds reported that most mothers '*readily acknowledge that their children's best place is with them*' (2005: 38). However, on this local and reduced scale, most of the mothers agreed that the arrangement was positive for both the parent and the child, particularly if the carer could function as a role model. Although the agreement could not be easily replicated for other families, as it did not receive the financial support of the local authority, this successful example demonstrated the possibility for effective cooperation. In Pamela's eyes, this sort of arrangement represented a possible way forward; she had always been a strong supporter of supplementary schools, community and church groups and similar. However, she was concerned about the risks associated with the dismissal of people's work within the household and the family in general. Moreover, this example demonstrated that a positive interaction based on trust and understanding could lead to an effective cooperation. Reay and Mirza (2003) describe the relationship between parents and staff from supplementary schools as *symbiotic*

and *'one in which the parent remained the expert on their child despite the schooling context'* (2003: 164). In Terrel's case, the expertise derived from the interaction and exchange of knowledge between home, services and school. Under the recommendation of the SENCO, Melissa had completed a course exploring techniques to support and help children diagnosed with ADHD. Her personal investment and involvement, not just with the child but the whole family, seemed to enable a more meaningful communication and cooperative planning with regards to the care of the children. The fact that Melissa was, however, employed and paid for her work seemed to function as a validation of this arrangement. As explained by Reynolds (2005), the work of women in supplementary schools and other similar voluntary organisations *'mirrored their domestic activities at home (...) the gendered dimension to these organizations mirror wider gendered division of labour patterns in society'* (Ibid, 2005: 130-131). Alongside reproducing gendered relations, these services functioned as a reminder of the failure of mainstream services; as the lack of appropriate provision for children other than white middle-class. Pamela stressed this very issue on several occasions during our conversations. The examples she provided would vary; one day she recounted the moment in which she decided to fund a different type of child magazine.

'I was finally ready to be a mum I think, I was just really tired. So then I started buying my children Early Years magazines and then I realized 'there is nothing in there for my child'. Everything is so stereotypical. Then I decided

to create a magazine for my children and I did it. I had friends who helped, I wasn't sure the direction my life would have taken. All I knew was I needed this magazine to be out there, so I began to create it and it was about a little girl travelling around the world and report back to the magazine, this is where the building up would be coming from. The major contribution was from children that were writing, on the back page there were some parents' information too. At that time, for the very first time, I built a very first sense of value in my life and it felt I was doing the same for my children.'

(Pamela, in conversation, February 2010)

The experience with the magazine had represented empowerment for both Pamela and her children. The magazine did not have a long life, mainly due to financial constraints, but this inspired Pamela to pursue a career in developing services and opportunities that would recognize and value the cultural specificity and richness of her tradition. A similar situation is described by McCalla (2005) in the narration of the development of the Marcus Garvey Nursery in Birmingham.

'My root started pushing towards education and little by little the doors opened for me through education. My brother in law at the time told me not to pursue with the

magazine. He was in publishing and told me ‘this doesn’t make money’. For me there was still something that needed to come out for these young people. I went to university and things begun to escalate, it has been an interesting ride. We are like boats sailing in adverse waters.’

(Pamela, in conversation, February 2010)

The need for services addressing the issues described in this chapter will be explored in the following section, giving light to reconsider and rethink the theoretical framework underlying the foundation of such services.

Chapter 10: Fluctuant attachment

After months of fieldwork, I started noticing that the focus of the narratives I was collecting was drifting away from the classic topics associated with attachment, to give space to accounts focusing on issues that the informants were identifying as those having an impact on their lives and on the interactions with their families. In this chapter I will discuss my analysis and reflection on these emerging themes, which will be presented in detail in section two, against three key categories of attachment theory with the aim to support and develop critical arguments with regards to the applicability and cultural validity of this framework. The intent of this chapter is to explore the possibility of reconsidering the framework of attachment considering interesectionality and to incorporate socio-cultural factors effecting the experiences of Caribbean families in the UK. The exploration of the three core areas, revisited through the explanations emerged from the analysis of my data, will elicit the surfacing of clashes between the traditional understanding of attachment and the socio-culturally defined experiences and representations shared by my informants. I will then conclude the chapter by suggesting a revisited form of attachment which is conceived as a fluid postion influenced by both experience and circumstances, rather than a fixed range of pre-determined elements.

A different approach to exploring culture and attachment

The history of the development of attachment theory shows an eagerness to demonstrate the universal validity of this concept. First and foremost, the emphasis of its derivation is from ethological studies. `Fixation,'¹⁴³ as associated by some contemporary psychoanalysts, wish to adhere to a scientific model (Fonagy and Campbell, 2015). This acts as an apparent confirmation of its universality, securing it with '*biological roots that can only be understood from an evolutionary perspective*' (van IJzendoorn and Tavecchio, 1990: 6). The applicability of the concept outside Western society was soon contested by Ainsworth with her fieldwork conducted in Uganda in 1963. This is frequently mentioned as an exemplar of cross-cultural consolidation of Bowlby's initial thesis and of Ainsworth's own assessment and recording tools and methods (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991; Schmitt et al., 2004). A growing number of studies conducted in different parts of the world, both within and outside Westernised contexts, have more recently been presented as corroborating evidence of the two original indications provided by Ainsworth and Bowlby (van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg, 1988). The key element associating Ainsworth's fieldwork with Ganda children and the clear majority of cross-cultural investigations of attachment patterns, is the consistency in embracing the existing framework (developed in a Western middle-class context), with its core assumptions, variable and measurements. Ainsworth's Ugandan data, for example, contained a broad

¹⁴³ Pun intended

number of observed attachment behaviours¹⁴⁴, deriving from the scrutiny of the mother's willingness to partake in the research, as informant, the mother's willingness and pleasure in breastfeeding and the quality of maternal care and interaction with the infant (Ainsworth, 1967). In many examples, the cross-cultural study was developed as a comparison across Western and a non-Western context, with results obtained under the same circumstances and adopting the same methodological tools, namely the Strange Person Situation (SPS) (Rothbaum et al, 2000). The adoption of this fixed structure within a different environment frequently lead to the emergence of new and diverse results, all of which are however conveniently fitted within the existing categories of attachment patterns. In a smaller number of cases, researchers adapted minor variations in the technique used to measure and evaluate data, such as in the study conducted in Japan by Takahashi (1986 in Rothbaum et al., 2000). In this study, variations in the application of SPS, in accordance with observed beliefs and parenting practices, lead to a diminished indication of pathologising or alarming findings. The preferred method of investigation across different contexts and cultures remain, however, the replication of the original model of data collection (SPS), with eventual variations in the interpretation of data, in accordance with pre-identified child-rearing customs and beliefs (Sagi et al., 1994). The exploration of existing literature indicates, therefore that verification of the universality of the construct cross culturally has been conducted by maintaining Western-derived tools and underlying concepts, with the

¹⁴⁴ This was then divided into the three classifications of attachment: secure, insecure and non-attached

exception of minor context specific differences in the interpretation of the results obtained. This form of cross-cultural application of the theory highlights a main issue which is broadly discussed in the field of health-related studies. That is, the adoption of standardised measurements and Western ideologies and beliefs as keys for collecting and reading data. To overcome this limitation and its correlated problems, medical anthropologists have emphasized the importance of adopting an emic perspective of the circumstances under investigation. A prominent clinical model, developed by Kleinman (1980) in the eighties, theorised the use of Explanatory Models, *'a useful way of looking at the process by which illness is patterned, interpreted and treated'* from the perspective of the patient, as much as that of the clinician (Helman, 2001). Conversely, in the field of study of attachment theory, the dominant tendency is to continue adopting the classic framework and concepts, creating a situation in which *'attempts to categorise attachment styles have been largely limited to White United States and European populations'* (Metzger et al, 2010: 5). It could therefore be concluded that cross-cultural attachment research is committed to maintaining a high fidelity to the original model, with allowance for mild modifications of the reading and interpretation of the results. This issue has, however, been discussed and, indeed, denounced in a number of publications (Bretherton, 1995; Keller, 2013). There is a seeking of significance outside the standards related to a classic reading of attachment theory and emphasizing the importance of *'ecologically valid, theory driven observational and interview measures that are tailored to specific cultures and based on deeper knowledge of parents'* and

children's culture-specific folk theories about family relationships and attachment'
(Neckoway et al., 2007: 72)

Clinically driven investigations of culture-specific, or culturally informed, patterns of attachment are still a rarity, with attempts at conducting this type of study being driven by researchers from other fields; mainly anthropology (Otto and Keller, 2014). This trend could be interpreted as ultimately underlying an inclination to hold Western culture as the standard of normalized behaviour, with its associated patterns and beliefs of childcare and relationships held as exemplar of effective parenting (Mead, 1962). This privileged status of normativity is not a novelty for Western constructs, nor is it limited to the field of child development and psychology. In the attempt to unpack this controversial issue and its implications in the specificity of attachment theory, I will adopt a trivial, perhaps more accessible, example from my personal experiences, bearing in mind that much more is implied in the topic in discussion.

A while ago, I took my Italian parents to a Middle Eastern restaurant in London. Upon being presented with what was listed on the menu as flatbread, my father pointed out its resemblance to pizza. I clarified what he was about order was not pizza and that although it might have looked like it, the recipe had significant differences. The key tenets defining the differentiation between the flatbread and the pizza are the type of yeast, the use of olive oil, the condiments and the type of oven used for baking. Although I had provided my father with clear indications of such very defining

differences, he proceeded to insist that, although both ingredients and outcomes were different, the flatbread was nevertheless a lesser version of pizza! His dedication to maintain pizza as the norm undermined the culinary value and uniqueness of the flatbread and he was, thus, imposing his own cultural standards as the norm. In a similar way, the stubbornness in identifying and adopting Western child rearing practices as normative, undermines the validity and effectiveness of other forms and realities of parenting. Imposing Western constructs and conceptualisations of family, parenting and relations precludes the possibility of exploring cultural variations and alternative forms and expressions of these realities, relegating these to being lesser forms of White middle-class life. The implications of this privilege are, however, exponentially more significant than the case of culinary traditions, though still perpetuating cultural hegemony¹⁴⁵ (Harry and Klinger 2014), and lead to inevitable misrepresentation and pathologisation (Neckoway et al., 2007).

Quinn and Mageo (2013) also reflected on these issues. In their chapter in the book 'Attachment Reconsidered', they suggested that, from an anthropologically informed perspective, the framework is comparable to folk theory. More precisely, the authors exposed attachment theory as a class-culture bound construct and as *'human condition that is regarded as universal and is held, implicitly or explicitly, by most*

¹⁴⁵ As previously discussed in Chapter Seven

group members but it is in fact reflective of experience within the group' (White Western - middle class) (ibid, 2013: 5).

Key scholars sustaining the need for a review of attachment theory (Neckoway et al., 2007; Keller, 2013; Morelly and Herny, 2013; Quinn and Mageo, 2013; Otto and Keller, 2014) shared recommendations to overcome the existing '*culturally parochial approach to understanding normative development'* (Quintana et al, 2006: 1134). Amongst these two points stand out as essentials: the identification of local cultural constructs and the critical unpacking of classic notions within the theory. It is of interest to note that researchers with an anthropological background tend to emphasize the former, whilst scholars attached to the field of psychology sustain the relevance of the latter, with some examples recommending maintaining 'links to the Bowlby/Ainsworth tradition' (Keller, 2013: 187).

In the following sections I will discuss the findings emerging through a process of framework analysis of informants' experiences against key pillars of attachment theory. Framework analysis, a content-focused investigation, has become widely utilised in health and social sciences in recent years, as it permits a certain level of flexibility within a systematic procedure (Gale et al., 2013). The adjustable nature of this process has permitted a cross-examination of the different type of data collected during the fieldwork (Ritchie et al., 2003), creating a richness of data that allows for a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the points presented.

As part of this systematic process, I group the data collected within three categories considered crucial in the construction of attachment. These ‘*key tenets*’ (Morelli and Henry, 2013: 241) are identified as the defining ‘*ideological underpinning*’ of attachment theory, and these are: maternal sensitivity; quality of care and stability of attachment (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991). This process allows for the juxtaposition of culturally specific accounts together with constructs of the traditional formulation of attachment theory. Thus opening opportunities for questioning the framework and reconsidering it under diverse socio-cultural experiences (Quinn and Mageo, 2013). Through this process, my informants’ accounts suggested a concept of maternal sensitivity that takes into consideration cultural specific manifestations of affection and expression of emotions. Similarly, the scrutiny of quality of care is experienced in terms of intent of caring; an act that is predominantly functional as an anti-oppressive practice and as preparation in facing, dealing and overcoming social and racial injustices. Lastly, the consistency and stability of attachment expands beyond the reality of the nuclear family, incorporating other members of the extended kinship and allowing for dynamic, relational connections.

The three tenets, revised

Redefining Maternal Sensitivity

Mama loved us.

Of that my sibling and I had no doubt.

But we also knew she wasn’t

necessarily in love with us ...

(Gault Caviness, 2015b: 91)

The difficulties related to identifying a cross-cultural definition of parental sensitivity (Bowlby) and warmth (Ainsworth) are multiple. As noted by Margaret Mead:

'Biological motherhood is a routine occurrence in the natural world; nursing – the responsible, devoted, conscious care of the young – is cultural and human'

(Mead, 1962: 52)

The accounts collected during the fieldwork and coded against this category, provide a breadth of examples in which a more profound understanding of an act, which could have been superficially deemed as not adhering to the Western/middle-class ideals of parental sensitivity, could in fact reveal a deep level of attentiveness and caring. In Chapter Eight, for example, the unpacking of what could be labelled as *material love* revealed itself to be a *different* way to deal with specific difficulties. Shanice's exuberant dedication to her son's eight birthday party is her way to provide the child with the extra attention she felt needed after his father distancing himself due to the arrival of his new baby. It could be argued that, within its socio-cultural context, Shanice's behaviour falls within the idea of timely and appropriate response to her child's needs, hence bearing a value against the concept of parental sensitivity as presented by Ainsworth (1974). Reflecting on the intended contextual meaning of such gestures enables it to re-appropriate meaning, from vacuous act to

act of love, and be accepted as manifestation of “maternal sensitivity”. It is of interest to reflect on the fact that most tools adopted to explore this category would not allow for such contextualization. An example of such a tool is the Attachment Story Completion Task (ASCT)¹⁴⁶. The ASCT consists of a series of cards depicting everyday life situations relevant to separation/reunion. The child is asked to complete the narrative of the picture presented indicating what will happen next by enacting it through toy dolls (Stievenart et al., 2014). Outside its explanatory context, it is doubtful that ‘throwing a birthday party’ would score highly as a form of parental response to a child’s distress. A recent systematic review of existing tools to conduct observations aimed at assessing parental sensitivity provides an indication of the key elements used in such instruments to determine the quality of parental engagement and presence (Mesman and Emmen, 2013). Unsurprisingly, and in line with Ainsworth’s SPS technique, nonverbal communication, expression of emotions and interaction dominates the list of variables adopted in these studies to investigate and determine parental sensitivity (Ibid, 2013). Aside from been identified as conducive to attachment, specific versions of these behaviours are directly associated with projections of *normal* development of the child.

In the process of framework analysis of the data, I realised that many exchanges I observed and witnessed during my fieldwork, did not have a decent level of thick description and could not have qualified as indicators of parental sensitivity.

¹⁴⁶ This tool was designed by Bretherton and colleagues (1990)

Skimming through my notes, I started identifying moments that were open to a broad variety of interpretations. Gestures, looks, words that, even if contextualized, could have easily lead to misconceived judgments. Coming from a cultural background in which body language and expressivity can be the extent of a considered language (Munari, 2005), I fear the perils associated with superficial and uninformed interpretation of gestures, and other forms of non-verbal communication¹⁴⁷.

Culturally specific features of verbal, and non, exchanges contribute to the incommunicability and the complexity of certain moments and relations, which require tools that are apt to support the development of explanatory models (as per Kleinman's theory discussed previously in this chapter), rather than formulate misinformed judgment. Reading through my fieldwork notes, I frequently encountered situations in which the parent's attitude and gestures, if analysed against a normative idea of maternal sensitivity, would have been marked as low in emotional quality. For example, in my observations at the supermarket, Cantrice

¹⁴⁷ In an influential study comparing the utility of gestures as form of nonverbal communication in different cultures, Graham and Argyle (1975) admonished their audience of the substantial differences between British and Italians with regards to this form of expression. The main discrepancy is based on whether the use of gestures is taught to children: whilst the former would consider it vulgar and rude and therefore not a preferable attribute, the latter rely on gesticulation heavily during conversations and would therefore expect children to understand and use the hand actions daily (ibid, 1975). This difference in the level of social acceptability of the use of gestures is aggravated by differences in other aspects of the communication, such as facial expression, volume, animosity, intonation and directness. These differences influence the type of communication between children and parents daily. An Italian mother calling her children for dinner can easily be described as angry and impatient by a British audience.

would kiss her teeth and glare at Wilma for behaviours that would not appear to be challenging, such as asking her to buy something that was not on the shopping list. On one occasion the mother even ignored the child for a protracted period as if she did not know her, only to then inform her that she intended to continue until Wilma would stop getting everyone to look at them. In the school courtyard, prior to starting the school day, I frequently observed Debara ignoring Calvin's request for one more hug or kiss; behaviour I also noticed in Trisha with Leroy, but not with his baby brother. Another example of an arguable response is Destiny's decision to cut her eldest daughter's hair in her sleep to prevent her from being over-sexualised¹⁴⁸. Through a superficial, possibly decontextualized analysis, this typology of examples of parental conduct could appear cold, insensitive and even cruel¹⁴⁹. A more in-depth understanding would instead offer, not only a more pertinent commentary, but also lead to an insight on the possible emic explanatory models.

For example, a possible interpretation of the aversion to being at the centre of attention and the demand for impeccable behaviour could be seen as linked to the cultural beliefs in maintaining an acceptable public behaviour - the inherited etiquette '*associated with the Victorian parlour*' (McMillan, 2009:138). Most of the insensitive responses I noted throughout my fieldwork displayed an underlying connection between manners, behaviour, and respectability together with the importance of exhibiting these characteristics without being overly visible (Lewis, 2004). Propriety, manners and respect undoubtedly occupied a place of priority for most

¹⁴⁸ As discussed in chapter eight

¹⁴⁹ I once overheard a teacher using this adjective about Abigail's grandma.

parents in my fieldwork. However, culture was not the only reason for this. In a study on the impact of social class on parenting styles, childrearing practices and expectations, Lareau (2002) evidenced that the adoption of directive, intransigent instructions in approaching their children prevailed in working-class parents. The research related this strict disciplinary approach, frequently enforced in conjunction with physical punishment, to a wider philosophy of parenting which was mostly dictated by monetary possibilities and the emphasizing of the idea of ‘accomplishment of natural growth’¹⁵⁰. With limited reference to psychological theories of development, a strong focus on discipline and limited interference in daily activities, the parenting of most of my working-class informants seemed to fit within Lareau’s (2002) description of this approach. Another possible interpretation, with a more direct reference to material goods, could be the recognition that access to certain wealth and resources was an enabler for a partnership between the mother and the infant (Keller 2013). In a critical analysis of the evolutionary nature of parental sensitivity, Keller (2013) specifically indicated economic stress as a key element impacting on the quality and typology of the mother-child interaction. Keller’s work emphasized that only to societies in which *‘material and social resources are plentiful so that families can afford the caregiver-child exclusivity without neglecting other tasks’* (Keller, 2013:180) can be ascribed the type of sensitivity described by Ainsworth.

¹⁵⁰ Lareau (2002) referred to ‘natural growth’ as a situation in which children receive limited external input and are not engaged in additional activities promoting their development (ie: limited access to extra curricula activities), and have limited opportunities to engage in discussion but maintain strong links with extended family.

Culture, class and financial circumstances do not always provide a fully constructed rationale for the observed mechanisms in parent-child interactions. Minor details, in the narratives of the examples in my discussion, indicate the need for further exploration and consideration of all possible variables to develop an informed interpretation of the situation. The inclusion of considerations elicited from thick analysis, secures a place under the 'paternal sensitivity' category regarding three other vignettes presented thus far: Cantrice's exchanges with Wilma in the supermarket; Debara's way of preparing Calvin to her return to work and Destiny's solution to Sherell's behaviour. Through a contextualised, emic explanation of the first account, we are encouraged to remember that the supermarket had been the setting of an uneasy exchange between Cantrice and a cashier¹⁵¹. This situation had severely impacted on Cantrice, who had shared feeling undermined and powerless; particularly as she had not confronted the person at the till, leaving the situation unsolved. Pittman (2011) underlined that passive coping mechanisms, such as Cantrice's avoidance of confrontation, are frequently linked to low self-esteem and difficulties in social interaction. The author emphasised, not only the risks associated with passive anger in terms of psychological wellbeing (ibid, 2011), but also the numerous repercussions on every day interactions and socialisation. A recent longitudinal study focused more specifically on the positive correlation between racial discrimination, its associated stress and less nurturing parenting style¹⁵². It

¹⁵¹ See chapter 9

¹⁵² The study focused particularly on competence-promoting parenting; a style of high incidence in

could, therefore, be argued that Cantrice's attitude towards Wilma was in response to the racial discrimination experienced in the setting and that this represented her attempt to safeguard Wilma from experiencing such discrimination. In a similar manner, the exploration of personal circumstances would help identifying Debara's toughness in the schoolyard as a form of maternal sensitivity. Conversely, from a classic attachment perspective, her behaviours could have been described as indicating limited supportiveness and affection which are both linked to maternal depression (Berlin et al., 2011). In the media, as much as in social care, these behaviours are usually associated to black motherhood, which is frequently demonized and defined by stereotypical figures, such as "tiger mum" and "tough love"; in general, any situation becomes an opportunity to focus only on the negatives (Gammage, 2016). A further exploration and discussion of these behaviours indicated however that Debara's toughness was her way to prepare Calvin for her return to work. After years of staying at home, surviving on benefits and with the help of her sister and her family, Debara was feeling ready to return to employment and was preparing Calvin to be less reliant on her presence. Similarly, Destiny admitted having decided to cut off her daughter's hair extensions after overhearing a comment from another mother from school. Although extreme and humiliating for the girl, in this new light, Destiny's choice appeared as an attempt to protect her daughter from being critiqued and/or mocked, whilst at the same time preparing her for an unforgiving world (Gault Caviness, 2015).

Ultimately, the interpretations presented above provide a meaningful explanation of events only once the various components of the narrative are combined. Through this deeper analysis, behaviours otherwise dismissed as harsh or even pathologised can be categorized as expressions of maternal sensitivity. The necessity to consider the full range of variables contributing to the experience of parenting and to the expression of sensitivity suggest the need to expand the definition of nurturing beyond its cultural boundaries (Mead, 1962), allowing for a conceptualisation of sensitivity that consider intersectional factors. It is, however, important to conduct this analysis not to determined causes behind the deviancy from desired levels of parental sensitivity. In most cases, socio- economic and cultural factors and experiences are explored as possible causes for inadequate levels of parental sensitivity (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2004; Platt, 2007). As an example, the Family Stress Model (Conger et al., 1992) supports the identification of factors preventing an optimal parental-child relation, indicating the risk of abnormal child development. Within this framework, rather than eliciting an understanding of the experiences, the intersectional analysis is conducted to identify culpability and promote correction in the parenting. As suggested by Mesman and Emmen, *'the good news is that insensitive parenting can be changed'* (2013:246).

A deeper analysis of the data, shared by my informants, emphasises the necessity to understand parental experiences and behaviours as adaptive reactions to the broader social context, rather than consequences to individual or multiple issues. Within this perspective mothering, and parenting in general, loses the specificity of

the family centred experience and becomes a necessary act of resistance against the ongoing social violations suffered by specific individuals.

Caring as an act of resistance

*'Some problems we share as women, some we do not.
You [white women] fear your children will grow up
to join the patriarchy and testify against you;
we fear our children will be dragged from a car
and shot down in the street, and
you will turn your backs on the reasons they are dying.'*

(Lorde, 2013:120)

The topic of race and colour surfaced in my conversations with informants in various circumstances. On one occasion, whilst walking home, Destiny and I were sharing stories of difficulties encountered whilst looking for a place to rent in London. Suddenly Destiny interrupted my moaning to exclaim *'Oh shut up, you! You are a whitey, you will survive!'*(Destiny, in conversation walking home, January 2010) and burst into laughter. The hardest part to digest was not been called *whitey*, as I had become used to the nickname in Kingston and somehow¹⁵³ it had followed me back to London, it was in fact recognising my privilege and admitting that Destiny was

¹⁵³ Thank you, Auntie Pam.

correct. The juxtaposition of my informants' accounts of experiences of issues in relation to race as opposed to those of moments of pride reminded me the much higher frequency and the invisibility of the former, as admonished by Lorde:

'For us, increasingly, violence weaves through the daily tissue of our living - in the supermarket, in the classroom, in the elevator, in the clinic and the school yard, from the plumber, the baker, the saleswoman, the bus driver, the bank teller, the waitress who does not serve us'

(Lorde, 2013: 124)

In recounting the time in which her son had been stopped by the police whilst walking home, Pamela emphasised the fact that, whilst for him it was the first time, many children at his school had experienced this sort of treatment before. Pamela identified preparing children for the possible risks they might face in life as a core task for all parents. In her view, for black parents this meant something different, as the main risk for their children is racial discrimination and its impact on their everyday life. Leah described this situation as a *'chicken and the egg sort of story. We are blamed for not doing enough, for not caring in the right way. But we must prioritise this, most parents are struggling with the basic stuff – like getting food on the table- and making sure your child is not taken in by the police is one of those for us'* (Leah, in conversation in her flat, November 2010). An empirical study of the impact of ethnicity and poverty on the formation of secure attachments indicated that financial

stressors are to be understood as stronger predictors for lower capacities for caring (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2004). The issue is located in the way quality of care, as a key tenet of the theoretical framework, is understood and defined.

For Pamela, the best way of caring for her children was ensuring that they were ready to live well in a world in which the police might stop and search you in the street just because of the colour of your skin: *'if your foundation is strong when these challenges come you will be able to withstand'* (Pamela, in conversation December 2011). When asked to elaborate the concept of 'foundation', Pamela explained: *'when I see youngsters out there rioting, it is due to insecurity, lack of values and self-knowledge. Giving a child a solid foundation is giving them roots in their history, values they can rely on and strong examples of who to be'* (Pamela, in conversation December 2011). Millie identified love as the fundamental aspect of caring: *'not the kind of love for which everything is fine, you need boundaries and to be strict. I want him [referring to Dangelo] to know who he is, where he comes from so that he can love himself'* (Millie, in conversation in her house, May 2011). Intergenerational explorations of mothering in African American women participants concurred that dealing with and teaching about racism is a core element of their caring for their children (Fouquier, 2011). Mothers in the study presented as acts of caring a series of strategies: *'they used to teach their children how to survive in a society that devalues their existence'* (Ibid, 2011: 149). The focus on the idea of nurturing shifts from responsiveness and attunement to instilling values, discipline and self-respect.

This difference in priorities and goals of parenting should not be deemed as a devaluing factor in the judgment of the quality of caring.

In this light, William's decision to remove Naomi¹⁵⁴ from an environment he perceived as discriminatory and negatively impacting is an exemplary act of caring. Whilst most of the professionals involved in the case believed his decision posed an indication of his reluctance to engage with services and a form of denial of the child's issues, William described his decision as a reaffirmation of his daughter's value and of his care for her. In conversations, many of my informants would similarly describe the common act of threatening their children to be sent to Jamaica for a period as an act of caring and as an attempt to protect, educate and nurture their children. When Trisha eventually opted for relocating Leroy to Jamaica for a whole summer, she rationalised it as a recognition of his need to reconnect with his roots and experience a different type of environment in which his behaviour would not be labelled as a cause for concern but simply as not acceptable. Leroy's teacher shared her worries about this decision with Trisha, suggesting that spending a summer away from family and friends might have a negative impact on the child as it would be depriving him of stability and continuity that the child needed to improve his behaviour. Trisha, however, did not appear concerned about the teacher's views. She believed that a summer with his Grandma and his cousins would benefit the boy in several ways and Malene supported her views, suggesting this experience would teach him what

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter 9

happens when you mess up, and that a good dose of reality would do him good. Conversely, in a conversation amongst colleagues, the teacher shared, that in her view, Trisha's decision was a selfish act; a way to not having to deal with Leroy's behavioural issues. The divergence between the teacher's and Trisha's way of interpreting her decision stands as an example of how different conceptualizations of parenting affect judgment on the quality of care.

Woldegiorgis (2003) discusses the issues of conflicting views between practitioners and parents in a paper focusing on racism in child welfare provision. The author described the conflictual situation as likely to result in a diminished sense of worth in the child and a loss of self-confidence in parents and, most importantly, as stemming from power imbalances due to institutionalised racism. This was summarized in the fact that *'even when there is a more diverse staff, the decision-making practices are a legacy passed on from European American culture'* (ibid, 2003: 281). Following this thinking, it could be argued that failing to recognise that teaching, opposition and resistance can be a caring act that tend to discredit parental involvement and the quality of care in the eyes of practitioners. Interestingly, whilst parents identified preparing their children to oppose and deal with racial discrimination as cornerstone of their parenting duties, in several studies having to deal with racism, it is indicated as a factor decreasing parental capacity.

A longitudinal study, conducted in the US, showed that perceived discrimination diminishes mothers' capacity to deliver competence-promoting parenting (Brody et

al, 2008). A possible reaction to these results would be to accept them with a sort of relief and as proof that bad parenting in Black mothers is not their own fault but rather the consequence of their life experiences. Aside from being very paternalistic, this interpretation deprives parents of agency and pushes the issue of racism to a secondary position. Additionally, it fails to recognize that 'bad parenting' is measured against biased specifics of 'good parenting'. Whilst racial discrimination bears a great impact on parental strategies and focus, it is very reductive to consider parents "less apt" just because their parenting strategies do not cater for the social requirements and expectations dictated by a specific section of society.

In our conversations, most parents would agree that caring for their children meant doing the best they could to ensure they were safe and growing up to be a good person. This was in accordance to findings shared in Fouquier's (2011) study on African American women. Opposed to parents' positions and experience, if their idea of caring do not match the mainstream conceptualization of it, in the context of attachment theory as defined by several tests and expected behaviours, it is very likely that the quality of their care would be deemed inadequate. Psychology has a long history of interpreting differences in development through a deficit model and, as evidenced by Cole's (2013) historical review of the issue, although this tendency has clearly decreased over the past forty years¹⁵⁵ it cannot be called a matter of the past. Furthermore, and of specific interest for the purposes of the discussion

¹⁵⁵ Length of the period analysed in the historical review

developed thus far, the author evidenced that the use of *'directive language that is said to be the proximal cause of poor children's inadequate development'* has been renowned to be used by middle-class parents in situations of *'even mild stress'* (ibid, 2013:90). This consideration evinces the existence of a bias in relating certain behaviours and attitudes to developmental issues; a bias that perpetuates a situation already described by Cole and Bruner in the seventies: *'in the present social context of the United States, the great power of the middle class has rendered differences into deficits because middle-class behaviour is the yardstick of success'* (Ibid 1971, p. 874). Similarly, in their discussion of the importance of considering culture in the conceptualization of intelligence¹⁵⁶, Sternberg and Grigorenko (2004) connected the shortfalls of developmental psychology to Western hubris. This suggestion reminds us of the importance of remembering that any difference can, and most likely has, being turned into a deficit. For this reason, Bakermans-Kranenburg and colleagues' (2004) admonishment that *'in research on child development the role of culture and ethnicity should not be confused with the influences of poverty'* (ibid, 2004: 430) not only failed to acknowledge the interconnectivity between these two elements, but also failed to recognise the need to refrain from using Western reality as a benchmark for life.

¹⁵⁶ The authors, following the results of tests on practical intelligence in children from a village in Kenya, noted *'middle-class Westerners might find it quite a challenge to thrive or even survive in these contexts or, for that matter, in the contexts of urban ghettos often not distant from their comfortable homes'* (Sternberg and Grigorenko: 2004:374)

Stability or fluidity? Two ways of experiencing family

In attachment theory, the quality and the typology of mothering are accompanied by a third element. This third category, identified as defining the appropriateness of mothering and enabling the formation of the desirable form of attachment, is the stability of the dyad. Due to the increasing recognition and acceptance of alternative family formations, the validity of this element has been questioned. Nevertheless it has maintained a defining role in attachment-inspired frameworks¹⁵⁷. An increasing number of studies have evidenced the necessity to consider family 'nuclei' that not only allow, but require, the presence of others (Kurtz, 1992; Sharma and LeVine, 2003; Lancy, 2008). Gottlieb (2014) completed a study focusing on Beng¹⁵⁸ babies being cared for by an organized network of women: wet and dry nurses and babysitters, with specific roles in looking after the child. In support of the affirmation of mothering, the author noted the likelihood that these various figures are expected to develop a close relationship and some form of attachment with the child. The child's capacity to engage and form relations outside the family is, in this context, considered functional. Stranger anxiety, whilst considered an indication of health in Western children, is perceived as a curse and an obstacle to everyday life by the Beng (ibid, 2014). The most fascinating point of discussion raised by Gottlieb (2014) is the context-specific exploration of the meaning of strangers; the author enquires

¹⁵⁷ Such as the key person approach (Lemos, 2012)

¹⁵⁸ Rainforest, West Africa.

into what constitutes family and that familiar and what falls within the category of stranger.

The difficulty resides in the fact that most these studies have been conducted in non-Western cultures and countries; almost as if to indicate that the “norm” in the Westernised world represents the experiences of nuclear families. Collins’ (1991:45) description of *‘the cult of true womanhood, with its emphasis on motherhood as woman’s highest calling’* might seem outdated nowadays. Nevertheless, statistics indicate a high disproportion in the numbers¹⁵⁹ of women and men working in childcare (Morton, 2015), where women are easily frowned upon for not wanting children¹⁶⁰ (Craig et al., 2014) and the negative impact of maternal employment which is an indication more detrimental to children than paternal (Baker et al., 2010). Considering these observations, Mead’s pondering appears particularly apt:

‘the cultivation of more exclusive and more intense parent-child relationships is not a pre-condition of the kind of character structure which is necessary to maintain and develop our kind of civilization’

(Mead, 1962: 57)

¹⁵⁹ Only 2% of the childcare workforce is male in England (Morton, 2015)

¹⁶⁰ Childlessness amongst educated people is described as a public health concern

Still, scholars are actively attempting to promote a different lens of analysis. Exploring socialization beyond the monotropic dyad, Lewis (2005: 9) indicates that *'there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the infant human child forms simultaneously attachment to older siblings as well as its mother and father and even possibly non-kin caregivers'*. Although accepted, the prospect that the child might develop attachments with members of the family other than the mother seems still to require prolonged stability and for the figure to be a kin member. Both these factors do not translate into the experiences and child rearing arrangements of most of my families. Then again, only three mothers¹⁶¹ out of the cohort in my study were not employed at the time of the fieldwork, meaning that interaction with other-than-mother figures was a necessity and not a choice. The negotiation between family and work responsibilities was a matter that most of the mothers in the study would refer to frequently. Looking back at the history of black motherhood two different stories come to light. Whilst Martinot (2007:80) eloquently reminds us of the painful history of *'control of black childbearing imposed by various forms of white power'*, Landry (2000:82) focuses on the victories of black mothers by dismissing claims that second wave feminism was at the heart of transforming the understanding of family life and composition. In a compelling argument, the author emphasised *'the very existence and growing acceptance of these couples within the black community challenged white society's most cherished beliefs about the family: its hierarchical nature and asymmetrical roles'*. Landry's discussion continued by focusing on what

¹⁶¹ One of whom was actively looking for employment

he defined as the '*three-fold commitment*'. That is, family, employment and the wider community.

The mothers participating in my fieldwork represented different levels and forms of commitment to these three aspects of their lives. In a sort of modernized version of Landry's (2000) idea of women from the nineteenth century, women such as Destiny, Leah, Shanice and Nikkya, to name a few, were preoccupied with balancing family, work, some minor level of community engagement and their personal and social life. As discussed in the previous chapters, it was very common for the younger mothers to rely on additional external support in caring for their children in order to be able to maintain some sort of social engagement. The arrangements, frequently involving three or more families from the child's school, neighbours and relatives, seemed to work well for the mothers. In terms of the children, no one ever complained or demonstrated signs of distress in my presence, although I wondered whether this was related to fear that I would have referred their views to their parents. On one occasion Talicia came to school with a small suitcase filled with clothes as Grandma had to travel to Jamaica and she was expected to relocate with Wilma and her mother. Whilst discussing these arrangements with her friends, Talicia was proclaiming the benefits of the temporary move, recognising that some time apart would have done good to both her and Grandma. In general, most children seemed genuinely satisfied with the shifting and interchangeability of their carers. As Calvin put it, '*it gets boring to always be with mum. I like when I get to spend time with my friends and relatives*' (Calvin, in conversation during an observation in their flat,

January 2011). When Abigail and Jodie were moved outside Grandma's house¹⁶², the fact that they were used to spending days, if not weeks elsewhere helped in normalizing a situation that could have easily been otherwise traumatic. Dangelo's comment also seems to indicate a genuine sense of recognition of the value of having many people to look after him: *'it's like I never have to worry, I have all the love I need, and mum doesn't even have to be at home for it'* (Dangelo, in conversation during an observation in their flat, May 2010). Then again, Dangelo's comment could be read as reticence to attachment, as a consequence of his prior experience with abandonment and separation. In evolutionary terms, it could be argued that this perceived easiness is a form of adaptive trait informed by specific experiences. Once again, however, this interpretation could stem from an attempt to explore difference as a deficit (see discussion above). Verifying whether these sort of childrearing arrangements bear any effect on the development of these children, without risking accepting normative definitions of development and without employing measurements of judgment that favour a specific behaviour is an almost impossible exercise. To further explore the theorization of "fluctuant transitions", I will discuss a case study encountered towards the end of my fieldwork.

¹⁶² During the investigation for the accusation of physical abuse

A case study: Anna's fluctuant attachment

Anna, a lively three-year-old second generation British Jamaican, and her family had been referred to the contact centre as the assigned social worker was looking for a neutral space where the child could meet with her mother, Felicia. Prior to commencing, as with all newly referred families, the child and her parents had to undergo a series of meetings with a family worker to identify needs and potential risks and be assigned to the best suited type of session¹⁶³. Anna attended the first meeting with her father, Romaine; according to the records provided by their social worker, the child had been living with her father for the last year as her mother's condition (Felicia was affected by MS) had deteriorated and was affecting her capacity to look after Anna, even with support. The family was known to social services because during the first two years of the child's life, prior to her moving in with her father, Felicia had received significant support from the Local Authority with caring for the child. Upon closing the child's case, as Anna moved to live with the father, the social worker recommended for regular contact to be maintained between the mother and the child. However, during the one-year review process the allocated worker had realised that contact with the mother had almost completely ceased. Anna would talk to Felicia on the phone, but contact in person had only happened on one occasion during the Christmas holidays. The social worker worried about the possible repercussions of these changes to Anna's wellbeing and therefore

¹⁶³ The centre was offering three types of session: supervised (session observed and recorded- mostly for judicial proceedings); supported (for parents with specific needs or as transition after supervised cycles) and unsupervised contact (which would also happen in group settings).

requested for a psychological assessment and for supervised contact to be arranged.

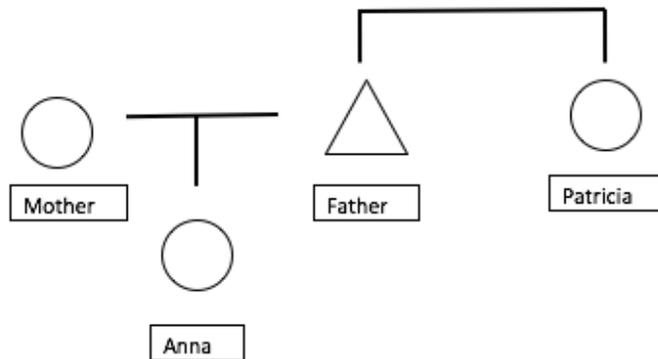


Figure 10: Anna's Family (attachment version)

At the first interview at the centre, Anna appeared shy, unwilling to let go of her father's trousers and with limited verbal capacity. The combination of these observed features alongside Romaine's unwillingness to engage in the process leading to Felicia seeing Anna on a weekly basis convinced all the professionals involved of necessity to collate further information about the situation of the child. By the end of this first meeting, the notes I collected on Anna read *'nonverbal? Insecure, incapable of leaving father and unwilling to engage in social exchange with play worker. Trauma? Evident lack of interest in surroundings* (my notes on Anna's case). The other practitioners involved agreed that Anna evidenced signs of a disrupted attachment as it was clear she had suffered from the abrupt separation for her mother, and there was concern for the child's development. The information

concerning Anna's family was placing the child in a sort of broken family picture composed solely by her mother and father.

Romaine was asked to return for a second interview. However, on the day of the meeting Anna arrived accompanied by her paternal aunt and her cousin Georgia. Patricia, the aunt, shared that Anna's father had been called into work and reassured the family worker that she could answer any questions regarding Anna and her care. Aunt Patricia had been helping her brother looking after Anna for the last year, after he had taken full responsibility for the custody of the child. From the moment she was greeted at the door, Anna seemed a different child. After walking into the building smiling and greeting everyone, she followed Ma' Pat, as she referred to her aunt, into the observation room and, having received permission to do so, she started playing with Georgia with the toys available in the room. As the sessions continued, Anna started opening up and engaging with both the environment and the practitioners. Most importantly as the observations continued, the team started gathering further details about Anna's family system, which contained not only her mother and father, but also the paternal aunt, Patricia, and her teenage daughter, Georgia. Moreover, Anna attended a play group regularly either with a friend of Patricia or her father's new partner and every Sunday she would spend the day in the local church.

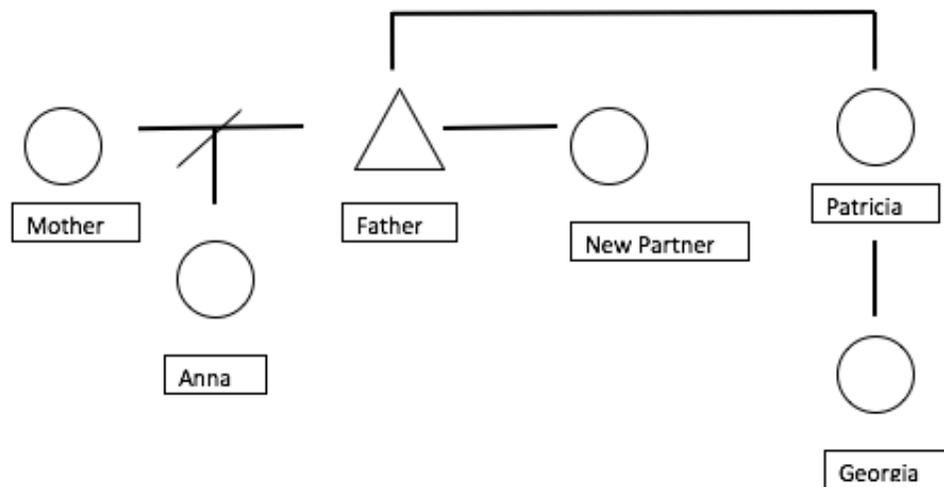


Figure 11: Anna's Family (extended)

Anna seemed undisturbed by the limited contact with her biological mother. She started calling Auntie Patricia “Ma Patricia” and her father’s new partner “Ma’ Mary”. Anna’s living arrangements and daily routines placed her “living” across four households¹⁶⁴, each hosting figures of importance in Anna’s universe, as depicted in the picture below.

¹⁶⁴ Her father’s house, Aunt Patricia’s, Mary’s house and the house where she attended playgroups

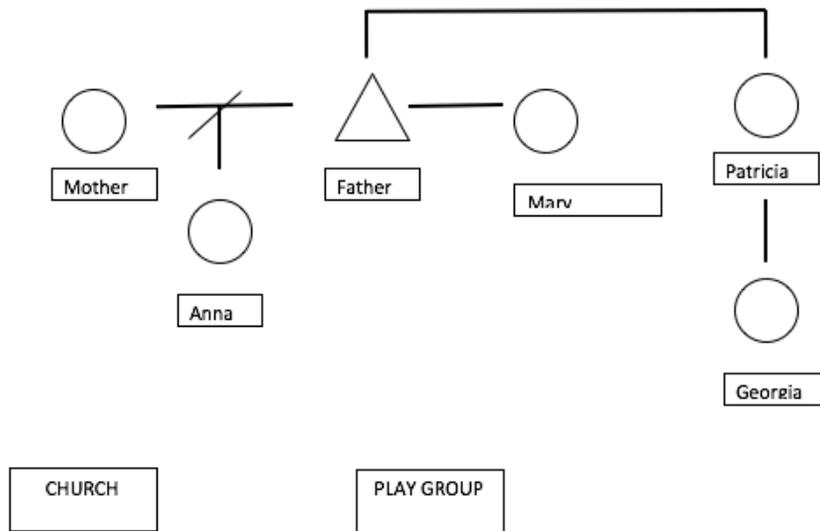


Figure 12: Anna's Family (socialisation)

Contacting her mother, Felicia, proved to be a difficult task: she was frequently busy due to medical appointments and unavailable to visit the centre due to difficulties with accessing transport. Eventually we discussed the situation on the phone. At first very apologetic, she quickly switched to a defensive mode insisting she had done all she could to look after Anna and that the current situation was not proof that she was a bad mother. Anna appeared content but the concerns with regards to her disrupted attachment with the mother continued nevertheless. The practitioner's focus shifted from the possible outcome of the limited contact between mother and daughter, to exploring the cause of Anna's limited interest in seeing her mother. After a session at the Centre¹⁶⁵, a colleague sought Aunt Patricia's views on Anna's circumstances, to which the woman replied,

¹⁶⁵ Anna was referred for play therapy and regular observations to track her progress

*'Anna only gets upset when she is here,
because you keep telling her she ought to be'*

The preoccupation of the practitioners involved with regards to the necessity for Anna's mother to be involved, in order to prevent causing any harm to the child's development, ironically became the factor most disturbing Anna's life.

Fluctuant Attachments

The discussion presented thus far reflects the complexity of a broader argument on the role of culture within the realm of psychology, and psychotherapy alike. A core argument offered against psychological frameworks, such as attachment theory, is that the standards and the tools developed to make sense of, and to test, these theoretical approaches are not applicable *'in other parts of the world, especially in non-industrialised groups such as peasants and hunter-gatherers'* (Quinn and Mageo, 2013: 37). Although bearing elements of opportunities for differential thinking, this argument seems to grant the right to cultural specificity solely to evident otherness. As observed in other disciplines, such as women's studies (Collins, 1990), the prevalence of White Western middle-class constructs and beliefs in child development theories hinders both the capacity for and the openness to alternative and differential frameworks (Zornado, 2001; Quintana et al., 2006), leaving ethnic and cultural minorities' experiences unrepresented. The *'Special Issue on Race, Ethnicity, and Culture in Child Development'*, published by the American Society for Research in Child Development (2006), provides an opportunity for

reflection on this very problem. This volume contains two articles focusing on Latino parenting: a literature review on parental control (Halgunseth et al., 2006) and a research on parent-infant socialization (Cabrera et al., 2006). In the former paper (Halgunseth et al., 2006), the authors share their concerns at the lack of critical reflection on the limitations of cross-cultural assessment relying solely on Western schemata. Research practice adopted in the latter article (Cabrera et al, 2006). Halgunseth et al (2006) advices their readers of the importance of focussing future work on explorations of *'within-group research'* with the intention of avoiding *'the risk of ignoring predictors that are important in one group but not in another, and in assuming equivalence across ethnic groups in parenting indicators'* (Ibid, 2006: 1294). A cultural specific research would nevertheless still present risks of pathologisation and limiting understandings of ethnic specific realities. Specifically, two risks have been identified in the development of a culture-specific theorization; both associated with intrinsic stigma in the conceptualization of otherness, particularly through race. Firstly, there is a strong possibility of falling back onto a default position of pathologisation, as local concepts could be relegated to minor aspects, whilst major theorization processes would still rely on existing Western ideas (Serpell and Marfo, 2014). Secondly there is the risk of developing intrinsic explanations (i.e.: developmental and psychological processes) for extrinsic issues, such as injustices and inequalities. Martinot (2007) refers to this process as the policing and stigmatizing of black(ness):

Black people are criminalized through their blackness for the purposes of decriminalizing and valorising not only the state's abrogation of responsibility to them as citizen but also its imposition of dehumanizing conditions upon them

(Martinot, 2007:81)

In a witty article in the New York Times, the journalist Gault Cavissen (2015), an author of a parenting advice book based on personal experience but aimed at mocking parenting experts, unapologetically compares white and black motherhood, ultimately suggesting that the latter have mastered motherhood more efficiently and for longer. Whilst condemning modern motherhood as a *'hot mess of guilt, confusion and hard labour'* (Ibid, 2015), a performance she also defines as *'white mommy mania cult'*, Gault Cavissen glorifies black motherhood, particularly from the past, for being effective and allowing a family-work balance. Although romanticized and personal, this account echoes in many ways the narratives shared by my informants, particularly with regards to the reflections of their experiences of being mothered and mothering. As in the accounts presented in this chapter, the author reminisces her mother's intense glare and shares the realization that harshness does not necessarily correspond to lack of love. Additionally, she (2015) discusses the centrality of the role of the many aunts who contributed to her upbringing and draws parallels to the difficulties experienced in a world in which mothers are expected to function independently. Although far from perfect and

limited in criticality and reflection¹⁶⁶, both her article and her book are an interesting and quite unique example of an alternative approach to mothering; an approach not too dissimilar to the experiences shared by several participants in my fieldwork. The process of framework analysis completed thus far, points towards the necessity for such alternative approaches to not only be recognised but accepted outside a framework of dismissal and negativity.

In an attempt to argue against the adoption of the deficit model and the suggestion that deviance from norm is negative, Cole (2013: 91) celebrates the importance of diversity by stating '*differences among human beings are essential to human life in the same way that biodiversity is essential to life on earth more generally*'. In a similar way, rather than focusing on what might be lacking, the idea of fluctuant attachments stresses the importance of the elements of positivity and reliance that are evident in the narratives of the families in this study.

The first point to notice in the conceptualization of this alternative form of attachment is that is plural, with the aim to indicate the infinite variations that can and will occur in each separate case. This is partly to avoid restrictive generalisations of experiences that are, in fact, determined by a wide range of factors, but mostly importantly to recognise the multitude of bonds that converge in shaping oneself

¹⁶⁶ Philyaw, D. (2015, May 12) What else black mums know: How to parent beyond racial stereotypes *The Washington Post* retrieved from www.washingtonpost.com

during a lifetime. This model follows Field's recommendation that 'a *parsimonious model of attachment would need to accommodate multiple attachments to a variety of figures at different stages of life*' (1996: 545). So, whilst in traditional formulations of attachment, a special bond is identified as the preferred and most influential in the child's life (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991), in the theorization of fluctuant attachments multiple bonds in different life periods contribute. Significantly, the concession for multiple bonds is not a novelty in the field. As example, in a special issue of *New Directions for Child Development* from the early nineties (Pianta, 1992), a few authors raised questions about the existence and importance of teacher-child affections alongside the maternal bond. Although the maternal bond is identified as more influential than the one with teachers (Pianta et al., 1997), the latter is still recognised as being of significance in relation to children's adjustment outcomes and experiences of learning (Verschueren and Koomen, 2012). Whilst the recognition of the possibility for other connections to develop and be influential has mainly lead to the establishment of practices that replicate bonding experiences as defined in attachment theory¹⁶⁷, it has also opened the possibility of discussing the idea of ad hoc attachment (ibid, 2012) which is a fundamental concept in the conceptualisation of fluctuant attachment. The idea of ad hoc attachment supports the recognition that a wider range of figures interacting with the child, beyond the dyad, can form a bond with the child (Water and Cummings, 2000). In existing formulations of attachment theory, the incorporation of these additional figures has been described (Bretherton,

¹⁶⁷ As the key person approach (Ofsted, 2009) (Lemos, 2012)

1985) through three possible alternative models of composition: hierarchical; integrative and independent organization of attachment. In the first form, the dyad remains at the core of the relation, with the primary caregiver maintaining a position of primacy, and other carers contributing as additional sources of safety and affection. The exclusivity of the dyad bears a different weight in the other two models. In the integrative construction, which emphasises the joint effort and contribution of all the figures of attachment around the child, all the contributing representations are grouped in a sort of “super” dyad (ibid, 1985), whereas, in the independent form, each attachment relationship has a specific function in supporting the child’s development (Howes, 1999). The formulation of fluctuant attachments allows instead for these different modes of configuration to interact and merge in a sort of continuum, recognising the possibility for overlapping, coexisting and mutating depending to the circumstances. Returning to Anna’s case study as example, the organization of the various attachment figures at play encompassed all three categories suggested by Bretherton (1985). During the weekly encounters and observations, Anna exhibited the capacity, not only to develop bonds with the various characters at play, but also to transfer and switch attachment related functions across them. When on their own, Anna would rely on her father for comforting presence and care. This function appeared to easily shift onto Ma’Pam or Georgia and, once at ease with the context, even with workers at the centre. In Anna’s case this capacity appeared to be disturbed and impacted by the introduction of an element threatening her living arrangements; the visits at the

centre, rather than by having limited contact with her mother¹⁶⁸. Anna's anxiety seemed to derive, in fact from, fearing a separation from a routine made of many attachment figures, rather than from maternal deprivation.

In my fieldwork, I observed many children seemingly uninterested and unaffected by separation from the mother/prime caregiver, whilst also exhibiting a resilient capacity for interchangeable affections. To name a few: Dante; Shantel; Wilma and her cousin. Interestingly, these children, still at a young age, if not from birth, had all experienced a sort of child shifting¹⁶⁹ and referred to a wide number of households as "home". The internalised working model of attachment (discussed in Ainsworth, 1990) in these children seemed therefore not to be deriving from their dyadic relation but to be constructed through a process of internalisation of the constellation of attachment relationships present in the child's life.

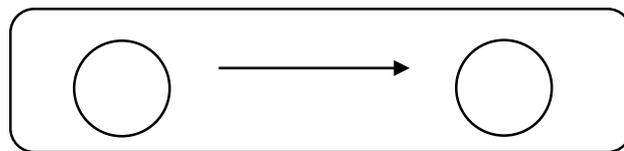


Figure 13: Internalised working model in dyadic attachment

¹⁶⁸ in a session, Anna discussed how she had worried that the visits at the centre meant she was in trouble and had to leave the new home.

¹⁶⁹ see chapter 4

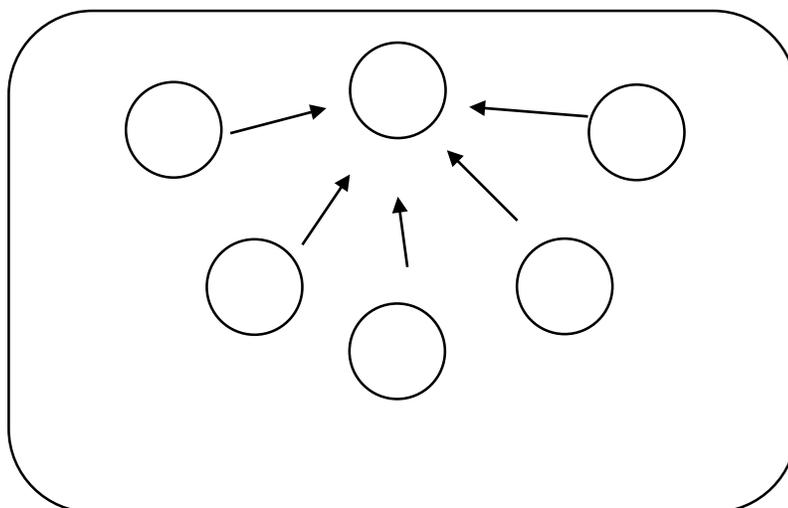


Figure 14: Internalised working model in fluctuant attachment

In this theorisation of family dynamics and relationships, the dyad is replaced by formations that could be explained through Minuchin's (1974) concept of family structures as organised patterns of interactions between the various members. Systemic family therapy offers numerous elements to support the development of relationship models alternative to that of attachment. Another example of this contribution, building a case in favour of moving beyond the centrality of a primary carer, comes from Bowen's belief (1978) in the importance of triangulation in relationships. In his theoretical standpoint, which places the formation of the self outside of the overly simplistic dyadic nucleus, Bowen explores the possibility of meaning in interactions beyond the mother-child bond. *'I believe attention went to the mother-patient relationship because the larger view was obscured by fixed individual thinking (...) an extension of individual theory'* (ibid, 1978: 106). It is on the grounds of a different approach to understanding the self that the mother-child centrality is replaced by an enlarged focus on the various figures participating:

'the sense of separateness and individuation occurs through participation through different family subsystems in different family contexts, as well as through participation in extrafamilial groups'

(Minuchin, 1974:48)

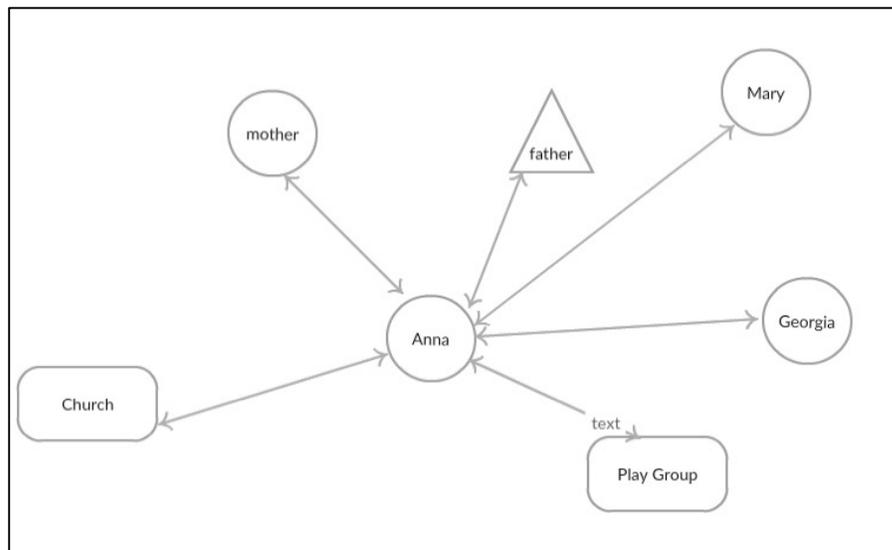


Figure 15: Anna's Family System

The recognition of the importance of systems within the family network addresses the issues raised with regards to the idea of the need for stability in attachment which is one of the three tenets discussed earlier in this chapter as underpinning classic versions of the theory (Morelli and Henry, 2003). This new understanding attributes value to and confirms the validity of the organised systems of care and supervision encountered in the families in my fieldwork. In the new theorisation of fluctuant

attachments, this significant shift in terms of influential roles, from dyad to systems, not only eliminates the preoccupation with the need for stability, but also opens the possibility to reconsider under a new light the other two tenets; quality of care and sensitivity. As the mother – primary caregiver is no longer charged with the sole necessity to respond to the child, the responsibility of quality of relations is shared amongst members of the systems.

Interestingly, this allows for a certain level of contextualisation of the response. That is, affection within the system as advocated in numerous publications exploring bonds in complex situations (e.g.: affection in cases of domestic violence, as seen in Buchanan, 2013). It is important to note that the flexibility in understanding and making sense of the quality of relations is not to be understood as a possible source of laissez faire approaches to behaviours and attitudes towards children. Conversely, the opportunity to reflect on a behaviour within the context in which it is embedded offers the possibility for identifying the causes of this behaviour and tackle them in a more effective manner, securing higher standards of care and relation for children.

'This recognition of the complexity of the conditions within which an infant grows, or a given adult-child relationship exists, can be used as a corrective to the present tendency to over-attribute certain consequences to single causes or sequences of events.'

(Margaret Mead, 1962: 46)

Part III

Trapped in the dyad,

theorising beyond attachment

Chapter 11: An Epitaph for attachment theory

Whilst the initial focus of the research was to investigate the possibility for an emic formulation and understanding of attachment in the studied population, the data collected led to a process of de-construction (Burman, 2008) of the conceptualization of the theory itself. This chapter delineates the three stages of this process performed through the application of three discipline-specific critical lenses: anthropological studies; feminist studies and children's rights approach.

Trapped in a white wor(l)d

The first level of deconstruction is guided by the investigation on the validity of the theoretical framework 'dyad-attachment' outside its *culture* of origin¹⁷⁰. As presented in chapter 5, when I asked children to describe or draw their families, the *conventional* representation of a nuclear family¹⁷¹ was rarely encountered. The children provided a variety of illustrations, ranging from lone-parent families to complex systems resembling a close-knit community or village. Godparents, cousins, neighbours and remote siblings (and dogs!¹⁷²) would frequently appear or

¹⁷⁰ This critical lens derives from investigations conducted in the field of Intercultural Therapy through research questions such as '*can white psychiatry look at psychological adaptation without the bias and ethnocentrism implied in its own cultural standpoint?*' (Littlewood and Lipsedge, 2005:156).

¹⁷¹ This term refers to a *theoretical* function of the concept 'family', in the tradition of the Structural-Functionalist school (see Parson, 1943). It is of relevance to note that, in more recent explorations of the term, the nuclear family has been theorised as composed of dyads: the '*smallest "nuclear" family would consist of three dyads: one spousal dyad, one mother child dyad, and one father-child dyad.*' (Trost, 2013:81)

¹⁷² See drawings in chapter 4

receive a mention as important members of the *family*. As also noted by Chamberlain (2004), in her study on Caribbean kinship, composition is not the only *deviation* from the mainstream concept of family. Presence, roles and constancy would also differ: *'the intensity and nature of the involvement may fluctuate according to the life cycle of the individual or the family'* (Ibid, 2004: 76). Although the variability in family patterns is no longer criticized as harshly as in Fitzherbert's (1967) controversial investigation of West Indian children in London, instability is still identified by a large portion of practitioners as the main cause of the issues and difficulties affecting Caribbean children.

'There is a lack of stability. [...] I have seen eight-year-old looking after a two-year-old, he had to cook and pick up the youngest children as the mum is working. Sometimes schools allow children to go home on their own. An eight-year-old should be playing not looking after their siblings; they are pushed to be adults at such a young age that then they find themselves playing another adult game when they are too young and they end up having children of their own. And I think that is since they are looking for a stability and relationship they never had with their parents. I am not a psychologist but it's not hard to see.'

(i1)

A growing number of anthropological studies provide evidence in support of the cultural relativity of the conceptualisations of the specificity of the unique mother-child dyad (Hrdy, 2009; Rogoff *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, anthropological research has demonstrated the need to acknowledge cultural differences in the the identification of the behaviours and features defining sensitive¹⁷³ mothering (Rogoff *et al.*, 2013). Finally, ethnographic work with societies evidently not relying on the mother-child dyad has promoted the relevance of consideration of the wider social context as a factor impacting on child development and family dynamics (LeVine, 2014). This shift in focus allows for relevant external factors to be taken into consideration when exploring the family dynamics. Buchanan (2013) exposes, for example, the issues associated with focusing only on the dyad when working with mothers who are victims of domestic violence, due to risks related to the lack of consideration of the broader context. Buchanan's comment on the need to consider external factors should subsist in relation to any other form of societal violence to which the family might be exposed, be it poverty, racism, social exclusion and so on.

The *sanctification* of the dyad and the reliance on its powers, however, still stands tall in many ways, minimizing the impact of the wide range of other factors affecting and shaping children and parents alike. Nevertheless, the anthropological lens

¹⁷³ LeVine (2014) refers to the formulation of maternal sensitivity introduced by Ainsworth in presenting the findings from her study in Uganda. The terminology had been previously adopted to describe the care of institutionalized children in France (see Bretherton, 2013). In her observations of the interaction between infant and mothers, Ainsworth stressed particularly the importance of maternal responsiveness to the child's communication; a performative act (Butler, 1988) identified to be at the heart of the expression of *maternal sensitivity* (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1971).

constitutes a first step in deconstructing the dyad as it loosens its restrictions by raising the awareness of the role of “allomothering” and of socio-cultural factors.

Trapped in a man’s wor(l)d

Although emphasizing the importance of “allomothers”, the studies referenced with regards to the anthropological lens still position the mother as having a unique connection and social responsibility towards her children (Meehan, 2014; Rogoff *et al.*, 2013). Feminist commentaries have principally criticized two aspects of attachment theory: on one side the normalization of a romanticized idea of womanhood, in which women can only be realized through motherhood (Oyewumi, 2000); and on the other the pathologisation of women not performing as per society’s requirements (Birns, 1999). Interestingly, in discussing their experiences with Caribbean mothers, practitioners would mainly have two stereotypes to which they would refer: on one hand the perfect mother - a superwoman holding the family together and providing for her children; and on the other the terrible mother, too self-absorbed or not functionally placed in society to be capable to care for her child.

‘(talking about a mother from the school) a woman with immense background, mother of four and hard worker. She can do it all and she won’t be behind any of this rubbish; she will have the kids on track and she will tell other parents to do their job as parents.’ (i6)

'I had a mother with a child with mild learning disabilities and instead of providing him with the love and support, she would just try to pass him around between the extended family.' (i7)

As explained by bell hooks (2000), during the early stages of feminist theorization as a reaction to the dichotomy of good/bad mother and in an attempt to liberate women from the flat, constricted role of mothers, theorists would frequently push towards a complete distancing of women from the family and, most importantly, from children. In the seminal work 'The dialectic of sex', Firestone emphasizes how *'the heart of woman's oppression is her child-bearing and child-rearing role'* (Ibid, 2015: 65). Whilst bell hooks (2000) emphasizes the diverse wish for liberation from the idea of family in different classes and cultural background and the necessity for women to be lifted from having the sole responsibility for children, their future and wellbeing seems to perforate/cut through class, race and culture. The emphasis on the importance of the dyad has left mothers to be blamed for all the evils of society (Vandelbeld Giles, 2012) and with children inevitably trapped in a cycle of failure from which they cannot recover¹⁷⁴ (Allen and Taylor, 2012). The creation of space between "woman" and "child" as society members creates opportunities for both to be present and discussed differently, both within their relationship and outside it.

¹⁷⁴ Allen and Taylor (2012) introduce the concept of the 'cycle of failure' in relation to a specific example of mother-daughter imprisonment during the 2011 London Riots

Feminist attempts to “free” women of societal constrictions of motherhood and this could, therefore, be adopted as a baseline to empower children by their becoming part of the discourse. Cassidy (2006) for example questions the very idea of parenting as an innate capacity/set of skills. In a controversial paper exploring whether people should renounce parenting, Cassidy (2006) places children on the same level of conversation as mothers/parents, opening opportunities to discuss how to enable children to actively be part of a non-oppressive network¹⁷⁵. Cockburn (2005) pushes through the boundaries of family conventions by formulating a relation based on an ethic of reciprocal and horizontal care, which alludes to the uniqueness and isolation of the dyad. This concept, is pushed even further by bell hooks (2000) who advocates for a form of community based parenting aimed at freeing children from the role of ‘love-objects’ (Ibid, 200:146) and reinstating them as members of the community.

The feminist lens is therefore fundamental in informing two aspects of the deconstruction of attachment theory. On one side, the liberation of women from the tyranny of motherhood reconfirms the importance of taking into consideration a broad number of factors and agents with regards to the wellbeing and welfare of the child. On the other, the elimination of the inevitability of the impact of motherhood on children allows for what Birns defines as ‘*the plasticity of behavior (...) the basis*

- The author argues that adults who are unskilled or unwilling to parent should not parent and should instead consider the right of the child to certain standards of interactions. By advocating for a parenting that is a ‘true vocation’ (49), it could be argued that Cassidy (2006) liberates both parents and children from oppressive relations.

of our hope and work to create a more equitable and safer world' (1999: 20). The level of liberation sought for women is however not permitted to children, whose role within feminist theory is mostly that of burden and constitutes barriers to the realization of the woman.

Trapped in an adult's wor(l)d

"Today Millie (64y.o.) compared my being here with the migratory movements of West Indians. I was asking her views on the difficulties experienced by children and she told me to think of my experience. I must have looked annoyed because she laughed louder than usual. She asked what differentiates me from them- 'I am an adult'- she smirked and offered me some milk."

(My fieldwork notes, June 2011)

The critical analysis completed thus far through the lenses provided by anthropologically informed perspectives and feminist studies, has introduced how critiques raised with regards to cultural relativeness and gender bias have been crucial in promoting a refinement of attachment theory. Nevertheless, a streamlined version of the classic attachment theory has remained a core point of reference for most practitioners in the field. A thematic analysis of the language used by practitioners and carers in discussing matters related to children during the

fieldwork, highlights an interesting pattern, which might be of help in understanding this apparent incapacity to move forward from the concept of attachment. On one side, practitioners referred to the importance of children's needs: the need of being loved; of being looked after properly; of receiving stimuli' of being focused on their future and being mindful of it.

'When children have confidence and that security around them, people can see they can be trusted. Unfortunately, those youngsters who were involved in those situations [riots] did not have that, and in those circumstances, it is difficult to make the right choices. they don't have something to look back at or to look forward to' (i4)

On the other hand, parents emphasised the difficulties attached to getting children to understand what was best for them and behave properly.

'I had to do it for her own interest, this is something she will not forget and it will help her stay on the right track. I don't want her to end up pregnant and drop off school and this will make her understand I am not joking.'

(Destiny, in conversation June 2011¹⁷⁶)

¹⁷⁶ Destiny discussing the incident with Sherell' hair. See Chapter Eight for a full narration of this event

The underlying connection between these two stances is in the conceptualisation of childhood within attachment theory and society at large, and it is this very element that poses a threat to the possibility of furthering the deconstruction of this framework. The image of children portrayed in attachment theory clashes with a number of theoretical advancements within the field of childhood studies. Firstly, it undermines the recognition of childhood as a social construct that cannot exist in an abstract vacuum (Prout and James, 1997; McDowall Clark, 2016). In doing so, it also denies the existence of power relations within the Western model of the nuclear family unit, a social element that has been indicated as perpetuating inequalities and disadvantages against women and children alike (Coppock, 2014). Lastly, these underlying beliefs concerning need and best interest, could be associated with the perpetuation of regimes of truth (Foucault, 1988) that inform the primary role of parents/carers in children's socialisation and emotional wellbeing¹⁷⁷ (McDowall Clark, 2016).

To understand the full extent of these theoretical issues, it is helpful to consider LeVine's (2014) historical contextualisation of the development of attachment theory. In tracing the origins of attachment, the author indicates two problematic circumstances that were addressed by postulating the need for mothers to actively engage and commit to the care of their children: the return of women to a more household based existence and the improvement of children's standards of living

¹⁷⁷ Identified in practices such as the Key Person approach in the Early Years and discourses in support of the need for 'quality time' and extended parental leave (McDowall Clark, 2016).

(LeVine, 2014; McDowall Clark 2016). These goals were strictly related to specific historical circumstances and to a post-war shift towards a more romanticised vision of childhood, portraying children as creatures in need, subdued and dependent on the care of adults (Ibid, 2014). The newly acquired role of children in society was that of future citizens; a new form of investment on which society had to capitalise after the disastrous conflicts (Bard, 2008; Taylor, 2012). Additionally, researchers (Roopnarine and Carter, 1992; Plaza, 2000) emphasise the adoption of conservative white middle-class nuclear family stereotype as the baseline indicator for *normal*, with the unspoken intent to uplift the masses to the standards of the leading section of society, placing any different experiences of childhood in the realm of pathological.

These insights give credit to Kagan's (2004) indication that the context, tools and inferences adopted to conceive a theory will be reflected in it. Kagan writes: '*each experimental procedure or method of analysis influences the conceptualisation of the phenomena each produces*' (Ibid, 2004:292). The admission of the self-fulfilling origin of the theory should suffice as the rationale for its deconstruction. The encouragement would be to "*treat such frameworks as offering helpful reminders that the platform from which we speak is no more than a ramshackle structure built from the lives of those we claim to speak about, or (sometimes) for*' (Burman, 1997:148). Nevertheless, unveiling the self-fulfilling nature of the process that lead to the development of attachment theory would not suffice as argument against its use. The relevance of attachment would in fact still be supported by the widespread

belief in the concept of children being in a status of *need* (Woodhead, 1997); the heart of the ethics of care towards children (Cockburn, 2005).

The 'liberationist movement'¹⁷⁸ for children has built upon the ideas of children's rights, holding the UNCRC as pillar (Davey and Lundy, 2011), in an attempt to overcome issues related to resistance created by the regime of truth (Foucault, 1988) concerning '*need*' (Wyness, 2016). For example, Holt (1975) has disputed this commodification of children by challenging the ideas of *help* and *care* as pillars of the parent-child interaction. The sanctification of biological motherhood has also been questioned in the attempt to unveil discourses of ownership in relation to children (Archard, 1990) and promote concepts of community parenting and shared social responsibility (bell hooks, 2000). Children's participation in decision-making processes, whether related to health matters, such as with certain medical procedures (Alderson, 1993), or to the political sphere (Wyness et al., 2004) has been explored and supported by advancements in theorizing children as agentic beings. Children's participation and agency have been used as a basis to secure the development of ethical practices and a impetus to engage children as protagonists within research (Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Oswell, 2013).

These advancements support my suggestion for theories based on the grounds of children being in need, being innocent, incomplete and at/posing risk to be

¹⁷⁸ Childhood studies in its various forms and ramifications.

reconsidered and amended in light of the recognition and legitimation of children's knowledge, agency and rights (Cantwell, 2011; Archard, 1993). Protection can no longer be accepted as an argument to preclude the possibility for the critical review of existing theories and practices, and can no longer prevail in the children's rights agenda at large (Holt, 1975; Burman, 2008; Wyness, 2015). The development of critical pathways to promote the meaningful advancement of children's rights requires a shift in the way we think of and about childhood.

Feminism campaigned for recognition in society and for emancipation from patriarchal views on motherhood for women. Similarly, children's studies as a discipline should aim at liberating children from the status of non-individual beings subordinate to adults. Conversely, children's role within attachment theory is still that of the inactive agent; a "tabula rasa", absorbing and being moulded permanently by the actions of the adult agent¹⁷⁹. This lack of space and capacity for children's agency and participation in the theorising of their own lives could, and should, be argued as an infringement of their rights. Moreover, this exercise of disempowerment appears arbitrary and unjustifiably paternalistic (Divers, 2013). Recognition of children as agentic being and their meaningful and ethical participation in theoretical formulations are steps towards creating capacity for

¹⁷⁹Smith (2010) and Person et al (2014) refer to Bersky's suggestion that children's responsiveness and behaviour should be considered as an element influencing the quality of attachment, promoting children to a more participant role. This modification to the theory would, however, still leave children in a position of subordination in the dyad.

children to be considered as social actors, rather than passive agents. Existing frameworks leave limited, if any, space for children's views and ideas in the theorisation of their lives:

*Abigail told me she did not have a preference; she was happy to live with either mum (grandma) or mummy. She even asked if she could live with me, I could be her mum, if her (younger) sister could come too. I asked her if she would not mind being separated from her mum or grandma and she replied, 'Should I?' and then quickly added 'Could I live with Calvin and auntie [Debara]?' I was trying to understand whether this behaviour could *or would* be interpreted as an indication of insecure attachment, but she genuinely seemed sincere and fine.*

(My fieldwork notes, December 2011)

Abigail's unexpected declaration of flexibility does not fit within the expected, acceptable schemata of child-parent relations. Just like Abigail's, children's views, voices and agency are often left outside matters informed by attachment theory. More generally, children have been and are excluded from the formulation of frameworks theorising and defining their lives.

Conceptualizing childhood outside the dyad

*"The relation between parent and offspring,
like that between husband and wife,
ought to be freely willed"*

(Beauvoir 1993:549)

Along with most of the existing psychological theories on child development and parenting, attachment theory is based on a deficit model; an act of epistemic violence in which children are passive recipients in need of support and irreversibly forged by this one vertical exchange on which they have no control. Buchanan emphasises the unbalanced nature of the interaction by stressing *'it is disempowering to perceive ones' destiny as compromised by an early relationship deemed as deficit'* (2013: 26).

The unravelling of attachment theory presented thus far has highlighted how the conceptualisation of the dyad as power relation is an effective tool to remove its members from the wider context of society, and trap them in a condition of co-dependency, pre-fixed performativity and likely pathologisation. On one hand, attachment theory, as with other psychological concepts, encourages dynamics in which *'responsibilities become obligations that parents have to children which limit the ways in which they can socialize, nurture and care for them'* (Wyness, 2015: 210). On the other hand, the biological reductionism, which informs most theories (Prout, 2005), maintains a deterministic and future-only focused experience of childhood

happening within a vacuum and apart from society. The emphasis on a circumscribed, dyadic or non experience of relations, in which the child/self is solely a recipient, reinforces the idea that *'the baby is an interactive project not a self powered one'* (Gerhardt, 2004:18).

The development of the “natural self” as confined within a specific period of time as a set of interactions and a process of one –way influencing, invests “adults” with the power to determine, shape and dismiss children as recipients of development. The mono-directionality of this exchange can be defeated with the conceptualisation of the self as being the result of interactions and as part of a process that requires the presence of both the self and the other (Mead, 1956). In Mead’s vision, *selves* are subjected to reciprocal influences, both prior to, during and after the interaction. In preparing the interaction the self considers and plans its actions. Mead refers to these as *'gestures'* (ibid, 1956) engaging, therefore, in a conversation with itself, which leads to the shaping of the self per se. The importance of recognising the role of self in its own shaping is essential as failure to do so would result in the formulation of *'obvious absurdities'*(Mead, 2013:124). Mead’s vision of the social self recognises in children the possibility to be active¹⁸⁰ in the shaping of their selves. The possibility of self-reliance, regardless of age, licenses the child-self to have agency, as also suggested in Wyness (2014), through the interpretation of age as a category along with gender and race. Moreover, stretching the development of the self beyond a

- See Mead’s discussion on the possibility to conceive of a solitary self

specific period, forces the recognition that a broad number of factors must be at play in this mechanism and that the self is unlikely to remain constant throughout the years (Rutter, 1981). Moving away from this conceptualisation of the self as one, that is permanent and innate, in his exploration on the formation of the self, Wagner (1981:80) suggests that *'our theories of child development and the expectations they bring about are simply masks for the collective invention of the "natural" self'*. In Wagner's work, the self, socially defined as in Mead's work, is far from natural. The self is an *'inventive process'* (Ingold, 2016: XI) *'created by consciously articulating the conventional controls of Culture, by attempting to predict, control and process it'* (Wagner, 1981: 80). Ultimately Wagner's perspective offers culture a dominant role in the formation of the self, both as concept and as reality, eliminating the focus on the relationship with specific pre-determined others, and widening the interest to all the others interacting with the self.

In the act of decolonising womanhood from the necessity of motherhood, feminism has focused on arguments that emphasise the value of women as individuals and social actors endowed with agency. The process of decolonisation of childhood, however, requires a different approach, freed from the conceptualisation of agency as intended within the neo-liberal framework (production, financial capacity, etc). Equally, it would be unconceivable to postulate children's agency within current society through frameworks relying on Marxist theories of productivity or Kantian declassification of naturally dependent individuals (such as children) to a status of passive citizens (Schapiro, 1999) (Divers, 2013). As suggested within the realm of

queer studies in discussions on the self, the theorisation of childhood requires the adoption/formulation of '*alternative models of competence, rationality, relationships and values*' (Valentine, 2011: 352). To reconfigure the conceptualisation of childhood, it is necessary for children's studies to embrace being a critical theory, much as in the example of feminist and queer studies, and brave the process of postulating children's experiences as such, rather than as *in the process*. The first step would, therefore, be the affirmation of children as members of society, actively engaged and operational in the shaping and making of social realities. In an attempt to formulate the concept of agency for the category 'child', Divers suggests the conceptualisation of '*developed agent*' as '*one who has such a set of internal laws by which to regulate their conduct*' (2013: 235). Considering the capacity to interact and have roles within exchanges as features determining a human being as active agent in society would eliminate the vertically unbalanced power relations currently characterising adult-child socialisation (Minuchin and Fishman, 1981).

It is important to clarify that the shift proposed is not proposed in order to undermine or discard family and close bonds, but to reconceptualise these within a broader framework based on functional, interactions securing active participation of all the participants along with decisional capacity and power. The conceptualisation of childhood outside the constrictions imposed by Western Psychology would require two initial founding steps, both of which would position childhood studies as a critical lens to inform, critique and guide other relevant disciplines and fields. Firstly, as explained in the attempt to formulate a theory of social justice that would take

children into fair account, it would be necessary to eradicate the concept of need (Woodhead, 1997) by creating a '*distributional policy that assures every single child a minimum access to primary goods such as nutrition, health care, education, and a caring environment.*' (Bojer, 2000:37). Overcoming the focus on *need* would enable the consolidation of a social exchange based on rights and responsibilities, not determined by age differences but by the concept of evolving capacities (Lansdown, 2005) and informed by lived experiences and cooperation. Secondly, social and psychological dynamics would need to be reformulated within a framework based on a participation model, taking into consideration the contribution and relevance of all social agents, no longer differentiated between active and passive or differentiated by age and/or assumed capacity. Core to this process would be the exploration of the conceptualisation of 'dividual' (Stathern, 1988). That is, a self not formed upon the realisation of individualism, but on the reinforcement of the functionality of socialisation. In explaining the formation of a dividual, Stathern (1988) emphasises the relevance of all social connections, interactions and relations that are relevant to the person under discussion. Within this system, no one can *be*, without relating. Within this framework the famous Cartesian statement '*cogito ergo sum*' (I think, therefore I am) would become '*consocio¹⁸¹ ergo sum*' (I relate, therefore I am). The centrality of all relations is also identified as focal by the pragmatist philosopher G.H. Mead, as indicated by Swanson in his essay on social psychology:

¹⁸¹ - *Consocio* (*inf.* *consociare*) is used here to mean connect or associate. Another possible version would be '*Alio uter, ergo sum*' meaning 'I rely on the other, therefore I am' however this version would require a further exploration of the concept of *relying* in more depth in order to avoid falling into a *need model*.

'for Mead, a self is socially constituted in being created through social relations: through people's being led, trained, equipped and motivated to see their own point of view as one among many and to take simultaneous account of it and of any others that may be relevant'

(Swanson, 1991: 207)

The dominant views on needs and absence of agency, as taught in theoretical frameworks that limit children to a right-less, no-agency status, stand as one of the main obstacles to the meaningful advancement of children's rights in practice.

The limitations of theories informing approaches such as the Developmental Appropriate Practice (DAP) have been explored and highlighted for over two decades (Burman, 1994; Kagan, 1998). Recent studies have reiterated the emphasis not only of the shortfalls, but also of the dangers of theories professing normativity of development (McNaughton, 2001; Graue, 2005). Nevertheless, advancement in the translation of these theoretical critiques into practice is very limited and obstructed by obsolete policies and the lack of dissemination of critical perspectives into practice oriented settings (Tzuo et al., 2011). In their professional education, practitioners are taught about the *normal* stages of child development; children are presented as innocent and naïve becomings (rather than beings) and the concept of child agency, if present at all, is mainly related to a limited capacity of participation in decision making. In addition to incorporating teaching on children's rights (Jerome

et al, 2016), the education of practitioners working with children should focus on the critical analysis of theories and perspectives, equipping them with much needed tools for criticality and reflexivity (Woodhead, 1998; Berthelsen and Browlee, 2007). In a study inviting practitioners to identify key elements in their work with young children, the majority of respondents indicated 'care' as their primary function (Berthelsen and Browlee, 2007). A growing number of studies advise that the underpinning theories and beliefs held by members of the children's workforce directly inform their practice, behaviours and attitudes towards children (Woodhead, 1998; Pui-Wah Cheng, 2012; Wyness, 2012). Worryingly, it is likely that practitioners focusing on care and needs would not engage with children as agentic beings.

The dominance of discourses on need and care is largely determined by Western social constructs of childhood. In research exploring the conceptualisation of quality across international Early Childhood programmes, Woodhead (1998) warns the reader of the imposed universality of Western views and formulations of childhood:

*'theories, programmes and evaluation strategies (...)
transmit hidden messages through rhetorical devices (...)
much to do with particular socio-cultural contexts.*

(Woodhead, 1998: 8)

Whilst this underlying presence (or dominance?) of Western concepts in international theories and practices might not seem to be an issue in the formation of children's

workforce on a superficial level, it is symptomatic of broader issues in the social sphere. I suggest that the depth of the problem can be identified in the rationale behind this dominance, here discussed via four key issues that ultimately impact our practice in working with children. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 10, the clear element of cultural hegemony is apparent; an inherent predisposition to colonise thinking space by undermining other traditions and systems and over-appreciating Western frameworks (Mead, 1962; Neckoway et al., 2007; Harry and Klinger 2014). The issue of *cultural* dominance does not concern solely culture per se; it expands to the contrast between Science and science. In criticizing the dominance of biological reductionism, Science, Gabriel (2017) reprimands publications that demonstrate lack of awareness of the impact of socio-economic factors on children's lives¹⁸². Counterintuitively, he also has no sympathy for publications lacking biological grounds. The *seduction* of hard evidence (Kagal, 1998) could be considered as a form of cultural hegemony of Science and Scientists¹⁸³. Transposed into practice, this might mean that practitioners have more confidence and assurance in Science derived learning, but may also feel less equipped or not sufficiently knowledgeable to respond or resist these theories. This could therefore result in the uncritical application of oversimplified adaptation of theories in practice, as already discussed in this chapter.

- -The critique is moved against Field, F. (2010) *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults*, The Report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances. London: Cabinet office.

¹⁸³ A recommended reading on the cultural hegemony of psychiatry as Science is Whitley, R. (2008). Is psychiatry a religion? *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 101(12), 579–582.
<http://doi.org/10.1258/jrsm.2008.080044>

The second issue relates to the processes that have led to the formulation of theories that are dispensed to practitioners. The origin of developmental psychology is controversial, not just for its cultural relativism, but notably for the methods and ethics in which it was developed. In Brofenbrenner's words, a core issue is that *'much of American developmental psychology is the science of the behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults'* (ibid, 1974: 3). Arguably, theories conceived within research contexts that regard children as objects will not inform practitioners' views in favour of children's rights, agency and participation. This approach has been defined as a deficit model (Robertson, 2006). An interesting result of this dilemma emerges in countries¹⁸⁴ in which policies are embedded in children's rights, whilst practice reinforces discourses of need, vulnerability and deficit (Giamminuti and See, 2017). Aside from the issues of dissonance between policy/practice, in this scenario the possibility of improvement of conditions and outcomes for children is limited and completely dependent on the scope for identification of the gap between theory and delivery (Woodhead, 1998). Because of this issue, practitioners would be at constant risk of labelling children, families and circumstances as deficit driven, leaving little space for resilience and empowerment. Limited access to opportunities for improvement, can also derive from a different scenario, which constitutes the third issue. In this case, the dissonance is between research and practice. The former would contain very clear indications on how best

¹⁸⁴ The country discussed in this article is Australia

to proceed to secure an approach mindful of children's rights and empowering them. The latter would be unaware of, ignore or fail to integrate approaches and instead follow recommendations made by research, thus preempting practice with the application of superseded knowledge and failing to address the context. The example of the use of DAP (McNaughton, 2001; Graue, 2005) emphasises the urgency and the dangers of this problem in the gap between research and practice. A factor contributing to the perpetuation of this division can be found in Foucault's (1988) ideas on the intricate system of power relations and forces underpinning and shaping social schemes. An example is provided by the different possible approaches to the development and delivery of educational curricula. MacNaughton (2003) emphasises the possibility for curriculum to function as an agent of social change or conformity. The author continues by stating that the pedagogy and theories informing the curriculum can determine its transformative nature and potential (ibid, 2003). Thus, the reformulation of practices in line with emancipatory and rights based theories could be perceived as a potential threat to social order and to structural power relations. This fourth issue relates directly to two aspects of neo-liberal macrostructures governing children and families' experiences and lives, as seen in the fifth and final issue. The neoliberal agenda for the education and social care of children places on individuals the full responsibility for their own "betterment". Education and social care are stripped of their transformative potential, being replaced by the individual responsibility of children and families. Individuals are, however, confronted with facing the stressors and obstacles posed

by social inequalities and imbalances, which are not addressed or even hidden (Penn, 2017).

My suggestion is that these five issues ultimately constitute the resistance towards critical and transformative revisions of theories such as attachment theory. Adopting a theoretical framework enabling changes and transformation is not only difficult, but could also lead to new unknown social orders. The fear of the 'other', be it different cultural beliefs, different modus operandi with children and families, different approaches to working children, remains an unbearable burden to meaningful and fair social progress (Fanon, 1958; Lorde, 2013). To be clear, I am not arguing that practitioners are responsible for this complex system of social relations. In their position they, however, have the possibility and also the responsibility for operating (or not) this social machine.

A recommendation arising from my research relates, therefore, to the absolute need to amend the education of practitioners working with children and families. The need for quality, transformative education, providing tools for reflection and criticality, would enable practitioners to grow in their roles with confidence, capacity and the space for questioning theories and practices as well as an attitude open to social reforms (Kingdon, 2014).

Practitioners alerted to cultural differences, social constructs and power relations might be more open to approach the idealization of a natural self that develops solely

through attachment of specific figure(s) as an act of control; an attempt to maintain individuals attuned to society and its requirements for conformity. Moreover, they might also reflect on whether this model of formation of the self could be an attempt to concentrate responsibility within a circumscribed nucleus, evading the necessity to reflect on the impact that social inequalities have on a daily basis and, in the long term, in the shaping of the self.

Being alerted to how theories and normative approaches can preclude engagement with and understanding of actual dynamics, could lead to avoiding dogmatic adoption of theories (Skolnick, 1975).

In conclusion

In answer to the specific investigation on the cultural validity of attachment for African Caribbean families in London, it is important to consider a few key points. Firstly, stereotypes of the Black family have represented for years the opposite of the Western ideal of family: disempowered fathers; insufficiently dedicated mothers and differently nurtured children. The debate on whether these perceived differences derive from African heritage (Sudakasa, 1996) or slavery (Frazier, 1948) maintains the focus on a comparative analysis of the dyad, failing to acknowledge the full range of factors of relevance in the lives of these families. Conversely, Black feminism promotes a holistic approach to the *family* experience, offering the opportunity to focus on the bigger picture, rather than being constrained to comparisons against what is believed to be the normative. One of the points of emphasis identified

through this process is the centrality of the public and the social in the experiences of all of the family members alike (Hill Collins, 1994; bell hooks, 2000; Reynolds, 2005).

The adoption of normalising frameworks stem from a specific socio-cultural background, such as the concept of the dyad, and also reinforces the creation of environments within socio-cultural vacuums. As denounced by Billington (1996:53), '*narrow and value-laden*' definitions of "childhood", "self" and "family" are adopted by Western psy-sciences with an unspoken intent to control individuals, '*through procedures of regulation and pathologisation*'. This tendency has been discussed by Wagner (1975:54) in his book on the creation of "culture", in which the author highlights the human tendency to '*apply the conventional orders and regularities of our sciences to the phenomenal world in order to rationalize and understand it*'. In a similar fashion, it can be argued that psy-sciences, such as developmental psychology, promote the application of standardised frameworks, charged with socioeconomic determinations, to contain, make sense of and, ultimately, control forms of being (Alldred, 1996; Billington, 1996).

The process of deconstruction (Burman, 2008) of attachment theory presented in this thesis indicates the possibilities and likely favourable outcomes, deriving from promoting childhood studies not as an isolated discipline, focused solely on children as removed from society, but as a critical lens contributing to the intersectionality of fields. This insight emphasises the need for childhood studies to push existing

theoretical boundaries and to become a framework that dares to react against the force of oppressive theories by proposing the reconfiguration of systems in collaboration with other disciplines and with the aim to promote a rights based approach, acknowledging that at present '*social structures are constraints imposed on us by the nature of social organization*' (Wyness, 2015: 209). As part of this process, children would no longer be perceived as future securities for adults, but would be recognised in the present and as part of the mechanism sustaining and shaping society.

In recent years, children's rights advocates have promoted the importance of children to be called to the heart and centre of activism¹⁸⁵. Similarly researchers have increasingly involved children in investigations and reviews. The shift discussed in this thesis indicates the importance of ensuring that children are contributors in the formulation of knowledge, whether practical or theoretical. This would suggest moving away from a celebration of paternalistic expertise, towards a recognition of the relevance of experience and cooperative knowledge.

¹⁸⁵ See UNICEF (2016) Unless we act now: the impact of climate change on children

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Appendix 1: African Caribbean

As suggested by Phoenix (1988) to write about a unitary Caribbean culture is both delicate and dangerous. In fact, as also the author states an “oversimplified notion of culture” could lead to misinterpretations and mistakes. The idea of a shared “West Indian culture” can be accepted only if accompanied by the awareness of its complexity and multifaceted reality. The “*structural influence of class, gender, and race, which influence white people’s as well as black people’s lives*” cannot be underestimated.

Phoenix’ (1988) statement finds its basis in Mintz’ words “*it is inaccurate to refer to the Caribbean as a “cultural area”, if by culture is meant a common body of historical tradition*” (1971:19). The definition “*sociocultural area*”, suggested by Mintz in his analysis of the Caribbean area, seems to produce a better picture of the Caribbean situation. The impossibility of linking the area with one specific “*culture-bloc*” (1971:18), even if attempted in numerous studies, is due to the influence and the interaction of various cultural bodies on different levels. Slocum (2003) has denominated this process with a term commonly used to define a linguistic phenomenon: creolization. In their “*Insights from Caribbeanist Anthropology*” the authors define the condensation of the various cultures encountered in the Caribbean area as the act that generated common sociohistorical contexts. Mintz reinforces this position, stating that the sociocultural area “*shares more socio-structural features than cultural ones*” located in similar social structures and dynamics. This situation would then represent the consequence of the mixture

between traditions inherited in specific “*historical and material conditions*” and the powerful and dominant presence of European organizations and models (Slocum and Thomas, 2003:556).

The idea of a process of creolization has been recognized as the answer to the debate around the opposing theories presented by Frazier and Herskovits on the origin of the New World black culture (Yelvington, 2001). Both the authors are particularly relevant to this project since they both have based and developed their theories on the study of family patterns in the Caribbean. Frazier, a black sociologist from the Chicago School, describes slavery and the consequent events as the cause of the disconnection of African slaves from their original culture. From his structural position, the author argues that no connections can be found in between the new culture and the African heritage. Circumstances and context are then the basis for a culture that should be viewed as part of the mainstream, and understood as constantly shaped and informed by the disadvantaged position of the blacks within the American society. Coming from an anthropological background, Herskovits offers an analysis of the elements, rather than of the processes, characterizing the New World black culture. His theory is then based on the study of ‘*cultural forms and institutions transported to the New World with the slaves from what he called the West African-Congo cultural area*’ (Yelvington, 2001: 248) such as religion, family, and language. According to Herskovits’ argumentation, the black culture would then be the result of the adaptation of the African heritage in a new socio-cultural context. Both the authors have somehow supported some elements of the opposite theory. Frazier did recognize some African traits in the New World culture, and on his side

Herskovits mentioned the relevance of the circumstances of the process of adaptation. The formulation of a theory that mitigates these two not so opposite positions, such as the creolisation theory, seems the best way to approach this delicate discourse from a dynamic and comprehensive point of view. Moreover, the recognition of the presence of various elements and cultures interacting in the formulation of the New World black culture is fundamental to understand the components of such a complex reality.

Throughout the research, I have adopted the term African Caribbean being mindful of two key suggestions by Phoenix (1988):

- The behaviour of Afro-Caribbean people in the UK will not be understood as equivalent to the one of people living the Caribbean;
- It is essential to consider the Afro-Caribbean culture as a developing culture, with all the influences due to historical process or immigration process.

Appendix 2: Summary of fieldwork in Jamaica – on religion

Whilst completing the literature review on ‘Caribbean childhood in context’ it became evident that religion and religiosity were the persistent elements in all the analysed contexts. Researchers from various fields have indeed recognised religion as a fundamental element not simply of Jamaican culture, but of Jamaican everyday life. The ethnographic study, here summarized, gathers an understanding of the role and the impact of religion on children’s lives and on the dynamics in which they are imbedded.

The ethnographic fieldwork lasted for a period of six weeks, during which I regularly attended the Sunday Service at a Pentecostal church in Downtown Kingston (the congregation attended by Auntie Pam, my landlady and Jamaican aunt –as she would proudly specify in introducing me). Additionally, I attended several weekly services in churches from other denomination. During my stay, I visited various religious centres for children, where I had the opportunity to observe the daily routine and interview both staff and children. The investigation focuses on the various levels on which religion is present in the everyday life: from the oral and visual presence of God in various contexts, to the impact of religion onto family and community life.

Visual presence

This first element is related to the physical presence of churches as much as to the aesthetic performances of Jamaican churchgoers.

Whether on the hills, downtown, or in the ghetto, the one thing you will surely find in Kingston is a church. Possibly linked to the large number of existing denominations, the interpretation of the concept 'church' would vary significantly: from highly organised structures to a small group of people praying together and reading the Bible or talking with God. According to Auntie Pam, most churches were nothing more than normal houses that were utilised by the congregation as point of gathering to *'pray and share the experience of the grace of the Lord Almighty'* (Auntie Pam, August 2010).

Regardless of the appearance of the church-building, the commitment of the community members towards the rigorous ritual of Sunday morning 'parade' stood as indication of the value of visual performativity in Jamaican religion. Every Sunday morning at 7am Auntie Pam would wake me up to provide me with enough time to shower and iron the clothes that we would have carefully picked and washed the previous day. As a visitor, I was not formally requested to conform to the customs of the congregation, as in I had been condoned for not wearing a hat and a pair of smart shoes, nevertheless Auntie Pam would always check my outfit before leaving the house. A strong indication of the necessity to 'appear' right when going to church is well exemplified by Auntie Pam's decision to not allowed her seven-year-old nephew, who was living at the house for the summer, to join us to church for the first two weeks of my permanence, as his mother had forgotten to pack his church outfit. The relevance of the ritual of the Sunday dress is illustrated also by the keenness of all the children to be photographed during Sunday school before having their half morning nap. When asked about their favourite part of Sunday school, many of the

children I interviewed proudly picked their outfit. The response of a five-year-old girl from the Pentecostal church expresses this point clearly: *'Today I am God's princess. Jesus like to see us wearing our pretty dresses as we remind him of his angels.'*

Oral presence

Jamaica is renowned for its music scene, even if mostly related either to Rastafarianism or to the dancehall scene; similarly, music occupies a major role during the Sunday ceremony.

While interviewing the director of an innovative youth choir, renowned for entertaining its church members with a gospel adaptation of dancehall music, I came across a strong belief that music is the best tool to enable self-actualization in the child whilst promoting his/her contact with God. Music is a dominant mean for religion proselytising not only in church, but also on the street, in the market, and occasionally on the bus. Music proved to be also a main part of the summer camps provided by religious associations. During my visits to the camps I noticed that religious themes were presented to children solely through music.

Presence in the community and in the family

Through what could be defined as an attempt of "social action", churches have ensured to provide the community with services that were otherwise lacking in the provision from other institutions. The main areas of intervention for churches are education and care. Saturday and Sunday schools offer, to both members and not,

the opportunity to access additional learning moments. Churches provide children and youngsters with spaces to develop skills and gain a better level of literacy and knowledge, raising their chances to find a respectable occupation. The religious community would frequently be a place for the child where to find in the grace of god a constant monitoring presence.

What struck me about Jamaica was the level of performativity of the religious self. According to Butler (1988) subjectivity is nothing more than a retroactive construct that derives from absorbing and enacting social constructs. So, in this specific case religion is the ideology to which the self is exposed and that is enacted in the subjectivity of the child as result of his/her exposure to it. If we consider Peter Wilson's (1973) description of Jamaican 'Identity' we are confronted with the dominance of the 'crew' (the social identity) over the individual (personal identity as usually postulated in Western psychology). The concept of development of a personal identity, as single individual detached from society and based on personal experiences and circumstances, becomes merely an imposition of Western theories.

Appendix 3: Families in the ethnography

Note: all participants (children included) were asked to choose a pseudonym to replace their real name in the study. Children's age provided was noted at the beginning of the fieldwork (which lasted two years).

	Child(ren)	Relevant Adults	Living arrangements	Notes
1	Tyrell (5 yrs.)	Malene (mother) Father – limited engagement	Malene and Tyrell live in a refuge. They also have temporary access to Tyrell's father's house (near school)	Religion: Not going to church but exhibiting religious ornaments Discipline: Strict at home, at school Tyrell struggles a bit.
2	Leroy (4 yrs.) and his Baby brother)	Trisha (mother) and her husband (father of the boys)	Trisha, Leroy and the baby live together. The father, who lives in his own flat, visits them and stays at their flat occasionally.	Trisha is not religious but is planning on going back to Jamaica to baptise the baby. There is a recurrent threat to send Leroy "back" to Jamaica for stricter discipline. Leroy spends most summer holidays in Jamaica with grandma.
3	Calvin (7 yrs.)	Debara (mother)	Debara and Calvin live alone. Debara has 'courtyard' agreement with Abigail's grandma. Moreover, Debara's sister is involved in raising Calvin.	Calvin likes going to church and Sunday school with his auntie (Debara's sister) and his cousin.
4	Abigail (7 yrs.) Jodie (4 yrs.)	Grandma (3 daughters – one of which is Abigail and	Abigail, Jodie and grandma live in the same block of flats	They all go to church regularly and once a month they attend another congregation (where

		Jodie's mother)	as Calvin and Debara. Abigail and Jodie spend also some time at one of their aunties' houses. None of the aunties live with them regularly. Their mother lives in another city in the UK.	grandma has friends from Jamaica) Grandma reported to social services for use of physical punishment on children
5	Joyce (6yrs.)	Nikkya	Joyce and Nikkya live on their own	Nikkya has a very strong link to religion (learned whilst living with her grandma). Nikkya is very strict with Joyce and complaints of Joyce's father poor parenting skills.
6	Sami (7yrs)	Mother 4 sisters	Sami lives with her mum. The other sisters visit at times, however they all have independent living arrangements.	Mum is religious – Sami does not engage and does not always follow mum to church. Sami's sisters are much stricter than their mother with Sami.
		Grandma	Grandma lives on her own in the same block of flats as Sami and her mum	Grandma picks up and looks after Sami at times. Grandma, allegedly, has issues with drinking
		Auntie + cousins	Sister of Sami's mum, she lives with her two children in a nearby neighbourhood.	Mum's sister – Sami spends at least few afternoons a week with her cousins.
7	Shai (6yrs.?)	Shanice	Shai and Shanice live on their own. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Shanice's new partner started living with them.	
		Father lives with new partner and new-born baby		

8	No children	Desiree+ Jacob	Own property	
9	Otis (5 yrs.) Nelson (7 yrs.)	Janice (mother) Max (uncle)	Janice, Nelson and Otis live together with Janice's eldest son. Janice's brother, Max, at times stays with them. Otis is the son of a friend of Janice (and old neighbour), who has been deported back to Jamaica for VISA issues.	Uncle Max functions as authoritative figure in the family. Janice is very quiet and reserved. Janice is not Otis' mother.
		Brianna (Nelson's sister)	Brianna lives on her own (she has a baby), however she helps with Nelson and Otis and gets help for the care of her baby.	
10	Dangelo (5 yrs.)	Millie (grandma) Delroy (grandpa) Andreas (uncle) Pauline (auntie)	Millie and Delroy live in their family home with two of their children, Andreas and Pauline. Dangelo is their grandchild, his father- their son- is not in the picture (in prison?), his mother is a drug addict.	Jehovah witnesses, for sense of belonging and tradition from home as feeling excluded from mainstream churches when arrived from Jamaica. Millie is very strict and focused on the importance of education During my fieldwork, Andreas was temporarily kicked out of the house. Pauline is
11	Talicia (9-10 yrs.)	Grandma Cantrice (auntie)	Grandma lives in her own flat	Talicia's teachers would regularly report her for her 'attitude' at school. Cantrice believed that Talicia has serious difficulties in dealing

				<p>with weak authority figures (ei: teachers!)</p> <p>Talicia would accompany grandma to church every weekend. Talicia would also tell off Cantrice and Wilma for not going to church.</p>
12	<p>Wilma (6 yrs.?) (Cousin of Talicia)</p>	<p>Cantrice (mother)</p>	<p>Cantrice rents a flat</p>	<p>Cantrice would go to church regularly whilst in Jamaica, however she reported not liking churches in England (described them as boring and lacking sense of community).</p>
13	<p>(from youngest to eldest)</p> <p>Baby boy</p> <p>Siobhan (5yrs.)</p> <p>Mario (10 yrs.)</p> <p>Sherell (16yrs.)</p>	<p>Destiny (mother)</p>	<p>Destiny and her children live on their own, through at times Destiny's partner stays over). Destiny has a complex support system in place for her children's care.</p>	<p>Destiny is very strict with her children. Mrs D. (her mother) is highly involved with the local church and runs activities and groups for parents and children.</p>
14	<p>Latisha (10 yrs.)</p> <p>Baby brother</p> <p>Baby Cousin</p>	<p>Fawn (mother)</p> <p>Aunt (Fawn's sister)</p>	<p>The two sisters live together with their three children in a two bedroom flat near Latisha's school.</p>	<p>In her final year of primary school, Latisha was experiencing what the teachers would refer to as 'attitude issues'. As she started secondary school, her school reports improved significantly, with teachers praising her for her performance and behaviour. Fawn linked this change to the newly acquired responsibility deriving from the birth of her little sister.</p>

15	Terrel (6 yrs.) Shandrice (7 yrs.)	Mum	Terrel and Shandrice live with their mum, mum is trying to be relocated to a more accessible flat for her medical needs.	Mum has a degenerative condition that prevents her from being fully able to look after the children.
		Melissa (carer)	Lives in the same block of flats	Melissa is a neighbour and paid carer for the children.
		Father (not much known)	NA	The father starts visiting the children during my fieldwork. Possible involvement of social workers.
16	Michael (16/17yrs.?) Maya (4 yrs.) (youngest) Shelley (14 yrs.?) 2 other daughters	Leah (mother)	Leah lives with her four daughters in a two-bedroom flat.	
		Jerome (father) has also another flat (not sure of the arrangements for this)	Jerome has his own apartment, however he spent a lot of time at home with the kids and Leah.	
		Problems w Michael for behavior, moved to grandmas for family's sake	Michael (Leah's son) moved out of the flat during my fieldwork. He was suffering from lack of space and privacy, he also wanted to start a family with his girlfriend.	
17	Baby daughter	Keisha and Derrick	Living together – not married as waiting to be settled and to have bought a house	Catholic church as more middle class and Pentecostal when around Derrick's family.
18	Tanya (6 or 7 yrs.)	Michele (mother) Rob (father)	Michele, Rob and Tanya live in a house. Michele became pregnant with her second child during the fieldwork.	Although not religious, Michele and Rob decided to enrol Tanya to a religious school to secure better outcomes and to instil moral values.

20	Janet Michael (both late teens)	Pamela (mother)	Pamela and her children live together – both the children are in their late teens; Pamela thinks they will both move out to go to university.	Pamela is proud of having raised her two children on her own, she comes from a large family (I met her brother in my fieldwork in Jamaica). She attends the same Pentecostal church as in Jamaica (same congregation with different churches in both countries).
21	Nat (6 yrs.) and Dario (4 yrs.)	Lorraine	Council flat	Lorraine was raised by Jamaican foster parents; this relationship gave her a very strong sense of belonging to the Caribbean community. Lorraine's eldest son (late teen) in prison. The father is not allowed to see his children Lorraine is extremely strict with her children; during the fieldwork, she transferred them to a Catholic school to 'keep them out of trouble'
22	Naomi (7 yrs.)	William (father)	William is helped by his mother and extended family in caring for Naomi.	

Appendix 4: Practitioners

Identifier in text	Job role	Setting	Info	Interview
p 1	Family worker Focus on brokerage, child care and provision of information around services available	Family services – Local Authority	F South American	<i>taped</i>
p 2	Team leader and caseload holder for families with children referred for SEND	Schools via local authority	F W/British	<i>Taped</i>
p 3	Family support worker	Family services – Local Authority	F W/other	<i>Taped</i>
p 4	Children's centre manager	Children's Centre	F Black Caribbean	<i>Taped</i>
p 5	Primary school teacher	Primary school	M W/British	Notes

p 6	Primary school teacher	Primary school	F W/Other	Notes
p 7	Social worker	Local Authority via agency	M W/British	Notes
p 8	Refuge worker	Local women's refuge	F W/Other	Notes
p 9	Nursery nurse	Primary School	F w/other	Notes
i 10	Occupational therapist	Schools via local authority	F w/British	Notes

Appendix 5: Visualising Leah's cycle

	Background		Religion	Relationship	Leah's cycle
Millie	First generation	Working class from respectable family	Dedicated religious	Married	contentment
Leah	Second generation	Working class – mixed race	Religious (not practicing)	Partner	Realisation Build up anger
Pamela	First generation	Middle class	Religious (within limits)	Single mother	Unrest Action